



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 024 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1005)

[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the fall 2013 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

* * *

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83 (1), I have the honour to table a notice of a ways and means motion to introduce an act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement. I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of this motion.

I also have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House,

(a) any recorded division deferred, or deemed deferred, to Wednesday, November 27, 2013, Wednesday, December 4, 2013, and Wednesday, December 11, 2013, shall be taken up at the conclusion of oral questions, provided that there shall be no extension of the time provided for Government Orders pursuant to Standing Order 45(7.1); and

(b) any recorded division demanded in respect of a debatable motion, other than an item of Private Members' Business, on Wednesday, November 27, 2013, Wednesday, December 4, 2013, and Wednesday, December 11, 2013, shall be deemed to be deferred to the conclusion of oral questions on the next sitting day.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the 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)

* * *

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting several hundred petitions from all across Canada from petitioners calling on the government 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.

In this week of commemorating violence against women and dealing with the violence against women issue, I have to say that these petitions are very timely.

INCOME TAX DEDUCTIONS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to table four petitions today that come from Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, all in support of my bill, Bill C-201.

Routine Proceedings

As members know, many tradespersons can be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers from temporary skilled labour shortages, simply because the cost of travelling is too high. My bill would allow tradespersons and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so that they could secure and maintain employment at a construction site that is more than 80 kilometres from their homes.

The petitioners are urging this Parliament to pass that bill immediately.

FERRY SERVICE

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a number of petitions on behalf of a large number of Canadians who wish to draw to the attention of the House of Commons the following:

The Northumberland Ferries Limited contract ends March 31, 2014. The economy of Prince Edward Island depends heavily on the ferry service and needs it to maintain the industries on Prince Edward Island. The ferry carries approximately half a million passengers and 160,000 vehicles. The ferry has an annual economic impact of \$27 million on Prince Edward Island.

Therefore, your petitioners request the House of Commons to direct the Government of Canada to negotiate a new contract that is equal to or greater than the previous three-year contract with Northumberland Ferries Limited, taking into account the increase in the consumer price index, and provide—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I hate to stop the hon. member, but it does sound like he might be reading the petition instead of just providing a brief summary.

The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I present petitions from many Canadians from across Canada who are petitioning for a full inquiry into the misleading robocalls and other voter fraud tactics used during the 2011 federal election. The petitioners would like this House to take necessary measures to put a stop to the erosion of Canadian democracy, as fair elections are the foundation of our democratic process.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 48.

[Text]

Question No. 48—**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to the Prosperity Mine and New Prosperity Mine proposals: (a) what is the total cost incurred by the government to consider or evaluate both proposals; (b) what is the total amount of funds recovered by the government from the proponent (Taseko Mines LTD); (c) what is the total amount of funds expected to be recovered from the proponent; (d) what is the total amount of funds the government has determined as non-recoverable; and (e) what are the expected costs of continued consideration and evaluation of the project, broken down by costs that will be incurred by the government and costs that will be incurred by the proponent?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency incurred the following total costs for recoverable salaries and operation and maintenance, as well as for non-recoverable operation and maintenance, as of October 28, 2013: for Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$2,022,115.03; for New Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$1,793,948.80. The grand total is \$3,816,063.83.

With regard to (b), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency recovered the following amounts from the proponent as of October 28, 2013: for Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$1,312,628.66; for New Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$1,060,082.16. The grand total is \$2,372,710.82.

With regard to (c), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency expects to recover the following amounts from the proponent as of October 28, 2013: from Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$282,486.00; from New Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$383,630.25. The grand total is \$666,116.25.

With regard to (d), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency determined the following operation and maintenance costs as non-recoverable as of October 28, 2013: for Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$427,000.37; for New Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$350,236.39. The grand total is \$777,236.76.

With regard to (e), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency forecast the following amounts as of October 28, 2013: for Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, the question is not applicable, as the environmental assessment was completed; for New Prosperity Gold—copper mine project, \$1,110,288.00 in recoverable costs and \$75,000 in non-recoverable costs. The grand total is \$1,185,288.00.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if Questions Nos. 10, 17, 20 and 22 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 10—Mr. Matthew Dubé:

With regard to the funds allocated by the government for the Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games, and the 2012-2016 Host Program Contribution Agreement between Canadian Heritage (Sport Canada) and the Organizing Committee of the Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games: (a) how much has been allocated to all the sports venues, including but not limited to the CIBC Athletes' Village, the CIBC Pan Am and Parapan Am Games Athletics Centre and Field House, the Markham Pan Am and Parapan Am Centre, the Welland Flatwater Centre, the Caledon Equestrian Park, and the Hamilton Soccer Stadium; (b) what are the specific details of the amounts allocated to construct new sports infrastructures and those allocated to renovate existing sports infrastructures; (c) for each of the capital projects (especially the sites for test events, training, competitions and support services), what are the specifics of all the interim quarterly activity/results reports describing the status of each project as stipulated in Annex E, Interim and Final Results Reporting Requirements, of the 2012-2016 Hosting Program Contribution Agreement; and (d) the amount allocated to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Contribution Agreement related to official languages and related services provided by the government for the Games?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 17—Hon. Geoff Regan:

With regard to spending in the federal riding of Halifax West, how much money was spent between 2007 and 2012: (a) through the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund; (b) through the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund; (c) through the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund; (d) through the Infrastructure Canada program; and (e) how much money has the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency directed to businesses and projects in the federal riding of Halifax West between 2007 and 2012?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 20—Mr. Alex Atamanenko:

With regard to the horse slaughter industry in Canada: (a) what was the reason for the temporary halt, initiated by European Union (EU) officials, to horse meat imports from Canada on October 12, 2012; (b) has Canada participated in talks with EU officials regarding the safety of horse meat from Canada since that time, (i) if so, what topics were discussed, (ii) what conclusions were reached; (c) what restrictions effective in 2013 will be imposed upon the Canadian horse meat industry by the EU, (i) what is the anticipated impact of these restrictions on the frequency and type of drug residue testing on horse meat in Canada as well as on the data required on Equine Information Documents (EIDs), (ii) will the restrictions on prohibited/non-permitted drugs be further tightened; (d) is there any oversight by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on transport drivers and horse meat dealers listed on EIDs as current owners to check for a history of violations of the United States Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Transport, or CFIA transport regulations, (i) does the CFIA enhance its scrutiny of such violators or conduct follow-up investigations on those who have been flagged for violations, (ii) is this information shared with any other inter-connected government agency either in Canada or in the United States; (e) how often do CFIA inspectors do a visual inspection of the transports that arrive at the slaughter plants to ensure that the horses have been transported safely; (f) how many transport violations concerning horse slaughter transportation have been issued to transport drivers within the last five years, (i) how many warnings of violations have been issued, (ii) if the warnings have been ignored, how does the CFIA restrict or prohibit those transport drivers from conducting business in Canada; (g) how often does the CFIA conduct inspections of feedlots and how many warnings or violations were imposed in the last five years because of these inspections; (h) in the last five years, how many times has the CFIA conducted audits of processes and procedures regarding the export shipments of live horses to foreign countries, (i) how many audit reports were prepared, (ii) how many warnings were issued to shippers; (i) how does the CFIA ensure that e-coli or the potential for e-coli is properly erased from horses and horse meat during and after the slaughter process; (j) how often are in-house video cameras scrutinized in plants and does the CFIA keep these videos to scrutinize at a later date, and how does the CFIA address inappropriate behaviour by slaughter plant personnel that may be uncovered in video recordings; (k) after conditions at Les Viandes de la Petite-Nation were revealed in 2011, were structural changes instituted at that slaughter facility and, if so, which ones, and were changes concerning the safe use of a rifle rather than captive bolt gun instituted and, if so, did the CFIA see a reduction in the number of horses regaining consciousness after switching from captive bolt gun to rifle; (l) what accountability measures are taken towards recorded owners of horses whose carcasses were condemned for reasons of disease,

malnourishment or other abuse; (m) are the carcasses of horses that test positive for prohibited drugs used for rendering, and if not, how does the CFIA oversee the safe disposal of contaminated carcasses and ensure that condemned carcasses are not combined in any way with normal rendering; (n) how often does the CFIA inspect slaughter house feedlots and out buildings for dead or downer horses, (i) are there any reports kept by plant personnel regarding dead or downer horses, (ii) if so, does the CFIA inspect these reports at any time, (iii) how many dead or downer horses have been involved since January 1, 2010, and what were the circumstances surrounding these cases; (o) what protocols are in place to ensure that equine blood and other body fluids are being properly diverted from municipal town water systems; (p) does the CFIA conduct audits or oversee EIDs when obvious erroneous information is listed by the recorded owner and is the slaughter plant required to flag these EIDs for scrutiny by the CFIA when there are obvious or deliberate errors or omissions; (q) what do slaughterhouses do with registration papers that may accompany thoroughbreds, standardbreds, quarter horses or other breeds to slaughter facilities; (r) does the CFIA compile statistics on breeds that are most likely to have been administered prohibited drugs; (s) what are the "animal well-being program" and "program to monitor animal slaughter" mentioned in the response to written question Q-714 on September 17, 2012, and what results have been seen from the use of these programs; (t) are horse slaughter facilities checking with ID scanners for microchips, (i) if not, does the CFIA plan to implement a microchip ID program and if so, when is the deadline for its implementation; (u) has a database been developed for Equine Information Documents and who is responsible for oversight and maintenance of the database; and (v) how many horse fatalities and serious injuries have occurred during loading or air transport of slaughter horses to Japan and any other countries, between January 1, 2008, and April 1, 2013, (i) what reasons were recorded for the fatalities or injuries, (ii) how was each case resolved?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 22—Mr. Pierre Nantel:

With regard to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, on an annual basis: (a) what human and financial resources have been allocated to the Convention's implementation since its ratification, for fiscal years (i) 2013-2014, (ii) 2014-2015; (b) what projects, groups and associations have received funding since its ratification; (c) has the Department of Canadian Heritage reviewed its policies to ensure they comply with the Convention; (d) what action does the government intend to take in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 to implement the Convention; (e) how many meetings on the Convention have the government and the provinces held since its ratification; (f) how many UNESCO meetings on the Convention have Canadian delegates attended; (g) with regard to the Canada-Europe free-trade agreement, how many meetings between the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development have been held to date?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

●(1010)

*[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.) moved:

That, given the recent sworn statements by RCMP Corporal Greg Horton, which revealed that: (i) on February 21, 2013, the Prime Minister's Office had agreed that, with regard to Mike Duffy's controversial expenses, the Conservative Party of Canada would "keep him whole on the repayment"; (ii) on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff wanted to "speak to the PM before everything is considered final"; (iii) later on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff confirmed "We are good to go from the PM once Ben has his confirmation from Payne"; (iv) an agreement was reached between Benjamin Perrin and Janice Payne, counsels for the Prime Minister and Mike Duffy; (v) the amount to keep Mike Duffy whole was calculated to be higher than first determined, requiring a changed source of funds from Conservative Party funds to Nigel Wright's personal funds, after which the arrangement proceeded and Duffy's expenses were re-paid; and (vi) subsequently, the Prime Minister's Office engaged in the obstruction of a Deloitte audit and a whitewash of a Senate report; the House condemn the deeply disappointing actions of the Prime Minister's Office in devising, organizing and participating in an arrangement that the RCMP believes violated sections 119, 121 and 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada, and remind the Prime Minister of his own Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State, which states on page 28 that "Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ," and the House call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

He said: Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I want to thank my colleague from Cardigan for seconding this important motion.

Today there are basically two issues we hope Canadians will reflect on in this House and pronounce on later this evening.

The first is the role of the Prime Minister's Office, the senior advisers to the Prime Minister, in a potentially criminal cover-up and a series of events, which the RCMP believes, in fact, have violated three sections of the Criminal Code.

The second issue is the role of senior Conservative operatives and senior Conservative senators in participating in a whitewash of a Senate report in attempting to influence an independent audit being conducted by a national auditing firm.

We think Canadians, increasingly, do not believe the Prime Minister and do not believe his constantly changing version of these events. That is why we think it is important to have this discussion in the House of Commons today. I hope that colleagues will agree with us tonight, in a vote, that the only solution is for the Prime Minister to, in fact, come clean, under oath, and explain to Canadians the exact extent to which he was informed of many of these details.

[Translation]

The real problem here, apart from the fact that the RCMP believes that criminal activity took place in the Prime Minister's Office, is that not only are there multiple versions of the facts in terms of the degree of the Prime Minister's involvement, but the versions put forward by the RCMP and by this government demonstrate that the Prime Minister and his staff acted inappropriately.

It has become clear that Canadians no longer believe the Prime Minister when he tells his changing version of this sordid affair. In fact, the person who is undermining the Prime Minister's credibility the most is the Prime Minister himself, because he has given us so many different versions. His story keeps changing. Every time, new details are made public. We are at the point where people are doubting what the Prime Minister of Canada is saying.

[English]

On the one side, we have email correspondence from Nigel Wright, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, highlighted in a sworn affidavit from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and presented to a judge. Let us look at the first email.

On February 22, Nigel Wright states that Mike Duffy would be made whole through the use of Conservative Party money, but at the end, Nigel Wright wanted to "speak to the PM before everything is considered final. Less than an hour later, according to an RCMP sworn affidavit, Nigel Wright sent a further email saying, "We are good to go from the PM".

[Translation]

The inference here is very clear: Nigel Wright confirmed the details of the agreement to pay back Mike Duffy with the Prime Minister.

I would very much like to give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt when he claims that Nigel Wright did not tell him the details of the agreement. However, Nigel Wright has been very clear. At that time, the agreement was in fact to use Conservative Party funds to pay back Mike Duffy's inappropriate expense claims.

It is ridiculous to suggest that Mr. Wright needed the Prime Minister's approval to ask Mike Duffy to pay back his fraudulent expense claims with his own money. Quire frankly, this story borders on the ridiculous.

●(1015)

[English]

The determining factor in an illegal act such as the ones the RCMP believes took place in the Prime Minister's Office is not only who gave the corrupt money and when but that such a transfer ultimately took place. The Prime Minister's problem here is that all indications, all the circumstantial evidence, point to his knowing and approving of at least a \$32,000 payment to Senator Duffy, plus his legal fees. These funds were originally going to come from the Conservative Party through the hands of Senator Irving Gerstein, who was a senior Conservative member of the caucus and chairman of the Conservative fund.

It does not matter, in the end, that the source of funds changed and that the amount increased. The Prime Minister appears to have approved a plan to corrupt a sitting legislator, and that is the essential element of how this whole sordid affair began. That allegation has met with no credible defence from the government spokespersons, and the RCMP, in its sworn affidavit, tells a very compelling story to Canadians.

Business of Supply

Indeed, the RCMP affidavit paints a clear and compelling story of a widespread and directed cover-up at the senior levels of the Prime Minister's Office, including senior members of the Conservative caucus in the Senate and a woman who, at the time, was a senior Conservative cabinet minister. The RCMP believes that in the totality of the evidence, these actions and the subsequent attempt to cover up these actions constituted a violation of at least three sections of Canada's Criminal Code.

[Translation]

Even if we believe the Prime Minister when he says that Nigel Wright told him nothing and that he was never informed of the Mike Duffy repayment scheme; of the whitewashing of the Senate report, which was ordered by his own office; or of the involvement of four senators in his inner circle—even if we decide to believe all of the excuses, each more ridiculous than the last—there is still a serious problem. This government chose to protect the individuals who were involved in this possibly criminal scheme instead of adequately disciplining them.

I want to share a few of the most blatant examples. Some of these people are still Conservative senators and others were directly employed by the Prime Minister of Canada before being promoted to the highest echelons of Conservative ministerial offices.

[English]

Let us start with the Conservative senators. Four of them, senators LeBreton, Carolyn Stewart Olsen, David Tkachuk and Irving Gerstein, were interviewed by the RCMP in regard to their role in the Conservative scheme to whitewash a Senate report that was supposed to be, originally, critical of Senator Duffy's behaviour.

Indeed the RCMP have found, in sworn affidavits, that these Conservative senators were less than truthful when they were interviewed by Canada's national police force. Senator Marjory LeBreton was a senior member of the Conservative cabinet in the current Prime Minister's government. She was a key architect in the government plan to whitewash the Senate audit and participated actively and directly in an effort to sweep the whole mess under the carpet.

She presided over an effort in the Senate to potentially hide criminal acts, and for that she has been rewarded by remaining on the internal economy committee of the Senate.

Senator Carolyn Stewart Olsen really did the heavy lifting in the effort to whitewash the Senate report. She in fact moved to strip sections out of the draft report that were critical of Senator Duffy's spending. She was an architect of the deal to go easy on Senator Duffy, as was negotiated between the Prime Minister's lawyer, Mr. Perrin, and Mr. Duffy's counsel, Ms. Payne. She was found, herself, to have been less than truthful in her discussions, in her interview with the RCMP.

For a government that pretends over and over again that it is cooperating fully with the RCMP in this investigation, maybe it should start by suggesting to the senior members of its caucus, as well as Senator Stewart Olsen, the Prime Minister's former press secretary, that they in fact be truthful when they are interviewed by the RCMP.

Some will remember Senator David Tkachuk as having been involved in the scandal concerning spending in the Saskatchewan legislature. Senator Tkachuk played another critical role. He was chair of the internal economy committee. He subsequently resigned. Canadians will remember that Senator Tkachuk was briefed by Deloitte in a verbal presentation on the progress of its audit.

• (1020)

It was a private meeting. Three senators were present. The auditors came to give a preliminary report on their findings. Deloitte had found that Senator Duffy was claiming per diem allocations from taxpayers in Ottawa at a time when his cellphone records indicated he was in Florida, and what did Senator Tkachuk do? He picked up the phone and called Senator Duffy and told him he had better come up with some explanation as to why he was claiming per diems in Ottawa when in fact he was in Florida.

Ever compliant, their favourite senator, Senator Duffy then sent a phony letter to Senator Tkachuk referring to a conversation they had two evenings previously and saying he had reviewed his records and in fact there was a clerical error in his office as to why taxpayers were paying per diems for his work in Ottawa when he was in Florida.

Senator Tkachuk had an obligation to taxpayers to protect taxpayers' hard-earned dollars, not to call a colleague who is under investigation in a forensic audit and tip him off. That would be like a judge who meets with the police before granting a search warrant, and the minute the police leave his or her office, the judge picks up the phone and says to the target of the search warrant: "Look you'd better get rid of the evidence, because the police are on their way over". That makes no sense at all. That was what Senator Tkachuk did, and he too has been rewarded for his good work by continuing to serve on the internal economy committee of the senate.

Canadians will know Senator Irving Gerstein as a senior Conservative fundraiser, the chair of the Conservative fund. Surprisingly, he felt it appropriate to pick up the phone, on instructions from the Prime Minister's Office as we have learned from the RCMP affidavit, and call Deloitte, a reputable national auditing firm, to try to put pressure on it to say that if Mike Duffy reimbursed the money they could just sort of call it kiff and forget about Senator Duffy and the audit. He asked how that might work.

Senator Gerstein is not a member of that committee. He was not involved in the audit function in the Senate at all, but presumably he has a relationship with senior officials at the accounting firm. It might be because it has done \$50 million worth of work for the Government of Canada in recent years; that could be. I see my colleague, the NDP House leader, may agree with me that it might in fact be one of the reasons Senator Gerstein felt it was appropriate to just pick up the phone and say, "Look, can we just forget about this?"

Business of Supply

That constitutes a huge breach of professional ethics on the part of Senator Gerstein. It is inexplicable why the Prime Minister's Office would instruct people to contact an independent audit firm. I am very pleased that the Senate internal economy committee, inspired by an intervention from the Liberal Party, will in fact be calling Deloitte before the Senate committee later this week to explain exactly how and by whom they were contacted, when senior Conservative operators called attempting to whitewash an audit.

Senator Gerstein was also willing to pay \$32,000 to reimburse Mike Duffy for his potentially fraudulent expenses. As we know from the RCMP audit, Senator Gerstein certainly did not worry about the propriety of potentially trying to corrupt and bribe a sitting legislator. His concern was with the quantum. His concern was with the amount of money involved, and he was willing to take \$32,000 of contributions that Canadians made of their personal money to the Conservative Party and flush it to Mike Duffy to try to make a problem go away for the Prime Minister and for Mr. Wright, but at the end he decided that the amount was too much; and then Nigel Wright entered with a bag of money.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Now let us take a look at the steps taken by the Prime Minister's employees, those who played some sort of role in this sordid affair and who still work for the Conservative Party and the Canadian government, namely Chris Woodcock, David van Hemmen, Patrick Rogers and Ray Novak. I want to look at what they knew, when they knew it, and what the Prime Minister did for his own employees who were responsible for this scheme.

I will start with Mr. Woodcock. He was director of issues management in the PMO. In other words, if there was a fire, it was up to Chris Woodcock to put it out. RCMP documents show that he participated in whitewashing the Senate report and, what is worse, Nigel Wright sent him an email on March 8 to inform him that Mike Duffy would be receiving a \$90,000 cheque from Nigel Wright's personal bank account.

Rather than informing the police or perhaps even calling a lawyer, what did he do? Clearly, he could not call the Prime Minister's lawyer in the Prime Minister's Office, because we are well aware that Mr. Perrin was also involved. Instead, Mr. Woodcock helped to do more to cover up the scandal. In the private sector, he would have been fired and the police would have been called. As a member of the Conservative Party, he became the chief of staff to the Minister of Natural Resources.

David van Hemmen was Mr. Wright's executive assistant in the Prime Minister's Office. Not only was he aware of the illegal plan to pay back Mr. Duffy, but he also helped to transfer the funds. He took the cheque to the bank of Mr. Duffy's lawyer. He was aware enough of what was going on to be in possession of that cheque, which the RCMP described as key evidence of corruption. Once again, what was his punishment? He was promoted to the position of policy adviser to the Minister of State for Finance.

Patrick Rogers was the director of parliamentary affairs in the PMO. According to the RCMP, he and Senator Gerstein were involved in trying to put an end to the Deloitte audit in order to protect Mike Duffy. Mr. Rogers also had dealings with

Senator Tkachuk and Senator Stewart Olsen, who whitewashed the Senate report about Mike Duffy by removing any criticisms of his behaviour. What happened to Mr. Rogers as a result of this unacceptable behaviour? He is now the director of policy for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Finally, let us talk about Ray Novak, who was the Prime Minister's deputy chief of staff. We know two things about Ray Novak. He knew enough about this sordid affair to call Mike Duffy a serial liar, and he worked on the Senate file with Senator LeBreton. If we are thinking about accepting that the Prime Minister knew nothing about what was happening—and that is a big if—then clearly Ray Novak knew much more and he never shared that information with the Prime Minister. What was his sentence? Ray Novak replaced Nigel Wright as the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

Canadians have the right to wonder how the Prime Minister can trust Ray Novak to be his chief of staff. Why replace a chief of staff who, according to the Prime Minister himself, misled his boss with another person who allegedly did the same thing?

[*English*]

The concept is very simple. At the end of the day, in the private sector, if any chief executive officer presided over such chaotic behaviour from his or her senior staff, or if any board of directors was faced with a chief executive officer who the RCMP, in sworn affidavits, knew presided over an operation that may have violated three very serious sections of Canada's Criminal Code, that chief executive officer would have been shown the door. That chief executive officer would not have then promoted all the incompetent and deceitful staff who participated under his watch in what may in fact be a criminal conspiracy to subvert three important sections of the Criminal Code.

In his own guide for ministers and ministers of state, the Prime Minister outlined what ministerial responsibility allegedly should be. If one hires all the players, then one is responsible ultimately for their behaviour. The current Prime Minister is not living up to his own standard of responsibility, and Canadians are increasingly distrustful and disbelieving of the words of the Prime Minister.

The government's stories and answers make no sense at all: Mr. Wright was a great Canadian; then, all of a sudden, he accepted full responsibility and resigned; then, suddenly, we find out that he was fired.

The idea that he took sole responsibility for a criminal act has no basis at all in law. If a group of people conspire to violate the Criminal Code, it really is not acceptable at the end of the day if one of them says, "You know what, let me take the blame on this one and then you guys will owe me something down the line".

That basis has absolutely no credibility, and Canadians are increasingly distrustful of a government that has lost its moral compass and simply is unable to tell the truth in the face of this very serious scandal.

Business of Supply

•(1030)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked and appalled that no Conservatives wanted to get up today and refute any of the claims that my friend from the Liberal Party has made. It is remarkable because this is a scandal that goes right to the very heart of the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister. Yet they remain silent and remain in their seats, perhaps because they do not have a lot to say on this scandal, which has gripped the country for the last number of months.

I have two points and a question for my friend.

There appears to be two consistent themes in the story and narrative he described today.

The first is that every character involved in this play, every actor he mentioned who has been at the heart of this corruption scandal, are intimately tied to the Prime Minister. They are personally connected to the Prime Minister and to his judgment. He appointed them all. They were confidants. In many cases, they were friends. He trusted them implicitly. It calls into question the Prime Minister's judgment and the culture that has been created in the Prime Minister's very own office, which the RCMP are now investigating. By the way, the Prime Minister claims that there is no RCMP investigation into his office. Rather, the RCMP are just interviewing everyone in the Prime Minister's Office about an illegal affair but that is not an investigation.

Second, and this is where my friend might diverge a bit, there is also a consistent theme that everyone involved on the Senate side of this scandal has virtually no accountability. The interactions he talks about between the head of the investigating committee, the board of internal economy, the auditors and Mike Duffy, from Stewart Olsen, LeBreton and everyone down the line, the reason they can act that way, act with such incredible ease with the law and any ethical guidelines, is that there is no accounting. They simply know they are there by the will of a prime minister or a previous prime minister and there is no day of reckoning with the Canadian public. At the heart of this scandal, is there not also a call for fundamental reform if not outright abolishment? The Senate itself, by its very DNA, its very nature, encourages this kind of behaviour to go on and be rampant, like the old boys' club.

Are there not those two consistent themes in the narrative the member has woven today?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and NDP counterpart, the House leader of the official opposition, for his question.

[*English*]

I agree with my colleague that the Conservatives are remaining silent. That is probably because the incessant talking points that are cranked out in the Prime Minister's Office really have nothing to say in the face of RCMP sworn affidavits given to a criminal court judge.

It is increasingly difficult, even for the great talent in the Prime Minister's Office, to fabricate talking points that Conservative members can get up and repeat in the House. I would suspect as the debate unfolds today that there will be very few Conservatives who

will want to participate in the debate and very few who will be able to defend the actions of their own leader, as we have seen in media reports.

I agree with my colleague that the characters in this cover-up, whom we have called the “fraud squad” and the “dirty dozen”, the different people who were intimately involved both in the potentially criminal acts and the three Criminal Code violations identified so far by the RCMP, were intimately tied to the Prime Minister. He selected those people. He appointed some of them to the Senate. He has continued to give them immense responsibility in his office. However, when the heat came on, obviously he was unable to fire all of them, maybe because they knew too much, so they were sort of shifted laterally and then up a bit. They probably received pay raises by assuming senior positions in the offices of Conservative cabinet ministers.

I would also agree with my colleague that there needs to be full accountability in the Senate. Ultimately, we may disagree on the disposition of the upper chamber, but I think there is no disagreement whatsoever on the idea that the senators need to be fully accountable and that those who behaved in a way that the RCMP said was less than truthful in interviews with the police should also face consequences. I think that when the police finally get access to those emails and correspondence the list of people potentially charged in this criminal conspiracy will grow and we may very well see Conservative senators facing criminal charges as well.

•(1035)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Beauséjour for his actual and remarkable summary of what has happened in this criminal conspiracy.

He opined about three different sections of the Criminal Code that have been offended by Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy, including reference to bribery that was offered and tampering with documents. However, there is another section of the Criminal Code that relates directly to criminal conspiracy, another word that was used by my friend. Paragraph 465(1)(c) essentially says that anyone who conspires with someone to commit an indictable offence is themselves guilty of an indictable offence and subject to the same punishment.

He alluded to Senators Gerstein, LeBreton, Tkachuk and Stewart Olsen. I wonder then, if the good member might opine on his thoughts on the violation of section 465(1)(c)?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Guelph, who as colleagues will know is a senior lawyer and had a distinguished law practice in that great city for a number of years. Obviously, when we are talking about complicated legal matters and the Criminal Code, the opinion from my colleague from Guelph carries great experience and great weight.

I would agree with him when he correctly focused on section 465 (1)(c) of the Criminal Code. You, yourself, Mr. Speaker, were a senior lawyer in the great city of Windsor. I am sure you have reviewed the Criminal Code many times in your law practice. Clients would colloquially refer to that as the aiding and abetting section.

Business of Supply

Everyone understands that if two or three people get together to rob a bank and a couple of guys go in with face masks and weapons while the other guy is waiting outside in the car, the guy in the car is as guilty of participating in the criminal act of robbing the bank as the two people who showed up in the bank with the weapons and balaclavas.

In this case, the people wearing the balaclavas were a senior group of operatives in the Prime Minister's Office. They were the ones who were part of what we believe, and the RCMP may ultimately believe, a crown prosecutor may ultimately conclude and a criminal court may ultimately find, to have been a criminal conspiracy.

Under the section correctly identified by the member for Guelph, I think that this dirty dozen, these senior advisers to the Prime Minister and these senior Conservative senators, are very much at risk of finding themselves subject to a criminal prosecution, depending on the evidence that the police uncover in their very thorough and comprehensive review of the evidence they are getting and have asked to be produced by the information to obtain order that was made public.

• (1040)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whilst we may disagree on a number of facts throughout today's debate and we may disagree that it is a priority of the Canadian people at this point to take the full length of a day, I wonder if the member might at least comment on whether he would agree with me that the actions of these three senators and disgraced former Liberal senator, Mac Harb, were inappropriate? Would he agree that, ultimately, the Canadian taxpayers were defrauded by these four senators and they needed to face some type of punishment?

If he would agree that this is the case, would he explain to the House why it was that the Liberals in the Senate fought so hard against removing the three remaining senators from the Senate? Why did they fight so hard to protect the status quo in the Senate?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with one aspect of what the parliamentary secretary said and disagree with perhaps another aspect.

He said he is not sure that this is a priority of the Canadian people. I think that the very ethics at the centre of the Government of Canada and the truthfulness of the Prime Minister of Canada when facing tough questions about ethical scandals under his watch are very much a priority of the Canadian people.

I would draw to the attention of the parliamentary secretary the results of last night's by-elections and the rather massive decline in the Conservative popular vote. If he does not think that Canadians are concerned about this, I think he read the by-election results last night differently than I did.

We agree that the behaviour of these four senators was clearly inappropriate. In fact, the RCMP believe, and may conclude, that it warrants criminal charges. There has to be and should always be a very robust accountability for persons who are spending taxpayers' dollars. Certainly one of the Conservative senators involved did not think he had to reimburse expenses himself because someone in the Prime Minister's Office would make him whole with a large cheque.

Taxpayers may have been reimbursed, but it was certainly not by the offending senator. He was reimbursed by the Prime Minister's senior adviser. We think that, too, was wrong.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this. The hon. member from the Liberal Party touched on the by-election results last night. I want to take a very brief moment to congratulate the two newest members of the Conservative caucus who will be coming to the House very soon. I want to congratulate all those who ran. It is never easy running for an election. It is certainly not easy in a by-election, running when a candidate is left alone and the focus of the world is on other areas, but again, congratulations to the newest Conservative members and congratulations to all members who ran and who were victorious last night.

I will start by continuing along with the question I asked of the member opposite. All Canadians have been very saddened by the behaviour they have seen by a number of senators. The vast majority of Canadians expect that when they elect members of Parliament or when individuals are elevated to the Senate, they will do their best to use the money that Canadian taxpayers provide them to do their job. They expect the senators will do their best to use that money in a respectful way, in a way that respects the taxpayers. When Canadians see that does not happen, they rightfully demand that action be taken.

As others have tried to do, I will not defend the actions of these senators, because I think they are very indefensible. We have seen throughout this debate the need to have significant reforms in the Senate. This government has been trying to do so for a number of years. We have brought forward legislation that is right now being debated in the Supreme Court of Canada because we want to have a road map for the reform of the Senate.

Canadians at the same time have said that they want a reformed Senate. They want a Senate that they can once again be proud of, but at the same time, they do not want to see the attention of the elected members of Parliament be turned toward constitutional battles that would take us away from what should be the main focus of government, creating jobs and opportunity and hope for Canadians across this country. That is why we have put forward a number of reforms to the Supreme Court, which we hope will again provide us with a road map for going forward.

I note also that the Senate did take some steps last June to improve accountability measures in the Senate. It was unfortunate, and I hear this often in my constituency, that it took them so long. Why did it take so long for the Senate to catch up with the House of Commons with respect to accountability and how their expenses are being handled? I wish I had the answer to that, and perhaps had these measures been undertaken earlier by the Senate, the senators would not be in the position they find themselves now.

Having said that, the member for Beauséjour raised a number of points. He talked a little with respect to the Prime Minister and the actions of the Prime Minister's Office. The member has heard me say this on a number of occasions, and I will reference the report itself. It is on page 21. I will read some of the relevant sections. This is the RCMP speaking on page 21:

Business of Supply

Rob Staley, legal representative for the PMO, advised my office that he had clear orders from the Prime Minister to provide complete cooperation with the investigation, and to provide any assistance or documentation the RCMP requested. The PMO employees (current and former) whose e-mails I deemed relevant, have all provided privacy waivers through their legal counsel, relating to the content of their e-mails. The PMO has also waived solicitor-client privilege for those e-mails....

Upon learning of the allegations, and the subsequent RCMP investigation in May 2013, [the] Prime Minister...ordered that all e-mails of PMO staff were to be retained for the RCMP, should they be required.

• (1045)

It goes on to say:

The process resulted in the initial identification of approximately 260,000 e-mail items of possible relevance. E-mail item refers to either e-mails, or attachments to e-mails. Through a review process that number was reduced to approximately 19,000 items. Further detailed analysis of that data reduced the number of e-mail items containing possible evidentiary value to approximately 2,600.

For months we have been hearing from the opposition. First, last spring we heard the opposition suggesting that the Prime Minister was not participating or assisting. Clearly, evidence shows that the opposite was actually happening. The Prime Minister moved very quickly upon hearing of the allegations to make sure that his office not only assisted but participated in the investigation.

I bring that up as a contrast because the member for Beauséjour raised a number of points, and sometimes we have to go back to judge what the member is saying. I think there is a context, so I want to talk a bit about the income trust problem that the previous Martin government found itself in. I want to go over some of it and I will bring it back around and show the contrast. I will quote some sections here from a report.

[The member for Kings-Hants] was also interviewed by the Mounties about an e-mail he sent to an acquaintance at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the day before [the member for Wascana's] announcement.

This was with respect to the approach that the then-government was going to take on income trusts. The member for Kings—Hants wrote in that email that the recipient “will be happier very soon”. That was a quote from the member for Kings—Hants.

The investigation then went on a bit further. The member for Wascana said that he was contacted by the member for Kings—Hants and asked to state publicly “that my recollection of events was the same as his”, so what would appear to have been happening is that the member for Kings—Hants was trying to convince the member for Wascana that they should somehow talk about things in advance of the RCMP investigation, figure out their story, and go public with it.

It then goes on a bit further.

Under RCMP questioning, the member for Wascana seemed uneasy about discussing his one-time cabinet colleague. “I guess others will have to make the judgment call about how to characterize [the member for Kings—Hants] activity”.

That is important because it shows the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party on so many fronts.

Then when asked about emails and BlackBerrys, the member for Wascana had this to say. He told the RCMP that:

...he has no email service, either on a handheld device or even his desktop computer, saying “it just ticks me off”, especially when colleagues thumb their BlackBerrys at meetings.

That is the Liberal approach to something as serious as the income trust.

The decision on whether the government was going to tax income trusts or not would have had a massive impact on the market. We would have seen the market move. People had significant holdings and resources that would have been impacted by the government's decision.

• (1050)

It would appear on the surface that when the member for Kings—Hants was telling a person at the CIBC that he would be happier very soon, the day before this would be released to the public, I am making the assumption that he was actually letting him on the fact that the member for Wascana, who was then the finance minister, was about to make a decision on the income trusts that would make this person at the CIBC happier.

What appears to have happened here is that the member for Wascana informed the member for Kings—Hants, who then informed somebody at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Forgetting about cabinet secrecy, what they seem to have done is to try to find a way to positively influence the people who were at that time donating massive amounts to the Liberal Party.

As members will recall, one of the first acts of this government was the Federal Accountability Act, which removed the influence of big money and big unions from banks. Then when they went on a little further to investigate, apparently he had no email. He did not have a BlackBerry, nothing of the sort.

I contrast that to our Prime Minister. The moment he found out, the moment he was informed that there might be problems within his office, he immediately goes back. His staff is asked to sign waivers so that they could appropriately assist in the RCMP investigation. Hundreds of thousands of emails are turned over. Everything that the RCMP is asking for is provided to them so that they can assist in this investigation.

In addition, talking a bit further about some of the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party, this is apparently a priority. It is a priority for the Liberals. I am going to say, and we will disagree on this, that the economy is a priority for Canadians. I think jobs and opportunities are priorities for Canadians. I think public safety is a priority for Canadians. I think resource development is a priority for Canadians.

Apparently the Liberals have a different philosophy. They think that is important. It is such a priority that the Liberal leader sits down every day in this House and is not allowed to talk about other things. It seems that it is not important enough for the Liberal leader to come into the House and talk about these issues. It is not important enough for him to come and ask the questions that he deems to be the most important questions of the day. He does not do it. He sends another person, a surrogate, to do it and to ask those questions.

As I said before in another debate we had, while I disagree that this is the absolute priority of Canadians, it is a priority of at least one of the two opposition parties. On a daily basis the Leader of the Opposition shows up in the House and asks questions. It is every single day.

Business of Supply

Every single day the Leader of the Opposition asks questions, because he says it is a priority, and I assume it is a priority because he shows up and asks those questions. I may disagree. I might not like the questions he is asking and I know he does not like the answers I am giving back, but at least he is somewhat consistent in that he is making it a priority.

That is in contrast to most of the Liberal Party members, who when a camera might be on or when they think they might be able to score a cheap political point, will rise in their place and try to make a point.

We also have the leader of the Liberal Party, who gets up and says, “Oh, I am Mr. Positive. I am Mr. Happy”, but then he gets somebody else to get up and make slanders and slurs against either the official opposition or the government. He is neither accountable nor honest in how he deals with the Canadian people.

More and more, every single day, Canadians are coming to the same conclusion that we did a long time ago: that this is a person who is in way over his head. His inability to speak to motions that he deems to be the most important to Canadians reflects either his lack of trust in the parliamentary process or his inability to actually back up the things that he is saying with evidence.

●(1055)

There has been a lot of discussion with respect to the actions of Mr. Wright and why, on February 22, there was an email that seems to have caused a bit of grief.

These documents are a very impressive body of work, and I congratulate the RCMP. However, people are asking why the Prime Minister would need to tell Senator Duffy to repay his expenses. As I said in the House yesterday, on February 7 Senator Duffy defended himself, saying that his expenses were perfectly fine. On February 11 Senator Duffy again tried to defend the fact that he had claimed these inappropriate expenses.

On February 13 he approached the Prime Minister, again trying to justify these inappropriate expenses, and the Prime Minister told him he had to repay them.

On February 19 Senator Duffy tried to defend his inappropriate expenses. On February 20 Senator Duffy tried to defend his inappropriate expenses. On February 21 Senator Duffy tried to defend his inappropriate expenses. At no point did the senator ever agree that he had to repay them.

As I have also said on a number of occasions, just because someone can find a way around the rules does not mean that he or she should find a way around the rules. There is the spirit of the law, as the Prime Minister has said, and there is the letter of the law. When these rules are put in place, we do not envision members of Parliament or senators finding all kinds of convenient ways around the rules and justifying them. Canadians give us a lot of money to be here, they provide us with a lot of resources to be here, and they are fair in what they give us, but they also want to be treated fairly. Part of being treated fairly is not finding a way to scam or get around the rules.

Therefore, when Senator Duffy came to the Prime Minister on February 13, the Prime Minister said to repay the expenses, despite

the fact that the senator, on February 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, and 21 was still objecting to the fact that he had to pay. Finally, on February 22, it appeared that he was going to repay them. Of course, we have all learned that such was not the fact, that he had somebody else repay those expenses.

That, at its core, is what this investigation by the police is about right now. It is about the fact that Senator Duffy claimed expenses that he did not incur and that it was made worse by the fact that Nigel Wright repaid those expenses on his behalf. As I have said countless times—and if people read this, it is quite evident—Nigel Wright said he is prepared to accept the consequences of the decisions that he made. He is working also, it would appear, with the RCMP on this matter. However, despite his pronouncements in the Senate a number of weeks ago, Senator Duffy is in no way co-operating with this investigation. He said he would turn over lots of emails, but every time he is asked, he finds a reason he cannot turn them over.

It also says on page 72 of the RCMP report:

I am not aware of any evidence that the Prime Minister was involved in the repayment or reimbursement of money to Senator Duffy or his lawyer.

The RCMP, after reviewing thousands of emails and documents, has come to that conclusion.

Nigel Wright has also said that he did not bring the Prime Minister into his confidence with respect to this matter. Therefore, it is very clear that the Prime Minister did not know. Had he known, he would have put a stop to it. What Nigel Wright did was inappropriate. It should not have happened, and he should suffer the consequences of that decision.

Ultimately, what Senator Duffy, Senator Mac Harb, Senator Brazeau, and Senator Wallin did is something that all Canadians are infuriated with, and rightly so. In addition to working with the RCMP, that is one of the reasons that we have to move forward as a Parliament with substantial reform to the Senate.

●(1100)

On all these matters, it is very clear that the Prime Minister has shown leadership, he has worked with the RCMP, has been open and honest and that he, just as badly as everybody else, wants to see the conclusion of this.

As we have said on a number of occasions, we will continue to govern for all Canadians. We have an incredible record of some 61 bills, and 19 private member's bills that have been passed. We have a very impressive record that I know a majority of Canadians look at everyday and are very proud of. That is why I am so proud to work with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. He missed a number of key elements of this 80-page affidavit, particularly about the role of senators in the Prime Minister's Office of trying to interfere with the issue of the eligibility requirements of Mike Duffy to sit in the Senate. In fact, it was used to hold over him. Chris Woodcock said at one point, “Describing Duffy's arrangements in Charlottetown as a ‘residence’ may be too cute...I’ll cross that line out”.

Business of Supply

I bring this up not because of Duffy. We know Duffy scammed the system. I bring it up because on page 26 of the affidavit, Nigel Wright said in an email to Benjamin Perrin:

I am gravely concerned that Sen. Duffy would be considered a resident of Ontario under [these changes]. Possibly Sen. Patterson in BC too. If this were adopted as the Senate's view about whether the constitutional qualification...the consequences are obvious.

The issue is that the Prime Minister's Office is considering Senator Patterson to be a resident of British Columbia. If anyone looks into Senator Patterson's living conditions, then his constitutional eligibility to even be in the Senate is in question. We have seen how the Conservatives bend themselves out of shape, twisting the constitutional requirements for their friend, Mike Duffy, but I would like to ask a question of my hon. colleague about Senator Patterson of British Columbia.

What do the Conservatives know about his residency in British Columbia, rather than in his home territory of Nunavut, that they identified and flagged as an issue that he would not be constitutionally eligible to sit in the Senate? As well, have they looked into whether Senator Patterson was scamming the taxpayers for his housing allowance if he was in fact not a resident of Nunavut?

• (1105)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, there is an audit under way by the Auditor General into the expense filings of all senators at this point. I do not want to prejudge that. However, we set a very important standard with respect to senators' eligibility when the Conservative senators fought so hard, supported by this caucus, to have Senators Brazeau, Wallin and Duffy removed from the Senate.

We heard for a number of weeks during that debate how people thought that was somehow against due process. We argued that it was not, that in fact these senators had been given a tremendous amount of opportunity to address these charges and, failing to do that in the right way, we believed they should be removed.

I am encouraged now to hear the member would agree, at least on that point, that these three senators should have been removed. I think he would also agree that it is probably a good idea that the Auditor General does review all of the expenses of the Senate. I think he would probably agree that the only party that believes in the status quo is the Liberal Party, and the Liberals will always fight for their entitlements as opposed to putting taxpayers first.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding that last comment by the parliamentary secretary, I must admit I have a bit of sympathy for him because in the lottery of jobs, he has drawn the shortest possible stick at this point. He is left in the position where, out of that vast Conservative caucus, only two members get up to defend the Prime Minister: the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary. It is a sad state of affairs for which he is not responsible.

However, my question has to do with income trusts. I cannot believe he would talk about the subject of income trusts, which brings such huge discredit to his leader and his party. The allegations he mentions against two of my colleagues were totally unfounded. It happened some eight years ago. No charges were ever laid, so it is completely baseless.

The reality is that the Prime Minister, during the election campaign of 2005-06, promised repeatedly there would be no tax on income trusts. Then what did he do on that black Halloween day of 2006? He changed his mind. He raised taxes on income trusts to the point where hundreds of thousands of Canadians lost hundreds of millions of dollars overnight, turning many former Conservatives into non-Conservatives. It was a total breaking of a solemn commitment made by the Prime Minister, leading to massive losses by millions of hard-saving Canadians, who have, in many cases, not recovered from that.

I know the member is desperate for defences, but how does he have the nerve to bring up income trusts as a matter of defence against his Prime Minister?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, that question defies logic. He needs to read the motion that has been brought forward today.

He said that there was no evidence and that they were not charged with anything. Nobody has been charged with anything right now. Yet, day in and day out, at least the Leader of the Opposition has been asking questions. The Liberal leader is always missing in action.

The relevance of the income trust is to show just how hypocritical the Liberals are with respect to this. He talks about the income trust and millions of people turning. My vote count went from a victory of 500 to a victory of 22,000. When I first entered Parliament, the Liberals were right there, across from me, as the opposition, with approximately 80 members. Now they are tucked away in a little corner, with approximately 31 members.

I think the only people who are turning away are the people who used to vote for the Liberals. They are turning to other parties. They have given us a majority because they see, in this Parliament alone, that the record of achievement of this party and of this government is incomparable with any in the history of the country.

Ultimately, the Liberals have to look at themselves to try to appreciate that Canadians are telling them they just do not meet up to the standards of what Canadians think a government should look like. That is why, on this side of the House, we will always stand up for taxpayers. We will tell them what we are going to do, how we are going to do it and we will ensure that it is always in the best interest of this country, unlike the Liberals, who are always entitled to their entitlements, who will never stand up for Canadian taxpayers, who always stand up for the status quo. However, then again that is why they are in a little corner of the House.

• (1110)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing this debate shines a light on is the fact that Canadians are calling upon our government to reform the Senate. We have looked at a number of ways that this can be done. We have a motion right now where we have asked the Supreme Court to take a look at it.

Could my colleague talk about some of the things we are looking at and what his constituents are saying about reforming the Senate and finding accountability there?

Business of Supply

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as I said initially, nobody is proud of what happened in the Senate. I think we are all angered by the actions of those senators. It shines a poor light on all of us as parliamentarians.

Having said that, we have put forward a road map that we think is very important to seek change in the Senate. The Senate brought in some accountability measures in June. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has put forward a number of recommendations to reform the Senate, to make it more accountable, to have elections for senators, to put term limits on the table for senators.

However, at the same time, we know Canadians want us to focus on jobs and economic growth. Therefore, we want to do this in a way that works with our partners and that does not start into big long, drawn out constitutional battles.

Constituents in my riding are split. Some want to maintain a bicameral system. Others want to see the Senate removed. What they are very unified on is that they do not want to see the Liberal approach of protecting the status quo and the Senate at all costs. I think they are more in line with our approach to reforming the Senate. Also, I have talked a bit about the NDP approach of abolishing it, at the same time. The Conservatives and the NDP are the only two parties that have any position on the Senate that would change the status quo.

I think that is why Canadians are looking more in a different direction than the Liberal Party and that is why it is always sitting in that little tiny corner of the House of Commons.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise with great honour, as always, to represent the people of Timmins—James Bay who put their trust in me to represent their interests. All of us are here to represent the public good, including the office of the Prime Minister.

I will definitely be supporting this motion. It shows the concern and sadness of the House of Commons that the Prime Minister's Office is under investigation for bribery, corruption, breach of trust, fraud, and that the RCMP is seeking warrants to get production orders from all the key players in the Prime Minister's Office, except one. Benjamin Perrin is the only person the RCMP is not seeking production orders from because his emails have been erased.

Today, rather than get into the cast of dubious characters in this disgraceful scandal, I would like to focus on Benjamin Perrin. I find his role to be particularly interesting because his role in the Prime Minister's Office is as lawyer to the Prime Minister of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Gatineau.

As a lawyer, Mr. Perrin had certain obligations and responsibilities. He was to protect the interests of the Prime Minister and work for the Prime Minister. The question is this. What role did Benjamin Perrin play in this deal that is now being investigated for fraud, corruption and breach of trust?

On May 21, Benjamin Perrin said, "I was not consulted on, and did not participate in, Nigel Wright's decision to write a personal cheque to reimburse Senator Duffy's expenses". However, the RCMP affidavit seems to suggest otherwise. Mr. Perrin also said, "I

have never communicated with the Prime Minister on this matter". However, as his lawyer, I would find that sort of a strange situation.

Let us go through this.

Mr. Perrin becomes involved in this scheme on February 19. So Duffy's lawyer, Ms. Payne, has a legal person in the Prime Minister's Office to talk to, Benjamin Perrin steps up.

Nigel Wright on February 20, stated the "cash for repayment scheme", which is what it is called, and that Deloitte would not find against him.

Therefore, Benjamin Perrin was involved in these negotiations. Who authorized him to get involved in these negotiations? As the lawyer for the Prime Minister, was he just doing this on his own working against the express position of the Prime Minister, as has been reiterated in a very dubious way by the parliamentary secretary?

February 21 and 22 are key in this scandal.

Nigel Wright contacts Benjamin Perrin and they talk about setting up this story for Mike Duffy, the media lines for Mike Duffy. Nigel Wright says to Mr. Perrin that he does not like the optics of sending lines to a lawyer and wants to do it over the phone.

Now if this was a legal agreement, an honourable agreement, is it something that the Prime Minister would support? Why would they not want to put the deal in writing? However, no, they did not want to talk to the lawyer, but tell Duffy over the phone. This is the lawyer for the Prime Minister being involved in this.

On February 21, we found out that Benjamin Perrin, the personal lawyer to the Prime Minister of the country, came back with a five-point deal.

The first was to kill the audit and say that Duffy's expenses were okay. Now the audit is on whether or not Mike Duffy had defrauded the taxpayers of Canada. Therefore, the first thing they would do is kill that audit and say that Mike Duffy did not defraud the people of Canada.

The second was that Duffy meet the requirements for residency. Well, they knew he did not because, as Chris Woodcock says, "Describing Duffy's arrangements in Charlottetown as a 'residence' may be too cute...I'll cross that line out". However, they were going to pretend that Duffy's summer place was his residency.

The third, and this is the key element, was that his expenses stemmed from his time on the road working for the party and that his legal fees would be reimbursed and he would be kept whole. As the RCMP tells us, financially, Mike Duffy will not be out of pocket.

The fourth, the old Duffster, if they changed the rules back, he would like to be able to claim his P.E.I. residence again and start scamming the taxpayers one more time, but that was in the deal.

The fifth was that the Prime Minister's Office would take all reasonable steps to ensure the Conservative caucus would stick to the media lines. This meant that nobody was going to bad mouth the Duffster.

Business of Supply

Therefore, Benjamin Perrin writes back that they have negotiated this deal. Once again, who is Benjamin Perrin negotiating this deal from?

• (1115)

Then Nigel Wright said to him, “I now have the go-ahead on point three, with a couple of stipulations”. The go-ahead is that they are going to pay Mike Duffy's expenses and pretend that he paid them back. Who gave the go-ahead, with the stipulations? Are we to assume that the phantom Prime Minister was not the one they had to get the go-ahead from?

Later on that day, as the negotiations go back and forth, they go back and say that they need the final word from the Prime Minister before this deal is okayed. The Prime Minister's own lawyer has laid out a deal, which we now see is under investigation for fraud and breach of trust. Then they say that they have the okay. “We are good to go”.

How can the Canadian public be expected to believe that a lawyer as important as Mr. Perrin, with all the professional and legal obligations he has, would have been involved in the negotiations on his own, would have misrepresented those negotiations to the Prime Minister, would have argued with some fictitious person in the Prime Minister's chair about the stipulation on point number three that they were going to cover off, through the Conservative Party, Mike Duffy's expenses, and would have then turned around and said that he did not know a thing about this and further that he never bothered to tell the Prime Minister? I would find that very surprising for a man of integrity and for a man with the professional and legal responsibilities Mr. Perrin has.

The other interesting point here is that Senator Duffy's lawyer wanted the agreement in writing, and Mr. Perrin did not want to put it in writing. He says, “we aren't selling a car here”. It sounds like we are reading *Goodfellas*. This is the lawyer for the Prime Minister of the country saying that we are not selling a car here; we are not putting it in writing.

This deal is about transferring money from the Conservative Party, whitewashing an audit, and claiming that a man who is not eligible to sit in the Senate meets the constitutional requirements, and doing all of this but not putting it in writing. Again, who is Mr. Perrin, the Prime Minister's lawyer, representing when he says that they are not selling a car? One has to sign a big legal agreement to sell a car, but they would set up a potentially illegal deal in the Prime Minister's Office, not put it in writing, and not tell the Prime Minister.

We know that the deal goes off the rails on February 27, when poor Nigel Wright is gobsmacked to find out that Mike Duffy has scammed so much money that instead of the \$30,000, it is \$90,000. Senator Gerstein balks at this point and walks. Nigel Wright is in a pickle, and for whatever bizarre reason, he agrees to cut the cheque himself so that the deal stays in place.

Then we go back again to the lawyer for the Prime Minister of this country, Mr. Benjamin Perrin. On page five of the RCMP's affidavit it says:

Nigel Wright decided that he would personally cover the cost of reimbursing Senator Duffy. After back and forth negotiations between Janice Payne and Benjamin Perrin (legal counsel within the PMO) terms of the agreement were set.

Benjamin Perrin told us on May 21 that he was not consulted on and had not participated in Nigel Wright's decision to write a personal cheque to reimburse Senator Duffy's expenses, and further, he had never communicated with the Prime Minister on this matter.

What we are seeing in this scandal is that a cover-up was orchestrated in the Prime Minister's Office. We have named the names of the senators who were involved in attempting to whitewash the audit, including the call from Wright to Gerstein and from Gerstein to Michael Runia at Deloitte, a friend of his, to try to whitewash an audit. What does whitewashing an audit mean? The audit was about whether Mike Duffy defrauded the people of Canada of \$90,000 and had set up a housing scheme to collect the per diems.

We see Senator Tkachuk and Senator Stewart-Olsen involved. We see Senator LeBreton and Senator Gerstein. All of them have acted shamefully, but within the office of the Prime Minister, there were two key people: Nigel Wright, the chief of staff, and Benjamin Perrin, the lawyer for the Prime Minister. How can we believe that nobody told the Prime Minister when, on February 22, they were needing the go-ahead on point three. Point three is about coming up with a scheme to pay Mike Duffy to make him shut up and make the problem go away.

• (1120)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay has hit the nail on the head.

What is interesting is that when the Conservatives first spoke, they asked why this was being brought to the House of Commons today when there are so many other important things happening in this country. I am sure the Republicans said that about Nixon when there was trouble in the Oval Office, with the energy crisis that was happening down there as well as Vietnam.

Why bring it to the House of Commons? It is because that is where the power is centred. I think all Canadians would agree that there is a confidence problem with respect to the Prime Minister's Office.

I would like to ask the member for Timmins—James Bay what he has been hearing in his riding and across the country with respect to the seriousness of the situation. What are his feelings on the attitude of the Conservatives, who are saying that we should not even be bringing it to the floor today?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have such great respect for my hon. colleague, because he is from the island of Cape Breton. My family left the Dominion coal mines in Cape Breton to work in the mines in northern Ontario.

I am sure that the folks back in Cape Breton, just like in Timmins—James Bay, are appalled. They were appalled that senior citizens were told that they could work until they were 67 and not to worry about it; they would actually tell the millionaires in Davos that. The government told the veterans that they would close all their points of contact and that they would be kicked out without being given a pension. That is the attitude of the Conservatives. They show no mercy to anybody. However, when it is one of their buddies or pals, there is a pot that is so big we cannot even get to the bottom of it.

Business of Supply

This is about corruption. It is about a rip-off of the people of Canada while telling the hard-working Canadian taxpayers that they should be footing the bill for these crooks. All of the Conservatives over there are going along with this. We have not seen any Conservative members stand up to say that they are ashamed of the behaviour of their Prime Minister, of his staff, and of all those Conservative senators.

They have identified Duffy, Brazeau, and Mac Harb. What about Tkachuk, Gerstein, and Senator Patterson, who they have identified as living in British Columbia, who may be ripping off the taxpayers? It is going on, but they have decided to look the other way.

People back home are not too happy.

● (1125)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in contrast to what the Liberal MP just said, I wonder if I might ask my hon. colleague this.

I will not question the New Democrats' desire to make this important, because their leader stands up in the House every day and asks a number of questions. I think they have identified that. However, if this is so important to the Liberal Party, if it is not just about cheap political points for the Liberals, and if this is the most important issue to them, why is it that their leader could not stand in his place and make the case? Why is it that day in and day out the leader of the Liberal Party sits there and asks somebody else to do the hard work on what he thinks is the most important issue for Canadians?

I wonder if the hon. member might comment on the fact that the Liberal leader seems to be constantly missing in action. Even when it is something he calls a priority, he seems to be too busy to take up that challenge. I wonder if the hon. member might comment on that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I do not agree on much. However, I think he would agree that when we are in the House, members are considered to be under oath. Otherwise, we are in contempt of Parliament. Therefore, when we have a motion that states that the Prime Minister should speak under oath, the Prime Minister, as much as I disagree with him, has shown up. We have asked him question after question. This is how we are trying to get to the bottom of this.

Unfortunately, our Liberal colleague, the Liberal leader, does not often show up. Given the opportunity to ask 45 questions in a week, at most he might ask nine. He seems to be everywhere else in the country.

This is a priority for Canadians. Regardless of our positions, the House of Commons is where Canadians send us to debate the issues of the day. How we bring forward positions is through debate. It is not about glossy brochures and ladies' nights. It is about standing up here and debating ideas.

I might not like much of what the Conservatives say, but they show up and they debate. We will debate them. I would invite the Liberal leader. I wish he were here. We need the extra voice. We would like to hear his perspective. Unfortunately, he is rarely in the House. I think that Canadians are not being served well by that.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not say that I am honoured to discuss such a subject, because I am very depressed at having to rise to speak again about scandals. The particular scandal we are discussing could be the plot in a John Grisham novel, and I would not be surprised if it were outright fiction.

For several weeks now, if not months, we have been pounded by all kinds of speeches. This motion from the Liberal opposition calls for the actions of the Prime Minister's Office to be condemned and for the Prime Minister to testify in committee under oath, among other things.

I agree with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay that we all swore an oath here, before even entering the House, when we were elected as members of Parliament. I hope that when we speak, we do so under oath.

The Liberal leader seemed to suggest that having the Prime Minister testify under oath somewhere would change something, but I do not agree. However, it would be interesting to look into this issue in committee and ask the Prime Minister all kinds of questions. Again, I highly doubt this will change anything at all.

I say this with unimaginable sadness. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is doing his job, but I still think he is being thrown to the lions. He is trying to handle things as well as he can. Clearly he is in no way involved in this scandal, but he was chosen to play this role and to lend some credibility to the whole affair. It is rather unfortunate for him that he has to do this, although it does give him an opportunity to exercise some of his natural talents.

That said, if he thinks that this is not a concern for Canadians, then he is just a little too busy with this issue and too focused on learning his lines. He would find it useful to visit his riding and talk to his constituents.

When I go to Gatineau, all that people have to say is, "Don't let up on the Senate." Seriously, this is what people most often say to me. The reason for that is that Canadians, including the people of Quebec and Gatineau, are fed up with being taken for fools.

We, too, feel that their version of the story is changing little by little. This is not a minor matter. This situation concerns an extremely important institution, one that has gained great importance in recent years. Whether the government is Liberal or Conservative, power has become increasingly concentrated in the PMO.

No one in government can speak or even sneeze without the PMO's prior permission, and this is a good indication of how much power that office wields. When a scandal erupts from that office, it rocks one of the main pillars of our great democratic institution, Canada's Parliament.

I already knew that the government does not have a great deal of respect for the legal system, judges, courts and, now, even for the Supreme Court of Canada. Still, it is incredible that the Prime Minister of Canada's office is so deeply involved in such a situation.

Make no mistake. The holier than thou Conservatives can feign indignation as much as they want and swear, with their hands on their hearts, that they wanted Canadian taxpayers to be reimbursed, but the information obtained proves the contrary. Perhaps that is where their problem lies.

They now have no credibility because their versions of the story, from the first day to yesterday, and perhaps even up to today, are diametrically opposed, different and conflicting. People are hungry following this story because it reads like a thrilling political suspense novel.

•(1130)

People are wondering what went on. Everyone has an idea in their mind, but if you do not, I will help you out. Everyone remembers the Prime Minister's absolutely extraordinary meetings with Mike Duffy. He was the star they brought in to make the Prime Minister look good on so many occasions that it is almost laughable.

Now they are distancing themselves from Mike Duffy, even though he used to play an extremely important role for the Conservative Party and the government. The Conservatives could meet people all over Canada and Mike Duffy would help make the Prime Minister seem a little more human. No one has a hard time believing what is in the sworn statement from the RCMP, in which it appears that they wanted to protect someone who was very important to the party.

However, when you make up a story and try to manipulate the truth and rationalize, you eventually reach a point where you have problems knowing what is right and true. At some point, your story stops making sense, so you are forced to do a complete 180 and distance yourself as much as possible from the situation. That is what we are seeing here.

I once asked the parliamentary secretary a question and told him that it would be much easier to apply the saying, "a fault confessed is half redressed".

The Conservatives could have said that there was a misunderstanding about the expenses but that they were going to take care of it, instead of inventing this absolutely nightmarish scheme in which they are trying to defend the indefensible and change things by the back door. Then, they rise and try to suggest that they did this for Canadians, to ensure that they were not out that \$90,000 we keep hearing about. Someone repaid the money, and it was not just anyone. It was the person closest to the Prime Minister.

In view of the notes that the government blithely hands out to everyone, I think that it—and the PMO in fact—are confusing the concept of responsibility with the concept of finding a scapegoat.

I think that the Conservatives truly believe that standing up and saying that Nigel Wright accepts responsibility should be good enough for the rest of us. We should just accept that and say, okay, we have the person responsible. It does not work like that. We are talking about the PMO in the same way we talk about a department being the responsibility of the minister. This Canadian democracy and its democratic pillars have to mean something. We have a system of ministerial responsibilities that does not seem to mean much of anything any more, when the government can hide behind the Nigel Wrights of this world to justify not taking responsibility.

Business of Supply

Whether things happen with the Prime Minister's knowledge or not, whether he is aware or not, the fact remains that when something happens on his watch, it is his responsibility. It is up to him to stand before Canadians and apologize and tell them that something inappropriate happened and that he is going to get to the bottom of things and find the truth. He should not say this, learn that, change his story, take three steps back, move ahead two steps, step to the side and let his parliamentary secretary answer for him and so on and so forth.

In closing, the unfortunate thing about all of this is that, once again, after the sponsorship scandal and the Gomery commission, after being promised the moon and the stars by this Conservative government, which was supposed to be squeaky clean, all we have seen is one scandal after another. This is having an impact on all of us, on all members from all parties. It will not be easy to regain the trust of Canadians. Right now every Canadian thinks that we must get to the bottom of this and ensure that the truth comes out about the Senate.

•(1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is going to be quite clear throughout the debate today that it is unlikely I will agree with much of what the opposition is saying. However, this is the House of Commons and they have the opportunity to debate this motion. That is why we are here.

I want to go more to the substance of the motion and the hypocrisy of the Liberals for actually bringing this motion forward. The NDP members have brought forward other motions with respect to this, and it is clear that they have made this a priority.

While I said earlier that I do not necessarily agree that it should be the priority of the House, that is a decision that can be made by the opposition. At the same time, every single instance that the leader of the Liberal Party has had to actually address these issues, he decided to take a pass and let somebody else do the work for him.

While the Leader of the Opposition was in the House asking questions, the leader of the Liberal Party was in some part of the country saying that he would support removing mandatory minimum sentencing for some of the most heinous crimes.

While the Leader of the Opposition was in here questioning the Prime Minister with respect to this, the leader of the Liberal Party was at a primary school on the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, talking about his plan to legalize marijuana. While the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister were debating this in the House, the leader of the Liberal Party was talking to women, getting close to them, and explaining how a dictatorship is his favourite form of government.

How can the Liberals claim this to be a priority? How can the Liberal leader claim that this is a priority for him when he hides from this place, when he never addresses the issues that he says are a priority and when he abdicates his responsibilities to others?

Business of Supply

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it has been a long time since I have tried, and I have stopped trying, to understand the Liberal Party of Canada.

I am quite a proud NDP member, and I do not necessarily think I have to try to justify the Liberal attitude. What I can say, and am quite proud to say, is that I have the utmost respect for my leader, who is not afraid and who is doing the job we are supposed to expect from our leaders on the opposition bench.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

He is making sure that we are asking the right questions of this government. I feel immense pride when my leader rises each day. He will not give up. Others can say what they want, but that is what the people expect. That is what the people in my riding of Gatineau are telling me. They are proud to see what is happening because they are asking themselves these same questions.

I really do not have time to worry about what is happening at the other end of the House. We are paid to do a job and we work relentlessly. We are taking a stand and we are not afraid to ask tough questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I will support this motion. Anyone who believes that the Prime Minister was not involved probably also believes in the tooth fairy.

This is a symptom of a much bigger problem: a flawed electoral system and a flawed governance system, where MPs and senators all too often work for parties more than they work for the people.

From 1867 until 1970, MPs worked for their constituents, their conscience and for Canada. In 1970, Pierre Trudeau changed the Canada Elections Act to require party leaders to sign their nomination papers, and soon thereafter he described his own backbenchers as mere trained seals.

My question is: Will the member and all the members in this House of Commons support a return of the control of nominations to their ridings, and restore true representative democracy to the House of Commons?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, suffice it to say that I never consider myself a mere trained seal. Anybody who looks at me and thinks that would be the case is bound to have a good fight on their hands.

[*Translation*]

In all honesty, I am accountable to the people of my riding, and they know that. I am here, first and foremost, to represent the people of Gatineau. Those in my party and my leader know that. I use the means at my disposal to ensure that my leader has no choice but to sign the papers.

I agree that having the leader sign the paperwork is a bit paternalistic; however, I have only ever felt accountable to the people of my riding. I support my party's policies, but I am accountable to my constituents.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal motion moved by my hon. colleague from Beauséjour calls on the House to do three things.

First of all, it invites us to condemn the unacceptable and irresponsible actions of certain members of the Prime Minister's Office. Second, it reminds the Prime Minister that, according to his own guide entitled "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State", he is personally responsible for the actions of his office. Third, it calls on the Prime Minister to testify under oath in a context in which he must stop avoiding the questions, as he always does in the House.

The rationale for the Liberal motion currently before the House is RCMP Corporal Greg Horton's sworn affidavit, which indicates that fraud has been committed by the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, and Senator Mike Duffy. It states, "[They] have committed...frauds".

The first perpetrator, Mr. Wright, secretly gave a \$90,000 cheque to the second perpetrator, Mr. Duffy, to pay back his ineligible expense claims. The second perpetrator, Mr. Duffy, accepted the cheque on the condition that he state publicly that he was paying the money back himself. According to the RCMP, they committed fraud. The RCMP seems to be accusing them not only of fraud, but also corruption and breach of trust. This is very serious.

Who else knew about this fraud, besides Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy? Who was involved? Who closed their eyes? Are the accomplices still members of this government? Do they still work for this government? If so, why?

The government refuses to answer these questions. It keeps repeating that only Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy are under investigation and are entirely responsible for this matter.

The government's refusal to answer this simple question—Who knew what?—is very disconcerting. This evasiveness comes from the top, from the Prime Minister himself, and makes us fear the worst.

Some are concerned that the Prime Minister himself was involved and that he did know about it. He is behaving as though he has something to hide and not like someone with a clear conscience. He avoids questions, repeats the same stock phrases and is not being forthright.

At this point in this lurid business, there are only two possible scenarios. In the first, the Prime Minister knows the truth, but is hiding it from Canadians. In the second, the Prime Minister did not know, and members of his staff kept him in the dark. It is either one or the other. Either he knew, and lied, or he did not know and they lied to him. "They" refers to people other than Mr. Wright, if we are to believe Corporal Horton's affidavit.

The Prime Minister claims otherwise: Nigel Wright was the only staff member who hid the truth from him.

Business of Supply

On Friday, November 22, when the Prime Minister was in Manitoba, a CBC journalist asked him the following question: “Do you believe that others, besides Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright, kept you in the dark? That was the question. The Prime Minister answered no. That is impossible. The Prime Minister's answer cannot be true. He misled Canadians with that answer. That answer cannot be true because we know that other members of the Prime Minister's office were aware of efforts made so Mike Duffy would not have to pay back what he owed. Some knew that Nigel Wright had written him a \$90,000 cheque. If the Prime Minister did not know, a number of his staff members kept him in the dark, not just Nigel Wright.

Let us follow the sequence of events as outlined in the statement given under oath by Corporal Horton, starting with what happened in February 2013.

•(1145)

[*English*]

In an interview with police, Nigel Wright confirmed that he asked the Conservative Fund of Canada chairman, Conservative senator and bagman Irving Gerstein, to repay Senator Duffy's bogus expenses of \$32,000.

On February 21 Benjamin Perrin, the Prime Minister's personal lawyer in the PMO, and Senator Duffy's lawyer exchange emails detailing the plan to have the Conservative Party pay Duffy's \$32,000 in bogus housing claims as well as his legal fees. The agreement describes this as keeping Duffy “whole on the repayment”.

On February 22 Wright confirms with Gerstein that the party will pay the expenses and the legal fees. Later on February 22, Wright emails Perrin and states, “I do want to speak to the Prime Minister before everything is considered final”. Less than an hour later, Wright sends a follow-up email to Perrin that says, “We are good to go from the PM once Ben has his confirmation from Payne”, Ben being Mr. Perrin, the PMO lawyer, and Madam Payne being Mr. Duffy's lawyer.

The PM's chief of staff and personal lawyer are specifically discussing a plan that is contained in an email from Duffy's lawyer that includes covering Duffy's bogus expenses and legal fees. When Wright says that he has to check with the Prime Minister before everything is final, he can only be talking about the deal that they have negotiated with Duffy's lawyer. When Wright says that the Prime Minister is “good to go once Ben has his confirmation from Payne”, the only thing they had discussed with Payne was the plan to have the Conservative Party repay Duffy's expenses and legal fees.

The email evidence and chronology presented by the RCMP are clear. Nigel Wright sought the approval of the Prime Minister for something. At the exact same time as this approval was sought and received, the PMO was negotiating a deal with Duffy's lawyer to have the Conservative Party repay Duffy's bogus expenses. Given that the emails show that finalizing the points of the deal with Duffy's lawyer was what Wright and Perrin were focused on at the time, what else could they have been seeking approval for from the Prime Minister?

The evidence is so strong that it is simply not believable for the Prime Minister to claim that he was authorizing Duffy to repay his own expenses. Not only is that patently absurd and unbelievable statement, the emails tell a very different story.

•(1150)

[*Translation*]

For the Prime Minister's version to be credible, Nigel Wright would have had to lie to the Prime Minister and make him believe that Mike Duffy was going to pay back the money himself, and he would have had to lie to all of his accomplices and make them believe that the Prime Minister approved the Conservative Party making the payment. That is rather unbelievable, is it not?

However, even if we accept this version that Nigel Wright is a double liar, we would then have to conclude that the other parties to the scheme also hid the truth from the Prime Minister. They knew that Mike Duffy would not make the payment. They apparently never told the Prime Minister.

If that is the case, why are some of them still working for the government? Why, for example, is Senator Gerstein, who allegedly hid the truth from the Prime Minister, still a member of the Conservative caucus? Why is it impossible to get an answer to this question from the Prime Minister or any member of his caucus? Do our Conservative colleagues have no desire to help Canadians get the truth?

Let us see how this unfolded.

[*English*]

On February 27, Duffy's lawyer emails Perrin and informs him that the amount Duffy owes in bogus expense claims has now risen to \$90,000.

Wright also told police that, in addition to Perrin, he informed the following people that he would personally provide Duffy with the \$90,000 to repay his bogus expenses: Conservative Senator Irving Gerstein, Chair of the Conservative Fund Canada; Benjamin Perrin, as I said, the Prime Minister's personal lawyer in the PMO; David van Hemmen, formerly Nigel Wright's assistant and now policy adviser to the Minister of Finance; Patrick Rogers, then legislative assistant to the Prime Minister and now director of policy for the Minister of Canadian Heritage; and Chris Woodcock, then director of issues management and now chief of staff for the Minister of Natural Resources.

For example, on March 8 Nigel Wright advised Chris Woodcock by email that he was personally covering Duffy's \$90,000. On March 23 Nigel Wright sent an email to David van Hemmen that said “My cheque is in the correspondence folder”. The same day, Wright wrote an email to Benjamin Perrin that said “I will send my cheque on Monday”.

It is true that there is no proof that the Prime Minister was aware of the cheque, but according to Wright, he was aware of something. He wrote in an email, “The PM knows, in broad terms only, that I personally assisted Duffy”. The Prime Minister was aware of that.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Even if we accept the Prime Minister's story that he knew nothing about the financial aid to Mike Duffy, why is he keeping in his government individuals who hid the truth and the fraudulent activities from him? Why is David van Hemmen still a policy adviser to the Minister of State for Finance? Did he not hide the truth from the Prime Minister?

Why is Patrick Rogers still the director of policy for the Minister of Canadian Heritage? Did he not hide the truth from the Prime Minister? Why is Chris Woodcock still the chief of staff for the Minister of Natural Resources? Did he not hide the truth from the Prime Minister? Why is Senator Gerstein still a member of the Conservative caucus and the Conservative Party's bagman? Did he not hide the truth from the Prime Minister? Unless these people did not hide anything at all from the Prime Minister. That would then mean that the Prime Minister was aware of the fraud and is trying to hide that from Canadians.

The Conservatives have to choose between the only two possible scenarios. Either the Prime Minister was aware of the fraud and is trying to hide that from Canadians, or the Prime Minister did not know anything about the fraud and key people around him hid the truth from him. If so, why is he keeping them on staff?

In fact, the Conservatives can do better than choose between these two scenarios. They should tell us which one is the truth. Canadians have a right to the truth. They have the right to know whether their Prime Minister is an honest and straightforward man or a secretive manipulator who thinks that hiding the truth is acceptable conduct in Canadian politics.

Canadians can rely on the Liberal leader and the Liberal opposition not to let up on the Conservatives and the Prime Minister until the truth, the whole truth, has come out into the open.

Canadians are entitled to the truth.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting to listen to that member. Of course, he was a member of a cabinet that could have potentially leaked income trust decisions and that was complicit in the sponsorship scandal.

Having said all of that, I wonder if this is such a priority. The Liberal leader goes on TV and says he is going to be such a positive guy. He is going to be Mr. Positive. He even quoted the leader of the NDP in referring to hope rather than fear. However, what he does is get his henchmen to get up in the House and to go across the country casting aspersions on people and saying all kinds of negative things about people. He gets other people to do his dirty work.

If it is such a priority for the leader of the Liberal Party that we are spending a complete day doing this, why is it that he sits in his place and does not get up and make the case himself? Why is it that he sits on his hands day after day? The only thing we hear from him when it comes to the Senate is that first he said he was going to defend the status quo in the Senate, and then he tried to whip his senators into voting against the suspension of these other senators.

If he so believes that this is a priority, why does he sit in the House day after day, even today, and not get up in his place and make the case himself that this should be a priority? Why does he have his henchmen doing all of the dirty work? Why does he ask that the Leader of the Opposition do all of the heavy lifting with respect to this issue?

I agree that the NDP has made it a priority. The Liberals do not make anything a priority unless they think they can gain a point or two.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I am ready to table at any time a list of the questions that the Liberal leader asked on this issue, at any time. If we have agreement, I will table it right away.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member have unanimous consent to file the list of questions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, why does he say the Liberal leader has not asked questions? A long list of questions has been asked. Why do the Conservatives not have it? It is not the questions; it is the answers.

My colleague, if he had an opportunity—

The Deputy Speaker: The parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to table the attendance records of the leader of the Liberal Party.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to table that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Paul Calandra: What is he afraid of, Mr. Speaker? What is he trying to cover up? I am shocked—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

The hon. member Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem tabling the attendance list if he has no problem tabling the questions. Why this selective request? It is always the same.

The point is not that questions have not been asked; it is that answers to the questions have not been given. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister once again failed to answer questions.

I asked specific questions in my speech. I asked why David van Hemmen is still working for the government since, according to the Prime Minister, he did not tell the truth. He did not tell the Prime Minister what he knew about the \$90,000 cheque. Why are Patrick Rogers, Chris Woodcock, and Senator Gerstein still working for the government? That is a very simple question, and we do not have an answer. The Conservatives do not want to answer because it is very likely they have something to hide.

Business of Supply

•(1200)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, I do not see that gentleman as a henchman. I see him as a duly elected member of Parliament doing his job.

I must say I was surprised to see so many Conservative MPs willing to risk or even sacrifice their personal reputations over this scheme that has come out of the PMO. I am reminded, and I am sure the member who just spoke is reminded as well, of the 1970s, when a particular saying oozed out of Washington. It was called “plausible deniability”. This is the worst of times in this place because of that type of attitude.

However, my question to the member is this. He has listed off repeatedly the number of people in the Conservative Party from the PMO and from other places such as the Senate who are involved with putting together this scheme. Would he deem that to have been a conspiracy?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my colleague. It is difficult not to see a conspiracy when we read the affidavit, a conspiracy about the ability to pay for Mr. Duffy, and Mr. Duffy would simply agree that he himself paid. It was a lie, and they were complicit in that. There was a conspiracy to try to affect the audit done by Deloitte. Clearly they tried to do so.

The question is twofold: what was the Prime Minister aware of, and why is he keeping the people who did this pretty dirty job? The NDP and the Liberals, all the politicians, have asked these two questions so many times during these weeks, and we have no answer.

Are my Conservative colleagues proud of that, proud of trying to cover up what happened? Their duty is to help Canadians to discover the truth. It is not to protect their Prime Minister at the expense of the truth.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to address the remarks made by the parliamentary secretary, who claimed that the leader of the Liberal Party has not been asking questions. If I may read directly from *Hansard*, I have the leader of the Liberal Party saying:

Canadians deserve leaders who tell the truth. The RCMP revealed this morning that the Prime Minister's Office was guilty of corruption and that the government has been covering up for months.

Very recently there was this:

...Canadians across the country have had doubts about what this government has been telling them. Today, we learned that the Prime Minister did in fact mislead the House.

Then again very recently, there was this:

Senator Gerstein was aware of the Duffy affair and he still has his job. The people in the Prime Minister's Office involved in this scheme were simply shuffled off. Canadians across the country want their MPs to express the will of their constituents....

In another statement just recently, the leader of the Liberal Party was keeping the government to account by saying:

...in this sordid saga...Senator Gerstein admitted that he was aware of the arrangement between Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy. The Prime Minister fired Nigel Wright because of his cheque and his silence. He admitted that Senator Gerstein....

Over and over again, the leader of the Liberal Party has been asking questions. I ask my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville whether or not the point made by the parliamentary secretary is correct.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that is not correct. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister himself knows it is not correct.

He is showing an admirable imagination to not answer questions. However, I do not have admiration for that. I do not think he should sleep very well today and in the coming weeks, because he should do his best to get the truth from his Prime Minister, and he is doing his best to hide the truth in answering nothing except the very basic questions.

I repeat my question, which will have an answer before the end of today: Why are people who were aware of the cheque to Duffy still working for the government? Why?

•(1205)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member the same question: Why is it that he sits in a caucus with the members for Kings—Hants, Wascana, York West, Guelph, Westmount—Ville-Marie, Malpeque and Vancouver Centre? I could go on and on.

These are all people who, one way or another, have either been accused of wrongdoing or have been found guilty of wrongdoing, either with their expense accounts or with respect to Elections Canada rules. If the hon. member has such high standards, I wonder why he sits in a caucus with so many people who have broken so many rules. I wonder if he is going to call and ask them to resign their seats in the House of Commons.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it is a shame, because he has no proof against these individuals. They are honourable people.

The member missed an opportunity to answer the question. He tried to deflect to others. Even if he were right that we Liberals are as awful as he is describing, it does not give him the right to be as awful as that. Each time they try to describe others as awful, they do not deflect the fact that they are in trouble.

The trouble is that the Prime Minister is keeping people who, according to this affidavit, lied to him. So whether he knew what was happening and is not saying the truth to Canadians, or whether they lied to him and he is keeping them working with him, which is complete nonsense, we need to have clarification. All the mud my colleague may send to others will not change the fact that he is only dodging question after question.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being recognized in the House today in support of this Liberal motion.

I would like to, at this point, start my speech by talking about the narrative that is talked about not only here but when it comes to public discourse, public discussions. I speak of politics, of course, but I speak about politics in the general sense of what we do here, which is to enable the discussion to be centred right here, at this focal point, because this is what Canadians are talking about.

Business of Supply

A lot of people would say the issue we are debating today is not germane to everyday goings-on, the machinations of how we live and how we operate as a society. The economy, yes, jobs, yes, as we have talked about, and crime are all important products of this place.

However, I will say this. We also compel our politicians to strive to be the utmost in ethical behaviour.

We have heard it. Many people in this House have either been accused or have been brought to a court and found guilty over the years. Many have admitted their guilt. Many of them have been found guilty. Some of them have been found innocent of all accusations.

However, this is the type of discourse we have here. This is the type of conversation we need to have to get to the bottom of the matter as to what behaviour took place in the office, funded by taxpayers, the office we put trust in every four years, via a ballot box, being the democracy that we are—the greatest democracy, I might add, in the whole world.

Let me go back to the narrative. The narrative of the story is that we expect public officials to strive to be the most ethical individuals and, also, to be the caretakers of our finances, of our taxes, to exercise authority in this office to ensure they are doing it at the utmost level of the ethical standards and, of course, to do it as any reasonable person in this country would expect them to.

Let me go back. Let me flash back for a just moment to when I first arrived here in the House of Commons. It was 2004 when I arrived here in the fall, for the first time. I sat on the other side of the House, in the Liberal Party, which was government at the time.

What I faced was an absolute barrage of angst, hatred and accusations, some true, some not, but the hatred and the vitriol that was in this House was palpable and was incredibly thick.

Flash forward a few years and we found ourselves overturned in an election. We then, at that time, sat in the opposition.

I heard it on the doorstep during that 2004 period, but a lot of this vitriol and a lot of this hatred was put forward by the opposition parties of the day, including, I might add, the current government. Many of those people are in this House today.

However, a lot of the people who are in this House today, I would even say the majority of the people in the government in this House today, were not here at that time.

I hear the argument, every time we lay out what has happened and we say to Canadians and we say in this House, in public discourse, “Look. Here is the situation that happened within the Prime Minister’s Office. It is something that is substandard. It is something that does not measure up to the ethical expectations of this country”, and we get back, “Well, the Liberals did this back then” and “But back then, you did this”, without answering the question.

My response to this is always that if the government can only say to us what was done in the past, as opposed to what we are dealing with in the present, then it proves that the government has become everything it said it would not be.

There we have it, the narrative that goes from then to now.

●(1210)

The problem with many politicians today, sometimes me included, is that we need to own up to what was done wrong. We need to tell ourselves that there has to be a time when we reflect upon what we say, what we do and the actions we take, and ask if they are up to the standard of what a reasonable taxpayer and citizen of this country would expect. I would say that in many cases we do not and turn a blind eye.

What bothers me the most is that when we turn the blind eye by avoiding the topic and talking about something else, we have to make one base assumption, which is that the citizens watching this today did not notice or that the citizens watching today do not care enough to listen to the specific questions. What a sad mistake that is when we campaign, do television commercials, tweet the nasty stuff and simply say, “If you think what we did is bad, look at what you did”, and the argument goes back and forth—to use the vernacular, “I know you are, but what am I”, as said by many four and five year olds. We pretend Canadians do not even notice, but they do. We do not give the average citizen in this country enough credit for being intelligent enough to read between the lines.

Yes, by the way, before the question comes, I will follow my own advice and try to measure up to a standard that was given to us to be sitting here in the House of Commons. Can anyone imagine how many citizens in this country would dream some day of standing or sitting in this place where we are today, my friends? Let us make this debate about an ethical standard that we feel is not up to par. Let us make this debate about an ethical standard that we strive to be. However, in doing that, we have to point out that there are people among us—and I am including all parties—who do not measure up to this, given the trust of the public. There are people who are given the trust of the public who need to be looked at. We need to shine a spotlight on their actions and come up with answers. We talk about judicial inquiries. They are expensive and they take time. Sometimes they are necessary. The problem is that many times we have to realize that this is a forum that taxpayers pay for and their voices need to be heard.

The motion today was brought forward by my hon. colleague from Beauséjour, in New Brunswick. We talk about the recent sworn statements by the RCMP, Corporal Greg Horton. They reveal that in many cases the ethical standard was not reached, which is putting it mildly, and some cases that ethical standard appears to have been subverted.

On February 21, the Prime Minister’s Office had agreed, with regard to Mike Duffy’s controversial expenses, that the Conservative Party of Canada would keep him whole on the repayment. This is the type of conversation that took place. What exactly does that mean? We try to pontificate as to what exactly that means, and I am sure the average Canadian does. In other words, how do we protect an individual who has—pardon the vernacular again—fallen off the rails when it comes to ethical standards?

On February 22, the Prime Minister’s chief of staff wanted “to speak to the PM before everything is considered final”. Later the same day, February 22, the Prime Minister’s chief of staff confirmed, “We are good to go from the PM once Ben has his confirmation from Payne”.

My hon. colleagues have already discussed the details, names and faces, colleagues like the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. What I want to focus on again is the narrative, and the narrative is about how these actions do not measure up to the ethical standard, which was not met.

● (1215)

Agreement was reached between Benjamin Perrin and Janice Payne, counsels for the Prime Minister and Mike Duffy. The amount to keep Mike Duffy whole was calculated to be higher than first determined, requiring a changed source of funds from Conservative Party funds to Nigel Wright's personal funds, after which the arrangement proceeded and Duffy's expenses were repaid.

Let us go back for a moment. As citizens, we have the right, thank goodness, because we are the best democracy in the world, to not only vote for a particular party, its beliefs, ideals, ideology, but we also have the right to donate money to help them communicate that message to the masses.

As a Conservative Party fundraiser, certainly as a donor, if I were, imagine my dismay and shock to realize that my money went to Mike Duffy to say this is something for him to walk out and look good while doing it. It is particularly galling, to say the least. It got to a certain level where even Senator Gerstein could not handle it anymore. That threshold was gone. He had a certain threshold and a certain amount of money, but he just could not go any further.

Certainly when it climbed close to \$100,000 and the personal cheque was written, I ask the people watching this at home or in the gallery to imagine that someone we barely know has done something wrong so we are going to reimburse them with a cheque close to \$100,000 and by the way, that is from our account. Imagine that. We might do it for our children, but certainly not for someone we barely know. The narrative goes to the fact that there is not just one person in on this. There is a network of people involved in keeping this from the spotlight. That is the narrative that fails Canadians.

I know the Conservatives are going to talk about the past and about certain things that happened in my party in the past, but the point is that we go through the process of getting to the answers, which is what in 2004 we did to find the answers to make sure it did not happen again.

This morning I attended a briefing with the Auditor General, a fantastic exercise, highlighting the inefficiencies of government, even though it had the best of intentions. For example, we talked about issues of meat inspection. We talked about examples of border guards. We talked about the example of online services that need to be centralized and more accessible to people of all walks of life from everywhere in the country, whether it is urban, rural, east, west or north. However, these are inefficiencies in the system that start out with the best of intentions.

We want to engage citizens across this country by using online resources. Yes, it saves money and allows people to do it any time of the day. We know people are busy travelling back and forth to work, not just from a small geographical area, but many people in my riding travel from Newfoundland and Labrador to Alberta on a bi-weekly basis, or around the world to Russia, to Africa. They want their services to be online.

Business of Supply

I bring this up by way of example because the inefficiencies that we have right now started out with the best of intentions. Is that germane to this debate? Yes, it is because this situation we are dealing with today did not start with the best of intentions and it got worse and worse. It pulled more and more people in. It became a situation of not just inefficiencies but of some substandard ethical actions taking place.

I certainly believe that the motion today not only highlights that, but also looks at ways that we can fix it.

● (1220)

Let us have a look at some of the other details in this. The Prime Minister has given contradictory responses to the House of Commons, that we know. To the people out there watching today, we know exactly what it is we are talking about. Did he quit? Was he fired? Originally he quit. He is a nice guy, a good guy, means well. A few months later it was, he was fired.

There is a word we use in Newfoundland, called "sleeven". It is someone of sub-ethical standards, and I am being kind. They are usually described in a much harsher way. They basically sleevened the guy. If nothing, I hope we have learned a new word today from the Newfoundland dictionary: sleeven, someone of substandard ethical values.

Basically they have pointed out that this man is the sleeven of the most sleeven nature. I do not even know if that makes sense. I am trying to illustrate the point by saying that everybody in this country is talking about it. Everybody wants to know what is happened here, because they do not want to see it happen again.

The RCMP court filing also paints a disturbing picture of the entire PMO senior staff. The "fraud squad" engaged in the whitewash of a Senate report. Now we are going back to the other side with the whitewashing of a report that looks at this and says that there are people involved here, calls made from people on the board of the internal economy to the senator involved in the actions.

The conversation went like this, and this is why everybody is talking about it, because everybody understands this part. I am not a lawyer and when we look at some of this stuff, the vernacular of what is written down in legalize, sometimes it is hard to understand. Here is what is easy to understand. They wanted to get rid of the part or fix the part that shows that Senator Mike Duffy claimed per diems, claiming money because he was working in Ottawa on the very same day he was in Florida.

Now that I get, any Canadian can get that, anybody watching today can get that. Someone claimed money for doing their job in Canada while finding themselves in Florida. I doubt if anyone would even consider Florida the 11th province.

Ms. Lois Brown: Or Mexico...

Mr. Scott Simms: Sure, let us use Mexico. It is the same sort of difference; the person dealt with is gone. That is how malfeasance works, but that is admitted to.

To my hon. colleague who intends to interrupt my speech, I did not mean to interrupt her interruptions of my speech. I apologize.

Business of Supply

However, that was the case. The light was shone on that and actions were taken. For this one, where is the spotlight?

Here we have a situation where it is not just one person anymore, it is several. The story unravels, the details come out and the documents come out. Let us just have a look at it for what it is. It is people behaving badly. People not behaving in the way in which Canadians expect them to behave.

I would leave with this thought. In 2006 I was in government. The Conservative candidate at the time put a flyer in the mail to every person in my riding. They said the worst thing one can do is not keep promises. Well, that is a good point.

However, here is a worse one. Since then we have seen this many times by the government. Not only did the Conservatives break the promise they made, but they continue to try to convince Canadians that they kept it when they know that they did not. When will the Conservatives practice what they used to preach?

• (1225)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech. He started off talking about how upset he was, how when he was in government he did not like the course of debate, and he thought we could elevate the debate. Then he goes on in his speech. He talked about four individuals and coins them, in his attempt to elevate the debate, the "fraud squad". These are people, of course, who have not been accused of anything and who are not the subject of any investigation.

He talked earlier on in his speech about how we should be more respectful of each other. The Prime Minister has said that he did not know. The RCMP documents on page 72 outlined that the RCMP do not have any evidence that the Prime Minister knew anything about this. The member does not accept this at face value. The Prime Minister said he expected more from his staff. The Liberals do not accept that at face value. Nigel Wright has said that he did not bring the Prime Minister into his confidence on this. They do not accept that at face value.

As we go on and on in the report, every time there is something that shows that this Prime Minister worked with, co-operated with and assisted the RCMP, the Liberals never accept it at face value.

My question, ultimately, to the member is this. If it is such a priority for the Liberals, why is it that day in and day out their leader sits on his hands and does not make this a priority? Why is he not in the House? Why is he sitting in his place in the House not directly making the case for this?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Before I go to the member, I would remind all hon. members that it is not acceptable to reference who is or is not in the chamber at any time.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the member wanted proof of the leader of the Liberal Party doing his job and asking about this. We offered to table it earlier but he said no. Therefore, I am not sure what he wants.

I will say this. At the beginning, the member said "elevate the debate" and I used a term with the word "fraud" in it. My apologies. He is absolutely right. Sometimes what can happen in the course of debate is that we get carried away. However, we have to be a measure above what people expect so that we can say that it is probably not the right terminology to use. If the member was offended, I apologize.

What he did talk about was the lone person involved in that situation, in that office. The recent documents that were tabled were talking about what the RCMP discovered. How can we look at this now and say that only one person was involved? That is just not possible. It is to the extent now where I am flabbergasted to think that somebody was the lone individual in all of this, the fall guy. Nigel Wright started out as the saviour of the Conservative Party. Now he is the biggest sleeven we know within this area.

Does the member who asked the question still believe there is only one person involved in all of this despite all of the evidence we have?

• (1230)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to the comments by the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. As one might expect, I was a bit surprised and interested in his comments about the Newfoundland dictionary. I want to ask him about that dictionary because there are some words that have been used in the House where the meaning is not entirely clear to me.

On this side of the House, we have been asking the Prime Minister about the investigation into the Prime Minister's Office around the Wright-Duffy scandal. Clearly, we know that the RCMP is involved. We know that questions are being asked of a number of staff members in the Prime Minister's Office. We do not know who else is being questioned by the RCMP but we do know that the PMO is involved. However, when we rise in the House to ask the Prime Minister a question about the investigation to get some clarity so that the Canadian public can understand what the breadth and scope of this investigation is, which I would argue every Canadian is entitled to as we are talking about the money of Canadian taxpayers being at stake here, he responds by saying that there is no investigation. Therefore, people are being questioned, the RCMP is doing the questioning, but apparently there is no investigation.

I wonder whether the member could turn to his Newfoundland dictionary and tell us what the definition of an investigation might be. Perhaps that would help us answer a question that the Prime Minister refuses to answer.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I have to rise to that occasion and see how this goes. There is a word in the Newfoundland dictionary called mauzy, M-A-U-Z-Y. It describes a weather phenomenon. I used to be a TV weatherman so I kind of know what I am talking about.

Business of Supply

Anyway, mauzy usually occurs in the morning. It is like a thick grey fog with a bit of rain in the air so it is very obscured and very hard to see. Visibility is reduced dramatically. What I am getting at is that within the Prime Minister's Office it is very mauzy. The visibility has been reduced dramatically. We cannot see a hand in front of our eyes. That is the word mauzy. It is a bit rainy and a bit wet. It is very uncomfortable in the PMO. Therefore, to say that the greyness that surrounds the PMO is mauzy is an understatement.

I enjoy what the member said. I also appreciate the fact that there are so many contradictions involved here.

Let us take a look at Mr. Hamilton, another lawyer. The PM has defended the actions of his party and its lawyer. If he has no problem with what Hamilton has done, he should have no problem testifying before a court where real answers can be given rather than 15-second talking points. That is pretty mauzy as well, if we think about it. There is a greyness around that area. There are so many lawyers involved here who are doing what are considered substandard ethical things, one gets a little awry upstairs. We start to understand exactly what is going on.

There is the mauzy that takes place within the PMO. I want to thank my colleague for bringing that up. Any more words? I am kind of running out of a dictionary.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do have a legal background and I cannot see through the mauzy to which my colleague refers.

Members have probably noticed, I know I have, but I would ask my colleague whether he has noticed the complete absence of participation in this debate by the governing party. From day to day in question period, only one person gets up to answer the questions that are asked of many ministers. They are in the House and they should be answering on their own behalf.

Today's debate is a very serious one about allegations of fraud and deceit within the Prime Minister's office. One would think that one would take every opportunity to stand and defend oneself by participating actively in this debate and explain what really happened.

There is another word for "mauzy" and it is called "obfuscation". Obfuscation is exactly what is going on here by the non-participation in this debate.

Could my friend give us his opinion on why the governing party is not participating in this debate?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, to do so would be hazardous to one's career I guess, which is probably the most logical.

I will give the parliamentary secretary credit though, he has stood quite a bit. He is a lone person in all of this, and that is the problem. It seems like every time we try to explore answers within the House there is that one person, the vanguard, who stands out there and does that with every talking point down to a precise measurement. The parliamentary secretary has certainly done that.

However, I would like to hear from others as to punching holes into every argument that is out there to get through this obfuscation that my hon. colleague from Guelph talks about. How does one get to the nuts and bolts of this issue without making reasonable sense in

defence? It is a difficult thing to do and perhaps why there are not many volunteers.

• (1235)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor for enlightening us on the Newfoundland dictionary around meteorological terms.

I would like to ask the member for his opinion, as a weather man, if it would not make a lot of sense when we have "mauzy" to allow bright sunlight to occur.

On this file, we need the sunlight of an inquiry to bring to light what we all want to know, which is what on earth was going on within the Prime Minister's Office. What did the Prime Minister know? What does Mr. Duffy have in his particular skill set or other bits of knowledge that required the vast machinations of the PMO, working in concert with Conservative senators, to pull off a massive "deception", in the words of the Prime Minister? The question that remains is this. Who was in knowledge of it and who orchestrated it?

Surely we need the sunlight of a full inquiry to get there. Why does the Prime Minister himself not demand this?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, sunlight is the best disinfectant out there. I credit the member for the things she did earlier, the same thing we did, on proactive disclosure and that sort of thing which is buried meteorologically.

Again, I am not a real meteorologist but I played one on television.

The mauzy conditions due to the weather of Newfoundland and Labrador always cleared up to be sunny due to one thing: the passage of time. With the passage of time, we, too, will get better answers, or at least we hope to, which is what this debate is all about.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his introduction of a very useful term, "mauzy" in his speech. He sells himself short as a former weatherman. I have heard weathermen apologize for their weather forecast, saying "Well, I was wrong yesterday, the weather actually wasn't the way I said it was going to be". That is something I wish the government would do. It could simply say that this was the mistake it made, these are all the facts, this is the truth, it made a mistake and it would take the punishment and move on. If the government had done that early on, it would have contained the effects of the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office.

This scandal has consumed a lot of time and resources in Ottawa. The government claims it wants to work on the economy, but the necessity of having clean government, of ferreting out all the misdeeds of the Conservatives in the Prime Minister's circle, has consumed a lot of time. We have to consume a lot of resources to do the proper investigation, and it is unfortunate that we have had to take this time.

Business of Supply

My constituency work and my work on the Liberal Party team as a critic for science and technology, post-secondary education and economic development has meant that I cannot be consumed by all the details of the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office. That is probably true for most Canadians. They have their daily lives, family members to take care of, jobs to go to and communities to be part of. They do not have time to immerse themselves in all the details. I am in the same boat.

I hear all these names and it is very hard to keep track of many of them in the Prime Minister's Office, in the leadership of the Conservatives in the Senate and in the Conservative Party. It seems like all the Prime Minister's men and women have been involved in this cover-up. My question for the Prime Minister would be this. If he is really running the country, or managing the country's economy for Canadians, as the Conservatives would like to claim, how could he be so cut off from his own people and do a good job as Prime Minister? It does not seem reasonable to me that this could be true.

My guess is that the Prime Minister must have known because so many people in his inner circle in his office were involved in the cover-up. Cover-up was a word recently used by a spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office. That is not consistent with a well-functioning team that is responsible for managing the entire country and the economy for Canadians. Either the Prime Minister was involved or he was not managing the country's economy just hoping natural resources prices would stay high.

A lot of Conservative members of Parliament are aware of the facts put forward by the RCMP. They understand how damning the evidence is. They do not want to stand and defend the Prime Minister or try to explain what went on, or to try to put in their own words what they think really happened. From what I understand, there may not be any Conservative MPs standing today to make a speech or to ask questions. So far it has only been the parliamentary secretary who has been up to speak and we know that in question period, it is only the parliamentary secretary who has stood to answer questions when the Prime Minister has not answered them.

● (1240)

I forgot to mention at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to share my time with the member for Malpeque.

It is clear that Conservative MPs, having looked at the evidence that the RCMP investigators have brought forth and thought about it by themselves, know it would be very damaging to their prospects in the 2015 election if they were to stand and try to defend the Prime Minister. They can see, from the election results yesterday, that Canadians are very upset by the behaviour and the poor ethical standards of the Prime Minister's Office. They are voting with their feet, by not getting up, and we can see it will be pretty clear

I need to also comment about some of the things I have heard in the debate today. I had not prepared to talk about this, but I have been hearing the remarks from some of the members in this chamber. It seems to me that, for example, the parliamentary secretary has been trying to say, incorrectly I would add, that the leader of the Liberal Party has not been asking questions about the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office. In fact, that is untrue and I stood earlier during this debate to read out a whole list of questions the leader of

the Liberal Party had asked in the last few days. Whenever the leader of the Liberal Party is here, he always gets up.

I know the Liberal Party only has 34 seats right now, although 36 seats in a few days, and so we get a limited number of questions in question period. Out of the first 17 questions in question period, this smaller Liberal caucus only gets 3, so I know it is hard for the leader of the Liberal Party to get up and ask a lot of questions, but every time he is here he asks questions. He gets to ask the three questions and he does ask them to keep the government to account. I read out a number of them just a short while ago. Therefore, the parliamentary secretary is making up some things that are totally untrue because there is nothing left to resort to.

The Conservatives will not answer the questions that have been posed to them in question period and during today's debate, so all they can do is resort to personal attacks on the Liberal leader, especially since the by-election results yesterday. All they can do is resort to talking about unproven accusations from the past.

What we should be doing today, and as is the intent of the motion today, is to talk about the cover-up, the fact that it does not make sense that the Prime Minister was simply asked if it were okay for Mike Duffy to pay back the expense claims he owed. This is something that, from what I have heard in question period, the Prime Minister would have expected from any member of his caucus. Therefore, why would the Prime Minister ever need to approve something as simple as that? The implication is clear in the RCMP document, and we have heard it in debate and in question period in this chamber, that the Prime Minister was asked something more substantial. We do not know what it was, but it does not make sense that the Prime Minister was simply asked to approve the fact that Senator Duffy should repay the expense claims to which he was not entitled.

For somebody who shares, along with the rest of Canadians, a general sense of what the problem is, but not all of the details, and we hear a lot of conflicting statements that change from week to week and month to month from the members of the Conservative Party, we need to clear the air. We need to cut through the mauzy, as my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador said.

● (1245)

We need to clarify what the story is. That is why it is important for the Prime Minister and his inner circle, who have been involved in this cover-up, according to the RCMP, to testify under oath to say, "This is our statement. This is what we say happened".

I think it will be clear, if that happens, that there have been serious ethical breaches in the Prime Minister's Office. It will be clear that the members of the Prime Minister's staff who, it is clear from the RCMP's statements, have been involved in this cover-up, who are going to be charged under certain sections of the Criminal Code, and who are still working for the government, should not be working for the government. It will be clear that if the Prime Minister wants to uphold the standards he claims to uphold, these members of the Prime Minister's Office should not be working for the government.

Business of Supply

For these reasons, it is very important for us to support this motion and to ask the members of the Conservative government who have been involved in this scandal in the Prime Minister's Office to testify under oath, state very clearly what they believe happened, and clear the air and put some sunlight through the mauzy for the people of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we go to questions and comments, I just want to clarify that the member for Kingston and the Islands actually was mistaken. He has a 20-minute time slot to be followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments. There are eight minutes remaining. I do not know if he wishes to retake the floor or proceed directly to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I will continue, because I understand that my colleague from Malpeque would like to speak for a full 20 minutes.

Let me talk about some of the other points that have been brought up in debate today. The parliamentary secretary talked about income trusts. This is an old accusation that has not been proven. The member for Markham—Unionville said that very clearly. He was here when those accusations were first made, and they were just accusations.

Members make accusations every day in the House. I wish that when Conservative members answered questions in question period, they would just answer the questions instead of going back years and years to talk about other accusations. This is an example of how members of the government try to deflect questions by bringing up old accusations. This is not a good way of conducting the business of the House. It is not what voters want.

When I walk the streets of Kingston and the Islands, it is not uncommon for people to walk up to me and make some comment about question period. They say that it must be frustrating, because we never get any answers to questions.

The topic of today's debate is a very serious one. It is about whether we can trust our head of government, and for that reason, it is very important that when the Conservatives are answering questions, they answer them. They should grab the bull by the horns, acknowledge the questions, and give their best answers. They should not deflect the questions by talking about old accusations or about old stories about one's family or about the pizza delivery man. We have heard these things in the House, and this is not what we are supposed to be doing here. This is not how we are supposed to be serving the people of Canada.

It is hard for me to go back to my riding of Kingston and the Islands and tell people that this is what happens and that is why it is called question period. We need to get voluntary compliance from members of Parliament on the government side. This place has a purpose, which is to serve the Canadian people. Questions are asked for a purpose, which is to keep the government to account. This used to be done in the chamber many years ago.

We have to call into question why the government wants to be the government and why it should be the government. Right now, the government has a majority, so we cannot win a vote of non-confidence, but if we had a secret ballot among all members of

Parliament as to whether they all have confidence in the government, I wonder if that motion would pass, particularly if the backbench members of the Conservative caucus could vote secretly. I suspect that we might not get all government members supporting the government.

That is how serious this scandal in the Prime Minister's Office is. That is why none of the Conservative members are speaking to this motion. It is because it is toxic. They know that there have been ethical breaches in the Prime Minister's Office, and they know that this is very serious. They know from yesterday's by-election results that Canadian voters take this very seriously. They want to get re-elected in 2015, but it is not going to happen with the leadership of the Conservative Party, which is unwilling to admit and fix the mistakes that were made. That is what we have to be talking about today.

● (1250)

I cannot say whether particular Conservative MPs are here or not, but I think *Hansard* will show, by the end of the day, that only the parliamentary secretary has risen to give a speech. Maybe I will be proven wrong. I hope I am proven wrong. We will see what happens by the end of the day. However, so far, there is no evidence that other Conservative MPs will be getting up to defend the Prime Minister.

With that, I am ready to answer questions or hear comments.

● (1255)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to the hon. member about the views he has on the Senate.

The Senate was created, presumably, to provide sober second thought. I think most Canadians are under the illusion that the Senate is an independent body that forms its own opinions. Yet I am sure the member will verify, when he stands to reply, that the Liberal and Conservative members of the Senate, respectively, are part of the caucuses of those two parties, respectively, and receive briefing notes and opinions on how to take positions. The witnesses who come before the reviews are called in either by the Liberals or the Conservatives.

Does he not foresee that, in fact, the kinds of issues we have facing this second body of Parliament were, in some ways, foreseeable? Does he not agree that, in fact, maybe we should go in a direction of an actual body making decisions for the country where the people are duly elected by Canadians?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I am just a bit surprised by the end of my hon. colleague for Edmonton—Strathcona's question. It sounded like she said she was in favour of an elected Senate.

Ms. Linda Duncan: No.

Mr. Ted Hsu: No. Okay. We will have to look at the record.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell members about an experience I had, as a newly elected member of Parliament, with a Liberal senator.

One of the things I have learned since I have been elected the member of Parliament for Kingston and the Islands is that I thought I knew a lot about Canada. However, when I came here and started talking to people from across the country, I realized how little I knew about the rest of the country and how much there is to know.

Business of Supply

I had the privilege of sitting down with Senator Mitchell, from Alberta, to talk about climate change, pipelines, the oil and gas industry, and the view of the country from Alberta. It was an enormously enriching experience for me to sit down and talk at length with someone from Alberta and to be able to ask a lot of questions and talk in a very frank and open manner, which is sometimes hard to do when two politicians are speaking, or when a politician is speaking with anybody.

However, I benefited enormously from this conversation. I think that is just an example of how having senators, with their experience and regional representation, can help Parliament in its work.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on an excellent speech. I want to ask him a particular question.

I have noticed, and he has noted, that the Conservatives have now had three slots in which to put forward a speaker. They have not. The only person who seems to stand up to speak or to ask questions or to do anything at all is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

It is interesting. The only reason people are so tightly scripted and secretive about everything they are going to do is that they are afraid that someone will make a mistake. Does the hon. member think that is so?

Second, the Prime Minister's Office actually gave to many of its ministers a guide, which, on page 28, said:

Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ.

The Prime Minister has said that, what, 15 of his staff had deceived him. Should he not be responsible for this? Should the buck not stop with him?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I do think that the Conservative Party is afraid that if it lets members speak, somebody might actually say what they think and get the party in trouble. That is why in question period members are quite often flipping through cards and reading the cards with their heads down while answering questions. It is to make sure they do not accidentally say something wrong. There are a lot of members on the Conservative side who think for themselves and who could speak if they were free to speak, or if they were courageous enough to speak or able to.

Let me address the second question. In any large organization, the manager cannot manage every single thing that every one of his or her employees does. Nevertheless, the manager is responsible for the actions and consequences of what his or her direct reports do. The way that a manager has to deal with this is to set the culture of an organization. Really the only way someone can direct a large group of people to act in a certain way and to uphold certain standards is to establish a culture, because that is what is possible in management.

What is not possible is to micromanage every single thing that employees say or do. The Conservatives try to do that with cards, but what they should be doing is to try to set a culture that would have prevented this scandal in the Prime Minister's Office.

• (1300)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

it is odd hearing the member for Vancouver Centre talk about reading documents. She must have read the Canada Elections Act before she decided to break the rules with respect to her leadership expense debts, which she has not paid back.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I did not break the rules. Read the ruling.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, wow, she is really vociferous about it right now. I think we have touched a nerve with the Liberal Party with respect to people not talking, because I highlighted the fact that their own leader does not seem to ever want to talk. He seems to have a muzzle. In fact, he is not even allowed to talk about policy until 2015.

The only time he has talked about policy, he talked about legalizing marijuana. He has talked about getting rid of minimum mandatory sentences for the most heinous of crimes. When he was asked which form of government he admires most, what came out of his mouth? It was that he admires a dictatorship. Whoops, he did not mean that one.

It goes on and on. The Liberals are so terrified of their leader that on what they claim to be their most important motion, they do not even let him speak in the House about it.

We have obviously touched a nerve with the Liberals today, because again their leader is terrified to speak—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, let me say that the Liberal leader has constantly been in the House answering questions and asking questions in question period about the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office. He has not been sitting on his hands. In every question period he has been here asking questions.

On the other point, the parliamentary secretary brings up another accusation from the past. He probably forgets that his party changed the rules in the middle of the Liberal leadership race in 2006. That was a very clever thing to do. The candidates started off with one set of rules, and the Conservatives changed the law in the middle of the Liberal leadership race. That is what is really responsible for what happened, and the responsibility lies with the Conservative Party.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why are the Conservatives unable to answer any questions about what happened in the Duffy-Wright-Prime Minister saga? Why are they avoiding any question on it and speaking about everything else?

Why is there only one member of the Conservative Party who is willing to speak on that today? Are they in a position where they cannot say anything positive about what the Prime Minister did in this affair? Is it that they do not want to discover the truth? Do they not think it is a responsibility to help Canadians discover the truth? Do they think it is their responsibility to hide the truth? These are the questions I ask of my colleague after his very excellent speech.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has been asking question after question about the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office.

Business of Supply

At the same time, Conservative MPs have had opportunities every question period to ask questions about this very important matter, and they have never asked a question about it. It is pretty clear that the parliamentary secretary has no basis on which to make his accusation during debate today.

• (1305)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I might say at the beginning that I would not be too worried about the accusations from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, because he would not know the truth if it hit him in the eyes.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this opposition day motion. The key point of the motion is that:

...the House call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

That is the context of the motion. That is the important part of the motion. What the opposition motion really does, I believe, is give the Prime Minister an opportunity to clear the record, if he has nothing to hide.

Comments expressed by his parliamentary secretary, however, lead me to believe that the government will continue the cover-up. It is interesting, as my colleague previously said, that in this debate, the only person who is allowed to speak on the government side is the parliamentary secretary himself.

There are a lot of good people on the backbench of the Conservative Party. There are. I have to ask them if they are under orders not to speak. Do they not care about the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office, this group that came to Ottawa on accountability and transparency? Are they fearful of standing in this place and asking the Prime Minister a question? In the Conservative government, have accountability and transparency just gone out the window in what is now clearly not just a cover-up in the Prime Minister's Office, but a cover-up by the whole Conservative Party of Canada and its entire backbench? They are all party to this cover-up in trying to protect the Prime Minister.

It must be difficult for backbench MPs who came to this place on a law and order, tough-on-crime agenda to swallow themselves whole. It really must be difficult. I sympathize with them that they came on here on a law and order agenda and now they are swallowing themselves whole.

Yes, there are laws, and they need to be abided by, but not by those in the Prime Minister's Office, that is for sure. Being tough on crime clearly only applies to others and not themselves when it comes to this particular government under the current Prime Minister's leadership.

If it is a youth from a broken family or a mentally ill person who has got in trouble and broken the law, everything we have seen in the Conservative government is punishment, punishment, and the harsher the better. The idea is to throw them in jail, practically, and throw away the key.

However, when it comes to government folks, some of their own, it is an entirely different story. In this case, looking at this issue in its simplest terms, it is bribery, fostered by the highest office in this

land, the Prime Minister's Office, and that is okay. It is okay to the backbenchers over there. Influencing the buying privileges of senators and sanitizing a Senate report are okay. That bribery is not a crime to Conservative backbenchers, and they do not seem to want any answers.

Let us recall again what I said a moment ago about the Federal Accountability Act. The Conservative government may have had great intentions and it may have passed the Accountability Act, but it sure does not follow it. As far as transparency goes, every Canadian knows, except seemingly those on the backbench over here, that this is the most secretive government in Canadian history.

• (1310)

There are lots of areas where laws do not seem to matter to the Conservative Party. We have the in-and-out scandal, the robocalls, the Duffy-PMO scandal, and the list goes on.

I want to recall the words of this Conservative Prime Minister to a former prime minister and ask members in the governing party if these words apply to this Prime Minister. He said that if the Prime Minister knew about the scam, it was unconscionable, and if he did not, it was incompetence.

Does that statement not apply to this Prime Minister? That statement certainly does.

Let us imagine this: his chief of staff knew, but the Prime Minister did not. About a dozen people, his closest advisers, knew, but the Prime Minister did not. The head of the Conservative Fund knew, and was willing to pay the bribe as long as it was only \$32,000. That is the head of the Conservative Fund, a senator appointed by this Prime Minister. He knew, but the Prime Minister did not.

An audit of Duffy was sanitized at the request of close advisers to the PMO, a circle of them, and with the full co-operation of the Prime Minister's leader in the Senate; a second senator, his former communications director; and a third loyal senator. This neat little trifecta of three closest loyal senators knew about the changing of evidence, fostered by a buyout, a bribe in the Senate, but the Prime Minister did not know.

Does that not really stretch reality? I certainly think so. Do Conservative members expect us to believe that the Prime Minister did not know? That is incredible.

Let me come back and re-quote that statement. It was that if the Prime Minister knew about the scam, it was unconscionable, and if he did not, it was incompetence.

I ask members on the government side, those who are sitting there with their lips zipped, which is it? It has to be one or the other.

Let us go back to the real reason the Senate scandal has landed on the Prime Minister's desk. The Prime Minister made the appointment in the first place, in violation of the residency requirements. Why did he do that?

When we think about it, we realize why. Many in the country, many of the legal and constitutional experts, believe what the Prime Minister did in the appointment of Wallin and Duffy was a violation of the Constitution. I certainly believe it was.

Business of Supply

Senator Duffy is supposed to be my senator. He lives in my riding. However, he certainly does not represent Prince Edward Island; he represents the Prime Minister's voice in coming back to Prince Edward Island to tell them what they should do.

I have not heard Senator Duffy speak out on EI. I have not seen him in the coffee shops, talking to the people affected by employment insurance. He is a messenger for the Prime Minister in Prince Edward Island. That is not the way it is supposed to be, which is the other way around.

On this issue, as on other issues, the Prime Minister clearly just did not care. He just did not care about violating the Constitution of this country that we in this Parliament are supposed to represent. I can say to all those quiet backbenchers over there who were sent here with an obligation to represent the country that when the Constitution is being violated, they obviously do not care either. They stand and they cheer on the issue as the Prime Minister defends himself in an unconscionable cover-up.

● (1315)

What was the real objective of having two high-profile media types appointed to the Senate? A government member can correct me if I am wrong, but I think it was to have those senators, because they were well known in the media, go out and spin the message. Recall, they were the two key fundraisers within the Conservative Party for awhile. I believe they co-chaired the last Conservative convention before the one just about a month ago. I believe that a year or two ago they co-chaired that convention. They were the high and mighty, but now the Prime Minister is throwing them under the bus to try to cover up his own involvement in terms of the bribery of the Senate and the auditing of a report.

I vividly remember watching the program, and I can recall Senator Duffy sitting on his little stool in the media-type atmosphere, interviewing the Prime Minister, looking him in the eye and asking him tough questions with only invited guests in the audience, all the Conservative lawyers. The whole idea behind the thing was to make it look on TV like this was the Mike Duffy of old asking a Prime Minister tough questions. Really what it was all about was spin, trying to manipulate and manoeuvre Canadians into believing the Prime Minister's message. That is what it was all about. It was spin, and nothing else. That is one of the reasons the Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy. The Prime Minister violated the Constitution in terms of the residential requirements to appoint these two media-profile people to go out there and really, in effect, abuse the trust of Canadians by providing spin for the Conservative message and the Conservative song.

When these folks were appointed, can members picture the gaggle of advisers, the hangers-on around the Prime Minister's Office as to whom they should appoint and how they should do it? The Prime Minister was probably advised that it could be a violation of the Constitution. However, the Prime Minister probably said not to worry about it, that he did not care about the Constitution and that they needed these people for a purpose, to sell the Conservative message on what the Conservative government was doing, in everything from its cutbacks on services to Canadians to its attack on seasonal workers to whatever we can name, to provide the spin to try

to massage the message. Therefore, the Prime Minister went with the appointment.

I would even go a little further. Maybe the parliamentary secretary can tell me if this actually happened. He was not parliamentary secretary then, but he might have been in the meeting. Can members imagine that first meeting of the Prime Minister with Senators Duffy and Wallin? As I said, the parliamentary secretary can tell me if I am right or wrong, but I expect this is what was said: "Pam, Mike, go out there and sell the message. Do the fundraising for the Conservative Party and bill the Senate". Was that what was said? "Bill the Senate and do it at the taxpayers' expense".

I know Mike Duffy well. I have known him for years. He is a visitor to the province from time to time. He has a fictional residence in Green Gables, so I know him well. He took his orders well. I will not get into the wording of what Senator Duffy said in the Senate on this issue. He thought he had permission to bill the Senate. He maybe never looked at the rules, but I expect he was told by the Prime Minister to just bill the Senate and everything would be fine. Now we know it was not fine.

● (1320)

Really, only the Prime Minister can tell us if that is what actually happened to get these senators in this kind of trouble. I would think the Prime Minister and his minions on the other side would see this as an opportunity. For the Prime Minister, if he has nothing to hide, it is an opportunity to come forward and clear the record. I think that would be a good thing.

As a member of Parliament from Prince Edward Island, this entire scandal concerning Senator Duffy, the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office has been one that has had a direct impact on residents in my province. It really bothers me when I read in the press or I see in the nightly news, night after night, Prince Edward Island Senator Mike Duffy, then the scandal, then the expenses and all that kind of stuff. Prince Edward Islanders are so embarrassed. I have had people call me from Vancouver asking what is wrong with Prince Edward Islanders. They did not realize that, from our point of view as Islanders, Mike Duffy is not our senator. He is the Prime Minister's senator.

It is a real problem. As I said, this is the Prime Minister's senator, not Prince Edward Island's.

As for the previous owner of that cottage, seeing the cottage on the news nightly with this kind of scandal, for which the Prime Minister has to accept responsibility, it brought the daughter of the previous owner near to tears in talking to me. She said if her dad saw that cottage held in the light that it was on the nightly news, he would be very saddened. That is as a result of the Prime Minister appointing a senator who is not actually a resident of Prince Edward Island and then abusing that privilege and that trust.

Let me sum up and close by rereading what we are really asking for, and that is that:

...the House call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

Business of Supply

I see it as an opportunity to come forward and come clean, to stop the cover-up, to explain to us how a dozen people in his office knew and he did not, how his chief of staff knew and he did not, how senators down the hall knew about the whitewashing of the Senate report and he did not.

Either it is a scam that he knew about or it is absolute incompetence. However, he is the Prime Minister of this country and he does have to accept responsibility for decisions made in his office. That used to be the tradition in this place, and the Prime Minister should accept that responsibility and abide by the motion. I expect the Conservative backbenchers should like to see him have that opportunity, where we could have accountability in this place and those backbenchers could support it, the way they did when they talked about it in the last election. That would be quite a change.

• (1325)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise to speak to the motion. I want to point out that in no way do I condone senators for taking illegal funds they are not entitled to, including Mac Harb, who in fact took more than any other senator.

I am surprised that the Liberals are “holier than thou”. We know they had illegal robocalls. We know they have taken illegal donations for their leadership. We know they have taken illegal brown envelopes, transferring moneys to their Liberal ridings through the ad scam. I find that totally surprising, and the prime minister at the time, Jean Chrétien, said, “What is a couple of million dollars among friends?”

I am still wondering, and I ask my colleague from Prince Edward Island this. Can he honestly tell us where that \$40 million is that is still missing from ad scam?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, as colleagues are saying here, that is the only line the member has.

I will say that in terms of anybody in the Prime Minister's Office, and in the previous government—

An hon. member: Answer the question

Hon. Wayne Easter: I am, if they would listen.

This is the only government where we have seen criminal charges applied by—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to listen to the hon. member. The heckling from the Conservative side is not only disrespectful but it makes it impossible to hear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair would agree with the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North and ask all hon. members to refrain from speaking when one of their colleagues has the floor.

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I probably do not have enough time to list the number of violations that go to the centre of the current government, with criminal charges here, criminal charges there, the in-and-out scandal, the robocalls, the member for

Peterborough, and the list goes on and on. I do want to say that when it comes to senators taking illegal funds, it should not happen and they should be charged when that happens. There is no question about that.

However, to stay on topic, what this debate is about today is how far into the inner circle this illegal act goes in the Prime Minister's Office. Does it go to the Prime Minister himself? That is what the motion is about. The Prime Minister can clear the record by agreeing with the motion and coming clean, under oath.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he could go back to a couple of comments he made about the supposition that certain senators had been appointed primarily because they had been journalists and maybe that would create some added benefits in the future.

I am not so sure how charitable that is to the journalism profession, but it strikes me that everybody in this House knows that the main reason Senators Duffy and Wallin were appointed was to be chief fundraisers for the party. Senator Wallin even said she thought she was supposed to be a special kind of senator for that very reason, and we all know that Senator Duffy played that role to the hilt.

Why would the Liberal Party not see the kinds of problems that are rife in this PMO-Senate scandal, which have everything to do with partisanship, and acknowledge the fact that its own party has exactly the same problem of the blurring of the lines between partisanship and the Senate? Therefore, why did they not agree with us in our motion to get rid of partisanship in the Senate?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question and I think it is a good one.

Personally, where I come from, I believe that we need a real debate on the Senate in the future. However, I do not agree with the abolition of the Senate; not at all. I think the Senate often does good work, but the problem we are dealing with here is with some individuals who certainly went astray and whether the Prime Minister was involved in that scenario of bribery and cover-up. His office certainly was and we know that, but was the Prime Minister himself involved? This is an opportunity, as I said, for him to come clean.

I will go back in terms of answering the member's question on the Senate.

I was a former farm leader and had the opportunity to appear before House of Commons committees and Senate committees in, I guess we could call it, a former life. I will say that the Senate reports on those agricultural issues for which I was before its committee were always more non-partisan, although it can be a problem. Those reports were well researched and were good reports. Whereas, with the very nature of this place, we are a little more partisan, so I think we ought to be careful on the Senate issue.

Business of Supply

I do believe that we need that sober second thought, but without the other issue that has not been talked about here on the Senate. I do not care whether it is Liberal, Conservative or NDP. We have to find a way to manage the absolute power that is in the PMO. The Senate, to a great extent, is the last stop. When we have backbenchers like we have over here who are not willing to stand up and challenge the Prime Minister, then in effect we are almost in a democratic dictatorship.

• (1330)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Malpeque for his insightful remarks. He has speculated that this dishonesty, this scandal, this conspiracy actually goes beyond just the Prime Minister's Office and right to the Prime Minister himself. I want to offer him the following. On February 22, Mr. Wright said, "I do want to speak to the PM before everything is considered final". What they were talking about was a payment of \$32,000, which was at the time what they thought was owed by Mr. Duffy. It was something the Conservative Party was prepared to pay on his behalf. One hour later, Mr. Wright came back and said, "We are good to go from the PM...".

Now of course they deny it, but it is kind of like the driver of a getaway car going to steal with others from the bank. They go into the bank intending to steal \$50,000 and they come out with \$100,000. Then the driver of the car says, "I am not guilty; they were only supposed to steal \$50,000 not \$100,000". Given that there is not a journalist out there, nor a jurist or anyone who believes the Prime Minister in his explanation, I am wondering if the member for Malpeque could be a little less speculative and tell us whether he thinks it actually does sit right at the feet of the Prime Minister?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do, but only the Prime Minister can tell us for sure, and he is constantly spinning the issue himself, and those around him are trying to spin it as well.

My colleague from Guelph talked about the \$32,000. It seemed okay from everything I see. The "good to go" really meant it was okay to spend \$32,000 out of the Conservative fund, with the approval of the senator in the Senate. However, when they realized that it was more money than that, then it was not okay to go with the \$90,000 that Nigel Wright paid privately. Both are the same principle.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you, when is a bribe a bribe? That is clearly what it was. It was a payoff, auditing of the Senate report, as a result. Now we have a massive cover-up by the whole of the Conservative Party. What we are seeing here today is not just the Prime Minister's Office anymore. It is the whole of the backbench along with it.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if only there were an NDP member for Toronto Centre right now.

I will start by saying that I will be sharing my time with my hon. friend from Hochelaga.

I would like to very briefly address one small point in the motion from the Liberal Party, which is the whole question of requiring the Prime Minister to speak under oath. I will be supporting this motion, but I want to suggest that this is a bit superfluous. Any MP in the House, including the Prime Minister, must tell the truth. It is a matter of our parliamentary privilege. Every time the Prime Minister stands in the House, he is duty bound to tell the truth. Therefore, he actually

already is, in the best sense of the words, under oath every time he is in the House. We need a little more information from the Liberals on exactly what kind of process would perfect what the Prime Minister already has a duty to do.

I rose in the House on May 21 to ask the very first series of questions on the criminality involved in what we now know to be a criminal scheme. I referenced section 16 of the Parliament of Canada Act and then section 119 of the Criminal Code. This is almost a symbolic point I want to make. The Parliament of Canada Act, subsection 16(1), states:

No member of the Senate shall receive or agree to receive any compensation, directly or indirectly, for services rendered or to be rendered to any person, either by the member or another person,

(a) in relation to any...controversy, charge, accusation, arrest or other matter before the Senate or the House of Commons or a committee of either House;

It fits perfectly and actually applies only to the Senate and senators. Interestingly, and this is the symbolic point, any senator guilty of this provision is liable to a fine of not less than \$1,000 and not more than \$4,000. There is no jail time in this provision, but every person who gives the bribe and is not the senator, according to section 16 of the Parliament of Canada Act, is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year. The symbolic difference between how the Parliament of Canada Act is drafted so that senators can actually be bribed and avoid jail while somebody else involved in the same process goes to jail—an average citizen, for example—is an absolutely symbolic statement of the state of privilege and, indeed, institutional corruption in that body.

Many of us have read in detail the affidavit from RCMP officer Horton, 80-some pages, where he not only mentions section 119 of the Criminal Code and bribery but also mentions breach of public trust in section 122 and fraud on the government in section 121. All three of these provisions seem very clearly to be made out given what we know about the quid pro quo arrangement involving at least Mr. Duffy and Mr. Wright, where Mr. Duffy's side of the deal would be to be silent both in the Senate and in public, and the side of the deal for at least Mr. Wright—and others in the PMO quite likely—was that there would be money paid back to Mr. Duffy so that he would not have to bear the cost of the expenses he owed and also that there would be some kind of rigging of a report coming out of the Senate so it would go easy on Mr. Duffy. That was a key part of the quid pro quo as well.

What I would like to focus the remainder of my remarks on is the fact that we cannot be blinded by the Wright-Duffy relationship as the direct participatory side, two parties clearly involved. This whole thing is most clearly a scheme. Others are involved. We know of different aspects, thanks to this very historically unusual insight provided by the affidavit from the RCMP. Assistance and participation, other than being the directly involved party, is part of our Criminal Code, and with section 22 of the Criminal Code, frankly, depending on what the evidence reveals, I would suggest that we can start with the Prime Minister.

With respect to a person counselling an offence, subsection 22(1) states:

Business of Supply

Where a person counsels another person to be a party to an offence and that other person is afterwards a party to that offence, the person who counselled is a party to that offence, notwithstanding that the offence was committed in a way different from that which was counselled.

● (1335)

It does not matter that somebody says “Please go out and do a hit job by kneecapping somebody with a hammer” and the person uses an iron bar instead. It does not matter if the source of illegal funds in a transaction was originally the Conservative Party's funds but turned out to be Mr. Wright's own funds, because either source is equally criminal. If that was to be the case, anybody counselling that initial payment from the Conservative Party fund would be equally guilty if it turned out that another fund was used.

Also, section 21 deals with parties to an offence, that being all criminal offences in the House, including the ones I have already read out on bribery, fraud against the government and breach of public trust. Every one of them has an analogue or accessory life, which is that other people can be involved as aiders or abettors.

As well, section 465 of the Criminal Code speaks to conspiracy wherein a number of people could agree to be part of a scheme.

I would like to suggest that we move on to another character in this quite tawdry and sordid drama, Senator Gerstein. Let us look at the whole idea of aiding what we know to have occurred between Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy. We know that being part of a common intention to fulfill the purpose of a scheme such as this is in itself criminal. Senator Gerstein tried to interfere with Deloitte by going to a contact within Deloitte to see whether or not its report could be stopped on the shady basis that Mr. Duffy was paying back the expenses and that somehow or another the matter would be moot. However, Deloitte said it would be going ahead but told him that it would not come up with a firm finding on the question of residency. That gave the PMO an advantage with respect to the rest of its scheme; that is, it told them how to go about obstructing the rest without pushing Deloitte any further. It is very clear that this was interference with respect to Deloitte in a way that assisted the broader scheme. If it turns out that what is said in the affidavit is true, I think there is more than enough evidence in that 80-page affidavit for Senator Gerstein to be charged with being part of the scheme.

I would also like to mention something else that is separate. Members should keep in mind that some things may have only gone so far and did not quite get completed. That might also include Senator Gerstein. Members should also keep in mind that attempting an offence is itself a crime under section 24 of the Criminal Code.

I will now turn to what happened after the scheme initially occurred. There was then evidence beginning to emerge and there was what one would call a cover-up. There is a whole section in the Criminal Code called Misleading Justice. Section 131 of the Criminal Code speaks to perjury. Perjury is not only something that happens when people tell an untruth in a court of law. Section 131(1) states:

Subject to subsection (3), every one commits perjury who, with intent to mislead, makes before a person who is authorized by law to permit it to be made before him a false statement under oath or solemn affirmation, by affidavit...

Therefore, the statements taken by the RCMP and revealed in this affidavit fall exactly within the scope of this provision. I would draw everyone's attention to how the RCMP has placed square-bracketed comments throughout that document, explaining in a number of cases that it clearly feels that somebody providing testimony did not tell the truth. I have to say that one of the highlights in the affidavit, from the RCMP's perspective, was that Senator LeBreton was not telling the truth. That was specifically in the affidavit. Perjury is also a crime, as is obstruction of justice. I will not go into the details.

Finally, I will get to the lawyers. It is an unethical practice for any lawyer to knowingly be involved in assisting a criminal offence such as may have happened in this case. I hope that there are members of the legal profession who will be drawing this to the attention of the respective law societies of the lawyers involved.

● (1340)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in an earlier question and comment, it is unlikely that will agree with many of the things the hon. member has had to say.

However, I cannot help but comment on the member for Malpeque and how odd it was to have the Liberals put him up to talk about ethics in government and ethics in expenses. This is coming from the Liberal member for Malpeque, who claimed thousands of dollars in expenses for a house he said he owned, but actually did not. He was being cheered by the member for Vancouver Centre, who is guilty of elections act charges. He is sitting next to the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who is guilty of elections act charges. My gosh, how funny it is to have that ethical standard by the Liberal Party.

I wonder if the member opposite might comment on something. As I said, we are not going to agree on a lot of things. I wonder if he would agree with me that the fact that the Liberal Party refused to allow its leader to speak on this issue is an indictment of the fact that it does not trust him to speak not only on this issue, but on any issue. Would he, in essence, agree that the Liberal leader is in way over his head not only this, but on just about every topic that matters to Canadians?

● (1345)

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I honestly do not believe the member's question deserves the dignity of a response. It is clearly part of a diversionary strategy that has nothing to do with what is in the House at the moment.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for the best speech I have heard from him since he has been in the House. It was very well-informed and very precise.

He said at the beginning that in the Liberal motion, we asked the Prime Minister to testify under oath, and he made the point that we were under oath in the House. The problem is that we want to have answers under oath, and the Prime Minister is not giving any in the House, so we would like to find a way that the Prime Minister would be obligated to answer very specific questions. For example, who in his office knew about the deal with Mr. Duffy? Why are the people who knew still working with the Prime Minister?

Business of Supply

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, what I would say is that we do not necessarily have to think about a specific institutional context when it comes to extending the context in which Prime Minister could testify under oath.

Keep in mind that we have already seen an example of the interviews of the people involved in the scheme, which were revealed in the affidavit. I hope at one point, given what has been revealed so far, the Prime Minister might himself be subject to such interviews. He will be under oath at the time that he gives such testimony.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, a woman named Alison Stodin, a lifelong Conservative, contacted CTV News recently and said that she was disillusioned by the party she supported for decades. In her email, she wrote:

It started in 2006. First [the Prime Minister] tried to put all of the chiefs (of staff) in place who were [Prime Minister] loyalists. Then they started planting their people in the ministers' offices at director level. Over time the ministers were marginalized and all the staff became Stepford Wives to the PMO.

Later, in a phone call, she went further, stating, “there's nobody inside anymore to stand up and say, “You can't do that, that's wrong”. She said that this was “because everybody just follows orders”. After 40 years, she is “ashamed by this sort of behaviour”.

My question for the hon. member on my side is this. What can we do to get MPs standing up and working for constituents, their conscience and Canada, instead of parties?

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, it is a slightly off-topic question. I will answer it very briefly. I do believe that the House of Commons legitimately functions strongly on the basis of a party system. I personally wish we had more independents, because it injects energy and a perspective that might not otherwise come through party dynamics.

Honestly, though, we need a House of Commons oriented around parties and we need a Senate that is completely distanced from party politics, especially of the sort that uses the Senate as a home ground for fundraising, speechifying and all kinds of other things that have nothing to do with a senator's job.

• (1350)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about all of the scandals in the Senate, but that is not true. Unless someone is completely disillusioned, there is no way that they would enjoy a situation that proves, without a doubt, that democracy in Canada is slipping away. If it were just the scandal in the Senate, we could clean things up, but that is not the case. We are talking about a few Liberal and Conservative senators, but also the Prime Minister's Office.

The world is watching. I just got back from a trip to Europe, where this was being talked about. Any outsider looking at Canada sees the mayor of Toronto, the Charbonneau commission, the government's backward policies and the senators' inappropriate expenses. Meanwhile, the government is imposing unprecedented austerity measures on families and the RCMP is investigating the Prime Minister's Office.

Seriously, what a mess. The RCMP is investigating the Prime Minister's Office.

[English]

“How many criminal investigations are there in your party, Mr. Martin?”

[Translation]

That question must come back to haunt the Prime Minister from time to time. He asked Paul Martin that in a debate before the 2006 election, which he won.

[English]

Right back at him, how many criminal investigations are there in his party, his administration?

[Translation]

This party was elected on a platform of transparency. It took advantage of the sponsorship scandal to take power and do something even worse.

Talk about hollow symbolism. The first bill that the party introduced was Bill C-2, which dealt with responsibility and accountability. Ironically, this bill strengthened the Conflict of Interest Act for public office holders, among others, and created the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer. Times change.

Now, we have the same Prime Minister, but he has become arrogant now that his party has a majority. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I said that he is arrogant. Whether that constitutes parliamentary language or not, this man has the arrogance to come before the House, before the parliamentarians who represent all Canadians and the country, and to perjure himself time and time again.

Apparently, “perjure” is too harsh a word because, according to the Speaker's ruling, the Prime Minister supposedly did not deliberately mislead the House of Commons. However, the fact remains that he misled the House. If you do not know, you do not say anything. Period. You do not make things up. This man is much too intelligent not to have deliberately misled the House. That is why the opposition parties are using the tools they have left to ask the Prime Minister to tell the truth once and for all.

Does he still have the moral legitimacy to govern the country and to stand in this House? If he was able to so readily deprive the three senators of their seats, I do not see why he can continue to claim that he deserves to keep his own. Perhaps he thought he was dealing with puppets who feared his influence too much. Whatever our opinion of them may be, Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy are also very influential individuals, and they are certainly not the kind of people you throw under the bus to save your own skin.

The Prime Minister is beginning to realize that. He even had the nerve to go before his supporters in his hometown of Calgary to tell them that Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy failed to abide by the party's standard of ethics and that they acted alone. I am sure everyone believes him.

Even the members of his own caucus have doubts about his version of the facts, particularly since it contradicts the version that Nigel Wright gave to the RCMP. Many people think that Nigel Wright is an ethical person and they are reluctant to believe that he could have orchestrated this whole affair without the Prime Minister's knowledge.

A Conservative member who asked to remain anonymous had this to say to the media:

[English]

“The Prime Minister told caucus that Nigel acted alone. But it's clear now that a number of people in the room, including some senators and his chief of staff, knew all about it”.

[Translation]

I doubt very highly that a secret between the chief of staff and a senator—to cover the Prime Minister's behind—could have been known to so many people in the Prime Minister's inner circle without him knowing about it.

They say that the Prime Minister and his entourage knew nothing. Then, all of a sudden, four people knew, then six, seven, thirteen, and so on. Even campaign organizers Jenni Byrne and Doug Finley were in the know. It is unbelievable.

• (1355)

Another backbencher also told *La Presse* that the Prime Minister would be “done like toast” if new information surfaced indicating that he knew what was happening and had lied to his caucus.

[English]

A number of us would ask for his resignation, but I do not believe that to be true.

[Translation]

This has become such a major story that people are calling it Duffygate. I do not necessarily want to make comparisons, but the similarities with the not-so-distant Nixon years are troubling. At the start, no one would have believed that the American president was involved. Instead, fingers were pointed at those around him, in particular his chief of staff, Harry Robbins Haldeman, who resigned. We still do not know if Nigel Wright resigned or was fired.

The American Senate investigated and promised to punish those responsible. It was discovered that the president's inner circle lobbied to have reports regarding the involvement of the president and those around him modified. Nixon's popularity plummeted and people began to consider the likely scenario that he was involved and might have to leave the White House. Next came the impeachment motion, but Nixon resigned in August 1974, before the vote took place and after releasing a recording of his telephone calls that clearly proved his involvement. That was the final blow. Does anyone see any similarities here?

The opposition members are not the only ones who are sick and tired of this. This situation cannot go on. The Prime Minister need not explain himself so much for the opposition members, but to reassure his own caucus, the senators and Canadians in general who are waiting to see whether they can still trust this man.

Statements by Members

The fact that the NDP has been fighting for over 30 years to have the Senate abolished is immaterial in this specific instance. The Senate is distracting us from the conversations we might have and the questions we might ask the Prime Minister about his personal ethics, his perception of his role as Prime Minister and his vision of democracy.

We do not share the same views and that is just fine. I can live with that. I have never been afraid to debate my ideas or be confronted about them. However, I thought that at the very least we all believed in the truth. Unfortunately I was wrong.

The journalist I was talking about earlier attended the Conservative Party convention earlier this year. His observation was rather sad:

[English]

Yet everyone I spoke to said that the entire Conservative party is unsettled. There is a palpable sense of disillusionment—a feeling that the leader and his staff have forgotten the party was elected on a ticket of accountability and transparency.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister's followers, Conservative supporters, MPs, ministers and senators do not want to believe that he had anything to do with this, and I can understand that. That is what trust is. They love their party and they love their country, and even though I do not share their views, I can see where they are coming from.

When asked about this, Senator Hugh Segal said his loyalty went beyond the Prime Minister.

...our oath to Her Majesty to do what's right is actually more important than any other politician.

People are not fools. They have given the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt and have been more forgiving of his behaviour than he was himself when it came to the senators he expelled with no regard for the presumption of innocence.

If he is a real leader, then he should go to bat for his team, his caucus and the people who follow him and believe in him.

[English]

People have got to know whether or not their president is a crook.

[Translation]

A real leader has to have the courage to do that.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an organization in Edmonton that makes a huge difference in the lives of young people at risk.

Statements by Members

In 1982, Youth Empowerment and Support Services, YESS, opened its doors to fill the gap between Child and Family Services and adult support systems for young people between the ages of 15 and 20. For some very important years, these young people had no one to turn to, no assistance for housing, no one to help them through high school, and no one to help them eat, sleep, or live safely. It is not surprising that a lot of these young people ended up on the streets, became involved with drugs or prostitution, or just gave up.

These kids are from across all demographic spectra, and many have faced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; abandonment; mental health issues; and substance abuse. Some have never been taught age-appropriate life skills and do not know how to look after themselves properly. An increasing number are refugees or immigrants. All are suffering and seeking guidance, stability, and a caring environment in which to grow and achieve their goals.

YESS provides shelter, safety, and hope for youths facing difficult realities. I am proud to be one of their local champions and urge all Edmontonians to support their efforts.

* * *

● (1400)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Cowichan Valley is recognizing the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” with its “Purple Light Night” campaign. It is a made-in-Cowichan response to the levels of violence against women and girls in our community. It invites people to hang strings of purple lights in their homes, business windows, and downtown trees to show support that gender violence has no place in our community.

Over 1,000 women access Cowichan Women Against Violence Society services each year. My community recognized it had to take concrete action to reduce violence. The City of Duncan established a designated domestic violence court in 2009, and it deals with around 300 cases each year. The North Cowichan RCMP established a domestic violence unit that same year. Recognizing that 90% of assaults are not reported to police, our local Cowichan District Hospital has a specialized response unit known as the sexual assault nurse examiner program.

We hope these actions get us closer to our goal. A community that is safe for women is a community that is safe for all.

* * *

BRANTFORD WALK OF FAME

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hometown, Brantford, has been home to some of the greatest Canadians who have ever lived, people who have changed the world.

Brant residents gave us the telephone, the world's first electron microscope, the first Canadian-made tractor, Canada's first female physician, great authors and artists, some of Canada's most storied first nation heroes, and great sports heroes, including the greatest hockey player and hockey family of all time.

The names and faces behind these achievements are all proudly displayed in the city's new Walk of Fame monument in Gore Park. A beautiful, semi-circular wall surrounded by gardens pays homage to Alexander Graham Bell, Dr. James Hillier, the Cockshutt family, Dr. Emily Stowe, Joseph Brant, E. Pauline Johnson, Jay Silverheels, Thomas B. Costain, June Callwood, Lawren Harris, Phil Hartman, Debra Brown, and of course, Wayne and Walter Gretzky, along with 12 other distinguished Canadians with roots in Brantford.

Brantford is a community where citizens of humble beginnings have and continue to shape the world.

* * *

ANDY SCOTT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on June 25, New Brunswick lost one of its most illustrious sons.

The hon. Andy Scott served in this House from 1993 to 2008 and will long be remembered by the people of Fredericton as an outstanding representative. Canada's first peoples also remember Andy as a compassionate and dedicated minister of Aboriginal and Northern affairs.

Andy bravely battled cancer for many months, but this terrible illness took him at far too young an age. His funeral was moving and his friends spoke lovingly of the man so many of us admired deeply.

[*Translation*]

Our friend Andy Scott will be greatly missed.

[*English*]

Today our condolences go to Andy's wife Denise, their son Noah, and Andy's two sons, Nathan and Nicholas.

* * *

CANADIAN CO-OPERATIVES

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, co-operatives are businesses that are driven by democratic values and principles. They employ over 155,000 Canadians. They pay taxes on more than \$50 billion in revenues, and they create jobs and offer goods and services in all regions.

The difference between the co-operative model and other business models is how the profits are used and that their focus is on long-term strategic planning, growth, and success. Co-operatives are more durable, and research has shown that new co-operatives are more likely to remain in business than any other new enterprises and are more resilient in economic downturns.

I am proud to be a supporter of the Canadian co-operatives industry, and I look forward to working with them to create even more jobs in our communities.

Statements by Members

Tonight, please join me and my colleagues from Ottawa—Vanier and LaSalle—Émard in celebrating co-operatives at their annual reception at the Parliament Pub. I will see everyone there.

* * *

• (1405)

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the solemn occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Holodomor. This genocide by famine, perpetrated against the Ukrainian people in the so-called breadbasket of Europe by Stalin's Soviet regime in 1932-1933, took millions of lives and has scarred generations to this day.

I am very proud to have joined in the vote in this House for all-party support for recognition of Holodomor Memorial Day in Canada. The City of Toronto announced a similar proclamation in a moving ceremony at City Hall last Saturday evening. I have also joined with Ukrainian Canadians in my community of Parkdale—High Park, as well as with those across Canada, in pressing for this terrible history to be recognized in our schools and museums.

We salute Ukrainian Canadians for their strong stance in defence of democracy, freedom, and human rights. They will always have a friend in the New Democratic Party, and we stand with them in saying, "Never forget, never again".

* * *

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we remember the Holodomor, a crime against humanity the world in the past knew little of, hidden behind the Soviet curtain of iron. More than seven million people perished in Ukraine 80 years ago in a forced famine of unimaginable horror. The deep, rich soil of Ukraine, known as the breadbasket of Europe, suffered not the ravages of nature but suffered the savagery of one man: Stalin. While millions of Ukrainians horribly starved to death, the people of the world feasted on Ukraine's bountiful crops, stolen by Stalin's evil regime.

We must speak out to support historical truths of mankind's failings, in Canada and around the world, or revisionist historians, deniers of the Holodomor, will educate the world with their version of the truth.

We remember today the victims of the Holodomor, the dark side of humanity. By remembering, we help the world guard against those who would repeat such genocide.

* * *

TOM THOMPSON ART GALLERY

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the old adage goes, "a picture paints a thousand words".

I rise in the House today to recognize the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound for its recent recognition as an A-rated gallery by the Ontario Arts Council. The Tom was established in 1967 and was named after Tom Thomson, a famous Canadian artist who was born, bred, and now rests in Owen Sound.

Since its establishment, the Tom has been home to the largest collection of art in the area. The gallery is being commended for its outstanding collection as well as the programs and services it offers to the community. I am very proud that a small-town gallery like the Tom is showing the big boys how it is done. I congratulate Virginia Eichhorn, director and chief curator of the Tom, and all of her staff and volunteers, on a job very well done. I and all residents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound are very proud of their accomplishments and their service to our community.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you and all members to visit the best, visit the Tom.

* * *

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women have been fighting to defend their rights for centuries, and the fight for equality continues.

Our position in the world is improving, according to a recent report from the World Bank. However, there are still some places where women are not allowed to work in certain jobs and a woman cannot open a bank account on her own or leave the house unaccompanied.

Here in Canada, our mothers and grandmothers fought hard to pave the way for us. There are now many women who work in business or are lawyers, doctors, engineers or MPs. There are more and more female graduates, but the fight for pay equity continues.

Although 54% of university degrees are now held by women, they earn on average only 75% of what men earn in Quebec. In addition, much more still needs to be done to wipe out domestic violence.

I would like to commend the excellent work done by some of the women in my riding. Whether in unions or at the Accueil pour Elle women's shelter, at CALACS La Vigie, Marg'Elle, the Résidence-Elle du Haut-Saint-Laurent or in many other community organizations, women stand in solidarity.

Kudos to all of these women, who are showing us the way with confidence and dignity.

* * *

[*English*]

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 2013 has been a great year for Canadian sport, thanks in large part to the efforts of our Special Olympics athletes who competed in South Korea, where Team Canada won 109 medals, 47 of them gold.

Statements by Members

Our government admires their dedication and passion for sport, and we are a proud supporter of the Special Olympics movement. We provide funding to Special Olympics Canada through the sport support program. We are also committed to developing and promoting an inclusive sports system that encourages participation and active lifestyles for all Canadians of all abilities. Canada's Special Olympics athletes show us that sport has the power to enhance lives, change attitudes, and strengthen communities.

I ask all members to join me in supporting the Special Olympics and to encourage others to do the same during their visit to the Hill today, and every day.

* * *

● (1410)

ELECTRONIC PETITIONS

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I begin today with a quote from Preston Manning:

To be able to petition one's elected representatives...is one of the oldest and most basic of democratic rights. Affirming and re-establishing this right in the 21st century through electronic petitioning is an idea well worth pursuing.

Mr. Manning provided this quote when he endorsed my private member's motion on e-petitions. Motion No. 428 requests that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs undertake a study on how we might best establish a system for accepting petitions signed electronically.

My motion comes up for vote early next year, and I am currently seeking support from all members.

I close with another supportive quote, this one from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation:

When taxpayers get the opportunity to go online and sign an official petition... they'll be able to get the attention of Ottawa politicians in a hurry....This would help restore some grassroots democracy and accountability on Parliament Hill.

* * *

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, we remembered and raised awareness of the horrific and catastrophic famine of 1932-33 that claimed the lives of millions of Ukrainian men, women, and children. The Holodomor, a genocide by starvation, orchestrated by the brutal communist regime of Joseph Stalin, was an attempt to stamp out the aspirations of the people of Ukraine.

It is important to honour the memories of those who suffered and those who perished in one of the worst genocides the world has ever witnessed. We need to always remember those victims and the horror that was inflicted upon Ukraine by Stalin's communist dictatorship.

Canada was the first western country to recognize this deliberate starvation as an act of genocide when Parliament passed my bill in 2008. This is a testament to our country's strong and proud ties to Ukraine. We stand in solidarity with the over one million Canadians of Ukrainian heritage and Ukrainians around the world and remember those affected 80 years ago by this dark chapter in Ukraine's history.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian as follows:]

Vichnaya Pamyat.

May their memories be eternal.

I encourage all parliamentarians to attend this evening's Holodomor service.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the European Union awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Malala Yousafzai, the courageous 16-year-old girl from Pakistan and soon-to-be honorary Canadian citizen, assaulted and still threatened by the Taliban for insisting upon her right to go to school.

Andrei Sakharov, the great Soviet dissident, whom I had the privilege to represent, once told me that his favourite part of the Helsinki Final Act was its affirmation of the right to know and act upon one's rights.

Through her words and deeds, Malala has not only demonstrated a profound understanding of her rights and an unbending determination to act upon them but has inspired many others, especially young women, in Pakistan and around the world with her courage and determination. As Malala said upon receiving the award:

Many children have no food to eat, no water to drink, and children are starving for education. It is alarming that 57 million children are deprived of education. This must shake our conscience...

I invite all hon. members to offer Malala our congratulations and our solidarity as she continues her valiant struggle for access to education, equality, and human dignity.

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BY-ELECTIONS IN MANITOBA

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a by-election veteran, I want to congratulate the new Conservative members-elect for Brandon—Souris and Provencher. They ran great campaigns, and we look forward to welcoming them into our national caucus and the Manitoba caucus.

Brandon—Souris neighbours my own riding in western Manitoba, and I enjoyed visiting with many of the people there with our great Conservative member-elect and his exceptional campaign team. The people of Brandon—Souris have elected a member with strong roots in Brandon and all of the rural communities of western Manitoba. An experienced MLA, farmer, and businessperson, he will serve the people well.

Our new member-elect from Provencher is also an experienced businessperson who knows how to create jobs. He runs a successful construction company, with 75 employees, and serves on the board of the Steinbach Credit Union.

Despite the smug punditry, including a wildly inaccurate Forum poll in Brandon—Souris, the media elites were wrong yet again. Of course, our strengthened Conservative caucus will continue to focus on jobs, growth, and prosperity as our top priority for Canadians.

Oral Questions

• (1415)

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's closest cronies have cheated, deceived, schemed and lost the confidence of Canadians, and how does the other side respond?

The Prime Minister evades the issues and plays victim. One would think that his parliamentary secretary is applying for a job as a speech writer for Rob Ford. The rest of the caucus keeps applauding, like puppets controlled by the boys in short pants in the Prime Minister's Office.

The saddest part is that while the Prime Minister's inner circle schemes and plots, railway safety is deteriorating and the Champlain Bridge is collapsing under the weight of inaction and under-investment in infrastructure. Of course, the Conservatives are far too busy covering up their scandals instead of governing.

Canadians deserve better than a government that has replaced the Liberal scandals, senators and corruption with Conservative scandals, senators and corruption.

The NDP is the only party that wants to change the status quo. Only the NDP can offer Canadians an honest government in 2015.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that the laws are strong and clear enough to protect Canadians in situations when accused persons found not criminally responsible pose a risk to the public.

That is why I am happy to see that our government has reinstated the not criminally responsible reform act. This legislation would ensure that the public is given paramount consideration. It would create a new high-risk designation for those who pose significant risk and enhance the rights of victims in the review board process.

In my opinion, creating the new designation for those few high-risk individuals would actually reduce the stigma for those who suffer from mental illness. It is acknowledged that the vast majority of individuals who are found NCR are non-violent.

Earlier this year, *The Globe and Mail* called the legislation a fair and measured response. The *Ottawa Citizen* described it as a reasonable approach.

I call on the Liberal leader to set aside his ideological opposition and help us get this bill passed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has expressed concern over the significant weaknesses in Canada's oversight of its railways. The very purpose of any government is to guarantee public safety. In light of the events in Lac-Mégantic and the Auditor General's report, we see that the Conservatives have failed miserably at protecting the public when it comes to rail safety.

When will they protect the public instead of private companies?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. The Auditor General notes that we have a system that works most of the time. In fact, accidents are on the decline in Canada. The Auditor General also notes that our government has made new investments since coming into power. However, he made some important recommendations that the government will accept and act on.

* * *

[English]

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another primary responsibility of any government is to ensure that the food Canadians put on their tables is safe. The Conservatives have failed in that as well. They were responsible for the largest meat recall in Canadian history. According to the Auditor General, the government failed to properly protect and inform the public.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to address the government's systemic failure to keep Canadians' food supply safe?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that just does not accurately represent what the Auditor General found overall. In fact, the Consumers' Association of Canada stated, "The Government's enhanced recall warnings will provide consumers with better information regarding steps they should take during food recalls".

It has been noted we brought in tougher penalties, enhanced controls on E. coli, new meat labelling requirements, and more than 750 new inspectors, and, by the way, as we have done those things and made those investments, the NDP has voted against them every step of the way.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they cut \$26 million from food inspection. That is their real record. One of the problems the Auditor General points to is that every time he prepares a report, the government claims it will accept his recommendations, but then turns around and ignores them. When it comes to protecting the public, whether we are talking about rail safety or food safety, will the government finally listen and take action?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government always acts on the recommendations of any auditor general. That is why our government has invested more in the food safety system. Our government will continue to make the necessary investments to ensure that our system remains a world-class system.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister agree with his most recent director of communications that there was a Conservative criminal cover-up in the Prime Minister's Office?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obviously up to the RCMP to conduct the investigations. As the RCMP has been very clear, we have been providing them with any and all access to the information that is necessary. The RCMP has made clear that there are two individuals who are under investigation. Those are individuals whom we have already sanctioned. Obviously, we will continue to assist the RCMP.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to his most recent communications director, there were several other people involved. Why did he not dismiss all the other people in his office who were involved in this cover-up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that statement is totally false. The RCMP has said that there are two individuals who are under investigation.

[English]

When the Leader of the Opposition starts tarnishing the names of people who face no allegations whatsoever, I am reminded once again of the old saying, "When you throw mud, you lose ground".

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Senator Irving Gerstein was deeply involved in the whole scheme to repay Mike Duffy's expenses, yet he is still a member of the Conservative caucus. Even more, he is still the Prime Minister's chief fundraiser.

Will the Prime Minister please explain to Canadians why Senator Irving Gerstein continues to enjoy his complete confidence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are two individuals who are under investigation, and there are a number of senators who broke rules or who disregarded rules.

Those senators have been dealt with harshly by the Senate of Canada, by the Conservative senators in the Senate of Canada. It is up to the leader of the Liberal Party to explain why the Liberal Party tries to protect such rule-breakers.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has shown that Irving Gerstein reached out to Deloitte to interfere with the audit on Mike Duffy's expenses and offered Conservative donor money to pay off those expenses, a deal that would have violated three sections of the Criminal Code.

With all these serious allegations of wrongdoing, why is the Prime Minister continuing to defend Irving Gerstein?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the facts here are that Mr. Duffy claimed he had repaid his inappropriate expenses when in fact he had accepted a gift from Mr. Wright.

That gift was not properly disclosed and was in fact misrepresented. That is why those two individuals are under investigation, as they should be, and why we will continue to assist the RCMP in any and all—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Papineau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, non-answers like that explain why the Conservatives lost 40% of their vote across the country.

[Translation]

Senator Gerstein tried to interfere in the audit of Mike Duffy's expenses. He even offered Conservative donor money to make the problem go away, which apparently violates three sections of the Criminal Code.

Why does the Prime Minister still have confidence in Senator Gerstein?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has been clear. Two individuals are under investigation, and our government is co-operating fully.

Canadians do not agree with the Liberal Party, which is protecting senators who break the rules.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have asked this question a few times, but the Prime Minister has always refused to answer.

Did the Prime Minister know about the original plan from the PMO to repay Mike Duffy's illegal expenses using money from the Conservative Party? Did he know about that plan, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I have been very clear on that.

It was my view from the beginning, as I told Mr. Duffy, that he should repay his own expenses. I did not suggest the party should repay them or that Mr. Wright should repay them or that anybody else should repay them.

Once again, I was told that Mr. Duffy would repay them. I was told he had repaid them, not anybody else. I could not be clearer on that fact.

Those are the facts. Of course, as we know, that was not true, and that is why two individuals are under investigation.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is still afraid to give a straight answer.

The Prime Minister's Office made nine separate promises to Mike Duffy in the deal to keep him quiet. Let us look at the other eight.

Did the Prime Minister know about the promise to pay Mike Duffy's legal bills, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have just said repeatedly “no” on that. In fact, as is well known, no such payment took place.

It was Mr. Wright who secretly paid Mr. Duffy. He gave him a gift and then allowed him to claim that he had repaid his expenses. That was obviously not correct, and that is why those two individuals are under investigation.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that question was about the legal fees.

[*Translation*]

Did the Prime Minister know that his staff negotiated an agreement to halt the Deloitte audit of Mike Duffy, yes or no?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, just to clarify on the legal expenses, as I said before, I became aware of that on May 15. That was not a surprise to me, given that parties regularly provide legal assistance to their caucus members, just as the Leader of the Opposition's party has provided him with tens of thousands of dollars, in fact six figures' worth, of legal expenses.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that one he knew about. How about Deloitte?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question is there.

As we know, Deloitte was retained by the Senate of Canada to do an audit, and Deloitte stands by the findings of its audit.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knew that his office negotiated an agreement to whitewash the Senate report on Mike Duffy and to not raise questions about his residence.

Will he admit it, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the problem with this situation is that Mr. Wright's gift to Mr. Duffy was not properly disclosed.

For that reason, we took action, and those people are under investigation.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister know his office made a deal to have “a senior government source” tell the press that Mr. Duffy met the requirements to sit as a senator from P.E.I., yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, it is well known that there are many senators and members of Parliament who have more than one residence. That was not the issue in my mind. The issue was that Mr. Duffy had claimed expenses that he had not in fact actually incurred because he was living at a long-time residence. That is why I believed his actions were not appropriate and why he should repay the money he had taken from the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister know that his own office made a

deal to have the Prime Minister himself repeat that same statement if ever he was asked, yes or no?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my position on this is very well known. There are many senators and members of Parliament who have more than one residence. That is not unusual. What is not appropriate in these circumstances is for somebody to claim an expense he did not actually incur. That is what Mr. Duffy did and why I told Mr. Duffy that I believed he should repay those inappropriate expenses.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister know that his office made a deal to allow Mr. Duffy to start charging taxpayers for his expenses once again if Senate rules were ever changed, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, my view on this has been very clear.

We have rules in both chambers of this House that cover legitimate expenses that members of Parliament and senators have when they travel, when they move around and when they do government business. I do not believe that any of those rules should ever be interpreted in a way that somebody would take an expense claim and get money back when they had not actually paid any money of their own out in the first place. That is inappropriate. It was inappropriate before, it is inappropriate now and it would be inappropriate under any future circumstances.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us try to get a perfectly clear answer to one question.

[*Translation*]

Did the Prime Minister know that his office ordered senators on the Board of Internal Economy to use the same media lines if they spoke publicly about the report?

Did they concoct those lines, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the committees of both chambers are responsible for their own positions, and the Senate took a very clear position.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Carolyn Stewart Olsen is a close confidante of the Prime Minister who he appointed to the Senate as a reward for loyal service. The RCMP records make it clear that Stewart Olsen was only too happy to assist with the audit report whitewash and that she was getting her orders right from the PMO; “...always ready to do exactly what is asked”, she wrote to Nigel Wright.

If Nigel got the boot, why is Stewart Olsen still in the government caucus?

Oral Questions

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as identified in the reports the member is referencing, the subjects of this investigation are both Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP records make it clear that Stewart Olsen tried to have the audit into Mike Duffy stopped. When she could not do that, she followed PMO orders and personally moved the motion to whitewash parts of the Senate report critical of Mike Duffy, just as they had promised. The RCMP says that her answers to it are "...incomplete, and not consistent with the facts", a polite way of saying that she is not telling the truth.

Why is she still a member of the government caucus?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the subjects of this investigation are Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright. Senator Duffy accepted payments that he did not incur and Nigel Wright made a repayment for those expenses, which also was inappropriate. That is the subject of this investigation.

The document does go on further to explain how the Prime Minister ordered that his office would assist in this matter.

It further says that the Prime Minister knew nothing of this. As we know, had the Prime Minister known, he would have in no way endorsed such an action.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives must be kidding when they say they are co-operating with the RCMP. The RCMP itself has said that Senator Stewart Olsen, the Prime Minister's former press secretary, refused to tell the truth when she was questioned by the RCMP. We cannot forget Senator Tkachuk, who seemed to suddenly forget some very important details when he was questioned by the RCMP.

If the government wants to co-operate with the RCMP, why are these senators, who are impeding a police investigation, still Conservative senators?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the subjects of this investigation are Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright.

However, when we are talking about RCMP investigations, I want to read a quote: "Under RCMP questioning", the member for Wascana "seemed uneasy about discussing his one-time cabinet colleague. I guess others will have to make the judgment call about how to characterize..." the activities of the member for King—Hants with respect to the income trust. It went on further to say that the member for Wascana:

...has no e-mail service, either on a handheld device or even on his desktop computer, saying "it just ticks me off"—especially when colleagues thumb their BlackBerry[sic] at meetings.

Let me get this: no BlackBerrys, no emails, no records. That is the Liberal accountability.

•(1435)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's Auditor General's report on shipbuilding makes it clear. Conservatives will not be able to build the ships needed to replace our aging fleet. Rough estimates, made years ago, have been treated as budget caps.

The Auditor General says the existing budget is "insufficient" to replace Canada's 4 destroyers and 12 frigates with 15 modern warships with similar capabilities.

What is it going to be? Will Conservatives cut the number of ships or will they increase the budget?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the national shipbuilding procurement strategy uses third-party experts to review the program and to provide advice regarding program costs and the decisions that go with them.

The Auditor General himself recognized that we have strong governance in place to manage the cost and capability trade-offs.

He also found that we are managing the acquisition of military ships in a timely, affordable, efficient and transparent manner that will support the shipbuilding industry for years to come.

We agree with the Auditor General. So should the NDP.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. According to the Auditor General, the budget for ships "is insufficient to replace Canada's 3 destroyers and 12 frigates with 15 modern warships with similar capabilities". The Conservatives promised that every shipyard would benefit from this program. However, if they stick to this budget, they will have to reduce the number of ships ordered and therefore the number of jobs promised. What will they choose: ordering fewer ships or spending more money?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to giving the men and women of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard the ships they need, while still respecting taxpayers. Experts are assessing the decisions and costs to determine what option will best meet the needs of our military personnel and will be in the best interests of taxpayers.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, aboriginal communities are among the most vulnerable in Canada when it comes to dealing with emergency situations like the one in Attawapiskat. However, the minister continues to turn a deaf ear. The budget is inadequate, there is no long-term vision and there is no prevention. In short, his management seems to be disastrous, at best.

Will the minister do more than say he accepts the Auditor General's recommendations and finally take meaningful action?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to accepting the recommendations, I would remind the hon. member that last week I met with my colleagues from all the provinces and territories in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I told them that we would be taking a new approach to ensure that first nations would be protected in emergency situations. I invite the member to read the press release for more information.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservative government has failed first nations, this time on emergency preparedness.

The Auditor General found that the department is stuck in a cycle of reacting to disasters and not doing enough to prevent and mitigate emergencies. Year after year, money set aside to respond to fires, floods and the lack of safe housing is not adequate.

When is the minister going to end this cycle of waiting for disasters to happen, and act to fix the problems that cause these emergencies?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in all fairness to the Auditor General, the hon. member will acknowledge, recognize and admit that the Auditor General acknowledges our commitment to improve emergency management to support first nations.

As I just said en français, last week I announced that the government is implementing a new comprehensive approach to emergency management on reserve that will ensure better coordination with the provinces and more accountability for taxpayers, which I know they do not care much about.

* * *

• (1440)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the media reported that disgraced Liberal senator, Colin Kenny, was facing serious allegations of sexual harassment. We also learned that he provided unwelcome, upsetting attention to a woman who worked at his tanning salon, as well as other women involved in a NATO parliamentary assembly. We also learned that the Liberal leader's chief of staff was aware of some of these allegations and did nothing about them for three months.

Today is the second day of 16 days of global activism about violence against women. What is the government doing to protect women and girls from sexual offenders?

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Mississauga South for her question on this very important issue.

Our government is committed to preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. These are very serious allegations, and if authorities find the Liberal senator responsible, he should face the full force of the law.

Oral Questions

I would like to express my deepest sympathies to his former assistant, who blew the whistle on his disserving actions, and anyone else who may have been victimized. We on this side of the House are listening. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same thing for the Liberal leader's chief of staff, Cyrus Reporter, who did nothing to immediately help this poor girl who was reaching out in a time of need.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, parents worry about the food they put on their dinner table every day, and today's Auditor General's report raises even more concerns.

The AG reported that the CFIA did not properly follow up with companies that sold tainted meat and continued to ignore underlying food safety problems. It failed to develop proper emergency response plans, creating confusion during emergencies. The CFIA has failed to learn from past incidents.

Given this record of failure, can the minister tell Canadians if we would be prepared if another mass recall hit us today?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health, responsible for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, I was very pleased to see the Auditor General recognize that the health of consumers is at the forefront of the food inspection agency. He confirmed that the food inspection agency promptly identifies potentially unsafe food, investigates quickly and, most importantly, effectively gets any unsafe or potentially unsafe food off the shelves.

Exactly to the member's point, Canadians are not purchasing those foods and taking them home and eating them. We can have confidence that the food safety system in Canada is world class.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in fact the Auditor General explicitly called for the system to be improved, because it is not working.

It is not enough to accept the recommendations; the government must act. The Auditor General clearly said that the system is not working. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency cannot even guarantee that companies subjected to a recall are able to correct the problems at the source. The minister's emergency response plan is even creating confusion in the department.

What will the minister do today, in practical terms, to correct her mistakes?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure the member that from a recent high-profile recall of XL Foods there were many lessons learned. In fact all of the recommendations in the Auditor General's report are already being acted on and will be completed by spring.

One of the important ones, and the member is raising this exact issue, is the importance of companies providing our inspectors with timely, relevant, accurate information when they need it. To that point, we have not only introduced tougher penalties on that front for companies that do not comply, but regulations to make sure that companies actually have all that information on hand all the time so inspectors can get to it.

* * *

*[Translation]***RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives cannot simply take rail companies like MMA at their word. They need to ensure that risk management is taken as seriously as it should be. That is not the case right now. Over the past three years, the government has not even audited the safety plans of three out of four railways. The minister is responsible.

What additional resources will she give Transport Canada so that all of the safety audits are carried out?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Auditor General for his work in this matter. We accept his recommendations and we are moving forward with the plan to ensure that we implement these recommendations as well. We will be closely monitoring that.

To the point of extra resources, it is our government that increased funding into the rail safety directorate to the tune of \$71 million in 2009. That enhanced the number of inspectors we had. Last year there were 30,000 inspections in our country, an all-time high.

• (1445)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously, it has not been working. Keeping Canadians safe should be a top priority, but today's Auditor General report on rail safety is damning. Three out of four safety audits are not done. High-risk companies are not inspected. Deteriorating bridges and tracks that carry dangerous goods are not noticed. Canadians deserve better than neglect and deregulation.

What are Conservatives going to do about this long list of failures and when are they going to act to keep Canadians safe?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take the health and safety of Canadians in the rail system very seriously. That is why we have issued emergency directives on the advice of the Transportation Safety Board. That is why we have issued two protective directions in the past six weeks on the same matter. That is why we asked the transport committee to study the transportation of dangerous goods and specifically, the matter of safety management systems. That is why we enhanced the resources available for the department. We are working very hard on rail safety

and the facts and figures show it. There was a 10% decrease in rail accidents in the past five years under our government and a 41% decrease in derailments.

[Translation]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General concluded that the Conservatives are putting Canadians' lives in danger with regard to rail safety. Let us look at what he said. He talks about "significant weaknesses" in rail safety and he points out that "it is taking too long to resolve significant safety issues". He also points out that there is no guarantee that rail safety inspectors have the skills needed to carry out their work.

What will it take for the minister to take Canadian rail safety seriously?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take rail safety extraordinarily seriously in our government. We have been acting on it. However, what I think the member opposite should be very careful about is ensuring that he quotes the Auditor General accurately and that he gives the appropriate information to Canadians.

I quote from the Auditor General's report that the audit "focused on Transport Canada's oversight role and was not designed to conclude on whether individual federal railways or the rail industry in Canada are safe." That was an untruth from the member opposite.

* * *

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's Auditor General's report says, "The government has not significantly expanded its online service offerings since 2005". In fact, since the Conservatives have come to power they have taken Canada from being number one in e-government to number 11. Since 2006, it appears that all the funds that the government has spent on e-marketing has been for the government's benefit and not for that of its citizens.

How can any government expect to become a leader in the digital economy when the Conservative government is still in the stone age?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very excited to work with the Auditor General, other agents and other parliamentarians on expanding the online offerings for citizens. It is better for citizens, more convenient and less costly to the taxpayer. We are going to the online world through a single portal called "Canada.ca". That is ongoing and we will be starting in December.

In fact, we are continuing to offer more online data for the average citizen, for researchers and for entrepreneurs. There are 200,000 data sets online as we speak.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

POVERTY

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, almost 25 years ago, the House unanimously adopted a motion to eradicate child poverty.

However, unfortunately, neither Liberal nor Conservative governments have solved this problem. One in seven children still lives in poverty, and that number is higher among aboriginal children. Families are having a hard time meeting their basic needs, such as shelter, food and clothing.

Why have the Conservatives not made child poverty a priority?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, under our Conservative government, we have seen major progress in reducing child poverty. Since we took office, there are 250,000 fewer children in poverty than under previous governments. Why is that? I will give members one example. We have the universal child care benefit where we give \$100 per month to every child under six years old.

The opposition members laugh at that. They would take it away. We will stand up for families and for children.

● (1450)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago, Ed Broadbent got the unanimous support of the House on a motion to end child poverty by the year 2000. Sadly, today more children and families live in poverty. Twenty-five years of Conservative and Liberal governments failed to act on this promise.

A real economic recovery plan must include reducing and ending child poverty. Where is the recovery plan for children living in poverty?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what our government has done to help families and children: job creation, tax reduction, the universal child care benefit.

Every time we bring forward a measure to put more money in the pockets of families and of the families who are raising children, the opposition members vote against it. We know that regarding the universal child care benefit, which families count on, the opposition members think parents would spend that money on beer and popcorn. We know they spend it to take care of their children. We will support it and we will always stand up for Canadian children.

* * *

SEALING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the World Trade Organization admitted the ban on seal products adopted in the European Union was a political decision that has no basis in evidence or science. The opposition and the radical global activists who support such a ban are disingenuous. They are against the humane, sustainable seal hunt but they probably eat other meats, such as fish and chicken, and wear leather.

Will the Minister of the Environment comment on the WTO's decision?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, opposing the seal hunt has had a devastating impact on northerners and coastal communities. The seal harvest in Canada is humane, sustainable and a well-regulated activity that provides a crucial source of income and food for Canadian sealers.

This ban, which is not based on facts or scientific evidence, undermines the Inuit way of life. Our government will continue to stand with northerners and Canadian coastal communities to defend their traditional way of life. This is why our government will be appealing the WTO decision.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs the opportunity to assure the House that he will honour his commitment to release his business plan for the Champlain Bridge by the end of the year, which is just a few weeks away.

At that time, will he be in a position to tell us whether he will expedite the work in a way that does not compromise the safety of public transit or the bridge's aesthetics so that the new bridge will be ready before 2021?

Is he able to guarantee that he will announce this business plan by the end of December? At that time, will he be able to tell us whether he will expedite the work?

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, as members know, we are working very hard on this issue.

As recently as yesterday, a former Liberal minister said that everyone knew that the bridge was deteriorating faster than expected.

We have done our duty and have prepared for the transition. We are maintaining the existing bridge and we are going to ensure that the new bridge over the St. Lawrence is ready on time and on budget. However, no toll, no bridge.

Oral Questions

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General found that, for all their posturing, the Conservatives are failing to prevent people from entering the country illegally. Systems are not working as intended. Agencies are not receiving key information about high-risk travellers and the CBSA budget has been cut.

The Auditor General said, “Failure to prevent illegal entry compromises Canada’s border, the immigration program, and the safety and security of Canadians”.

When will the Conservatives stop grandstanding and start properly managing our borders?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should read the report. He would see that the Auditor General notes that since 2007 the CBSA is doing a better job at the frontier. That is because our government has invested and increased the number of front-line border officers by 26%. No wonder just as of last year we have stopped more than 18,700 people who were not allowed to stay here.

* * *

•(1455)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has consistently put the rights of victims ahead of the rights of convicted criminals. Today, the Correctional Investigator released his annual report, which among other things, calls for private prisoner accommodations as if prisons were hotels, and criticizes the use of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in prisons, as if encouraging criminals to read more were a bad thing.

Could the Minister of Public Safety comment on this report?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West, who had a career in public safety. He is also a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I would also like to thank the correctional officers who work hard every day to keep Canadians safe.

[English]

That being said, we do not believe that convicted criminals are entitled to their own private accommodations. The suggestion of racial bias in prisons is totally inaccurate. The only identifiable group that our justice system is targeting is criminals.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the same Minister of Finance who is telling us that he has no money for anyone just increased the budget

for the transition office to oversee the creation of a single securities regulator by 60%.

While cuts are affecting food safety, rail safety and employment insurance, the Minister of Finance is ignoring the opposition expressed by provinces like Alberta and Quebec and shoving a plan down their throats that has received no new support.

Why is the minister investing so much in this project, which is still very hypothetical, rather than in services for Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the only developed country in the world without a single securities regulator. That is why we have been working together with the provinces to establish a single securities regulator for some time. We were pleased to see provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario advance the securities regulator. We are continuing to work with all the provinces.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, anyone who reads the Auditor General's report tabled this morning can reach only one conclusion: the federal government continues to jeopardize the public's health and safety.

The federal government is incapable of properly monitoring rail safety, as we saw with the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. It is incapable of following through when contaminated foods are recalled and it is incapable of preventing undesirable people from crossing our borders illegally and entering Canada.

How can the government be failing so miserably in its fundamental mission, which is to protect the public?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again we would like to thank the Auditor General for his report. It is extremely helpful. The recommendations will be implemented by Transport Canada and we accept those recommendations.

With respect to rail safety, we have been working very hard on this issue since 2006, when we became government. We will continue to apply the same amount of effort to ensure we have the best rail safety system in Canada.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the consistently eloquent and very pertinent Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister said—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. We almost made it the whole way through. I will ask members to wait until the hon. member for Gatineau is finished asking the question before they applaud.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that was the bouquet; wait until he gets the brickbat.

He said that “the Prime Minister had no knowledge of what was taking place”.

Is the Prime Minister routinely unaware or kept unaware by his staffers of what is going on in his own office?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for those kind words. It is always very nice to see such a collegial atmosphere in the House. I do like flowers and, of course, with lemons I like to make lemonade. My two daughters, this summer, actually had a lemonade stand where they sold lemonade for 5¢ on the street. They did very well. I am very proud of them.

I thank the hon. member very much for those kind words and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

* * *

● (1500)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: It is my pleasure today to welcome to the House of Commons athletes Katie Saunders, Matthew Judson, Aura Wilkinson, and Katie Isenor and her coach Jacquelyn from Canada’s Special Olympics team.

On behalf of all members, I congratulate them on their achievements at this year’s World Winter Games held in the Republic of Korea.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PRIME MINISTER’S OFFICE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to this opposition day motion from my colleagues down the way.

I will review a bit, some of what is worth reviewing. It is important for people to understand what we are talking about, especially when there has been a pause for question period in the debate. The motions says:

That, given the recent sworn statements by RCMP Corporal Greg Horton, which revealed that: (i) on February 21, 2013, the Prime Minister’s Office had agreed that, with regard to Mike Duffy’s controversial expenses, the Conservative Party of Canada would “keep him whole on the repayment”; (ii) on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff wanted to “speak to the PM before everything is considered final”; (iii) later on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff confirmed “We are good to go from the PM once Ben has his confirmation from Payne”; (iv) an agreement was reached between Benjamin Perrin and Janice Payne, counsels for the Prime Minister and Mike Duffy; (v) the amount to keep Mike Duffy whole was calculated to be higher than first determined, requiring a changed source of funds from Conservative Party funds to Nigel Wright’s personal funds, after which the arrangement proceeded and Duffy’s expenses were re-paid; and (vi) subsequently, the Prime Minister’s Office engaged in the obstruction of a Deloitte audit and a whitewash of a Senate report; the House condemn the deeply disappointing actions of the Prime Minister’s Office in devising, organizing and participating in an arrangement that the RCMP believes violated sections 119, 121 and 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada...

It reminds the Prime Minister of his own code of conduct for ministers, which surely applies to him. It states on page 28 that “Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ”.

The Prime Minister is a minister. He is one of the ministers to whom that rule ought to apply, so it is hard to understand how he could think he should not take responsibility for the actions of his own staff if it were the case that we were to believe he did not know what was going on, which is a little hard to believe in his case. Therefore, the cover-up continues.

The Prime Minister’s Office fraud squad have really been the authors of a scheme whereby we have seen the bribing of a sitting senator and seen it swept under the rug until the truth leaked out by CTV’s Robert Fife.

I see across from me the cowering Conservative caucus members. The silence from that side today has been deafening when only one of them stood to speak to the motion. It is a remarkable thing. Aside from vitriol from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, no one else on that side has deigned to make a speech on this all day long.

An hon. member: It is not true.

Hon. Geoff Regan: One of them said it is not true. If that is not true, let us hear those members speak. There is a lot of time this afternoon. I hope we will hear from a number of them. They can speak on this and tell us what they really think, because we know some of them are telling the media what they think, although they are doing it anonymously. They are saying that they are concerned about this. They are not happy with the Prime Minister’s actions or his office, and the way this has been handled, in their view, has been slipshod. Why do they not get up now in the House this afternoon and talk about that?

Business of Supply

It is a sad day for democracy and accountability. Canadians who I have talked to in recent weeks have been shocked to see the level the government will go to cover up its misdeeds.

Canadian taxpayers also want to know who will take responsibility for the ethical rot that has beset the Conservative government. Let us think about that. Who should take responsibility? Should it be perhaps the person who appointed Senator Duffy? Should it be perhaps the person who hired Nigel Wright to be his chief of staff? Should it be the person who promoted the other key players involved in this corrupt scheme to seniors jobs in ministers' offices?

● (1505)

Sadly, the person, and we all know who we are talking about, refuses to accept any responsibility and comes up with story after story. It is an ever-changing story.

It is a sad day when even Mayor Ford is more open and honest about his behaviour than his fishing buddy, the Prime Minister. Of course, Mayor Ford was caught and admitted it after he was caught.

The fact is that nobody on the other side of the House wants to defend this ethical rot. It is clear that even Conservative backbenchers recognize that what started out as a Senate scandal has spread well beyond Duffy and Wright and has now engulfed about a dozen senior Conservatives and even the Prime Minister himself. It is clear, as more and more Conservative members are saying in private, that the strategy of crisis management from the Prime Minister's Office has been a disaster from day one.

Let me turn to something I found in this week's *The Hill Times*, which quotes senior Conservatives as saying:

Everybody needs people who will ask you the questions that you don't necessarily want to be asked. Everybody needs to be challenged a bit. It makes you think better.

These senior Conservatives were talking about the Prime Minister and the fact that a prime minister needs people in his or her office who challenge him or her.

Could any of us in the country really imagine that from the current Prime Minister, that he would want to have that? We have a Prime Minister who has such determined control not only over his own office, but over his ministers and what they are allowed to say and even what the backbenchers are allowed to say. Everything has to be approved by the PMO.

It is clear to me that the Prime Minister is not interested in having the kind of people in his office that these senior Conservatives are suggesting he ought to have. Apparently he knows better than anybody else and does not need to have anybody's advice or anyone really challenging him. That is not good enough.

There is another angle to this that we have not heard a lot about. That is how what we had here last winter was a problem for the Conservative Party. It was a Conservative Party political PR problem. What was it solved with? It was solved with a \$90,000 contribution. Of course, any individual in Canada can make a maximum contribution to a political party of \$1,200, so we know that \$90,000 is an illegal contribution. That is in addition to the other aspects of this in terms of making payment to a senator to make some kind of a deal.

Let us go through the record, which clearly shows that the Prime Minister is not being completely open and honest with Canadians about his involvement in this corrupt cover-up scheme. The Prime Minister says that he never knew anything. He heard no evil, saw no evil and spoke no evil. Nigel Wright's own words show that this is unbelievable.

On February 22, an email, let us call it email the first one on that day, went from Mr. Wright. He said he wanted to "speak to the PM before everything is considered final". An hour later or thereabouts, we had a second email. He said "We are good to go with the PM".

Most Canadians and most sensible people would say that he must have spoken to the PM during that hour. There must have been a conversation between Nigel Wright and the Prime Minister between those two emails. It sure sounds like the Prime Minister gave the okay.

The Prime Minister claims that all he ever said was that Mr. Duffy had to make the repayment himself. If that were the case, surely he had been saying that for days and even weeks before February 22. Surely he had made that very clear already, so why would Nigel Wright have to go to him to get him to approve what he had already been saying had to happen? That does not make much sense.

The only thing that really makes sense is that Nigel Wright went to the Prime Minister, told him, it seems, that the Conservative Party was prepared to pay \$30,000 at that point to pay off Mr. Duffy's debt, which would be equally improper. It would appear the Prime Minister thought that was okay. It was good to go. The Prime Minister gave the thumbs up.

● (1510)

That is certainly the interpretation that most sensible people would take from those two emails. It is hard to imagine any other conceivable interpretation. Talk about a smoking gun.

What about Nigel Wright's statement to the RCMP? He said, "The PM knows, in broad terms only, that I personally assisted Duffy when I was getting him to agree to repay the expenses".

That one statement makes it crystal clear that the Prime Minister knew that Wright personally assisted Duffy. It leaves not a lot of doubt. It is clear that, as the RCMP alleges, Conservative operatives in the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's hand-picked Senate leaders either broke the law or took part in a cover-up designed to make the scandal go away. That is shameful.

The Prime Minister's story regarding the PMO ethics scandal has fallen apart. This is obviously a very serious issue, and hence the motion today, which is very appropriate. Today's motion talks about the PMO fraud squad's potential and criminal cover-up in a series of events that the RCMP believes may have violated three sections of the Criminal Code, not to mention the Elections Act in terms of election spending or donations to political parties, which effectively this was.

Business of Supply

Today's motion also talks about the role of senior Conservative operatives and senior senators, hand-picked by the Prime Minister., who participated in a whitewash of a Senate report and apparently attempted to influence an independent audit being conducted by Deloitte. The record is pretty clear on that as well. We have seen lots of reports on this in the media. They come directly from the documents obtained by the RCMP.

The list of suspects in this caper is indeed long and probably going to grow. On the Senate side there are Senators Carolyn Stewart Olsen, Marjory LeBreton, David Tkachuk, Irving Gerstein, and, of course, former Conservative poster boy Mike Duffy. In the Prime Minister's Office, either now or formerly, we have Nigel Wright, Benjamin Perrin, Ray Novak, Chris Woodcock, Patrick Rogers, and David van Hemmen. A bunch of them have been promoted since this all took place.

It is quite a twisted story, with a lot of conflicting accounts that need to be cleared up so that Canadians can have confidence in Parliament. That is why there ought to be hearings on this and testimony from people such as the Prime Minister.

For instance, Senator Duffy said in a statement from the Senate that the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, had provided assurances to him that his behaviour was acceptable and that he would give him a \$90,000 cheque to cover the Prime Minister's tracks. Senator Duffy also confirmed that he was told to take the \$90,000, keep his mouth shut, and go along with the cover-up or the Conservatives would kick him out of the Senate. That is the threat that he alluded to.

We are here today pushing for more transparency. We have been pushing the Conservatives for that for quite a while. We are here today trying to get to the truth for Canadians.

Of course, there are many other things we ought to be discussing in the House of Commons. Canadians have many other concerns, such as job creation; youth unemployment; the environment; pipeline issues; the debt loads of individual Canadians, which are very high; the cost of post-secondary education; the situation in Syria; and the new agreement with Iran and the government's attitude toward it. There are these things and many others. The Auditor General's report released today expresses concern about the basic safety measures that are supposed to be overseen by the government, especially when it comes to rail and food safety. We have seen things like the listeriosis crisis.

However, instead of talking about these important things, we are mired in this scandal. Why are we still talking about this scandal? Why are we mired as we are? It is because the Prime Minister refuses to answer questions. He refuses to come clean. He refuses to allow the House to hold a hearing and to testify under oath about what he knew and did not know and what happened here.

That is all he has to do: testify. It is time for the Prime Minister to speak under oath and tell the truth. That would get us on to other things, I would hope.

The Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary has been here today showing contempt for hard-working Canadian taxpayers, as he has shown, unfortunately, in question period for weeks. Really, he and the Prime Minister are showing contempt for the values their party

once prided itself on and on values the Reform Party also prided itself on.

• (15:15)

Of course, the parliamentary secretary has memorized the words that the kids in short pants in the Prime Minister's Office have given him to say. He has memorized them very well, and the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary would like nothing more than to sweep this whole affair under the rug. That, of course, was the original idea when Nigel Wright and others in the PMO were overseeing what was happening in the Senate and trying to manage this whole thing so that it not only would not come out in the Deloitte report but also so that the Senate committee, they hoped, would whitewash it after Deloitte had done so. Thankfully, in the end that did not happen.

It is clear that this scandal falls squarely on the shoulders of the Prime Minister. It is time that he and his parliamentary secretary stopped stonewalling. It is time they stopped trying to cover up. It is time they were held accountable to Canadians for what has occurred on their watch.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I know this member to be a very decent person, but I would like to ask him a question that goes more to the spirit of this motion.

The Liberals seem to be saying on one hand they would really like to see transparency, but on the other hand they do not provide transparency. I have been here since 2006, and I have never heard a Liberal member stand up and say, "We demand to know which Quebec Liberal riding associations got illegal sponsorship money. We would like to have Elections Canada look into this and determine it". They have never once said that.

When at least three of their members were caught charging rent to this place, the House of Commons, and paying it to their children, which is contrary to the rules of this Parliament, the Liberal Party actually participated in covering that up by allowing the members to simply pay it back and sweeping it under the rug. The information was completely covered up and kept from taxpayers.

If the Liberals really want to have this kind of transparency, why will they not stand up and demand it of their own members? Why will they not demand accountability for Colin Kenny?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I note that my hon. colleague from Peterborough is no longer a member of the Conservative caucus, yet he is certainly defending the Conservatives here today.

Why is he no longer a member of that caucus? It seems to me it is because he has been charged under the Elections Act. I believe strongly in the presumption of innocence, so we are going to presume that he is innocent, and I wish him well with whatever happens with those charges. However, he is no position to be attacking this party about transparency in the way that he has.

What we are really talking about here today is the record of the current government and the way it acted in this event, and that is important.

Business of Supply

It is important, in fact, that if an individual is no longer a member of the Conservative caucus, he or she shares the responsibility of holding the government to account. I can recall lots of times when we were in government when Liberal backbenchers took part in that process, especially in committees, where they acted independently and insisted that the government be held to account and that it answer questions. I can recall as a minister being asked some tough questions from my own members, not just the lob-balls we see on the other side all the time.

These are things that my hon. colleague should reflect on.

• (1520)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal motion is quite good and I am going to support it for sure. The member for Halifax West is always eloquent and well spoken, and he was logical today, and I thank him for that.

It is clear to most Canadians that the Prime Minister not only knew about this, but quite likely ordered the bribery and the cover-up. At least, that is the way it appears to many of my constituents. That is worrisome, to put it mildly.

However, I and many Canadians feel this is really a symptom of a more basic problem: an undemocratic electoral system; House and committee rules tailored to ensure undue control by the main parties; and especially since 1970, the requirement that party leaders basically choose the candidates and control them.

My question for the hon. member is this. Can he think of ways that we can reduce the power of the parties to control backbenchers, and even ministers, and increase democracy in Parliament?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is a little off the topic we have today, although I can see the link that he is making to the topic. That is fine.

He talks about the fact that the Prime Minister, he feels, ordered this cover-up. Whether he ordered it or knew of it, it seems clear that he ought to have known about it, and most Canadians think he probably did know about it.

The member goes from there to our electoral system. That is a bit of a stretch from this topic. We have had a discussion about where we would go, and I am not one of those who favours what his preferred route is for proportional representation.

Yesterday I read an article that talked about the economic situation in France these days. It talked about the inability of government to move and said basically that the government was either in the hands of the far right or the far left, that both of those groups had far too much influence, as I think can happen with that system and the coalitions that result. The government's survival can depend upon a small group with an extreme point of view. The result is that it does not move forward in a way that represents what most people want.

The fact that we are having open nominations in our party will go a long way to making sure people can choose the candidates they want, and I am sure they will.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Liberals for the motion today and I will be voting for it. Unfortunately, in the media the topic is being referred to as the

Senate scandal, and it is really not a Senate scandal. It is the Prime Minister's Office scandal.

The scandal is that the Prime Minister's Office has allowed this kind of insular control freak operation to exert itself over all aspects of government policy. It has been incremental. I will accept that it is incremental, since the notion of such a thing as the PMO was first put on the agenda back in 1968, but the PMO is not in our Constitution. The PMO, unlike the Senate, would be easy to abolish. It is just a question of how much money the House, this Parliament in charge of the public purse, is prepared to allow an unaccountable partisan operation that bullies and oppresses people throughout the system to be allowed to continue to exist.

Earlier in this debate, my hon. friend from Thunder Bay—Superior North quoted a current Conservative, who describes it as “the Stepford wives” for the PMO throughout the system who no longer have the moral compass to say when something is wrong.

Will the Liberal Party assist us in dismantling PMO?

• (1525)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I remember reading *The Stepford Wives*. I think it was back in high school that we were required to read it, and I thought it was quite illuminating. It was an excellent book and it made one think about the condition of women in our society, but that is not what the member is talking about today. In particular, she is talking about the situation in the Prime Minister's Office.

In relation to the question that this has become a very insular Prime Minister's Office in which there is a determination to have absolute control, that is a reason to be concerned. Does her prescription for it solve the problem, or is it the right answer? I have seen a number of prime ministers' offices over the years, and they have not all been like this one.

What the resources of the Prime Minister's Office should be is certainly open to debate. I do not share the member's view that it should be abolished, but what we need most of all is a Prime Minister who has the confidence in his team and in Canadians not to be a control freak.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on an excellent presentation, but I want to ask him a question. My colleague from Malpeque earlier today quoted the Prime Minister as saying during the ad scam that if the prime minister knew about ad scam, it was unconscionable, and if he didn't know, it was incompetent.

I would like my colleague to comment on this aspect. The Prime Minister continues to say he did not know and that everyone around him was deceiving him. Is that incompetence? If he did know, is that unconscionable? It has to be one of the two, and I would like my colleague to answer.

Business of Supply

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's logic is inescapable. This is a Prime Minister who we know takes an interest in everything going on in his government. I think it is difficult for most Canadians to imagine that he did not know what was going on in his office when there were as many as a dozen senior Conservatives, some in his office and some in the Senate, who knew about and were part of this. How could he not have known, given the way he has his hand into everything? If he did not know that surely indicates incompetence and if he did know it is unconscionable.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the second time in three weeks the Liberal Party of Canada has placed before the House of Commons a motion calling for the Prime Minister to testify and to do so under oath. I hope the House will be patient as I read the motion into the record. I realize that was just done, but there is a lot contained in the motion that is quite instructive as to why we are here today.

The text of the motion is as follows:

That, given the recent sworn statements by RCMP Corporal Greg Horton, which revealed that: (i) on February 21, 2013, the Prime Minister's Office had agreed that, with regard to Mike Duffy's controversial expenses, the Conservative Party of Canada would "keep him whole on the repayment"; (ii) on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff wanted to "speak to the PM before everything is considered final"; (iii) later on February 22, 2013, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff confirmed "We are good to go from the PM once Ben has his confirmation from Payne"; (iv) an agreement was reached between Benjamin Perrin and Janice Payne, counsels for the Prime Minister and Mike Duffy; (v) the amount to keep Mike Duffy whole was calculated to be higher than first determined, requiring a changed source of funds from Conservative Party funds to Nigel Wright's personal funds, after which the arrangement proceeded and Duffy's expenses were re-paid; and (vi) subsequently, the Prime Minister's Office engaged in the obstruction of a Deloitte audit and a whitewash of a Senate report; the House condemn the deeply disappointing actions of the Prime Minister's Office in devising, organizing and participating in an arrangement that the RCMP believes violated sections 119, 121 and 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada, and remind the Prime Minister of his own Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State, which states on page 28 that "Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ," and the House call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

That is the Liberal motion we are debating today.

From the outset, the people of Canada should know that only one Conservative rose in his place today to deliver a speech to the motion. Despite the fact that the Conservatives have many speaking spots, they chose instead to remain silent. Silence speaks volumes to the command and control style of the Prime Minister's Office. This party, whose leadership day in and day out pretends to stand up for right and wrong, is today the party that is silent in the face of potential criminal activity in the Prime Minister's Office. This party, whose leadership pretends to be tough on crime and holding others to account, remains silent today. We can only conclude that the muzzle has been applied to backbench MPs.

Of course Canadians can read into this as they wish. To me, it speaks to a deep sense of worry in the Conservative hierarchy.

As a result, the Prime Minister has silenced his backbench today. No one is allowed to speak except the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. The parliamentary secretary, who speaks on behalf of the Prime Minister, just happens as well to be the only one

allowed to speak today. Why is the Prime Minister again muzzling Conservative members?

For many Canadians, uncertain as to who knew what and when, this sordid affair emanating out of the Prime Minister's Office is troubling. These Canadians expect to hear from people in the House of Commons and expect us to hold the Prime Minister accountable.

• (1530)

Let me be clear on this point. It is not just the job of opposition MPs to hold the government accountable. It is the duty of all MPs to hold the Prime Minister to account. It is our duty because the questions swirling around the truth, or lack of it, oblige us all, on all sides, to speak up and ask tough questions. This includes Conservative backbench MPs.

I repeat, the Prime Minister, who is at the centre of all of this, is not allowing any of the Conservative MPs to speak. Yet, I am convinced that at some point the PMO muzzle will eventually be replaced with voices seeking some accountability. I said two weeks ago when we debated a similar motion calling on the Prime Minister to testify under oath that there is a great many good and decent Conservatives on the backbench. They were elected to be the voice of their constituents. I submit that they have a right to speak today.

These Conservative MPs are team players in normal circumstances. They are not parliamentary secretaries appointed by the Prime Minister. They are not ministers in the government appointed by the Prime Minister. They are not committee chairs appointed by the Prime Minister. They are the backbone of the caucus. Each and every day they come here to the House of Commons seeking to do their best for their constituents. Although many would perhaps like to have one of these high offices and positions, they remain, for the moment, loyal to their party.

However, what they were not elected to do was to be props for the Prime Minister. They were not elected to clap on cue as directed by the front bench. That is not the role of an MP.

Conservative MPs know something does not add up in this PMO scandal. They know deep down that all of the changing stories simply do not add up. They know that this scandal should not have happened and they understand that the current Prime Minister has allowed this scandal to distract from other issues facing their constituents. They understand because they represent their constituents, not the Prime Minister. They know that all of this secrecy and doublespeak raises serious questions about the leadership of the Prime Minister, yet today, of all days to have a voice, Conservative MPs are silent.

Business of Supply

However, I am asking that my colleagues from the Conservative caucus be bold. I am asking them to make the tough decision to do what is right. I am asking them to speak out. I am asking these Conservative backbench MPs to set aside their party loyalty and do what is best for the country they love and the constituents who allow them to serve in this place.

It is true that in our party, as it is with the NDP, the Conservatives and the Bloc, we belong to teams. These political teams have meaning for all of us, regardless of party. We socialize together, share similar ideologies and are naturally drawn to each other because of the team. However, we can only be a team up to a point. There are some moments when we must simply follow our conscience and do the right thing. Therefore, I am asking my colleagues in the Conservative Party to set aside their instincts to be a team player and do the right thing.

Perhaps some of the Conservative backbench are grateful to be muzzled, and I can understand why. I would not want to destroy my reputation defending the Prime Minister and his office who are, at their very best, incompetent, and at their very worst, involved in potential criminal activity.

There are Conservatives speaking up. Today in the *Toronto Star* we read thoughts about this scandal from the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert. He is a Conservative. He was elected a Conservative and he embraces Conservative values. He remains to this day a member of the Conservative Party.

• (1535)

Last spring, however, he made what I imagine was a very difficult decision. He made the decision to leave the Conservative caucus, all the while maintaining his membership in the party. He left the caucus out of principle over concerns about the overwhelming control applied to the caucus by unelected officials in the Prime Minister's Office.

Allow me, then, to read an excerpt from his blog that appeared in today's *Toronto Star*. Although the words are not mine, it hardly needs mentioning that I agree with them in their entirety. He says:

Currently, the PMO spin machine is dismissing all of the incendiary e-mails referred to in last week's RCMP affidavit on the Wright/Duffy scandal. According to that machine, all that matters is the one passage confirming the Prime Minister was unaware of the \$90,000 personal cheque. Amazingly, the PMO is so insular that it would seem they actually believe the document exonerates the Prime Minister.

On the matter of the \$90,000 cheque, the PM's ignorance appears to be confirmed. But this story ceased to be about Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy weeks ago. As salacious as a millionaire paying the ineligible debts of a now-expelled Senator might be, the bigger story is what their transaction (and who knew or didn't know what and when) says about how business is conducted in Ottawa.

Section 119 of the Criminal Code makes it an indictable offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison to offer or accept "any money [or] valuable consideration" to a Member of Parliament "in respect of anything done or omitted [...] in their official capacity."

Accordingly, if someone offered a sitting legislator \$90,000 in exchange for his co-operation in sanitizing a report by a Senate Committee on an independent audit into that very legislator's housing expenses, it could certainly qualify as criminal.

But since the Prime Minister has established, at the very least, plausible deniability of his involvement in all but the "broadest of terms" of that transaction, the legal question is secondary at this point.

What is more relevant and more threatening to our democracy is that the executive was interfering and attempting to micromanage the Senate — a body that exists to provide an independent check on government, not to be a PMO branch plant.

The Prime Minister's Office was heavily involved in this operation. The February 22 e-mails, wherein Wright, then the chief of staff, appears to seek the PM's approval for a scheme to have the Conservative Party reimburse Duffy's expenses (then estimated at \$32,000) and a subsequent confirmation ("good to go from the PM") are particularly troubling.

It appears the plan was run by and approved by the Prime Minister.

I am still quoting from the member for Edmonton—St. Albert. He says:

As a Member of the Conservative Party, I actually find the prospect of the party paying these ineligible expenses more troubling than Wright paying them. Moreover, the fact that the plan was subsequently halted may not insulate those who made the "offer" from prosecution under section 119.

The Prime Minister's response in Question Period that he was "good to go" with Duffy repaying the expenses himself is illogical. Such an obviously proper course of conduct would not have required the approval of the PM.

The PM's personal credibility is further eroded by his imprecise recollection of the days following the breaking of the story. The PM has stated several times that upon hearing of the cheque he took immediate action. But for several days in May, the entire PMO spin establishment had "full confidence in Mr. Wright."

That is an excerpt from a blog post published by the member for Edmonton—St. Albert this morning.

We know there are other Conservatives who feel the same. There are others who are troubled by what is happening. It is time for them to be heard. It is time for them to set aside their loyalty to the Prime Minister and to put the interests of the country and their constituents first. That, it seems to me, is the only honourable thing to do in these circumstances.

• (1540)

Let me close with this. For a Prime Minister who has had complete control over the entire operation of his government, from top to bottom, since 2006, to suddenly claim that he knew nothing about a payment to a sitting senator and the subsequent cover-up is, to be generous, simply not credible. In fact, it would be incredible if he did not know.

Canadians want to know the whole story. Canadians want to know if the Prime Minister is telling the truth. We know that many Conservatives over there wonder, as well, if the Prime Minister is telling the truth. It seems to me that the only way to get to the truth is for the Prime Minister to testify under oath.

There is an old adage that says that a half truth is a full lie. Let us finally have the truth—the whole truth. It starts with Conservatives across the aisle having the courage to vote for this motion calling for the Prime Minister to testify and to do so under oath.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree that the Prime Minister should answer all of the questions being asked of him and that he should be completely honest in doing so. I believe that my leader has done an exceptional job asking him questions.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask my colleague if he thinks that a forced testimony from the Prime Minister, under oath before Parliament, would be admissible in court. Would this positively or negatively affect legal matters involving the existing corruption in the PMO and the Senate?

• (1545)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I fully agree that the NDP leader has done a great job during question period in recent days, trying to establish the truth in this scandal. It is clear that he was not entirely successful.

I believe that the Prime Minister's sworn testimony should be admissible in court as part of a legal process. There is no doubt that, sooner or later, there will be a criminal process in this case. That testimony would be highly relevant in that type of process.

[English]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank my colleague from Charlottetown for his remarks today with regard to this particular motion.

I think it is fair to say that all of us within the Liberal caucus feel very strongly that the Prime Minister should testify, under oath, in this particular circumstance. It is also quite obvious that in doing so, the same level of control would not be there for the government. Maybe that is one of the reasons it has not supported this.

I want to ask my colleague how this is playing out in his home province of P.E.I., which we know has been in the news a lot as it relates to this particular issue. What has been the opinion of the hard-working, law-abiding citizens of Prince Edward Island when it comes to this particular scandal around the PMO and the Senate?

I would also like to ask my colleague, who has been practising law in this country for quite a number of years, what his opinion would be of how such ethical practices would be looked upon by those within the Law Society or within the practice of law in comparison with how we are seeing these things dealt with within the PMO and within the government.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, there is, indeed, a lot in that question. I regret that I have only a minute to deal with it. It is also somewhat awkward. I realize that out of respect for parliamentary tradition, I have to speak through the Speaker to the member who is sitting beside and behind me.

I go door to door one day a month in my riding, and the response from Prince Edward Islanders has been consistent and damning. Not only are they disgusted with the conduct within the Prime Minister's Office, but they are, frankly, embarrassed that Prince Edward Island has been cast in this light because the Prime Minister decided to appoint someone from Kanata to a Prince Edward Island seat. That is the first part of the question.

The second part is with respect to a tie-in with what is happening here and my previous career as a practising lawyer. Members would know that the practice of law is built on integrity. It is built on someone having complete faith that when something is said to a lawyer, it will be held in confidence. That is why, in the practice of law, if any comment is made, for example, to you, Mr. Speaker, by a client, all of your partners are deemed to know it.

Interestingly, we have something that is, arguably, akin to that in *A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State*, where it says that "Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ".

It is also quite telling that when Nigel Wright answered the question, he said that he acted within the scope of his employment. We, as lawyers, would know that acting within the scope of one's employment triggers vicarious liability, as opposed to being on a frolic of one's own.

What I would say is that the rules within the practice of law are built to maintain the integrity of those who practise. It is quite clear that no such rules are being applied in this case, whether they exist or not, and that speaks very poorly to the integrity within the Prime Minister's Office.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague.

I would like my colleague to speak to the vision for the short, medium and long terms, since there is no doubt in Canadians' minds that the Conservatives' position on the Senate is the status quo.

In the medium term, we can contemplate an NDP government arriving in 2015 and dealing with the Senate once and for all. In the meantime, I quite agree with the motion the Liberals moved today, but they did not support the NDP motion just a few weeks ago to set up guidelines for the Senate and send a clear message to all Canadians that it is possible to do so.

What solutions does the Liberal Party advocate in the short term for cleaning up the Senate, including their own senators, and for sending a clear message to all Canadians that we are dealing with the problem?

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. First of all, I certainly do not share his vision for 2015 with respect to which party will form the next government.

The Senate is very important for a small province such as mine. For Prince Edward Island, the mandate of the Senate, when established, was to protect the smallest provinces. It is very important for my province that the Senate not be abolished. However, there are obviously problems to tackle and things to improve.

It is vital that we listen to Canadians, especially those living in the smallest provinces. For example, if the Senate were abolished, Prince Edward Island would have fewer than four MPs and no senators. That is a great concern for us.

Prince Edward Islanders believe that this government is already ignoring our status as a province. When the NDP talks about abolishing the Senate, we take it as an insult.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak on what I think is a very important issue for all Canadians. In fact, I have had the opportunity to do a lot of door-knocking, as many other members have, and I can say that it is an issue that is top of mind for many Canadians, I would argue, from coast to coast to coast.

I must say that I am a little disappointed in the official opposition. I think that the NDP has dropped the ball in that this is not about Senate reform. The issue before us deals with the alleged fraud that has taken place in the Prime Minister's Office. That is what we need to focus our attention on.

Canadians want the Prime Minister to be straightforward and to tell the full truth as to what has taken place. The NDP can continue to debate the Senate, something they know they will never be able to realize, but they are missing the point here today. What we are talking about today is how critically important it is that the Prime Minister of our country come before Canadians and explain exactly what, in full detail, he knows. We are not going to settle for anything less.

I find it very interesting that there was an opportunity for five Conservative speakers to stand and talk about the motion. They chose not to do that. One member of the Conservative caucus, the one responsible for damage control on the fraud that has taken place in the Prime Minister's Office, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, has been the human shield who has been trying to deflect a very serious issue.

Now we see that the glass bubble around the Prime Minister's Office has made it very clear that if one is a Conservative member of Parliament, one does not stand up and deal with the issue before us today. That is the reason we have not seen one Conservative MP, other than the one responsible for damage control, stand and attempt to defend the Prime Minister or express what he or she feels is going on or went on in the Prime Minister's Office.

The leader of the Liberal Party talks a lot about how important it is that as members of Parliament, we are supposed to go into the constituencies and bring constituents' concerns to Ottawa. He contrasts that with the Conservative government, the Prime Minister, and this PMO, which do the absolute opposite.

The PMO's instructions are very clear. As a member of Parliament for the Conservative Party, one does not represent one's constituents in Ottawa; one represents Ottawa in one's constituency. The Prime Minister has that wrong, and we are seeing it today, because none of them are standing up.

I knocked on doors in Brandon and talked to people. I talked to people in Provencher and to my own constituents in Winnipeg North. One of the issues that came up time and time again was the issue of the Prime Minister's Office and what has been taking place there. I can say that they just do not believe the Prime Minister. They do not believe that the Prime Minister has been straightforward and is telling the full truth regarding what has taken place in what some call the Senate scandal. I think it is more of a PMO scandal than it is a Senate scandal. We need to be very clear on that particular point.

No doubt there were a number of factors in what took place in the province of Manitoba last night. It was an exciting time when we saw a very clear indication that Manitobans are looking at abandoning the Conservative Party. Even in areas where it traditionally had good strength, they are looking for an alternative.

● (1555)

It is the Liberal Party and the messaging and the attitudes we bring that I think is making the difference. What we have seen in a lot of the feedback I received at the door was that people want, and very much so, for the government to come clean on this issue.

What does the resolution actually call for? It is nothing earth shattering. The essence of the opposition motion that was introduced by the Liberal Party today is that we:

...call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

That is all we are asking for. Why are the Conservatives so fearful of being able to address that issue? Why are the Conservatives so concerned that they are not prepared to stand in their place and take a position on this particular motion?

If the Conservatives wanted to canvass their constituents to see what they had to say and were to share those thoughts with the House today, I suspect this particular motion would indeed pass.

It has been a very interesting process. We call it the "fraud squad", coming out of the Prime Minister's Office. It is amazing, the types of personalities that are actually involved. We talked about Nigel Wright. RCMP Corporal Greg Horton has ultimately alleged that Mr. Wright in fact broke the law with that payment of \$90,000. This is coming from the RCMP. It is very serious.

Who was Wright at the time? He was the chief of staff for the Prime Minister's Office. That means he was the go-to person. There was no one closer to the Prime Minister. Well, possibly his wife is. The point is that this is an individual who carried a great deal of influence here in Canada. He had the ear of the Prime Minister. That is just one person.

Remember, the Prime Minister initially said that it was only one person, only Nigel Wright, who knew anything about it and that he was disappointed that Nigel Wright kept it from him, and so forth. That is what the Prime Minister said.

Of course we found out that it is not true. A lot of people knew about it. A number of weeks ago, the Prime Minister said it was a few people. On my plane ride back to Winnipeg on Friday, I took a snap of something on the Internet. I wanted to try to get a better sense of how many people were actually around. It is quite impressive.

Business of Supply

We can talk about some of the senators at play who would have known. Obviously, Senator Duffy would have been one of them. He is in fact the key man here. We have Senator Tkachuk. He was the chair of the Senate standing committee. Remember the bit of a whitewash attempt that was being done there? We have Senator Stewart Olsen, again, a member of that particular standing committee. We have Senator LeBreton, government leader in the Senate.

These are all senators who knew about it, who we know knew about it. What amazes me is the individuals who worked for the PMO. There are individuals like Mr. Perrin, a lawyer, former PMO lawyer, who knew about it.

What about the PMO staffer who now works for the Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Woodcock? He was engaged and actually very much aware of what was going on. Again, he was working for the Prime Minister. The irony there is, of course, that he still works for the Government of Canada. He now works in the Ministry of Natural Resources.

• (1600)

The government talks a lot about getting tough on crime and issues of that nature. What is happening here, with regard to Mr. Woodcock?

Another PMO staff person was Nigel Wright's executive assistant, Mr. van Hemmen.

What about another PMO staffer's involvement, Mr. Rogers? Again, he now works for a leading minister from Manitoba.

We can talk about Mr. Hilton, who is the Conservative Party executive director, who was also engaged.

We also had Mr. Hamilton, the Conservative Party lawyer.

What about Senator Gerstein? He is the fundraiser. Many refer to him as the bagman for the Conservative Party. I believe he was the individual who made a connection call with regard to the audit.

Those were just some of the individuals I was able to kind of pull together, primarily because of news agencies.

Andrew MacDougall is another individual, the director of communications for the PMO. Christopher Montgomery is now responsible for issues management for the government in the Senate. Ray Novak is the deputy chief of staff to the PM.

Last week, prior to going out to Winnipeg, I talked about Jenni Byrne. She is the deputy chief of staff today, I understand. She had some prime ministerial responsibilities that had to be conducted in Brandon, I understand. She worked very closely with individuals like Dan Hilton and Senator Gerstein.

It is a pretty impressive group. We do not know to what degree or how big the fraud squad really was, at the time. We do not know all of the personalities who were engaged.

All I know is we have the Prime Minister who says there was only one. If I do a quick count, there are a lot more than one.

Yes, a number of months later, he did admit that there were more than one. There were a few.

We believe that there were a lot more than just a few. That is one of the reasons we are challenging the Prime Minister to come forward and start telling the full truth about who knew, what they knew and when they knew it.

These are not just average party Conservatives who we would find in some annual meetings. These are individuals who have been elevated to the highest levels within the Conservative Party, within the Prime Minister's Office. These are the elite who the Prime Minister himself would have, in many cases, appointed or had confidence in. It seems to be a fairly big circle.

What is the Prime Minister saying? He is trying to convince Canadians that he knew nothing about it. That is a hard one to accept.

One member from the other side finally speaks up and he says, "Accept it". I do not accept it, and I do not believe Canadians are buying it.

It is interesting. It was not that long ago that we had a poll, I believe, that came out saying there were more people who thought that Mike Duffy actually was more believable than the Prime Minister on the issue.

Some hon. members: Ah.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I would be saying "Ah", too. It says a lot about the Prime Minister's Office.

What I do know is that more and more Canadians are finding it difficult to believe that the Prime Minister has in fact been telling the full truth.

• (1605)

The question I would pose to my hon. colleagues across the way is why they do not stand in their place and articulate why they believe the Prime Minister has been telling the truth. What have you got to lose by doing that? You have already forfeited more than two hours of debate inside the chamber. Why would you not take the opportunity to stand and tell the viewers and Canadians why we have it all wrong, that in fact the Prime Minister has been telling the full truth?

I suspect the reason they are not doing that is that there is a credibility issue here, and there are very few within the Conservative ranks who are prepared to stand up in a public fashion and tell it as it is; and that is that there is something wrong here and we are not getting the full truth from the Prime Minister.

That is why we are challenging Conservative members in particular to support the motion that the Liberal Party has brought forward for a vote. All it does is compel our Prime Minister to come before us and tell Canadians exactly what he knows. Why would they not support a motion of that nature?

We have not had the vote yet. I am feeling somewhat discouraged because members are not standing up defending the Prime Minister; they are not standing up, period.

My fear, as I mentioned at the very beginning, is that I believe that the Prime Minister's Office has dictated and stated very clearly that Conservatives are not to speak out today.

Business of Supply

Some members laugh. If I am wrong, stand in your place. Let us see you stand up and defend your Prime Minister. If there is something we are missing, why not stand in your place and say, "Here is where we got it—"

• (1610)

The Deputy Speaker: That is the second time the member has spoken directly to the members on the opposite side. He must direct all of his comments to the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, we put the challenge to my colleagues across the way that they need to recognize an opportunity to defend the Prime Minister. If they are not going to defend the Prime Minister, then at the very least I would argue that they should be voting in favour of the motion. Do not allow the parliamentary secretary to be the only person to get on the record on this particular issue.

There is one very compelling aspect that I found personally in reviewing some of the emails that were provided through the investigative work of Corporal Greg Horton from the RCMP. There were three emails to which I would like to refer.

On February 21, Benjamin Perrin, one of the fraud squad group, stated that the Prime Minister's personal lawyer in the PMO and Senator Duffy's lawyer exchanged emails detailing the plan to have the Conservative Party pay Duffy \$32,000 in bogus housing claims, as well as his legal fees.

The agreement describes this as keeping Duffy "whole on the repayment". That was on February 21.

On February 22, Wright confirmed with Gerstein, the fundraiser for the party. In essence what took place is that Wright confirmed with Gerstein that the party would pay the expenses and the legal fees. Later on the same day, Wright emailed Perrin and stated, "I do want to speak to the PM before everything is considered final". Less than an hour later, Wright sent a follow-up email to Perrin and said, "We are good to go from the PM once Ben has confirmation from Payne".

Canadians have not been told the full truth as to what has actually taken place. We know there have been serious allegations of laws having been broken. Canadians have lost trust and are losing more faith in the Prime Minister every day in which he refuses to address this issue head-on.

We call upon all members of the House to support the Liberal opposition motion today so that we can get the truth from the Prime Minister.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really am compelled to comment on what I regard as disgraceful comments from the member opposite. When he takes a statement and says "the Conservatives are known to be tough on crimes, so what about Mr. Woodcock?" or when he refers to Mr. Perrin as part of a "fraud squad", he is slurring the reputations of innocent people, against whom there has been no allegation of criminality.

Through slimy innuendo, half truths and gossip, he is in effect saying things under the privilege of the House, this august and

sacred chamber, which allows us to speak freely. He is abusing that privilege to slur the reputations of others.

The fact is that the RCMP has not even suggested any criminal conduct against anyone other than Mr. Duffy and Mr. Wright. The RCMP has said in black and white that there is no evidence that the Prime Minister was in any way aware of what Mr. Duffy and Mr. Wright did. It has not suggested any criminal conduct against anyone else.

Quite frankly, this is a new low that I did not expect from that member in particular, who I thought had higher standards. It should be stopped.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate the member for Kitchener Centre was not listening thoroughly to my comments. What we are asking is for government members to stand in their place. I applaud the very few who have. The member might be the second one. I hope to see him stand in his place and defend the Prime Minister. I would like to see others standing in their place and defending the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office.

Everything I alluded to in all of my comments have been attributed to over the last number of months and reported on in good part by many different media outlets. Everything I have said should be of no surprise to anyone inside the chamber. That is why the challenge to the government is to stand, much like the member for Kitchener Centre just did, and deliver its arguments as to why this opposition motion should not pass.

I did not hear that from the member. That is the challenge.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the member for Charlottetown and the member for Winnipeg North made comments that sort of scurried around the comment about the Senate, trying to say that it was actually about the PMO, but the Senate is involved.

Premier Davis of Manitoba convinced his own upper house to abolish itself in 1876. Manitoba has functioned for over a century without that upper house.

Canadians know that abuse in the PMO is nothing new. Whether it is red abuse or blue abuse, it continues to abuse the office and Canadians are tired of that. Conservatives try to cover up the abuse of taxpayer dollars and corruption in the Senate. When will the Liberals do something to actually answer this corruption in the Senate?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I started off my speech by commenting on my disappointment in the New Democratic Party's inability to realize what we were debating here today. The New Democrats can continue to go on their own little ways about the Senate and whatever it is that they plan to do with it, possibly some time in the future. We know they do not know what reality is. They do not understand the issue of the Senate.

Business of Supply

However, that is not what is under debate here. What is under debate is the scandal that is taking place in the Prime Minister's Office. As the official opposition, the New Democrats would do a better service to Canadians if they focused on the issue of the corruption that has taken place within the Prime Minister's Office. They have the opportunity. They get 15 questions to our first 3 to really zero in on the issue. I hope they will get their priorities correct on this.

It is almost like the New Democrats get a bonus mark if they can throw in the Liberal Party. This is not about the Liberal Party either. If they think they are completely scandal free, we should sit down and I could talk to them about the New Democrats and some of the corruption that lies within the NDP in Manitoba.

Do not preach holier than thou.

• (1620)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for observations, which were quite accurate, about what is going on in the Prime Minister's Office. He postulates on why Conservatives are not getting up to defend the Prime Minister. I suspect they are in as much disbelief as all the opposition members and Canadians are. The Prime Minister is not believable.

I will refresh everyone's memories on why people do not believe it. Mr. Wright himself said that he needed to speak to the Prime Minister before everything was considered final. He said that on February 22. An hour later, he said, "We are good to go from the Prime Minister". There is every reason to believe the Prime Minister knew and every reason to doubt what he tells us now.

He started out by saying that Mr. Wright acted alone, then he said that he acted with a few people and then we find out there were 12 people involved. He said that this was Mr. Wright's own idea, that he apologized, he was a good man and he quit. Then we find out, in fact, that the Prime Minister fired him. He cannot be believed.

Does the member for Winnipeg North have any doubts now as to why Conservative members are not standing in defence of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I can speculate as to why, and I suspect it would be fairly accurate. Never before has a prime minister had such absolute control over his backbenchers. We have seen how effective he can be. With one statement out of the PMO, he can silence all 100-plus of them. Not one of them outside of the one who is responsible for damage control has actually stood in his or her place to deal with the issue in the form of debate. Yes, questions were asked, but only the man responsible for damage control has been allowed to speak today. We have not even heard from the Prime Minister.

There is no doubt that he controls a very tight ship. There is that glass bubble that circles the PM's Office and nothing gets out of it unless it is from the Prime Minister himself. That is why Canadians find it difficult to believe the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, usually I would thank the member opposite for his speech, but I really do not feel he has actually addressed some of the concerns raised by the member for

Kitchener Centre or the official opposition member who spoke previously.

Opposition days are to provide an opportunity for opposition parties to bring forward things, but if they do not construct a rational set of facts to debate, if they make their facts up or throw out allegations, as the member for Kitchener Centre said, and smear people, we will not respond. This is a sacred chamber, as the member said, not an echo chamber where the member can simply dismiss other people's views because we do not agree with the smears he throws out as facts.

When the member stands and says we should be defending, I would point out to him that he should be listening and maybe change the way he discusses issues in the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize that we are talking about an RCMP affidavit. That is pretty serious stuff. The allegations are very serious. There could be former employees from the Prime Minister's Office going to jail as a result. It is pretty serious stuff.

He talked about opposition days and trying to justify it by saying it is an opposition day and members of the opposition are supposed to be speaking out. I have been here on opposition days and the Conservatives are more than happy to stand in their places and speak. This one is making them feel uncomfortable and the PMO does not want any loose tongues on this issue.

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Drummond, The Environment.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess one has to go over this and explain it very slowly, over and over, before the penny drops across the way with the Conservative caucus.

This Liberal motion has followed the thread of the RCMP investigation, the timelines of that investigation, with emails and affidavits that show that on February 21, 2013, the Prime Minister asked Senator Duffy to repay his expenses. Nobody has a problem with that. Everyone thinks that is fair. That is what the Prime Minister should have asked him and that is what he should have done.

Then the very next day, February 22, the Prime Minister's chief of staff wanted to speak to the Prime Minister before everything was considered final, and he did. He got confirmation from the Prime Minister's Office, according to the RCMP affidavits, that in fact things were good to go once the PM had got confirmation from the lawyers, Benjamin Perrin and Janice Payne. This is an important piece of the thread that we need to talk about.

The PM was aware that his lawyers were looking at this, that there was something going on and discussions were obviously going on between Mr. Duffy to repay his expenses.

Business of Supply

Suddenly the amount for Senator Duffy's expenses was larger than everybody thought and then the tactic changed and it was suddenly an arrangement between Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy, when Mr. Wright paid it out of his own personal expenses.

After the \$90,000, which was paid by Nigel Wright, it was found, again, according to the RCMP affidavits, that the PMO was engaged in what should be called, and what it calls it, obstruction of the Deloitte audit and the whitewash of the Senate report.

We have two other things in which the Prime Minister's Office seemed to be involved. The question is that the RCMP, looking at these emails and affidavits, concluded that it believed, according to that thread of information, that there was a violation of sections 119, 121 and 122 of the Criminal Code.

This is clear. This is not made up. This is fact. These are affidavits. The questions we are asking, and a lot of people on this of the House are asking, is this. Did the Prime Minister know about this? Is he fully aware? Some of the emails say that up to a particular point, when it comes to whether his lawyers were okay about it, that he seemed to have known and then suddenly the communication stopped. Nobody decided to talk to the Prime Minister after that. Everything just disappeared.

This is really unbelievable. It is illogical, to say the least. I am not a lawyer. It seems to me suddenly strange that the Prime Minister had his lawyers involved and then, kaboom, nobody wanted to talk to the Prime Minister after this. He did not know what was going on. He was absolutely deaf and could not hear or people kept him out of the loop. This is the question we are asking. These things do not make sense, and we want to make sense of them.

If they are simple, if they are explicable, if the Prime Minister can say this is true, why does everybody just say they have a great explanation for why the Prime Minister suddenly, after his lawyers were involved and he said "good to go", he was shut out of everything.

There should be an explanation. If the Prime Minister is clear about all this, he could stand and say that he could explain it all. However, we are not getting these explanations. We are getting the same kind of pieces of talking points that go on and on which actually do not even answer the questions, but continue to slander everybody else in the House about what they did, whether their mother wore combat boots and whether they were in a pub one night, things that have absolutely nothing to do with the questions.

What is a person supposed to believe? It is obvious that Canadians are asking these same questions, because only two out of ten Canadians are reported as believing the Prime Minister. People are saying, "Oh, come on. We weren't born yesterday. Why can the Prime Minister not answer the questions if they are so easy to answer?"

• (1630)

These again are some of the things that are concerning some of us. Why can he not just answer the question, if it is clear and if the answers are reasonable and fair? Here is another thing. Why did the Prime Minister's Office intervene in the Senate? We not only heard that it intervened in terms of whitewashing a report, we also found out that people from the Prime Minister's Office were in the room

when the two co-chairs of the Senate were discussing the report. It is unbelievable that the House of Commons would be there in the room discussing a Senate report with the chairs of the Senate. This House is not supposed to interfere in that place over there.

Here we go, we find this interference going on. Then again we find out that there was a question and an email flow that told us that people were asking Senator Gerstein to try to intervene in the Deloitte report so that it could be modified, moderated, whatever they want to call it. I am trying to be kind here with my language and trying not to be obnoxious with it. I am just saying "moderated" or "modified".

However, this also is tampering. This is interfering. These are the things that we want to know.

Was there something that people wanted to hide? Why did they want to tamper with the Deloitte report? Did they want to hide something? Why did they tamper with the Senate chairs' report? When the Senate met, the committee had a report. The chairs do not usually tamper with committee reports. There would be heck to pay if our chairs tampered with our committee reports here in the House. Why would that happen there? We have to conclude there is something to hide, that there is something that is irregular and therefore people do not want it to come out.

Those are some of the questions that we are asking in the House. They are simple questions. They should give us simple answers, if everything is above board.

The Prime Minister says he did not know, and everyone in the House has said that is unbelievable, for a Prime Minister who controls every word that comes out of the mouths of his ministers, his parliamentary secretaries and his backbenchers.

We are not making this up. Backbenchers who have walked away from the Conservative Party have subsequently said that they had been muzzled, that they did not like the fact that they were being told what to say, especially some of them who came from the old Reform Party and remain there, who felt that they ran on openness and all the accountability that Preston Manning believed in. They felt in some ways that this did not sit well with them, so some of them left. Some of them refused to run again and they said why. Some of them have left and are now sitting in the House as independent members. As members heard today, they still hold a Conservative card, believe in Conservative values and want to be Conservatives. They just do not like what the Prime Minister's Office is doing, how it has muzzled them and kept everybody quiet, and how the talking points must be exactly as they are told.

This is why I must conclude, in all my innocence, that the only reason we are getting anyone answering questions or anyone standing up and saying anything in the House is that it is the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, who has been here with his little script. He repeats his script every day and adds to it some insults for everyone else in the House, to change the channel and deflect.

The question here is simply this. Did the Prime Minister know? Most of us around here find it very difficult to understand or to believe that this Prime Minister did not know what was going on, and that suddenly doors slammed shut and communications ended on February 22 when his lawyers became involved and all of that, and he wanted to talk with his lawyers. Suddenly everything went blank or whatever happened. Whether the Prime Minister went to sleep like Rip Van Winkle and only woke up in May when this whole thing broke loose, I do not know. However, we find it hard to believe that the Prime Minister did not know.

The Prime Minister also stood in the House when he was the leader of an opposition party and asked the former prime minister a very simple question. He said that it was unconscionable, and if the former prime minister didn't know, it was incompetent. I apply that same question across the way. Did the Prime Minister know? If he did know, indeed it has to be unconscionable, according to his own words and to his own moral compass. If he did not know then it is incompetence. What CEO of any company would have his top executives, 12 of them in this case, and his right-hand man in this case, especially since he knew about it on February 22 when his lawyers were involved, carry on under his nose and know absolutely nothing about it, and tell us that he absolutely did not know?

• (1635)

If he did not know what was going on under his nose, then he was incompetent. In CEO-speak in most corporations in our country that would mean he would have to take responsibility for whatever the consequences were of his incompetence.

I want to remind everyone of what the Prime Minister said on page 28 of his "Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State".

Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ.

Therefore, whether the Prime Minister knew or did not know, he is personally responsible. He has to take the heat for whatever went on. He said so on page 28 of his own memo to ministers and ministers of state. This is his ethical code, so why is he not taking responsibility? Why is he blaming everyone else? I am not making this up. This comes out of the Prime Minister's mouth. Is the Prime Minister going to stand by his own words or is he going to try to weasel out of them somehow, and say, "I saw no evil, I heard no evil and I therefore speak no evil because it's all not about me at all"?

This is incompetence from any CEO, in a small company, a big company or an international corporation. This is clear incompetence. These are some of the questions that we are asking.

What we are asking is for the Prime Minister to be fair to all Canadians, be open and transparent. That is what his party ran on, saying that was what it was going to bring to what it considered a House full of duplicity, et cetera. The Conservatives were coming in. They were going to form government and be open and transparent and accountable.

If I had about an hour I might go down the list of all the times that the Conservatives were not open and not transparent and not accountable, starting with budgets and with the Parliamentary Budget Officer having to take the government to court, or the Privacy Commissioner having to ask them to divulge information.

Business of Supply

We have seen this. I do not have to go down the list. This is now history, this pattern of behaviour. The modus operandi of the government is to keep as much secrecy as it can.

I might add, it is a pity it cannot keep secrecy for Canadians. When Canadians have medical information and such, it seems to be able to throw that one out, but it sure knows how to keep its little backroom deals secret. I just thought I would throw that in for good measure.

We are asking the Prime Minister to, under oath, stand up and tell Canadians what Mr. Wright, or any member of his staff or other Conservative, told him at any time about the whole Duffy affair and his expenses and what happened. What did they tell him about interference with the Senate report? What did they tell him about trying to water down the Deloitte report, or whatever happened when they talked to the Deloitte people? What did he know about that? When did he know about it? He said he did not know anything about it.

We have this whole confusion from everyone around who says they do not believe him. Two out of 10 Canadians are the only ones who believe him. About 80% of Canadians do not seem to believe what he is saying. This is purely because of this man's behaviour, the fact that he has been very controlling and suddenly, on February 22, he said he was good to go provided his lawyers who were involved were okay with it. Then suddenly everything ended. It was like a chasm opened and the Prime Minister fell into it. There was nothing, a void.

This is just unbelievable. I like watching *Twilight Zone* with the best of them, but this is just completely and totally unbelievable in terms of this issue.

We have no questions being answered here. No one is standing up to defend the Prime Minister in the House. There are no backbenchers standing up to do that. Why not? I would hope that if they felt this was unjust they would. We are talking about defending the Prime Minister not lobbing grenades over to this side of the House. We are talking about actually defending the Prime Minister and saying, "No, we believe the Prime Minister did this". No one is doing that. No one is standing up here to defend him, except of course the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

• (1640)

We have a couple of questions to ask. These questions are very simple. Let us go back, the Prime Minister continues to say that the senators are bad, the senators are all wrong, the Senate is horrible and the Senate is a bad place, but this Prime Minister embraced the Senate when he became Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister came here saying that he was going to reform it, but he did not because he was trying to reform it through the back door and not through Constitutional requirements. He could not get anywhere with that. Now, he embraced it wholeheartedly to the extent that the Prime Minister appointed two senators whom everyone knew, for the last 25 years, did not live in the provinces they were supposed to represent. Is that not going to create a problem? Suddenly these senators were going to have to find a primary residence in those places, and they did, indeed.

Business of Supply

My colleague, the member for Malpeque, talked about how Prince Edward Islanders were absolutely embarrassed and appalled, and how the person who owned the house that Senator Duffy bought was ashamed and embarrassed that a picture of their little cottage was being seen all the time.

Somewhere at the beginning the rot began. The Prime Minister put people into the Senate to represent provinces that they had not lived in. Now they have to hurry and go find primary residences and make up stories about primary residences and bill according to primary residence. How did that happen? The Prime Minister obviously either did not know what he was doing when he did it, or he did know and he had a secondary reason for appointing these two senators. We all know what the reason was. These were the two biggest fundraisers for the Prime Minister. They went all over the place. They were celebrities. People flocked to listen to them, blah, blah, blah. We know all of that. That is common knowledge.

Here is a Prime Minister who took advantage of the situation for his own gain and his party's gain. Now all of a sudden, he did not know how all this happened. He could not understand why these wondrous people who did not live in their provinces in the first place could suddenly do such a thing. Again, it defies common sense, simple common sense, people do not have to be lawyers to understand. It defies common sense.

Why did this chain of communication end suddenly? Can someone on the backbench get up during questions and comments and answer why the door shut on communications after February 22, and left this big void. Then all of a sudden the Prime Minister found out, and it was oh, my gosh, shock and surprise, shock and awe, he did not know about it. Suddenly he found out about it and what a wonderful man like Nigel Wright had done, this good deed. The Prime Minister praised him to the skies, and then suddenly he stopped praising him to the skies and said he did not know and it was terrible.

These are some of the questions that we want to ask. The Prime Minister seemed to change his story. That is another thing. In question period, the Prime Minister, over a period of time, moving aside the RCMP affidavits and emails that seemed to implicate the Prime Minister, said he did not know yet, he could not understand how that could happen, when the emails tell a different story.

Suddenly the Prime Minister, as we say colloquially, threw everyone under the bus, including Mr. Wright, whom he had first said he reluctantly took his resignation. Then all of a sudden he had fired him. Then he went back to saying he reluctantly took his resignation. I do not know what to believe anymore. My head is spinning.

Why would the Prime Minister not agree to do this, to just openly report the truth to the citizens of this country? Why not? I do not understand the problem. I do not understand why he would not do this.

The other question I have to ask is this. If all of these people kept the truth from him, "deceived" him that way, why did he promote them to minister's offices? Why? Is this a patting on the back for a job well done? What is this? Is this a shut up and I will give you a better job? What is this? I do not know. We want answers. The

motion is seeking to get those answers. I am hoping that the motion will pass, and everyone in the House believes that it is time to tell Canadians the truth.

● (1645)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suspect the members on that side are having a little difficulty hearing, because a number of times this afternoon I have heard the accusation that no members on this side were getting up to speak. However, just in the last hour there have been a number of us on this side getting up to speak to defend the Prime Minister. The RCMP clearly indicated that there is no evidence to link the Prime Minister to the deal between Duffy and Wright.

I cannot help but wonder if the conversation today is meant to somehow take away from the lack of support that the caucus members on the Liberal side have for their leader. Would my colleague stand up today and defend her leader's action in going into an elementary school to promote a reckless plan to legalize marijuana to elementary students?

The other question I have is this. On any given day, does this member know exactly what every member of her staff is doing? Does she have total knowledge of every staff member?

Finally, I am sure she will have a lot of time after answering those two questions to answer this one. Where is the \$40 million that is still missing? There has been no accounting provided for it. I would love to have an answer.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, so much for defending the Prime Minister's Office. Once again there are a whole bunch of fly-by accusations.

I would be happy to defend my leader. I am proud of my leader. I am proud of the fact that in the last four by-elections, the Liberal Party gained 44,000 votes to 29,000 in total for the Conservatives. Therefore, I have nothing to worry about with respect to my leader at all. That is the first thing. Obviously, Canadians seem to agree with me.

Second, I will answer the member's question as to whether I know what my staff are doing every moment of the day in my office. The answer is that I do not. I must say, though, that if they do something wrong, I will continue to own up and take responsibility for what they have done, as I have in the past, because when they do all of the great things that I get credit for, I accept it. Therefore, if they do something, I will not throw them under the bus. That is what a responsible boss does. A responsible boss knows that he or she cannot always keep an eye out and that once in a while something will slip through.

However, this is not once in a while. Rather, there are 15 people, including lawyers. It is not some little gaffe that somebody on the staff did.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am intrigued by the comments of the hon. member about whether or not the Prime Minister is either complicit or incompetent by not knowing what is going on behind him. Were those accusations that they were either complicit or incompetent not the same accusations that were levelled against Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien in the sponsorship scandal? In fact, somebody did go to jail as a result of that.

As we have come to discover, the Senate is being used by both the Liberals and the Conservatives for partisan political activities on the taxpayer's dime. We in the NDP put forward a motion not too long ago asking that the practice of doing partisan fundraising activities and the like on the taxpayer's dime cease. There are several Liberal senators out there who are doing that on a regular basis, and the Liberals have voted against that motion, so they seem to agree that it is a good thing for the Senate and that it is acceptable for taxpayers' money to be used for political fundraising.

Would the member care to comment?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to comment on that point.

It really surprises me that the NDP does not seem to care about what went on in the Prime Minister's Office. The NDP members are not the slightest bit interested. Rather, they hype on about this ideological idea that the Senate must go.

The Liberals did not vote for the bill to abolish the Senate because we understand the rule of law. We adhere to the rule of law in this House. It is a constitutional requirement. That question is before the Supreme Court of Canada, and when the Supreme Court of Canada answers the questions, the Liberals will then make a decision based on what the rule of law tells us.

This idea that the NDP can cast aside the rule of law and cast aside process is somewhat intriguing, but I still want an answer to this question: does the NDP not care about what went on in the Prime Minister's Office?

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could provide some comment on an issue she spent some time talking about earlier. On an opposition day, more often than not we have a rotation in which members from all political parties participate in the debate. They do not just ask questions; they participate. We have now had, I believe, six opportunities for the Conservatives to get engaged in the debate, but on all six occasions they have said no.

Why does the member think the Conservative backbenchers are refusing to debate on this very important motion that we have before us today?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question, but I would be presuming as to what I think is going on across the way.

I can only say that it is very strange that the Conservative Party would miss six slots in which they could speak to the issue, lay down the track, talk about what they need to talk about, and rebut some of the things being said here on what the RCMP has obtained from the

emails. I don't understand why. The only reason I could think of is that they were told not to speak, that they were muzzled.

The only person who gave any kind of speech in the House was the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, who obviously knows who gave him the appointment and what he is doing, and he follows the script.

It is really quite sad, because I know a lot of the members across the way and I have a lot of respect for some of them. I thought that they would want to clear the air. I thought that they would want to stand up and speak to this issue.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to mostly condescending sarcasm over there.

One of the things I learned in my years of police experience is that the last thing one wants to do is to presume the outcome of an investigation. In this place, fairness need not raise its ugly head, but if one wanted to be fair, one does not have to be a lawyer; one need only be a fair person and allow the authorities to do their investigation. If it comes out that there is some criminal liability, charges will be laid, but the police are doing an investigation primarily at the behest of the Prime Minister.

I, for one of those backbenchers, am getting up to say that I believe what the Prime Minister has said. Members should just give the police time to do their investigation. Then, if it comes out the way the member hopes it does or thinks it is going to, the member can get up and do her skulduggery and do her thing. The member should save her head from spinning by putting her mind to some useful things and letting the police do their job.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I find it very funny that I should be accused of condescending sarcasm when what I just heard was condescending sarcasm. We could take lessons from the Government of Canada on condescending sarcasm. Every day in the House at question period we get up, and whether it is the NDP or the Liberals asking questions, the answers are all condescending sarcasm.

All I can say is that I wish I could do as well on condescending sarcasm as the people across the way on the government benches.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be here debating in this House on behalf of the members of my community in Davenport in the great city of Toronto. I think it is fair to say that they have talked constantly over the last several weeks about the big scandals, because there are several going on, and then, of course, there is another large one going on in Toronto. Somehow the two conflate in the public's mind, because these scandals go to the heart of the political leadership of this country, what leadership is about, the purpose of it, and how we elevate the discourse in this country to a place that all of us here could be proud of.

I think that one of the deeply troubling bits of collateral damage from all these scandals is the public's disintegrating trust in our political culture. Of course, that plays beautifully into the neo-conservative ideology of the government, which is about shrinking government, telling Canadians that government is the problem, and telling Canadians that politicians are corrupt. My goodness, maybe that might actually have happened once in a while. It is what we are talking about today in this motion.

Business of Supply

I just want to read part of the motion into the record for those who might be watching in their homes. It is:

...that the House condemn the deeply disappointing actions of the Prime Minister's Office in devising, organizing and participating in an arrangement that the RCMP believes violated sections 119, 121 and 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada, and remind the Prime Minister—

This is what we are doing here today.

I think Canadians watching this debate are shaking their heads and wondering why we have to spend this time, and it is not just the time. I will remind the hon. member in the corner, who seems to have forgotten, that it has been this party, the official opposition under this leader, that has constantly and doggedly pushed this issue so that we are actually at the point where we are debating motions like this.

However, let me carry on:

—of his own Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State, which—

By the way, we have had to remind the Prime Minister and ministers and ministers of state of this guide many times since I was first elected here in 2011.

—states on page 28 that “Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their offices and the exempt staff in their employ,”—

The point of the guide for ministers and ministers of state is that it assumes that ministers and ministers of state are held to a higher standard, an exemplary standard. That standard telegraphs to the rest in this place and to Canadians across the country that ministers and ministers of state, including the Prime Minister and the government, take their responsibilities and roles with the utmost seriousness and endeavour to execute these roles in a manner that is beyond reproach.

Let me finish reading this excerpt from the motion:

—and the House call upon the Prime Minister to explain in detail to Canadians, under oath, what Nigel Wright or any other member of his staff or any other Conservative told him at any time about any aspect of any possible arrangement pertaining to Mike Duffy, what he did about it, and when.

The leader of the official opposition has been doggedly determined to get answers from the Prime Minister for several weeks now. It is amazing to ponder that the Prime Minister cannot answer these simple questions, but they are not just simple. They are essential questions.

● (1655)

They go to the core of how this place works. They go to the core of the public's trust in government. I can tell the House that this trust has been shaken very deeply. I am in my riding of Davenport constantly, and I hear very little else about politics these days other than the scandal.

We can all agree that this puts a pall over all of us. It is incumbent on everyone here that we endeavour to get to the bottom of these issues. Obfuscation is not helping us in this pursuit, especially because we have so many other pressing issues.

We can talk about some of the Senate appointees and the role of the Senate. Our position in the NDP and the official opposition is clear. It has been clear for 40 years. We feel that the Senate has long outlived its usefulness and should be abolished. It is important to remember that other jurisdictions in Canada once had senates. The

province where I come from, Ontario, once had a Senate. We no longer have a senate, and democracy still lives in Ontario. I believe that it will thrive here, notwithstanding a few people's hurt feelings over the ending of the Senate.

We have really important issues to deal with, issues the Prime Minister is not speaking to, as well as the fact that he is not speaking to the scandal before us. We need to get to the bottom of this, hear from the Prime Minister, and hear a clear explanation about what happened. We are past the point where we are prepared to hear little dribbles and nuggets of half-truths. We need the full truth, in part because we have so much to do.

We have the issue of climate change. We still have not got to the bottom of where the heck that \$3.1 billion went from the last budget, which seems to have disappeared. That is on top of the \$50 million to build a gazebo for the minister during the G20 summit, where the Auditor General said proper accounting was not pursued. We are still waiting for the paperwork on that. We are still waiting to find that \$3.1 billion. How does anyone lose \$3.1 billion?

The Conservative government likes to spin that it is fiscally prudent. It has posted the largest deficit in Canadian history. It cannot find \$3.1 billion. It is trying to sell this canard to Canadians that it is somehow a prudent fiscal manager.

If we take a look at the Government of Manitoba, which has posted serial balanced budgets over four majority mandates, we see what fiscal prudence is all about and why Canadians can be assured that an NDP government would manage the economy in the most fiscally prudent way.

That said, the Conservative government has piled scandal upon scandal. I have already mentioned the \$50-million gazebo. There was the robocall scandal. The biggest scandal is how the government has been asleep at the switch on job creation. It talks about the jobs it has created, but it never ever talks about what kinds of jobs they are.

I am in my riding all the time knocking on doors and hearing from people. People cannot live, raise a family, and pay rent in a city like Toronto with a minimum wage job. That is why so many people are working multiple jobs. We wonder how it was that voter turnout, for example in the by-election last night, was as low as it was in many of these by-elections.

● (1700)

People are working all hours. They are working split shifts. They are working multiple jobs, multiple part-time jobs. In Toronto right now, almost 50% of workers cannot find stable, full-time jobs. I thought that is why we came here. I thought we came here to try to make lives better. I thought we came here to try to make changes that would affect the most people. Instead, we have a government consumed with protecting their chosen few, some of them residing in the Senate.

Business of Supply

It is worth reminding Canadians who might be listening today who some of those senators are and what their job qualifications are. In fact, since I mentioned the by-elections last night, it is worth noting that the last by-election in Toronto Centre, for example, was in March 2008. Do members know who came in fourth in that by-election in March 2008? It was the Conservative candidate. His name is Don Meredith. Guess where Don Meredith sits today? He sits in the Senate. My goodness, it is kind of cheap to get into the Senate. All one needs is 2,939 votes, which is what Mr. Meredith had in the 2008 Toronto Centre by-election. The list goes on.

Actually, one can spend a lot of money to get into the Senate. David Braley made donations to the Conservative Party and Stephen Harper, among others, totalling \$86,000—

● (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: I would draw to the attention of the member for Davenport that it is not proper to mention any member's name, including the Prime Minister's, as opposed to one's riding.

Mr. Andrew Cash: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Braley made donations to the Conservative Party and to the Prime Minister, among others, totalling \$86,500, prior to his appointment. I would like to thank the government members for allowing me the opportunity to repeat that fact, and to repeat it in a clearer way. That is the qualification for Senator Braley's appointment to the Senate.

Some members, especially Liberal members, seem confused as to why we would dare to suggest that, with the gravy train the Liberals rode for so long and that the Conservatives, mirroring the Liberals, are currently enjoying, we would want to see the end of that institution. If one's qualification is that one becomes a name on a ballot as a sacrificial lamb in a Toronto Centre by-election in 2008 or has \$85,000 to spare, surely we can set the bar higher than that. I think Canadians understand that the bar should be set higher, which is why the motion is so important today. It is why Canadians are so concerned about this.

The Prime Minister and members of the government like to try to slough off the questions on this. They say that they have been clear and have already told everybody the truth. They say that they have already said these things so many times. Why are Canadians bothering them with all these details? It is the details that are important. It is the details that consume Canadians' lives. It is the price of food. It is the price of rent. It is the cost of gas. It is the cost of a Metropass in Toronto. These are the details of people's lives that people are consumed with and concerned about. These are the kinds of things the government should be concerned about.

We asked months ago why the government was letting companies charge seniors an extra \$2 just to get their bills in the mail. At the time, the Minister of Finance went on about a self-regulating code of conduct, as if that is some kind of comfort to seniors who are barely scraping by in expensive cities right across the country.

We want to see a government that is focused on the real needs of Canadians, on the ways that will help them live in cities that are very expensive. That includes young people who are today graduating from university. In my province of Ontario, the average student debt at the end of a four-year undergrad is \$37,000. Then they are going out into a job market where they cannot find permanent jobs. Their

options are serial short-term contracts, part-time work, and increasingly, unpaid internships. Now there are some excellent internship programs out there that are run well, with proper oversight, but currently, young workers are simply asked to work for free in jobs that were once entry level positions.

We have not seen the government budge on that issue. We have not seen any action on this issue from the government, but it has spent a lot of time on spin and has congratulated and rewarded its supporters handsomely.

Donald Plett, Conservative Party president, is in the Senate too. These are the same senators who, after the House passed Jack Layton's climate change bill, a historic bill, and one we all would have been proud of, including some members on the government side, killed that bill. We are laggards in the international community when it comes to climate change. We are laggards when it comes to democracy here if we are letting an unelected Senate, filled with folks who bought their way in, failed candidates, and party presidents, both Liberal and Conservative, make those decisions.

● (1710)

Some Liberal members and Conservative members whose close friends sit in the Senate try to make this personal, and they say to the NDP, "So-and-so is a good senator; why are you picking on him?" We are not picking on individual people. We are talking about an institution. We are talking about democracy. We are talking about how we do this. We are talking about how we bring the issues of our constituents into Parliament and how we work on those problems together and come out with solutions that help Canadians.

That is why we are here. That is what we are here for. We are not here to protect parliamentarians. We are not here to protect senators who are taking advantage of the public largesse. We are not here to provide cover for them, but we also do not expect the Prime Minister—who, by the way, ran on a platform of accountability and transparency—to duck and weave and to cut and run. We do not expect that. Canadians do not expect that, especially when we have so many important issues to deal with.

In my riding, right across Toronto and right across the country there are thousands upon thousands of immigrants, for example, who have been waiting years to sponsor their parents and their grandparents. They have been waiting years for that. They need answers to these questions. They come into my office, and no doubt they come into the offices of many of my colleagues, and they are wondering why the government is not processing these applications in a timely fashion. Right now it has put an actual moratorium on applications, and when it lifts the moratorium, it will only be accepting 5,000 new applicants.

This is the kind of thing on which we need to put our focus. We need the Prime Minister to stand up in this House and take the responsibility that this motion underlines he must take. We need him to do that, because we need the government to become focused on the very pressing needs of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

Business of Supply

● (1715)

[English]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 15)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)

Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rafferty
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scott
Sgro
Sor
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turnel

Mourani
Murray
Nicholls
Papillon
Péclét
Pilon
Quach
Rankin
Raynault
Rousseau
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote— 124

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raïtt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shiple

Government Orders

Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Watson
Sky Country
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Loan
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 146

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

The House resumed from November 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion at second reading of Bill C-2.

• (1805)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 16)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Bevington
Boivin
Boutin-Sweet
Brisson
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Choquette
Christopherson
Comartin
Cotler
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Foote
Freeman
Garneau
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Hyer
Jones
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélangier
Benskin
Blanchette
Borg
Brahmi
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Chow
Cleary
Côté
Crowder
Cuzner
Day
Dion
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseault
Eyking
Fortin
Fry
Garrison
Giguère
Goodale
Grogulé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Jacob
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Laverdière

LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Mourani
Murray
Nicholls
Papillon
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Rankin
Raynault
Rousseau
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote— 125

LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rafferty
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scott
Sgro
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Armstrong
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leaf
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Oliver

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon

Government Orders

Opitz	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 147	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

* * *

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

The House resumed from November 25 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.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-5.

● (1815)

(The House divided on the motion which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 17)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Baird
Bateman	Bélanger
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins

Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crockatt	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeshen	Dubé
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finlay (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gallant	Gameau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Glover	Godin
Goguen	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
James	Jean
Jones	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kellway
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leslie
Leung	Liu
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mai
Marston	Martin
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Michaud
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nash	Nicholls
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	Papillon
Payne	Pécllet
Perreault	Pilon
Poilievre	Preston
Quach	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Rousseau
Sandhu	Saxton

Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Seeback
Sellah	Sgro
Shea	Shiple
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibault	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Truppe	Turmel
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriotte	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 268

NAYS

Members

Bellavance	Fortin
Patry	Plamondon— 4

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.) moved that Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons), be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is not the first time we are debating this bill. It received the unanimous support of the House during the previous debates, and all along I have tried to ensure that it remain non-partisan and that it bring people together. The humour in this is not lost on me and I take a philosophical approach as this bill reaches the final stage while I sit as an independent member.

I want to thank everyone who shared their skills and put their hearts into creating this bill, including police officers, the women's groups that work with victims of trafficking, and the criminal law experts and parliamentary law clerks. I thank everyone. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues in the House for the support they have given this bill, speech after speech, stage after stage. I thank them for agreeing to send this bill as quickly as possible to the Senate.

We will not be able to fix the problem of human trafficking unless we address the root issue, which is prostitution. We all know that more than 80% to 90% of human trafficking victims in Canada are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The September

Private Members' Business

2013 report from the Service du renseignement criminel du Quebec revealed that the sex industry in Quebec is doing better than ever. This report highlighted a huge increase in the number of massage parlours: there are more than 200 of them in Montreal. The report states that 39% of the victims caught are minors and that 91% of the victims are women. The numbers are similar in other Canadian provinces.

The average age—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to give my speech.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

[Translation]

There is too much noise in the House. I ask that hon. members leave the chamber and move to the lobbies.

The hon. member has the floor.

● (1820)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this is the reality in nearly every province in Canada. The average age of entry into prostitution is 14. I have met sex workers who were recruited when they were just 12 or 13 years old.

According to the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada 2008 report, a pimp can earn \$280,000 annually or about \$900 a day from one girl. This shows just how enormous the battle before us is; it will require a great deal of political courage.

I urge all of my colleagues, men and women alike, to think very seriously about the kind of society we want our children to grow up in. Soon, perhaps next year, we will have to have a closer look at a fundamental question that many societies have faced recently: are we ready to legalize prostitution in Canada? We will have to answer that question, because the Supreme Court decision in Bedford v. Canada will be coming soon.

I believe that Canada can lead the way on this issue in the Americas. I believe that prostitution is not a job, but rather a form of violence against women. The legalization of prostitution is a scourge in many countries around the world, especially in Europe where there has been a constant and significant increase in human trafficking and child prostitution.

I want to live in a country where our daughters are not treated like objects to be bought and sold. Legalizing prostitution means that all women can be prostituted. Contrary to what one may think, prostitution is not a women's issue. It is a problem initiated by men, a system of exploitation that, unfortunately, has been set up by men and for men who go to prostitutes. As someone who takes the lead in most debates, it is interesting to see that women are taking the lead on this issue.

Private Members' Business

Here is a fairly interesting example that shows the true face of this fight. A female MP in France is fighting to criminalize the purchase of sexual services, as is currently the case in Sweden and Norway. France therefore wants to go after the men purchasing these services, who are often referred to as clients. They are not clients. They are people who support prostitution and who go to prostitutes. They are just as responsible for this system as pimps. Believe what you will, but after this fight began in France, hundreds of men signed a petition in which they claimed the right to purchase sexual services.

The petition was titled “hands off my whore” and the petitioners included writers, actors, a lawyer, a journalist and many others. This showed the real face of prostitution in France.

Grégoire Théry, a member of France's high council for gender equality, has said that johns are not poor, sexually deprived men. They are well-connected men of power who will not stand for the government prohibiting them from exchanging money for sexual acts.

I know that we have to have this debate in this chamber. I am therefore asking all the women in the House, who make up about 20% of MPs, to stand up and refuse to legalize this form of violence that we call prostitution. We need to have this political courage for our children, our sisters and our daughters.

I also invite all of my male colleagues to support the female representatives in the House when the time comes to consider this issue. I am asking them to do so for their daughters and their wives, but particularly for their sons so that they can grow up in a country and a society where human beings are not for sale.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues for supporting this bill.

• (1825)

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech and I congratulate her on her bill, which I think very highly of. I will certainly vote in favour of the bill. I too have worked very hard on the issue of human trafficking and I think that passing this bill is essential.

That being said, I must admit that I am a bit disappointed because my colleague spoke almost exclusively about prostitution. Human trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation. It also includes forced labour.

I know that to be true because in my riding, unfortunately, there are many cases of forced labour among domestic workers and seasonal workers. The hon. member did not say much about that. That muddies things a bit. One of the things that human trafficking experts tell me when I talk to them is that the definition is not well known.

I would like to give my colleague the opportunity to speak again because this is not just about sexual exploitation. It is also about forced labour. I would like her to share her thoughts because this is not a debate on prostitution. We are dealing with human trafficking.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Indeed, trafficking takes many forms, and forced labour is a much more significant aspect of it in some countries. In Canada, 80% to

90% of all human trafficking is for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This is why I am placing so much emphasis on this. This is currently the most significant phenomenon in Canada.

I agree that a small part of this exploitation occurs in the context of domestic work, for example, and the bill covers all kinds of human trafficking. All forms of human trafficking are abominable, but it is essential not to lose sight of a very important aspect of human trafficking worldwide.

Fully 80% of human trafficking in the world is done for sexual exploitation. It is important to understand that prostitution is linked to trafficking. We cannot separate the two issues and say that we have prostitution on one side and human trafficking on the other. That is not true. That would be burying our heads in the sand.

Prostitution and human trafficking are intertwined. All countries that legalized prostitution have seen human trafficking grow exponentially. We should be wary of this trap. We should not talk about prostitution as if it were an issue separate from human trafficking. That is a trap.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on this initiative. I think everyone in the House is interested in putting a stop to the dehumanizing practice of prostitution and human trafficking.

Recently I have become aware that there is a model called the Nordic model. I should have known this long ago, but much to my chagrin I did not. I wonder if my colleague would comment on her reaction, her response, to the Nordic model and how it could be applied to help cut down on this scourge of society.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question. I think that model is an excellent one.

Canada needs to address the issue of purchasing sexual services. Sweden has done it and Norway has followed suit. They started with a basic principle: prostitution is a form of violence and the women, men and children trapped in the system are victims.

They created a law called “Women's Integrity”. What a great name. They invested resources in it and they worked to make their society understand that purchasing any form of prostitution—through a massage parlour, a strip club, or escort service—contributes to human trafficking and the exploitation of women.

They have created an egalitarian society where no human being may buy another. I dream of the day when we have a law here in Canada that makes it a crime to purchase sexual services and decriminalizes those victimized by prostitution by giving them safe havens and resources to get out of the trade, not to keep them in it. I dream of that day. I know that Canada is a great country that can take that vision and bring it to North America.

Private Members' Business

• (1830)

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to support Bill C-452, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons). This is an important bill that would address a pressing issue. Human trafficking involves continuous violations of fundamental human rights whose protection forms the basis of our free and democratic society.

I would like to start by thanking the member of Parliament for Ahuntsic for bringing this pressing issue to the attention of the House again. As she knows, this is a very important issue for our government. Her previous bill, former Bill C-612, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), which proposed similar amendments, died on the order paper in 2011.

Before I turn to the proposals in the bill itself, I would like to make some general comments on the nature of human trafficking and its severe impacts on its victims, to underscore the importance of ensuring the strongest possible criminal justice response to this crime.

Traffickers force victims to provide labour or sexual services in circumstances where they believe their safety or the safety of someone known to them will be threatened if they fail to provide that labour or service. They are deprived of the very rights that underpin a free and democratic society. The reality is that victims suffer physical, sexual and emotional abuse, including threats of violence or actual harm to their loved ones. This abuse is compounded by their living and working conditions.

To further aggravate the problem, this type of criminal conduct is not something that just happens occasionally or on the margins of society. Rather it is widespread, as evidenced by the global revenues garnered by it, which are estimated to amount to as much as \$10 billion U.S. per year. This puts human trafficking within the three top money makers for organized crime.

What are we doing about it? I am pleased to report that the government's response to this crime is strong and multi-faceted.

First, we have a virtual arsenal of criminal offences that apply to this reprehensible conduct.

In 2003, trafficking specific offences were added to the Criminal Code.

In 2010, a new offence of child trafficking was enacted through Bill C-268, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum sentence for offences involving trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years), which was sponsored by myself, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul. This offence imposes mandatory minimum penalties on those who traffic persons under the age of 18.

In 2012, former Bill C-310, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), sponsored by myself, the member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul, extended extra territorial jurisdiction for all Criminal Code trafficking offences and enacted an interpretive tool to assist the courts in interpreting the trafficking in persons provisions.

All of this is in addition to the trafficking specific offence contained in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, section 118, which prohibits transnational trafficking and the numerous Criminal Code offences that address traffic related conduct, such as forceable confinement, kidnapping, sexual assault and uttering threats, to give a few examples.

However, that is not all. In recognition of the multi-faceted nature of this problem, the government launched a national action plan to combat human trafficking on June 6, 2012. The action plan recognizes that a comprehensive response to human trafficking must involve efforts to ensure what we refer to as the 4 Ps: the protection of victims; the prosecution of offenders; the partnerships with key players; and, of course, the prevention of the crime, in the first place. All activities are coordinated through the human trafficking task force, which is led by Public Safety Canada.

This is, without a doubt, a comprehensive response to a complex problem, but more can always be done and where more can be done, more should be done, especially, when efforts serve to address a crime as insidious as human trafficking.

Bill C-452 proposes a number of reforms that would strengthen the response I have just described. It seeks to impose consecutive sentences for trafficking offences and any offence arising out of the same event or series of events.

The bill would also create a presumption that would assist prosecutors in proving the main human trafficking offence and it would require a sentencing court to order the forfeiture of an offender's property, unless he or she proved that the property was not proceeds of crime.

Although some amendments would be required to address specific legal concerns, Bill C-452 would undoubtedly strengthen the response to human trafficking and, as such, merits our support.

• (1835)

Legal concerns would have to be addressed. For example, the bill should not overlap with amendments that have already been enacted by the previous bill, such as the former Bill C-310, as this would cause confusion in the law. The bill should also avoid compromising the government's efforts to defend the living on the avails offence, paragraph 212(1)(j), along with other prostitution-related Criminal Code offences whose constitutionality is now before the Supreme Court of Canada in the Bedford case. The procuring provision, which Bill C-452 proposals would affect, contains the living on the avails offence.

However, these concerns and others should not detract from the positive contributions the bill would make if it were enacted. The legal concerns I have outlined can easily be addressed through amendments.

Private Members' Business

We must continue to be vigilant. We must continue to support legislative initiatives that would improve our ability to hold accountable those who exploit the vulnerabilities of others. The impact of human trafficking on its victims is almost impossible to comprehend. We cannot tolerate it. We must ensure that those who engage in such heinous conduct are brought to justice, that their punishment appropriately reflects their crime and that they are not permitted to reap the rewards gleaned from the suffering of others.

Toward that end, I ask all members in the House to join me in supporting Bill C-452. I look forward to examining and analyzing its proposals more deeply in the context of committee review. At that stage, amendments can be moved to ensure that the bill achieves its laudable objectives without creating any confusion or inconsistency in the law.

I am sure that we all agree that we can never do enough to combat human trafficking. I am grateful that Bill C-452 has provided us with yet another opportunity to do more.

Again, I thank the member for Ahuntsic for her attention to this very important bill. Certainly it has our full support on this side of the House.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with pride and conviction that I, too, support Bill C-452 sponsored by the member for Ahuntsic.

Human trafficking is an issue that I am really passionate about. I have had the opportunity to talk with groups such as CATHIL, the International Bureau for Children's Rights, World Vision Canada, Half the Sky Québec and Walk With Me Canada, and also with experts such as Professor Yvon Dandurand, Professor Jill Hanley and Detective Sergeant Dominic Monchamp of the Montreal police force.

I have also listened to evidence from many experts and victims at meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and when I travelled to Thailand with World Vision Canada two years ago. As a result of these experiences, I am truly horrified by this serious situation, and I believe that it is urgent that we move quickly to make progress in this area.

For that reason, I support Bill C-452, which would amend the Criminal Code in order to provide better protection for victims of trafficking by setting out a legal definition of exploitation and including consecutive sentences for offences related to procuring and trafficking in persons.

To start with, we must take some time to explain what we are really talking about when we use the words “trafficking” and “exploitation”.

Trafficking in and exploitation of persons is an odious crime that can take several forms. The most common are forcible confinement; forced movement from one country to another, one province to another or one city to another; and forced labour and prostitution, when a profit is made by the person exploiting these victims. What all these crimes have in common is the fact that they are degrading, violate human dignity, and are characterized by incredible abuse, which can be physical, verbal or psychological.

The main victims are women and children, who represent 80% of persons affected by human trafficking, as indicated by a 2005 International Labour Organization study. The most vulnerable are the usual victims of this scourge, and it is our duty to do everything we can to protect them. We must not forget that almost 50% of victims are minors.

Sexual exploitation is the most common form of human exploitation. Once again, women and children are the main victims. In fact, 98% of the victims of sexual exploitation are women. Over half of them are minors.

Canada is not immune to the scourge of human trafficking. We have a real problem of human trafficking and exploitation right here in this country, and yet very few people realize the scope of the problem.

I know because, about a year ago, I showed the film *Avenue Zéro* in my office. I received many calls and emails from people who said that they had no idea that this was happening in their own backyards. Part of my riding, an area of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, is unfortunately known for human trafficking and prostitution. However, the general population is completely unaware of this problem.

As for human trafficking across international borders, the most recent official figures from the RCMP date back to 2005, which is quite a while ago. Perhaps more statistics are needed. In fact, the RCMP estimates that every year, about 800 individuals enter Canada illegally as a result of human trafficking, and about 1,500 to 2,000 are trafficked from Canada to the United States.

As for human trafficking within Canada, we do not currently have sufficiently clear and reliable statistics to establish exact figures. The studies done in Canada on human trafficking and exploitation often overlook the issue of trafficking in Canadian citizens and residents within the country.

It is possible, however, to assess the scope of this phenomenon and paint a picture of the people affected by human trafficking and exploitation in Canada based on studies done by international organizations and on the ample testimony of victims.

In 2009, for instance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime led a study that found that 80% of the victims of human trafficking are trafficked for the purpose of prostitution. This observation also applies in Canada. Those most affected are women who enter Canada illegally through human trafficking, but Canadian citizens are also affected, including a significant proportion of young women from aboriginal communities. As we know, exploitation is often the result of extreme economic insecurity and a lack of knowledge of individual rights.

Private Members' Business

● (1840)

Like these hundreds of people who enter Canada each year to flee deplorable living conditions in their country of origin, a growing number of Canadians are faced with poverty and limited access to education. Every year, poverty pushes young girls from disadvantaged communities and aboriginal peoples to move to urban centres and leave their families behind. They are easy prey, for pimps in particular who force them to sell their bodies no matter how old they are.

The figures provided by Criminal Intelligence Service Canada on this are clear: the average age of entry into prostitution in our country is 14. As my colleague mentioned, if the age of entry into prostitution is 14, that means there are clients requesting 14-year-old girls, which is absolutely disgusting.

In light of the gravity of the facts and the extent of the tragedy, I think it is necessary to act as quickly as possible. We must remain focused because solving the problem of trafficking and exploitation requires a comprehensive strategy, including reducing the economic inequalities in our country and fighting the organized crime that is at the root of human trafficking worldwide.

Nevertheless, I know that Bill C-452 introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Ahuntsic, is a first step in the right direction. Her bill considerably improves the legal avenues we have for fighting exploitation and it sends a clear message to human trafficking abusers and victims: we will not allow the current situation to go on much longer.

I support the legal approach taken by Bill C-452. The bill's proposed changes to sections 279.01 and 462.27 of the Criminal Code are essential for giving our police officers and our lawyers the means for effectively fighting human exploitation and trafficking.

First, the new section 279.01 would give the justice system the necessary tools for identifying cases of exploitation, through a complete list of circumstances that are deemed to constitute exploitation. That said, Bill C-452 provides a clearer and more precise definition of exploitation to ensure better victim protection. The changes made to section 462.27 of the Criminal Code, which seek to introduce offences of procuring and human trafficking, will enable more effective police action.

Bill C-452 would give the police and our justice system the means to work together to successfully combat human trafficking and exploitation. I had the opportunity to listen to Inspector Gordon Perrier, from the Criminal Investigation Bureau of the Winnipeg Police Service, when he testified before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in April. He said the following: "Combatting exploitation requires a broad range of commitments on many fronts, and all the practices police and our partners employ come together when the laws are comprehensive".

I am absolutely convinced that, in addition to being a significant legal breakthrough in the fight against human trafficking, Bill C-452 also holds great symbolic value. Indeed, it sends a strong signal to victims of human trafficking—to women, especially aboriginal women. There is an opportunity here to refocus the law on victim protection by providing for denunciatory and consecutive sentences,

which the accused must serve consecutively to any other sentence handed down by a judge.

Indeed, making the perpetrators spend more time in prison gives their victims enough time to begin their healing process, with greater peace. In doing this, we show our commitment to uphold human dignity. When we fight human trafficking we are fighting against the commodification of women and children, who are now being imported and exported, sold and resold. We are also fighting against the commodification of men who are forced to work, and against the sexual exploitation of the weakest and poorest by unscrupulous individuals and organized crime.

To conclude, I would like to take the time to talk about human trafficking for forced labour, which we might call "slavery". In my riding, I know that there are both domestic and seasonal workers who come to Canada and are forced to work. This is not sexual exploitation; although it was mentioned that sexual exploitation accounts for 80% to 90% of cases, there are all kinds of trafficking, which Bill C-452 is designed to reduce as much as possible.

I also think that we will soon need to talk about prevention, because when some young women arrive in cities and urban areas, they often fall into prostitution at the age of 14, through no fault of their own. We should therefore start working on prevention with these young women.

● (1845)

[English]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address Bill C-452, as have my predecessors this evening, which seeks to combat human trafficking and exploitation.

As I have said previously in debate on the bill, the true measure of a society's commitment to equality and human dignity is the protection it affords its most vulnerable members, and the victims of human trafficking are among the most vulnerable of all. It is therefore to the credit of this House that efforts to deal with this compelling concern have been initiated and supported by hon. members on all sides.

I was proud to introduce Canada's original human trafficking legislation, as minister of justice, in 2005, and I am pleased to acknowledge the subsequent and ongoing special contributions of the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, who spoke this evening.

[Translation]

Of course, I would like to thank the member for Ahuntsic for introducing the bill that we are looking at today. I intend to support it.

[English]

The bill before us seeks to bolster efforts to combat human trafficking and exploitation in three important ways.

First, by adding these offences of trafficking to those for which the forfeiture of the proceeds of crime applies, the bill seeks to ensure thereby that traffickers do not profit from their actions.

Private Members' Business

At committee, several witnesses testified that the average annual profit from trafficking one woman is \$280,000. Moreover, according to the 2012 U.S. State Department report, the international trade in human beings generates approximately \$32 billion each year. It is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world.

[Translation]

Éliane Legault-Roy, from the Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle, testified that this industry "responds solely to profit and customer demand".

I completely agree that the government must be able to seize the proceeds amassed by those who treat human beings as goods to be sold.

[English]

Second, the bill aims to facilitate the prosecution of human trafficking offences by reversing the onus of proof such that an individual habitually in the company of a person who is exploited would be presumed complicit in the exploitation, absent evidence to the contrary.

The justice committee heard from several witnesses that victims in such cases are reluctant to testify in court due to fear of facing their abusers and to the trauma of having to talk openly about their ordeal. It is therefore important to minimize the demands placed on victims in human trafficking trials to prevent their re-victimization, as this provision seeks to do.

At the same time, it is generally a fundamental principle of our justice system that the burden is on the state to prove that the accused is guilty, rather than requiring the accused to prove his or her innocence. The member for Ahuntsic has correctly noted that reversals of the burden of proof do exist in our Criminal Code, but they are rare, and for good reason. Accordingly, reverse onus provisions must be implemented with the utmost caution so as to minimize the risk of wrongful conviction.

As such, the Liberal member on the justice committee proposed amendments that would have specified that the reverse onus in Bill C-452 would apply only to those who live off the avails of exploitation and are over the age of 18. This change would have preserved the bill's intent of lessening the burden on victims at trial while reducing the chances that this reverse onus provision might, in exceptional circumstances, entrap an innocent person. I regret that these amendments were unsuccessful, although, as I say, I will support the bill nonetheless.

Finally, Bill C-452 aims to deter the expansion of human trafficking operations by requiring offenders to serve their sentences consecutively, such that each additional victim represents an additional penalty to the offender. Many witnesses at the justice committee expressed frustration that concurrent sentences are currently the norm in human trafficking cases. For example, Robert Hooper, of Walk With me Canada Victims Services, told the committee:

...when you are able to garner upwards of \$200,000 to \$300,000 per trafficked victim in one year, and the only real risk in sentencing is a concurrent sentence for each additional victim, the trafficker is almost compelled to expand his business empire with little risk of significant ramifications to him in the criminal justice system here in Canada.

I share the goal of making consecutive sentences the norm for human trafficking convictions. At the same time, I am reluctant to remove discretion from judges, as the bill does, by making consecutive sentences mandatory in all such cases. It is certainly possible to make consecutive sentences the norm while still allowing judges to order concurrent sentences in exceptional cases, providing they give reasons for departing from the usual practice.

This is precisely what a Liberal amendment proposed at committee would have done, and I regret that it, too, was unsuccessful. As with the amendment to which I earlier referred, this one would have preserved the bill's *raison d'être* while ensuring that our justice system remains well equipped to deal with unusual and unforeseeable circumstances. Still, once again, I share the objectives of this legislation and believe that its effects would be generally positive, and I will, as I mentioned, vote in favour of it.

● (1850)

I will now turn to a matter of process that arose at committee and that warrants our attention.

The justice committee began clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-452 on May 6. At that meeting, the bill's sponsor, the member for Ahuntsic, was present and permitted to speak by the chair. This was both appropriate and helpful for committee members and for all parliamentarians, who benefited from hearing the perspective of the member who proposed the legislation.

However, at the end of the meeting the Conservative members chastised the chair for having let the member for Ahuntsic participate. When clause-by-clause study resumed on May 8, at which time additional amendments were considered and a clause that had previously carried was reviewed and deleted, Conservative committee members refused to allow the member for Ahuntsic to take part in debate on her own bill.

The member for York West moved to let her speak. The government still rejected the motion. In the words of the committee chair, "...for a private member's bill I think every member has the right to come and talk to the bill and the amendments to it. ... I think that's only fair..."

I agree fully, and I find it deeply regrettable that Conservative members denied the member for Ahuntsic the opportunity to address significant changes proposed to her own legislation.

As we know, in most cases the sponsor of a private member's bill can substitute for a colleague from the same party and so participate in committee discussion. However, when the bill is that of an independent member, as happened in this case, that option is not available to them. It is therefore, as the chair said, only fair to invite them as an additional and important voice. The Conservatives' refusal to do so was prejudicial to the principle of open and informed debate, essential to our legislative process. Moreover, the silencing of the member for Ahuntsic constituted a missed opportunity to act in a collegial manner on important legislation that enjoys all-party support.

I would hope that hon. members would take pains to act collegially even when we disagree. How much more so should we seize opportunities such as this to join together in mutual respect and common cause?

[*Translation*]

In that same spirit, I would like to thank the member for Ahuntsic for introducing this bill.

[*English*]

I thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, who made yet another important intervention this evening, and others in the House for their efforts on this issue. I thank the many Canadians, including the witnesses who testified at committee, for their daily efforts to combat human trafficking and to help the survivors of exploitation rebuild their lives.

I will close by importantly recognizing the victims, both those bravely attempting to recover from the horrors of past ordeals and the millions in Canada and around the world who, as we speak, are exploited and enslaved. I look forward to continuing with members of all parties in the fight for their freedom.

● (1855)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There being no other members rising to speak, I invite the hon. member for Ahuntsic to take advantage of her right of reply. She has five minutes.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking all of my colleagues for their speeches and for their support for this bill. This demonstrates that when we work together in the interests of Canadians, we create positive results.

I will not use my five minutes because I know that we all wish to see this bill referred to the Senate so that it can follow its course. We have been debating this bill in the House for about a year or a year and a half, and it has unanimous support. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you can understand that we are simply eager to vote unanimously to send this bill to the Senate.

Once again, I would like that thank everyone in the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to follow up on a question I asked the Minister of the Environment. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the

Adjournment Proceedings

Environment responded to me a few weeks ago about in situ oil sands projects and federal environmental assessments.

In my question, I said that the Conservatives had dismantled the laws governing Canada's environmental assessment process. However, that was not enough to please their buddies in the industry. Now they are going even further to exempt in situ oil sands projects from any federal review, even though this kind of oil sands project is becoming more and more common, which is, in itself, a contradiction.

How do the Conservatives justify this decision, which does not seem informed and even seems dangerous? My hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, compared the in situ oil sands projects to blueberry washing facilities. I do not know where that idea came from.

The in situ oil sands projects are nothing like a blueberry washing facility. The level of danger is not the same. If polluted water is spilled, the problem will not be the same. I did not understand and I do not think I ever will understand how my hon. colleague could keep a straight face while comparing the oil sands to blueberries. He would have to explain it to me because I do not get it.

According to the Conservatives, environmental assessment is costly and results in delays. On the contrary, good environmental assessments save money in the long term and result in fewer delays as there is less to go on the defensive about in the event of legal action. The Conservatives must learn that the environment and the economy cannot be separated. They are inextricably linked. They strengthen society and make effective environmental assessments possible.

As they say, prevention is better than a cure. We must not wait for the damage to be done; we must prevent it. Unfortunately, this exemption for in situ oil sands projects does not do that.

The Conservative government is ignoring extensive discharging of materials harmful to the environment caused primarily by the oil sands industry. Millions of litres of toxic water are dumped with disastrous environmental consequences. This is due to the Canadian government's lax approach, which is based on a weak environmental assessment process.

Canadians are worried about the government's laissez-faire attitude towards environmental protection. They are worried about the potential impact on global warming. We should remember that the government recently went to Warsaw, where it embarrassed itself once again.

I would like to know why the Canadian government and the parliamentary secretary believe that it is a good idea to exempt in situ oil sands projects. I hope that they will not use the blueberry comparison again, as it is a ridiculous response.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Drummond for the opportunity to elaborate on his question.

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Our government is committed to environmental protection and sustainable development. In fact, it is this Conservative government that has been strengthening environmental laws, setting higher safety standards and has been committed to enshrining the polluter pay system into law. That being said, I appreciate the opportunity to inform the member opposite of a few facts pertaining to the federal environmental assessment process that he may not have been aware of prior to asking his question.

First, it is important for the member opposite to understand that in situ oil stands were never on the project list, so there has been no change there.

Second, this project list has been expanded to include projects that were not on it before. Therefore, in this regard, we have actually strengthened our environmental assessment process. Let me be clear. There has been absolutely no dismantling of the laws governing federal environmental assessment.

Quite to the contrary, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 strengthens environmental protection and brings the federal regime into the 21st century. This legislation brought in enforceable environmental assessment decision statements to ensure proponents comply with required mitigation measures to protect the environment. Federal inspectors now have the authority to examine whether or not conditions of a decision statement are being met. There are penalties for non-compliance.

After this legislation was passed, the Minister of the Environment talked to Canadians about its implementation. Comments were sought on whether amendments should be made to the regulations that identify which projects may require a federal environmental assessment. A variety of interests provided their views, and those views were given very careful consideration. Changes to the regulations have been made to ensure they reflect those major projects that have the greatest potential for significant adverse environmental effects in areas of federal jurisdiction. This will increase certainty and predictability for project proponents and for all Canadians.

Let me again reiterate for my colleague opposite there has been no decision to exempt in situ oil sands projects from any federal review. In situ oil sands projects are not covered in the environmental assessment regulations that came into force through the amendments. They were not covered in the regulations before the amendments, and they were not covered in regulations under the former legislation. To make things perfectly clear for the member opposite, in situ oil sands projects have never been subject to federal environmental assessments, and federal permitting and approvals processes related to in situ projects have not changed.

Federal environmental assessment will continue to be implemented in a manner that supports responsible resource development to the benefit of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I am a little angry. My honourable colleague, the parliamentary secretary, should not say that I do not know what I am talking about.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and I studied the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. I can assure him that the list is new. The Conservatives are the ones who made that change and they are the ones who established a list that does not include in situ oil sands projects. They are the ones who excluded them.

There never used to be a list. Instead, there were triggers. When there was a trigger, we considered the in situ oil sands project. My colleague should not try to mislead me because I studied this issue for two years as a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. He should not say that I do not know what I am talking about because it makes me a little angry.

I do not intend to get angry at him because he is usually quite nice to me. However, he should not tell me that I am not familiar with this issue when I am quite knowledgeable on the subject. Before, when there was a trigger, we examined the in situ oil sands project. Now, the Conservatives have excluded those projects from the list, which is a very serious and dangerous thing. That is why we are speaking out about this and that is why I am saying that it is absolutely essential that in situ oil sands projects be included in the list or that we go back to using the trigger process that is set out in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

We also need to let people share their views with regard to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Right now, environmental groups basically no longer have the right to express their views on these projects.

● (1905)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, if the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 had not been passed, we would continue to have a regime that requires environmental assessments of inconsequential projects with little potential for adverse impacts. That is what we talked about before in the answer with the blueberries. We would continue to have a regime without enforcement provisions. We would continue to have a regime lacking in predictable legislative timelines for the completion of an environmental assessment.

With the recent changes, environmental assessments will be focused on major projects that have a greater potential for significant adverse environmental effects. Federal resources will not be wasted considering assessments for an overly broad pool of projects.

Effective and timely environmental assessment is important for both Canada's environment and its economy. Our government's actions ensure federal environmental assessment is focused on the right projects.

[*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 7:07 p.m.)

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Mr. Calandra 1393

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The Speaker 1393

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