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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-564, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (time limit).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to introduce a private member's bill that would extend the time limit for filing a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission from one year to two years.

In addition, my bill clarifies the circumstances in which the commission can consider a complaint regarding an incident that happened outside that limitation period.

The Canadian Human Rights Act is modelled on the simple, indisputable principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability.

That is a well-established principle in Canadian society, and so much the better. However, there is always room for improvement. We need to remain vigilant in defending those rights.

My bill is a modest attempt at improving the current law by giving Canadians who are suffering the consequences of a human rights violation a bit more time to have their voices heard.

[*English*]

I close by noting that today the United Nations celebrates the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL CAPITAL ACT

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-565, An Act to amend the National Capital Act (Gatineau Park) and to make a related amendment to the Department of Canadian Heritage Act.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to introduce a new version of my bill concerning Gatineau Park, which I originally introduced in November 2012. I wish to thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for seconding this new version.

The version I am presenting here today includes the changes to the National Capital Act that resulted from the passing of the government's Bill C-60 a little earlier this year.

Apart from that, this bill is identical to the one I introduced in 2012. It gives Gatineau Park special status in the National Capital Act by establishing the park's boundaries in the act, giving those boundaries parliamentary protection and prohibiting the sale of public lands located within the park.

Once again, I invite all of my colleagues from all parties in this House to support my bill at second reading.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions with hundreds of signatures, brought to Parliament this morning. The petitioners request that Parliament amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services, criminalize the purchasing of sexual services and provide support to those who desire to leave prostitution.

As members know, our government has focused strongly on the victims of human trafficking, so these are very timely petitions.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise to present a petition in support of victims of crime.

Routine Proceedings

The signatories, from Toronto, state that a positive legacy must emerge from the loss of so many, including Kempton Howard, an inspiring young man who was dedicated to helping others in my community of Toronto—Danforth. He played a leadership role in working with youth and was murdered in Toronto on December 13, 2003. The 10th anniversary will be only days from now.

The petitioners ask, among a number of things, for a new approach to supporting victims of crime and are calling on the federal government, among other things, to create a meaningful country-wide system of public support for the loved ones of murder victims, as well as the victims of crime themselves.

DENTAL MERCURY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions regarding mercury, one of the most toxic substances. Mercury used in dentistry may contaminate the environment by the disposal of solid waste products and contaminate air from dental clinics. Burial, cremation and human waste may also contribute mercury to the environment.

The petitioners request that the government recognize that the World Health Organization recommends the phasing out of dental amalgam and recognize the work of the intergovernmental negotiating committee. The petitioners request the government assume leadership in recommending the phase-out of dental mercury and the phase-in of non-mercury alternatives within Canada.

•(1010)

SHARK FINNING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from thousands of Canadians across the country, calling on the government to say that measures must be taken to stop the global practice of shark finning and to ensure the responsible conservation and management of sharks. They ask the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on the importation of shark fin to Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, many Canadians are concerned about the link between the environment and human health, so I have two petitions. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to appoint a royal commission on environment and health, with a mandate to examine and make recommendations regarding all aspects of the environmental and health impacts of industrial activity in Canada and the application of the precautionary principle to the regulation of both industrial processes and the production, distribution and availability of consumer goods in Canada.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I join my colleague from Toronto—Danforth in rising today to submit a petition to the House in support of victims of crime.

Despite police warnings and international treaty obligations, the Conservatives are refusing to enforce simple rules that would help track and curb gun trafficking. Therefore, among other things, they also ask the government to ensure stable, reliable, long-term funding for programs that help divert youth away from the guns and crime and help keep our streets and communities safe.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I join my colleague from Toronto—Danforth in submitting a petition on the issue of victims of crime.

In my riding of Parkdale—High Park, there have been instances of gangs and crime. A number of citizens of Toronto have signed a petition calling for a meaningful country-wide system of public support for loved ones of murder victims and victims of crime, but also a long overdue, comprehensive anti-smuggling strategy to deal with the issue of guns and drugs coming across our borders.

PARKS CANADA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to stand today and present a petition on behalf of the people of Cape Breton and the broader community, those who have had access to the Bras d'Or lakes, year after year, and the great sailing and marine opportunities in the Bras d'Or lakes. The cuts at Parks Canada have reduced the number of hours that people are allowed access through the St. Peters Canal, which has created a great burden and really limited access to the lakes. There are hundreds of signatures from people around Nova Scotia, Cape Breton and outside the province who, for years, have used it, and I present this petition on their behalf.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to deposit a petition in support of victims of crime. I join my colleague from the city of Toronto in saying that a positive legacy must emerge from the loss of so many young people in Toronto and all other cities across the country.

I deposit today a petition that is called “Kempton's legacy petition”, where the signatories are calling for a meaningful country-wide system of public support for the loved ones of murder victims. They want to ensure stable, long-term, reliable funding for programs that help divert youth away from gangs and criminality. The petitioners are also calling for the reversal of the reckless cuts that the Conservative government has made to the CBSA.

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition this morning signed by over 800 people from across the Island of Montreal, including people in my riding, in Saint-Laurent and in Ahuntsic.

The petitioners are calling on the government to review the flight paths of planes, set a curfew between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. and create positions on the Aéroports de Montréal board of directors to represent community groups.

The Montreal airport needs to understand the impact it is having on the local population, and although Montrealers understand the economic importance of the airport, I believe there is a way to achieve a healthy co-existence.

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition signed by many constituents of Winnipeg North who are concerned about the government increasing the size of Parliament, increasing the number of members from 308 to 338, with the support of the NDP.

The petitioners are questioning whether or not this is the correct priority, and stating that there are many other things we should be spending tax dollars on.

• (1015)

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, present a petition signed on behalf of many constituents who are seeking to remember Kempton Howard by making sure that the government creates a country-wide system of public support for the loved ones of murder victims, as well as ensuring stable, long-term funding to keep youth away from gangs and crimes, and to reverse the reckless cuts to the Canada Border Services Agency that allows so many guns and drugs to enter our country.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning with two petitions. The first is entirely from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands, and from all the islands, Galiano, Pender, Mayne, Saturna, Salt Spring, as well as from the peninsula.

The petitioners are calling on this House to take note of the fact that fracking chemicals, used in the fracking industry, are not even known to Environment Canada. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development found that we do not even know what, of the many thousands of chemicals used and injected underground, they are actually are and how we could cope with them as an environmental risk.

The petitioners call for a federal moratorium on fracking across Canada.

The second petition is from residents in the lower mainland, mostly in Vancouver. The petitioners are calling for a permanent legislative ban on supertankers along the coast of British Columbia. Such a ban was respected since the early 1970s, at all levels, and we ask for it to be permanent.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my neighbour the member for Toronto—Danforth, I too am proud to table Kempton's legacy petition in the House.

I share in the hope that from this petition might emerge a positive legacy from the deaths of too many youth in my city of Toronto, like Kempton Howard. Kempton's legacy petition calls in part on the Government of Canada to ensure stable, reliable, long-term funding for programs that help divert youth away from gangs and crimes, and help keep our streets and communities safe.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition in memory of Kempton Howard and other

Routine Proceedings

murdered young men, calling for better youth employment programs and a stop to the smuggling of guns into Toronto.

CHILD HEALTH

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition from many Torontonians in support of my children's health and nutrition initiative, which would provide a daily nutritious meal of locally grown food to all school-aged children in Canada under the age of 18.

The petitioners note that this will combat childhood obesity, teach children about eating, and also support the local economy and a sustainable environment.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is calling on the Government of Canada to provide long-term predictable and non-partisan funding for public transit now, as they note that the GTA economy is suffering because of traffic gridlock. It is costing \$6 billion a year in lost productivity.

The petitioners note that we still do not have a national transit strategy.

INCOME TAX DEDUCTIONS FOR TRADESPEOPLE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many Canadians. It is on the issue of tradespeople travelling to other parts of the country, trying to find work.

It is certainly something that happens a lot in the Atlantic provinces. The petition supports Bill C-201, introduced by my colleague, the member for Hamilton Mountain. It allows tradespersons and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so they can secure and maintain employment at a construction site that is more than 80 kilometres from their home, a very important issue. I am happy to affix my signature and table said petition.

The Speaker: I see the member for Scarborough—Rouge River rising. Normally it is the practice when a member has already been recognized that we seek the unanimous consent of the House to see if she can present another petition.

Does the House give its consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

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, if Questions Nos. 108, 114 and 119 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Speaker's Ruling

[Text]

Question No. 108—**Hon. Wayne Easter:**

With regard to the Enforcement and Disclosures Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), for the years 2003 to 2013, inclusive, by year: (a) what is the budget of the Directorate; (b) how many people work at the Directorate; and (c) what training does CRA staff receive in the prosecution of cases against overseas tax evaders?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 114—**Hon. Mark Eyking:**

With regard to human trafficking in Canada and the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (NAPCHT): (a) how many charges have been laid under human trafficking specific offences in the Criminal Code since 2005 and what were they; (b) how many convictions have there been of human trafficking specific offences in the Criminal Code since 2005 and, in each case, (i) what was the person convicted of, (ii) what was the sentence, (iii) for a person being convicted of one or more offence, what other offences (if any) in the Criminal Code was the person charged with and convicted of, (iv) what was the sentence for each conviction for offences in the Criminal Code; (c) was there consultation done with stakeholders, non-governmental organizations or other interest groups in the development of the government's NAPCHT and, if yes, (i) with which stakeholders, non-governmental organizations or other interest groups, (ii) did the stakeholders, non-governmental organizations or other interest groups make recommendations to the government, (iii) what were these recommendations, broken down by each stakeholder, non-governmental organization or other interest group, (iv) which recommendations did the government incorporate into the NAPCHT, (v) which recommendations did the government not incorporate into the NAPCHT and why were they not incorporated; (d) what metrics will the government use to evaluate the effectiveness of the NAPCHT and who developed these metrics; (e) what are the metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the Human Trafficking Taskforce led by Public Safety Canada and who developed these metrics; (f) are there reporting mechanisms in place to report on the effectiveness of the NAPCHT and, if yes, (i) what are these reporting mechanisms, (ii) when is the first report expected, (iii) how often will reports be made, (iv) will these reports be made available to the public and, if not, why not; (g) are there reporting mechanisms in place to report on the effectiveness of the Human Trafficking Taskforce led by Public Safety Canada and, if yes, (i) what are these reporting mechanisms, (ii) when is the first report expected, (iii) how often will reports be expected, (iv) will these reports be made available to the public and, if not, why not; (h) what are the costs of this plan, broken down by year and expense; (i) how much has been allocated for the last five years and under what authority or authorities; (j) in what way(s) does the plan address the needs of victims of trafficking; (k) what specific funding is dedicated to the victims of trafficking and how is it accessed; (l) what sentencing models were considered in the creation of human trafficking offences; (m) which of the models in (l) is most effective and how is effectiveness measured and/or defined?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 119—**Mr. David McGuinty:**

With regard to "tax fairness" measures and changes to tax regulations announced in Budget 2011, in which the government claimed that these changes "will yield \$240 million in savings in 2011-2012, rising to about \$1.0 billion by 2013-2014": (a) what savings has the Canada Revenue Agency realized, by year, as a result of the implementation of these measures; and (b) which measures yielded these results?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

• (1020)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that a request for an emergency debate on the mortality of bees might not be something that the House would usually engage itself in, but I want to bring this forward as an emergency debate because Health Canada and others have all noted over the last two years an increasing mortality rate of bees, which is unusually high.

Why is that important to Canadians? It is because one third of our food sources are pollinated by insects, primarily by bees. There is not much greater emergency than not eating. There is a variety of reasons put forward by experts as to why this is happening, but for the last two years it has been happening and it has been a massive kill.

The reason I am asking for an emergency debate now is that this is effectively the last time that we will be able to engage in debate for the next six weeks. Over the next period of time, the farmers will be buying their seeds. They will also be buying pesticides, so if we have a debate in late January, early February, there is not much that Health Canada or the Government of Canada could do because the seedlings will be prepared, the pesticides prepared, the farmers will be prepared. Therefore, we will have another crop rotation through 2014, the effect of which is to postpone the ability of the Government of Canada or anyone else for that matter, to do anything about it until 2015.

The cumulative effect of this increased kill rate on bees is quite significant to our food chain, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask you to give serious thought to this being the last opportunity that we in the House have to discuss this issue. I am not proposing solutions. I think this is a complex issue. I think Health Canada at this point is on top of it, but at some point, and I would hope sooner rather than later, we may have to take actions such as the European Union has taken and such as the United States is considering to deal with this issue.

That is the basis for an emergency debate tonight, sir, and I hope you will favourably look upon it.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood for raising this matter. While I have no doubt the importance of it to a great many people, I do not think it rises to meet the threshold for an emergency debate.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-3, an act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act.

PRIVILEGE

LETTER TO THE HON. MEMBER FOR TERREBONNE—BLAINVILLE

The Speaker: The Chair understands the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons will be rising to add comments to the question of privilege raised earlier this week.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): You are quite correct, Mr. Speaker. I do rise today to respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

The essential facts are that the hon. member sent out a householder, which prompted a critical letter to her, which was sent by one of her constituents.

In her presentation, the hon. member cited page 111 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which advises that the recourse for any member who feels defamed is to go through the courts. She then quoted from page 96 of O'Brien and Bosc, which refers to limits on the freedom of speech protections extended to members.

Let me offer another quotation from page 111 of O'Brien and Bosc:

A Member may also be obstructed or interfered with in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions by non-physical means. In ruling on such matters, the Speaker examines the effect the incident or event had on the Member's ability to fulfil his or her parliamentary responsibilities.

In her presentation, the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville did not refer to any proceeding in Parliament in respect of which she was obstructed or intimidated.

The very next sentence in O'Brien and Bosc is, therefore, extremely instructive:

If, in the Speaker's view, the Member was not obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties and functions, then a *prima facie* breach of privilege cannot be found.

Given the nature of the complaint, which is that of a letter from a constituent to a member of Parliament, let me quote from some relevant precedence.

Madam Speaker Sauvé, on March 1, 1982, at page 15474 of the *Debates* ruled that:

Parliamentary privilege is based on the need to protect members from any action tending to obstruct, or intimidate them or impair their effectiveness in the discharge of their duties. It is not designed to protect them from criticism, however strong, even when the language used might be excessive.

In a later ruling, on October 12, 1983, at page 27945 of the *Debates*, Madam Speaker Sauvé observed that:

If Members engage in public debate outside the House, they enjoy no special protection.

Finally, given that the constituent in question is a member of the other place, it is relevant to refer to page 278 of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition:

Since the two Houses are wholly independent of each other, neither House can punish any breach of privilege or contempt offered to it by a Member or officer of the other.

That passage was favourably cited by Mr. Speaker Parent, on November 16, 1999, at page 1288 of the *Debates*.

Privilege

In conclusion, it is clearly established that members of Parliament cannot claim privilege to protect them from external criticism, even when it is in response to their own efforts to communicate with their constituents. Being criticized for one's position is just part of the job for any individual who seeks elected office.

I can assure the member opposite, the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville, that every member in this Parliament, in fact I would argue every member of any parliament in the world, has from time to time been criticized for the positions that he, she or their party takes. Sometimes that criticism may be extremely harsh. Sometimes that criticism may be hurtful. Quite frankly, sometimes that criticism may be unfair.

However, the point is that when we enter the political arena, when we seek elected office, we put ourselves up to the level of criticism experienced by the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville. In other words, that is part of the public and political discourse in the political world in which we operate.

I have no doubt the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville was offended and was probably hurt by the comments from the member of the other place. However, if all members in this place raised points of privilege any time they received an unwelcome communication from one of their constituents, I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, we would not get much done in this place. In fact, probably every day there would be a member, or members, rising to make such complaints and raise such points of privilege.

● (1025)

One can simply imagine that our days would be filled with nothing but points of privilege based on angry constituents' letters. Although we may not like them, it is part of our job to accept them, and they are certainly not, in my view, a point of privilege.

In short, I would say that a *prima facie* case of privilege is neither made out in this case nor would it be reasonable, given what could occur after that point.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had to step out of the House temporarily for a conversation, but I will look at the comments from my friend across the way.

This is an important issue for New Democrats and I would imagine it is an important issue for all members of Parliament. It is territory we have not been in before where members from the Senate, as has been suggested, take a coordinated attack on sitting members of Parliament and the legitimacy that each member of Parliament has to take their place here. This is a significant thing for all of us. If this is the pattern that our colleagues in the Senate wish to take, questioning the legitimacy and integrity of members of Parliament and their ability to perform their work on behalf of those who elected them to this place, then it is something I would imagine concerns all parliamentarians regardless of political orientation.

In this case, the senator in question talked about a coordinated effort, going to the Speaker of the Senate, your equivalent, Mr. Speaker, to talk about how to perform this attack on a sitting member of Parliament. This should raise even further concern for all of us, again, regardless of political orientation.

Government Orders

It seems to me that this is an issue that the government should take seriously and not take a partisan stance. It should take a stance on the legitimacy of the House of Commons to do our work, as opposed to those in the other place, in the Senate, who arrived there only by the grace and favour of a prime minister.

I will read the blues of my friend's comments across the way and will seek, if there is an opportunity today or tomorrow, to address some of the points made by my friend.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

FIRST NATIONS ELECTIONS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

• (1030)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-9, an act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain first nations and the composition of council of those first nations. While it is not usual for the Chair to provide reasons for the selection of report stage motions, in this case the Chair would like to provide a brief explanation.

As is the case with several standing committees considering bills, members who are not members of a caucus represented on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development were invited to participate in the committee's clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-9. However, due to an administrative error, these members were not informed of the deadline to submit amendments for the committee's clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

[*Translation*]

As members know, consistent with the note to Standing Order 76.1(5), the Chair would not normally select motions that could have been presented in committee; however, in light of the circumstances in this case, the Chair has decided to select these motions.

That being said, while the Chair certainly appreciates some of the challenges presented to members who are not part of a recognized caucus to follow the work of numerous committees, the Chair would nevertheless strongly urge all members to continue to ensure they are prepared to avail themselves of all opportunities presented to them with respect to committee proceedings on bills.

Accordingly, Motions Nos. 1 to 3 have been selected for debate at report stage. They will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP), seconded by the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-9, in Clause 3, be amended by replacing line 1 on page 3 with the following:

“(b) the Minister, having obtained the opinion of a representative sample of electors of that First Nation, is satisfied that the majority of electors of that First Nation believe that a protracted”

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-9, in Clause 3, be amended by adding after line 9 on page 3 the following:

“(1.1) For greater certainty, the Minister may not add to the schedule the name of a First Nation that governs its elections according to the custom of the band, unless such an addition has been approved in accordance with prevailing customary practices.”

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-9 be amended by adding after line 31 on page 12 the following new clause:

“REPORT

41.1 Within one year after the coming into force of this Act and every three years thereafter, the Minister must prepare a report on the implementation of this Act and its effects on elections of band councils and elections on reserves.”

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your earlier explanation as to why it is that the amendments are coming forward at report stage. I appreciate your consideration of the fact that due to a clerical error at committee, we did not receive notice to bring amendments forward at committee.

I must say that I am pleased. I have found that the so-called invitations to committees circumvent rights. I am able, at this point, to speak at report stage to what is a very significant flaw in this bill.

As everyone in the House knows, Bill C-9 initially came to us through the Senate as Bill S-6. It is a first nations elections act. Except for everything I am attempting to amend this morning, it is a good bill. It provides more precision in first nations elections. The bulk of the bill is a result of recommendations that came from first nations themselves, specifically from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, which represents the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy first nations of Atlantic Canada.

Before I move to my amendments, the intent of the good parts of the bill was to provide greater precision, to create set terms, and to provide for those first nations that had already opted in to elections under the terms of the Indian Act. That is worth underlining. The recommendations that came from the first nations themselves were to apply only to those first nations that had themselves already opted in to elections under the Canada Elections Act and not to those many first nations that elect their councils through traditional customs and methods other than under the Indian Act.

In any case, I will set aside the parts of the bill that are acceptable and will focus only on the amendments you have just read before the House of Commons. They both go to correct the mistakes that are found in clause 3 of the bill.

Government Orders

Parenthetically, I want to note that today is international Human Rights Day. Today is the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Vienna Declaration, which brought respect for human rights to the entire community of nations. Why is it relevant that we are looking at a first nations elections act? What about that is relevant to the fact that ironically, today is Human Rights Day?

The problem with this bill and the sections I hope to correct is also found in other bills that have come forward from this administration, such as the bill, not yet tabled, on first nations education. It is also found in bills that have been tabled, such as the NWT devolution in Bill C-15 and this bill, Bill C-9. What they all have in common is a failure to respect the constitutionally enshrined right of first nations to be consulted about changes that impact them directly.

In Bill C-15, in addition to the NWT devolution, which everyone supports, there are substantial changes to the Mackenzie Valley regulatory systems that are part of first nations agreements and treaties, without consultation with or the consent of first nations. This brings to mind that these changes are actually questionable constitutionally under section 35 of the Constitution, as interpreted in many Supreme Court decisions. From the Haida case and the Delgamuukw case to the Marshall case, it is clear that first nations in this country are protected under section 35 of the Constitution. Further, the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility, a constitutionally enshrined obligation, to consult with first nations.

In this case, we have something that is, in my view, outrageous. Under paragraphs 3(1)(b) and (c), there are two ways in which the minister may impose upon first nations, based on his or her own discretion, a different system for elections within the first nation. What could be more critical in touching on the rights of first nations than changing the way a first nation conducts its own internal elections?

These two paragraphs that are objectionable state that the minister may add the name of the first nations to the schedule of first nations that must conduct their elections as under the act. In other words, the bulk of the act is for first nations themselves to opt in and request to be seen under these sections of a new Indian Act procedure found in Bill C-9.

•(1035)

These are the two exceptions that are outrageous. Paragraphs 3(1)(b) and (c) state that the minister may add the name of a first nation to the schedule if:

(b) the Minister is satisfied that a protracted leadership dispute has significantly compromised governance of the First Nation; or

(c) the Governor in Council has set aside an election of the Chief and councillors of that First Nation under section 79 of the Indian Act on a report of the Minister that there was corrupt practice in connection with that election.

As the Canadian Bar Association aboriginal law subsection has pointed out, the bill does not provide any guidance as to what the corrupt practice might be or what threshold the minister has for making this change.

It is offensive in a couple of ways. One is that it appears to apply to not only those nations that have already opted in to the current version of the Indian Act in their internal elections. It would apply to those first nations that have explicitly not wanted to operate under

the Indian Act and that operate under their tradition and custom. Again, what could be more directly a denial of rights?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples says very clearly, in article 3:

Indigenous people have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 4 states:

Indigenous people, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal or local affairs...

These changes in paragraphs 3(1)(b) and (c) strike directly at the heart of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and further offend the Canadian Constitution section 35.

I would have wished that these sections had been corrected inside the committee, but I hope that today we may give them fair consideration.

What is being proposed in amendment 2, line 9, on page 3 is a proviso to protect those first nations that have been operating under their own customs. The amendment states:

For greater certainty, the Minister may not add to the schedule the name of a First Nation that governs its elections according to the custom of the band, unless such an addition has been approved in accordance with prevailing customary practices.

In other words, self-determination is protected within those first nations that have already decided that they will not opt in under the Indian Act. They will preserve that ability, which is enshrined in our Constitution and enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is therefore further protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which today has its 20th anniversary.

I appeal to my colleagues in the House to assess this amendment. It would preserve the right of first nations that are operating their elections under traditional custom to maintain those rights.

The second amendment would deal with this quite discretionary notion of protracted leadership disputes. We have seen instances when the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, or DIAND, as it was in the past, decides that, for instance, the ministry does not like the way things are going, to use an example, in the first nations of the Algonquin of Barriere Lake. The dispute is real, and the minister ends up taking sides. That is hardly respect for a first nations' right to self-determination and self-government.

In this amendment, I propose that the minister may not take that step unless, having obtained the opinion of a representative sample of electors of that first nation, those within the first nation are satisfied that they need to have the minister take this step. Otherwise, we have made a mockery in Bill C-9 of first nations rights under our constitution.

Government Orders

We will again do so if we fail to change Bill C-15 for the first nations within the Northwest Territories and some that are affected in neighbouring areas of the Yukon, where the first nations in that area have competing land claims issues. The leadership of the Tlicho as well as the Dene and other nations are appealing to have the bill split apart so that we can proceed with NWT devolution without offending first nations rights.

There is a pattern here with this administration of, bit by bit, chipping away at some fundamental rights in this country that are constitutionally enshrined and further protected by international law.

With the amendments I am proposing, we could pass Bill C-9 in good conscience. We would know that we had contributed to good governance, fairer elections, and clearer terms. However, to pass it as it is would be an insult to first nations, and this House would be violating our own constitution.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on her speech.

I agree with what she says about accountability, good governance and transparency with regard to this bill. Of course, these are ideas and concepts that we can all agree on. We do not have a problem with the bill so much as the illegitimate way in which the government imposed it on first nations.

I would like to ask my colleague if the governments that usually like precedents so much could not have followed the example of the Government of Quebec in 2002. That was when Premier Bernard Landry of the Parti Québécois signed the peace of the braves with the Cree. Before the government imposed a bill or did anything, there were proper negotiations with the first nations to ensure that the legislation truly came from both nations.

The Conservative government could have followed that example and sat down and legitimately negotiated, nation to nation, with the first nations in order to reach an agreement on this bill. Then we would not be here today talking about the government's paternalistic way of imposing its views and options on the first nations with regard to good governance.

• (1045)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague very much, especially because he helped me this morning by seconding my amendments.

The federal government is clearly imposing its own solutions on the first nations in complete violation of the aboriginal rights entrenched in Canada's Constitution. The importance, the very unique situation and the rights of Canada's first nations must be respected.

It is true that the other governments have made an honest effort to negotiate on a nation-to-nation basis in the past. That is how to work together respectfully.

I find it truly appalling that we are here this morning, faced with a bill concerning elections for Canada's first nations without consideration or respect for their fundamental rights.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her speech. I should talk about the magnificent riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, even though it is not as magnificent as mine.

She spoke about International Human Rights Day. I was at the international conference on human rights in Vienna, in order to make the entire world recognize that aboriginal peoples are also peoples, just like all the other peoples on the planet. We have fought that battle for a long time.

However, I would like to come back to an issue that I find to be important in this debate on relations with Canada's first peoples.

It is an important issue because, at present, we are celebrating the life of the extraordinary Nelson Mandela, who defeated a system that made no sense.

Does my colleague not have the impression that with the Indian Act we are dealing with almost the same system as apartheid in South Africa?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. I am absolutely astonished to learn that he was at the Vienna conference in the earliest days of recognition of respect for international human rights.

It is indeed very ironic that this bill concerning our aboriginal peoples is based to an extent on the apartheid system in South Africa. It is precisely as he said. This is a serious issue for aboriginal peoples, the first peoples in Canada, and for the Government of Canada. We must find another way to work together.

It is clear that we have to reform the Indian Act. The best way of crafting this bill is not obvious, but any changes made to Canada's legislation on aboriginal peoples must prioritize what the first peoples want and need.

It is unacceptable to propose such a solution as Bill C-9, which was imposed on first nations. Relations are based on respect between the two nations. Relations between the federal government and first nations must be based on respect.

• (1050)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to also take a few minutes to speak to Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations. Like my colleague, the leader of the Green Party, we were not asked to submit amendments to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. That is why the Speaker has given us permission to discuss these amendments at this point, the report stage.

Government Orders

Bill C-9 provides an alternative to the regime in the Indian Act governing the election of chiefs and councillors in certain first nations. As I said earlier when I questioned the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, the Bloc Québécois of course fully supports the transparency, accountability and better governance that Bill C-9 provides for.

The problem does not lie in the bill itself or in the improvements that I just mentioned. The problem is the way in which the government imposed its solutions and opinions on first nations. That is what I am going to try to demonstrate, and I am also going to introduce my amendment in the next few minutes.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the provisions in the bill limiting terms of office for chiefs and councillors to a maximum of four years, stating that the election of a chief or councillor may be contested before a competent court, and setting out offences and penalties. However, we oppose the fact that the Conservative government did not consult the first nations before going ahead with these major changes to the Indian Act. These are unilateral changes. As usual, the government acted paternalistically. When I say the government, I am talking about successive federal governments. The government paternalistically imposes unilateral changes on the first nations when it should know that we must talk, nation to nation, when working with aboriginal peoples.

Everyone agrees that there must be more transparency, not only during elections but also during each elected official's term of office. The government can give us examples of times when band councils or other councils, chiefs, leaders and councillors—as we see in any population—failed to govern appropriately. That is not the issue. First, as the Green Party member said earlier, this bill originated in the Senate. However, before introducing this bill, the government should have done what the Government of Quebec did in 2002, which I will talk about in a moment. The government should have sat down and talked, nation to nation, in order to come to an agreement and propose changes. The government would have no doubt received the unanimous support of the House for the bill had the bill first been approved by first nations.

However, we cannot do anything without considering the first nations rights affected by this bill, the direct impact this bill will have on the structures in the communities themselves and how that can affect the communities. The first nations are not opposed to the changes proposed by the federal government. They want to be consulted and be involved in the decisions that will have a direct impact on them. That is a dialogue as opposed to a monologue.

We are asking the Conservative government to sit down and have a dialogue, negotiate, come to an agreement with the first nations. We do not want it to have a dialogue of the deaf or a monologue in which it tells the first nations what is good for them. This goes back to what I was saying earlier when I described the attitudes of federal governments since the very beginning. They have shown a paternalistic attitude towards the first nations.

I used the example of the peace of the braves, and I want to come back to that. This was a historic agreement signed in 2002 by the Cree and the Government of Quebec, led at the time by Bernard Landry, the leader of the Parti Québécois. The peace of the braves is a good example. There were some economic improvements for many

peoples, but there are still many problems. I am not saying it is a good example because everything was fixed. It is a good example of how negotiation can lead to a formal agreement, so that the people and communities involved agree with the changes being proposed and carried out. The Quebec National Assembly recognized the first nations as nations, and the peace of the braves is an agreement between nations, as Bernard Landry pointed out when he was interviewed by a journalist who was reporting on what had become of the peace of the braves several years later.

● (1055)

I would like to remind the hon. members that Quebec made a commitment to involve the Cree in northern development and give them \$4.5 billion over 50 years. In exchange, the Cree put an end to certain land claims. A few months later, Quebec signed the Sanarrutik agreement with the Inuit, which is designed to accelerate economic and community growth in Quebec's far north.

The peace of the braves and the agreement signed between Ottawa and the Cree of Eeyou Istchee in 2008 brought prosperity to Quebec's Cree. The 16,000 aboriginal people of James Bay now have some of the highest levels of disposable personal income in Quebec, according to a 2011 article in *La Presse*.

However, as I said, things are far from perfect. There are still health problems and a housing shortage. There is still an unequal distribution of wealth, despite the fact that some people are better off. Right now, 92% of Cree youth interrupt their schooling before earning their diploma or some sort of certification. As I said, the agreement was not a cure-all, but it is a good example of negotiation. That is the point I wanted to make about the peace of the braves.

I do not understand why governments that, generally speaking, like precedents so much could not have used that 2002 agreement as a precedent to create a bill that is endorsed by the affected first nations.

Now, I want to talk about the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, which long ago developed a consultation protocol that the government is supposed to follow when drafting bills or taking action that affects first nations in Quebec and Labrador.

This protocol includes the duty to consult and accommodate first nations before taking actions that could have a negative impact on their interests. Such actions include the modification or adoption of legislation, policy-making, planning processes, the modification or adoption of resource allocation regimes and the approval of specific projects or resource allocations. A consultation and accommodation report must be prepared.

Government Orders

The protocol also includes the duty to conduct consultation and accommodation follow-up. What is more, as provided in the consultation plan, provision must be made for the establishment, funding and operation of mechanisms for follow-up, mitigation measures and compliance monitoring with respect to the contemplated action.

The first nations have therefore already set out a procedure that should be followed by the other levels of government, including the federal government. It is really unfortunate that the government decided to bypass the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador's consultation protocol. We hope that the implementation of this bill is not harmful to first nations communities.

Members of the House agree that the Assembly of First Nations' protocol was not followed and that the bill will be passed because the government has a majority. That is why the Bloc Québécois is proposing to amend the bill in order to, at the very least, respect the second part of the protocol, which involves assessing the bill's impact on first nations communities. We are therefore proposing the following amendment to clause 41.1:

Within one year after the coming into force of this Act and every three years thereafter, the Minister must prepare a report on the implementation of this Act and its effects on elections of band councils and elections on reserves.

I would like to once again speak about precedents. People might ask why we are proposing this when such a measure has never been implemented before. However, this type of measure has been implemented before in Bill C-21, which pertained to the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and affected first nations. At the time, the government had a minority. The opposition required that the changes be reviewed every five years and the bill was passed by a majority vote. A precedent therefore exists.

In closing, we would have also liked to introduce funding and mitigation measures, but unfortunately, they would have been deemed inadmissible. However, we would like to take this opportunity to urge the government to implement those sorts of measures.

• (1100)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. I also appreciate the fact that he talked about the peace of the braves model, since I personally took part in those negotiations. I am glad that model is being used as an example, not only for the rest of the country, but for the rest of the world.

My question has to do with that model. I know that the relationship between aboriginal peoples and this government is completely broken.

Last year, after the January meeting, we were promised a new era of improved relations between this government and first nations. That is not the case today.

I wonder if the hon. member can tell us what is stopping Quebec from using the peace of the braves agreement as a model in its dealings with the other aboriginal peoples in the province, for example.

Why not move in the same direction with the Innu, who still do not have an agreement, with the Atikamekw, who still do not have an

agreement, and with the Algonquins, who still do not have an agreement like the peace of the braves or the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement?

What is stopping Quebec from doing the same thing with those nations?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. Indeed, we would certainly never try to give him a lesson on these kinds of negotiations.

My colleague's question is really one for the Government of Quebec to answer. He is well positioned to go and meet with Quebec's Minister of Aboriginal Affairs or even the Quebec premier and speak with them about solutions that he has probably already come up with.

In the case of the Government of Quebec, first nations have been recognized as peoples since René Lévesque. I think these negotiations need to take place.

We would say the same thing to the federal government, the Quebec government and the governments of all the provinces and territories.

To answer the hon. member's question, or the allusion he made about the federal government keeping its hands in its pockets and not keeping its promises, I would say that the Conservative government is unfortunately shopping for votes.

The government selects clients to please in order to ensure that come election time, there are enough people in the ridings to elect Conservative members.

I think the first nations are not a clientele worth pursuing to the Conservative government. This is a government that uses marketing and determines how to operate based on the votes it can get. I get the impression that the Conservative government has made a purely political calculation and thinks that it does not need aboriginal peoples in order to win the election.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I understand what my colleague means about the Conservatives' current political strategy, that it is based solely on marketing.

However, I find it hard to imagine that a federal government would ignore its constitutional obligations to hold serious and essential consultations on Bill C-9. No effort was made to hold such consultations.

Why does my colleague think that the Conservative government does not feel it is necessary to comply with the Constitution Act?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. It is always hard to put ourselves in the government's shoes, when we do not think or operate the same way. We can only imagine or assume what they were thinking.

This government has no regard for the Constitution or even democracy and has not had any since being elected in 2006. Things became even worse when it won a majority in 2011.

As I was saying, aboriginal, first nations "clients" are not worth sitting down with properly, in accordance with the Constitution, as my colleague said.

Government Orders

With or without the Constitution, the government must sit down with the first nations to make the necessary changes with respect to transparency, good governance and accountability, but also to ensure that this is a real agreement signed between the two peoples. That is what should have been done.

Why did the Conservatives not do that? We are constantly asking them that. They have done the same thing in many other cases, such as the appointment of Supreme Court justices. There is a whole slew of cases where there is no respect for the Constitution, the Quebec people, first nations or Canadians in general. They might negotiate a little more, but only when there is something in it for them and it can win them votes. Otherwise, it is my way or no way.

● (1105)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. 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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 defeated. I therefore declare Motion No. 2 defeated.

(Motions Nos. 1 and 2 negatived)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 3. 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.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

(Motion No. 3 negatived)

● (1110)

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage without amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 of the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

An hon. member: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, December 9, 2013, the House will now proceed to the third reading stage of this bill.

Hon. John Duncan (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved that Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to support Bill C-9, the First Nations Elections Act.

As with everything we do as a government, this bill is about delivering results for Canadians and addressing the priorities of Canadians. That most certainly includes the priorities of first nations citizens of this country, who are currently living under the outdated and discriminatory Indian Act.

As the matters this bill addresses are a priority for first nations, this bill is about empowering first nations across Canada to take charge of their own destinies. In fact, it may easily be said that this is not a government bill, but a first nations bill. The government did not go to first nations with a proposal; first nations came to the government with one. They said, "Here is a serious problem and here is how the government can help us solve it." Bill C-9 before us today is not the result of the government consulting with first nations; it is the result of first nations consulting with first nations.

I should add that our government was proud to provide the support and coordination that helped first nations engage with each other on a national basis. As the hon. member for St. Paul's stated at a recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development:

Government Orders

We think this is an excellent example of bottom-up legislation.

I could not agree more with the Liberal member.

In that regard, I must recognize the initiative and determination of two first nations organizations that have played a pivotal role in bringing us to this day and giving us the opportunity to provide a legislative framework that is indisputably better than what first nations have been saddled with for decades. This is not simply duplicate legislation to the Indian Act, but an effective, accountable, and responsible option for first nations communities.

It was over five years ago that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, led by then Grand Chief Ron Evans, and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, with the support of our government, began the efforts that ultimately resulted in the bill that is before us today. They saw the need for electoral reform. They had good ideas for improvement. They consulted with the leaders of their local communities and with the people who live in those communities.

Half a country apart, they found a remarkable similarity of opinion emerging from these consultations. The quality and scope of these consultations and the close parallels to be drawn between their recommendations encouraged the government to ask the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs to lead a national consultation process. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs covered the west and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs handled the east.

The consultations included not only chiefs and band councils; from the beginning, they recognized the importance of including individual grassroots band members across Canada. Both organizations gave the consultations a prominent place on their websites. They published their recommendations and explained what they meant and what they intended to achieve. A simple feedback form enabled and encouraged individuals to provide their thoughts and opinions on the initiatives being proposed. I would point out that this feedback carried considerable weight with the government in developing this bill.

As a result, in supporting Bill C-9, we have the opportunity to endorse not only its contents, but the truly inclusive and collaborative process that led to its creation, an example of how first nations people, their leaders, their representative organizations, and the federal government can work collaboratively to find solutions and achieve a common goal.

It is difficult to imagine a more laudable goal than ensuring that all first nations citizens have the opportunity to participate in free and fair elections. However, the fact is that for many first nations governed by the outdated and archaic Indian Act, the most basic premise of democratic government does not exist. The failures of the Indian Act with respect to elections are well known and long-standing, dating back to the early 1950s. Even before the development of the bill before us today, more than 75 first nations communities decided to take matters into their own hands and move out of the Indian Act to design and implement their own community election codes.

●(1115)

Adoption of the proposed electoral system described in the bill is voluntary. The bill is intended to provide an option for first nations that may not have the capacity to develop their own community election code or that simply want a turnkey and accountable election code that they can opt into.

Let us consider some of the shortcomings the bill would address.

The Indian Act, for example, specifies the chief and band councillors are elected on a two-year term. This is hardly conducive to the design and execution of the long-term strategies needed to achieve key priorities. It also means that first nation communities are in almost constant election mode. By the time a first nation council has been elected, sworn in, got a handle on its responsibilities and started the actual process of governing, it is time to start campaigning for the next election.

Bill C-9 would enable first nation communities to fix that by implementing four-year terms for elected officials, bringing them into line with what is the norm for most other jurisdictions in Canada and allow time to not only learn the job but time to actually do the job.

In addition, the bill would enable different first nations to hold their elections on the same day, a common election day. This innovative idea came directly from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and it is a good one. With terms of office beginning and ending at the same time, common election days would make it easier for groups of first nations to collaborate and present a common front in business development endeavours and other shared priorities.

Longer terms in office and the potential to set common election dates are important improvements, but any elected official's term is too long if the legitimacy of the electoral process is in question. This is perhaps the most damaging impact of the electoral system provided under the Indian Act.

The sort of checks and balances that allow most Canadians to take for granted the results of an election as an accurate reflection of the will of the people are virtually non-existent in the Indian Act. We have all heard of cases of vote buying and other irregularities, irregularities that even if they do not effect the legitimacy of an election can cause it to be perceived as such.

There is little in the Indian Act to discourage these practices. They can be carried on with little or no consequences. This not only undermines confidence in government, but leads to paralyzing appeals of election results.

Under the Indian Act, anyone who does not like the way in which an election has turned out can simply appeal the results by providing a sworn affidavit to the minister regardless of the merits or validity of their arguments.

Government Orders

In addition, the appeal system under the Indian Act is slow and administratively cumbersome. Many months can go by before a decision is rendered. In the majority of cases the appeals are dismissed, but in the meantime with its legitimacy in question, a first nations government comes to a virtual standstill. Projects and initiatives that can benefit a community may be stalled. To add insult to injury, the Indian Act includes the paternalistic provision that all appeals are decided by the minister.

Similar to the provisions of the Canada Elections Act, Bill C-9 contains provisions that would minimize the likelihood of corrupt election practices by setting out specific offences and specific penalties for those convicted of committing those offences. Instead of appealing to the minister, an elector would file an appeal in federal or provincial court. These appeals would be addressed by the courts, just as they are for federal, provincial and municipal elections. This provision would minimize the potential for frivolous appeals and at the same time remove the minister from the process.

Local law enforcements could lay charges for corrupt activity in connection with first nations elections and they would have the backing of the courts to impose fines and jail sentences on those convicted.

Again, these are the kinds of protections, which most Canadians take for granted, that help to ensure the electoral processes are accountable, consistent and effective and that help to provide for political stability that is so essential to economic growth, job creation and higher standards of living.

The first nations elections act would also encourage greater citizen engagement in the political process by eliminating anomalies and other peculiarities that the Indian Act's lack of clarity has allowed to happen.

The nomination process is perhaps the most glaring example. Under the Indian Act, the same person can run for chief and for council in the same election. Not only can the same person run for both positions, the same person can be elected to and serve in both positions. That would change under Bill C-9.

● (1120)

In addition, the Indian Act provides little guidance on other aspects of the nomination process. If he or she wishes, one person can nominate dozens or more candidates for any position. It is not unheard of for a first nations voter to be handed a ballot with more than 100 candidates listed on it, sometimes without the knowledge of those candidates. This hardly encourages citizens' engagement. That too would change under Bill C-9.

The first nations elections act would enable first nations to implement a more stringent nomination process. First nations could impose a fee of up to \$250 to discourage the nomination of candidates who were not interested and were simply running as a lark.

Under Bill C-9, first nations would also have the authority to require all candidates nominated to accept their nomination in writing so the names of people with no desire or interest would not appear on the ballot. Other provisions in the bill would enable the development of regulations to address frequently expressed concerns about the potential for abuse in the distribution of mail-in ballots.

In conclusion, I would point out that neither this provision nor anything else in the bill goes beyond what is the norm for most Canadians. Through the consultations led by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, we have learned that first nations citizens want to have the option to divest themselves of the Indian Act provisions and to a new consistent and accountable system similar to that which is enjoyed by all other Canadians.

I would emphasize again that adopting the first nations elections act would not be mandatory for first nations. Bill C-9 is intended to provide an option for those first nations that are having difficulty with the status quo. They may want a more robust electoral system than what is proposed under the Indian Act, but may not have the capacity to design their own. They may have a community electoral system in place that is not working as well as they had hoped. This is an option and it would be flexible. Many of the provisions themselves would be optional, the nomination fee, for example, so it could be tailored to the specific circumstances of individual communities. It is an option that first nations themselves have asked us to provide.

I am confident all members of the House understand and support the belief that a strong, robust electoral system that assures elections are free and fair encourages citizen engagement and promotes good governance. I would urge all members to compare the option the bill would provide to first nations with the electoral system currently provided for in the Indian Act. The problems allowed by the Indian Act's lack of clarity could be exceptionally damaging.

Let me give the words used by Mr. John Paul, executive director of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs in a recent appearance before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. He said:

—the Indian Act election process is very ruthless. It is not a nice process. It is not pretty, and it's very vicious in terms of how it gets played out in a community. It negatively impacts a lot of people in the community.

Too many first nations have been struggling under the kind of electoral system described by Mr. Paul. It is why Mr. Paul and first nations leaders and individuals across the country came to the government with a plan to give those first nations a better option, the option that Bill C-9 would provide. The bill is the result of a true grassroots movement and it reflects broad and legitimate consensus among the people who want this option. I would argue that our task is as clear as it is simple. We need only to step out of the way.

● (1125)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I give my speech, I will touch on a number of problems with the bill. However, I have a specific question for the parliamentary secretary with regard to the consultation process.

He is absolutely correct that the Assembly of National Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress did carry out a consultation process, but in the briefing that was provided to committee members, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs had a frame that it carried out the consultation under. It was the fact that it was looking at new election legislation affording a common election date and longer terms of office.

Government Orders

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs initially supported going forward, but then when the draft legislation was presented, it contained additional clauses that would impact directly on first nations autonomy. Those included a continuance of the minister's ability to intervene with an election process, the fact that first nations were forced to the courts and a regulatory process that was not inclusive of first nations involvement.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. Why did the Conservatives not take that draft legislation back to first nations and then gather input on what they were proposing?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, the key part of this, which I spoke about numerous times during my speech, is the opt in nature of the legislation. There is nothing in the bill that compels first nations to adopt this mode of election for their first nation. If they prefer to operate under the Indian Act system, that is their right. If they have a custom election code, that is their right.

If first nations do not like what they see in the bill, they are free to continue on the same course they have currently. There is nothing to compel first nations to adopt this new elections act, although we hope many will choose that option.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the parliamentary secretary and he made numerous references to the outdated, the archaic to the discriminatory Indian Act and I agree entirely with him.

Could we hope that the government is mustering the courage to scrap the Indian Act and to start over with something that is much more responsible from a government point of view and that brings us into 21st century?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, certainly this government is taking steps where we can to provide options for first nations to get out from under the Indian Act. When we look at things like the First Nations Land Management Act, which removes the land related provisions for first nations who want to opt in, the legislation allows first nations to opt out of the Indian Act election system.

The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River proposed Bill C-428, which removes several sections of the Indian Act. As the Prime Minister said during the Crown-First Nations Gathering, simply blowing up the Indian Act would leave too big a hole. We need to work with first nations to systematically dismantle the Indian Act and that is what we are doing here. We are taking the election provisions and giving first nations the option to get out from underneath the paternalistic Indian Act.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most of us in the House live in communities where economic prosperity in some respects is taken a bit for granted. Any government has a responsibility to help put together a legislative framework to attract economic prosperity in communities. Bill C-9 is one of those vehicles in which we need to look at in order to help do that.

One of the issues we need to look at, which the parliamentary secretary talked extensively about, is the elections act and reformation of it. Could the parliamentary secretary highlight quickly the main benefits he feels are in Bill C-9.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, as we have seen, the two-year terms under the Indian Act election system right now simply do not provide enough time for a first nations chief in councils to propose any consistency in their community to allow them enough time to implement a plan perhaps on which they campaigned. The election cycle is too short.

However, the highlights of the legislation, the benefits for communities that choose to opt in, will include reforming the electoral system, which is too often open to abuse, close loopholes in the nomination process so only folks who want to be on the ballot are actually on it and provide the tools and mechanisms to discourage the abuse of the mail-in ballot system.

Right now there are too many loopholes in the Indian Act system. There is too much potential for abuse, and certainly we have seen cases of that abuse. This legislation for those first nations that opt into it would certainly close those loopholes and provide more certainty for those first nations.

● (1130)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary's speech carefully to hear when he would explain why in a bill, where I agree with him overall, it was about first nations opting in. Overall, it originally came from the Atlantic Policy Congress and the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs of Manitoba. However, without consultation with those first nations, or any other first nations in Canada, we have these two provisions, which I note that my hon. friend from Vancouver Island North, when he was the minister responsible, said that he would not use these provisions.

Why on earth does the bill contain 3(1)(b) and (c), which states that the minister may at his or her own volition, without consultation, force a first nation to operate under this scheme if it believes the minister comes to the conclusion there is a protracting leadership dispute or if cabinet has set aside an election claiming corrupt practice which is not defined.

These are imposition terms that even apply to first nations currently operating under customary practice. I would agree with every word the parliamentary secretary spoke, except that he omitted explaining sections 3(1)(b) and (c).

Mr. Mark Strahl: If I had had more time, Mr. Speaker, I would have been happy to talk about that.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development currently has the power, under the Indian Act, to take a first nation that is operating under custom code elections and put it back into the paternalistic Indian Act system. This is not a new provision. He has that power, currently, to move a first nation from the custom code into the Indian Act system if there is a protracted leadership dispute.

The member is right. The former minister from Vancouver Island North is correct. This is rarely used. This provision to move a first nation from a custom code back to the Indian Act system has been used three times. This is not a new provision. It is used extremely rarely, only when all other options are off the table and when there has been a protracted leadership dispute.

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This is not a new power, and it is used with extreme reluctance, but when the grassroots people of a first nation are not being served because of a protracted leadership dispute, the minister, under the current system, will act.

This provision would allow him to move a first nation from a custom code into this new, improved act instead of putting it back into the flawed Indian Act system. Bill C-9 would allow for that transparency, that robust electoral process, instead of putting the first nation back into the paternalistic and flawed Indian Act.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9 is a good step in the direction of good government on reserve, as the member has already indicated.

We have all heard of electoral abuses during some band elections and their effects on the stability of the affected communities. We are all committed to working to empower first nations communities to become self-governing and to ensure that they experience the economic growth and increased job opportunities that most Canadians have come to expect.

With that in mind, an opt-in framework is more suitable than a mandatory one-size-fits-all approach to band government. Would the member please comment as to why?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for London North Centre, who is a leading person in this government on the issue of the status of women, ensuring women's equality and that women are protected on reserve. I know that is why she was such a strong proponent of our changes to the matrimonial real property rights of first nations women living on reserve.

An opt-in approach is obviously preferred because for too long, too many governments have imposed their systems on first nations. This bill takes a different approach. It says that only those first nations that wish to participate in this system would opt in. It would be a decision made by the band council.

This collaborative approach is the approach that we would like to see going forward in working with first nations, because when first nations buy in and take the initiative, as they would under Bill C-9, we all benefit.

• (1135)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak on behalf of New Democrats. We will be opposing the bill.

Before I go into the reasons, I want to start with the parliamentary secretary's last comments about the opt-in provisions, because they are really an important piece of the bill. The member continues to emphasize this is an opt-in piece of legislation, but he does not speak to the fact that the minister still has the power to force a first nation, whether it is currently under the Indian Act or under custom code election, into the new elections act proposed under Bill C-9. If the government was truly interested in moving away from a paternalistic approach, it would have moved toward something like a first nations election commission that would have removed that responsibility totally from the minister's hands.

The government is not moving away from a paternalistic approach. It is continuing with it, and that is evident in a number of clauses in this piece of legislation. I am going to touch on those.

I want to give a bit of historical perspective.

Where we would agree with the government is that the current Indian Act is a paternalistic system. I want to refer to a Senate report dealing with first nations elections, which gives a bit of a historical perspective, and I want to read it into the record. It says:

The Indian Act's restrictive electoral system and imposition of federal control was widely resisted among Indian bands. Despite Indian opposition to the Indian Act system of elective government, attempts to suppress traditional forms of government continued. For example, in 1880, West Coast potlaches, an important means of affirming leadership and social order, were banned, and, in the 1920s, the Canadian government jailed the traditional leaders of the Haudenosaunee and installed an Indian Act council.

The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples illustrated the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal peoples with respect to the imposition of the Indian Act elective system. The Report concluded that: "for the past 100 years the [Indian] Act has effectively displaced, obscured or forced underground the traditional political structures and associated checks and balances that Aboriginal people developed over the centuries to suit their societies and circumstances". Thus, the Indian Act electoral regime is rooted in a colonial mentality, and amendments to the Act, from the perspective of First Nations, do not erase colonial control over band elections.

I would argue that this particular piece of legislation, despite the fact that it contains some things that first nations wanted included, continues on that colonial mentality route.

In a legislative summary document, there is more that has been indicated in terms of history. I just want to put on the record other proposals that could have been much more effective. The summary document indicates that:

A key attempt at policy reform was the 1998-2001 Assembly of First Nations/ Indian and Northern Affairs Joint Initiative on Policy Development.... The Joint Initiative arose in response to the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and was intended to provide policy options on key themes: elections, membership, additions to reserves and environment. With respect to elections, a key proposal was to develop community leadership selection systems and remove the application of the Indian Act as a preliminary measure to re-establishing traditional forms of leadership selection. To accomplish this, the following steps were suggested: community-level development of custom codes; community development of local dispute resolution procedures; the establishment of regional First Nations capacity and advisory bodies....

Then it went on to talk about opt-out provisions and so on.

This very good report from 1998-2001, a very in-depth process, was completely disregarded when it came to developing this piece of legislation.

Government Orders

In my question to the parliamentary secretary, I did touch on the stakeholder engagement process, but I want to touch on this aspect again, because it is a key sticking point. Canada did indicate, after a great deal of pressure, its commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. At the time the Canadian government finally caved and agreed to support it, it indicated it would take next steps. To date, we have not seen those next steps. However, one of the clauses in the UN declaration calls for “free, prior and informed consent”. What we heard in testimony at the committee was divisions among first nations about whether this piece of legislation was the way to go. Again, the opt-in clause makes it possible for a first nation that does not demonstrate free, prior and informed consent to this piece of legislation to be forced under this legislation.

● (1140)

When it comes to stakeholder engagement, the briefing document says with regard to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs:

With funds provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (the Department) between January and March 2010, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) held community engagement sessions in the province's *Indian Act* First Nations to obtain views and comments on the development of new election legislation affording a common election date and a longer term of office.

Those are the two key points in that consultation process: a common election date and longer terms of office. Of course, the proposed legislation contains much more than that, so the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs has withdrawn its support for the piece of legislation that is before the House.

The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs was also provided an opportunity. It has continued to support this particular piece of legislation despite some concerns about some of the clauses in it. It wants to go forward with it.

However, I would come back to the matter of free, prior and informed consent.

I want to turn to the Assembly of First Nations, which I think made a very good intervention. Its representative said:

The AFN supports enacting the full decision-making authority by First Nations governments empowered by their citizens. In choosing and designing mechanisms for the fulfillment of this authority, care needs to be taken that new barriers or new oversight mechanisms are not being created, further vesting control in the office of Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Of course, as I pointed out, in paragraphs 3(1)(b) and 3(1)(c), that continued ability of the minister to interfere and intervene is still there. There were other mechanisms that could have been brought forward, which I will also touch on in a minute.

I want to turn to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the appearance of Grand Chief Derek Nepinak before the committee. He raised specific concerns that other first nations have also raised regarding the legislation before us. He said:

Bill C-9 does not accurately reflect the discussions and decisions made by first nations leadership in Manitoba as it:

purports to grant the authority to the Minister to subjugate a First Nation to the act without the consent of the people. ...

This authority defeats the objectives of the AMC recommendations *ab initio* that First Nations retain their right to opt-in.

This clause would allow the Minister to subjugate those bands that have previously opted out of the Indian Act to custom election procedures.

This clause would allow the Minister to subjugate bands to the Indian Act who have never been subject to the Act, in violation of their inherent and constitutionally protected rights.

“Protracted leadership dispute” is not a defined term and leaves broad discretion to the Minister.

The AMC did not make any such recommendation.

Once placed in the schedule considerable obstacles and costs limit the ability of a First Nation from being removed from the schedule of “participating First Nations.”

On that point, I will refer back to clause 3(1)(a), which would allow a band to opt in to the legislation by making a request through a band council resolution. By simple band council resolution, the band could have a first nation participate and opt in. However, if a first nation finds that this piece of legislation does not work for it and wants to opt out, under paragraphs 42(1)(a), 42(1)(b), and 42(1)(c), it is a far more complicated procedure.

Under this section of the proposed act, for a first nation to opt out if it finds it does not work, the community election code has to contain an amending formula. Also, the question of a first nation being removed from the act must be submitted to a community vote in which electors must vote by secret ballot. The minister would only remove a first nation from the act if at least 50% of all eligible electors cast a vote and if a majority of these votes were in favour of the community election code and the removal of that schedule. The requirement to publish the code would ensure that all members would have the opportunity to read and become acquainted with the election code.

It is a simple band council resolution to get in, but it is a complicated process to get out. It comes back to the fact that what the government really wants to do is force people into this proposed piece of legislation and then not let them get out of it if it does not work for them.

Grand Chief Nepinak went on to talk about section 3(b). He said the draft bill also:

Purports to grant the authority to the Governor in Council to set aside an election “on a report of the Minister that there was a corrupt election practice in connection with that election.” ...

This preserves broad discretion of the Minister to determine that “there was a corrupt practice” methods and criteria not outlined under the proposed legislation.

The AMC did not make any such recommendation.

Once placed on the schedule considerable obstacles and costs limit the ability of a First Nation from being removed from the schedule of “participating First Nations.”

● (1145)

In subclause 3(1), “protracted leadership” and “corrupt practice” are not defined. That gives the minister a fair bit of authority to determine who he or she will force under this new election act.

One of the things that had been asked for by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs was a common election date for the first nations that chose that. Grand Chief Nepinak indicated:

...it does not provide Manitoba first nations with the policy of adopting a common election day and an extended term of office. The bill has a quasi common election day that does not mirror the recommendation of the AMC.

Election dates are found in clauses 5 and 6. Grand Chief Nepinak's written brief to the committee stated:

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The bill does not achieve a common election day with an extended (four year) term for all Indian Act elections, and does not give options for current Custom Election Bands to opt into a common election day with an extended four year term.

The other piece that has caused concern for many first nations is the restriction of the appeal process to external courts. Grand Chief Nepinak also pointed out:

This bill limits appeals to what it calls courts of competent jurisdiction and lists federal or provincial court as the only courts of competent jurisdiction.

This bill ignores the rights of First Nations people to develop their [own] legal institutions including a local appeal process.

This bill ignores the AMC's request for a local appeal process.

This bill requires individuals to finance cost prohibitive legal counsel and go to court for appeal rather than a less expensive and less complex and intimidating and local appeal process.

The requirement that First Nations appeal to federal and provincial courts is associated with a reduction [in] administrative and financial responsibilities of the Minister and constitutes a conflict of interest for the Minister, i.e. the Minister is not without motive to subject First Nations to the new legislation.

In the conclusion of the brief Mr. Nepinak presented to the committee, he said:

The proposed legislation is simply an addition to the Indian Act, citing the same authority and the same definitions, granting broad additional powers and discretion to the Minister and his office. The legislation mingles only one recommended change from the AMC and the illusion of another and the resultant product is another piece of federal government owned legislation that perpetuates Canada's self-proclaimed authority and chips away the rights of First Nations.

The fact that the government talks about a consultation process, and that the bill was broadly supported and whatnot, flies in the face of the testimony that was heard in committee.

I want to touch on one of the recommendations that came out of the Senate report, "First Nations Elections: The Choice is Inherently Theirs". Recommendation 3 states:

That the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in collaboration and consultation with the appropriate First Nations and/or Treaty Organizations, take immediate steps to establish a First Nations Electoral and Appeals Commission, operating on a national and/or regional basis, empowered to hear appeals arising from First Nations elections and to promote and strengthen First Nations electoral capacity.

That is a very important recommendation that has come from a number of different bodies. I referred earlier to the JMAC study that was conducted. The Senate held numerous hearings across the country to hear from first nations and their representatives about some proposed changes to the Elections Act. That is explicitly not mentioned in this piece of legislation. It would be an important avenue to provide community members an appeal process that would perhaps allow for appeals to be heard in their own language, because as far as I know, there are not too many federal or provincial court judges who speak many of the indigenous languages across this country. It would be a process that would respect custom codes and some of the traditions that our first nations communities may have. That is one recommendation that was not included in the bill.

I want to touch on the regulatory process for one moment because much of the changes in the act will happen under regulations. Under the regulatory process, clause 41 states, "The Governor in Council may make regulations with respect to elections, including regulations respecting...".

● (1150)

It includes appointments, powers, duties, removal of electoral officers, a requirement that electoral officers be certified, the manner of identifying electors of a participating first nation, the manner in which candidates may be nominated, the imposition by participating first nations of a fee on each candidate, the manner in which voting is to be carried out, the removal from office of a chief or councillor of a participating first nation by means of petition, the holding of by-elections, and "anything else that by this Act is to be prescribed".

Those are pretty broad powers that are outlined in the regulatory process. Unlike other regulatory processes where there was at least some notion of working with first nations, nothing in Bill C-9 talks about how first nations will be consulted and accommodated with regard to developing the regulations. This is a very important piece.

For the benefit of people who may be listening, by and large, most regulatory processes have absolutely no parliamentary oversight, as we have seen in other regulatory processes. The regulations are posted, there is a period of time where the public can comment, the regulations are modified based on public input, and then they are adopted. Neither parliamentary committees nor Parliament has any oversight on those regulations.

With the broad range of activities that would be included in these regulations, it is very important to include in this piece of legislation exactly how first nations will be included in developing these regulations, which will have a direct impact on how elections are conducted in their communities.

Part of the reason why that process needed to be spelled out was that there is a deep and abiding mistrust of how the government conducts consultation, or what it is now calling stakeholder engagement because it knows that stakeholder engagement does not meet the test of what the Supreme Court has laid out for a consultation process.

We only have to look at Bill C-9 to find that the government took a step toward a consultation process by engaging the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress, but then expanded the scope of the bill to that which was not included in the terms of reference for the consultation process that was conducted by AMC and APC.

We also have before us a draft piece of legislation called the first nations education act, which is another example where there is a deep mistrust of the consultation process. In fact, today there will be a rally on Parliament Hill protesting the government's direction on consultation.

Government Orders

At the committee stage, the NDP did propose a couple of amendments that would have improved the bill. We voted against clause 3(1)(b) and (c) at the committee stage so that they would be removed, which would remove the ministerial jurisdiction. We also asked for a report back to Parliament because we want parliamentary oversight on the regulations. That proposed amendment, which was voted down in committee, proposed that for any amendments made to the regulations or the schedule respecting the additions or removals of first nations, orders of the minister respecting the coming into force of any community election codes, names of persons who have been convicted of an offence under the act and penalized accordingly, applications submitted to a competent court regarding the contested election of the chief or council of a participating first nation and any decision made by that court, petitions for the removal of office of the chief or councillor, the minister must cause a copy of the report to be tabled in each house of Parliament on any of the first sitting days after which the House is sitting, and so on.

We did attempt to improve the piece of legislation before us so that at least it would reflect some of the concerns and provide some parliamentary oversight both to the regulatory process and the legislation itself.

Based on those facts, we cannot support the bill. If the government wants to claim it is engaging in consultation, it must adhere to the principles around consultation, which means that it must provide the resources and the information. It must listen and then take what it hears and make sure it is reflected in the legislation that comes before the House.

• (1155)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very indebted to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, and to know that the official opposition, like the Green Party, feels compelled to vote against Bill C-9, even though it initiated with consultations, as she quite rightly pointed out, on two key points, narrow points, of lengths of terms and timing of elections. We have seen the bill morph, thanks only to paragraphs 3(1)(b) and (c), into something that shows a disrespect for bottom-up control, and a disrespect for section 35, the inherent rights of first nations.

As the official opposition attempted to do in committee, as I attempted to do earlier this morning at report stage, would the hon. member share with me any insight she has as to why, with such good intentions from the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations and the first nations chiefs of Manitoba, we could not just get the changes that the first nations themselves requested so that we could vote for it, instead of having this imposition of ministerial discretion on what should be inherently first nations self-government?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is puzzling. I believe that it just continues with the approach the current government has consistently taken with regard to first nations, which is lack of recognition around inherent rights, lack of movement on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, continued lack of appropriate consultation. This has clearly been outlined by the Supreme Court. We have seen it in the first nations water bill. We saw it in the matrimonial real property bill. We are now seeing it in the elections bill that is before the House and we are seeing it in the first nations education act.

We could always remain eternally optimistic that during this comment period where first nations, schools, parents and organizations across this country have an opportunity to comment on the first nations education act, that the proposed piece of legislation that is before first nations would substantially change, based on that input, but that is not the track record of the government.

Once again, first nations have come to the table in good faith. The AMC, the APC, came to the table in good faith, yet they end up with a piece of legislation that at least the AMC cannot support.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan on her dedicated work on the files for first nations.

I am glad she mentioned the proposed national first nations education legislation, because I have in my hands a letter that was sent to me by Chief Ted Roque of the Wahnapiitae First Nation. Yesterday, I just happened to be speaking to Walter Naveau, the chief of the Mattagami First Nation. The last time I was on the Whitefish first nation, Steve Miller, who is the chief out there, spoke to me. Marianna Couchie also had a telephone conversation with me about the education legislation a couple of months ago.

It is all the same story over and over again. It is the lack of consultation with the first nations. It is the same thing with the bill, Bill C-9. It always comes back to lack of consultation. Now the Prime Minister is facing a mini-revolt in his own caucus because of lack of consultation with his own members.

Would the hon. member comment on the fact that the Prime Minister never consults, not only with his own members but also with first nations?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nickel Belt has been working very hard with the opposition arising to the first nations education act. It is just another example of a top-down paternalistic approach, imposing more bureaucracy and reporting on first nations, not listening to the very valid concerns, disregarding the successes that many first nations are having. I just want to point to B.C. and the first nations education act that was passed in B.C. in this House a number of years ago. It is showing some very good results, but that could all be wiped out by this supposed first nations education act.

With regard to consultation, it is very interesting, because I would say that the Conservatives acknowledge that they are not doing consultation because they do not call it consultation anymore. They call it stakeholder engagement.

As I mentioned earlier, they know that stakeholder engagement does not meet the test clearly outlined by the Supreme Court in a number of court decisions about the duty to consult, and I might add, the duty to accommodate. They know that it does not fit, so they are clearly not doing the consultation.

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• (1200)

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan commented a couple of times that the bill does not provide for an independent appeals commission. The fact is that this bill would remove the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development from the elections appeal process altogether. Instead, it would put this power back into the hands of the courts, where qualified, independent judges could hear these appeals.

This is how the provincial and federal elections appeal processes are decided. Is the member suggesting that this is not an improvement from the status quo?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, what the member is suggesting is that the government actually listened to first nations, who asked for a first nations commission, something like the Elections Canada commission, which would be a place where people could go with concerns.

That is what first nations have asked for, not what the government is imposing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan for her good presentation on this bill.

For 23 years I was involved in the negotiations that resulted in the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 3 of the declaration speaks about the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status. The word “freely” is important in this sentence.

Perhaps my colleague could help me understand something about this debate. It is now 2013, and today we are celebrating the life of a very important person in our history, Mr. Mandela, who brought down the apartheid system in South Africa. It seems that what is being proposed here today, to borrow the parliamentary secretary's words, is the improvement of a system that closely resembles the system that existed in South Africa. Can she explain to me why we are going in that direction instead of letting aboriginal peoples freely determine their political status?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for that very important question. It is a question that I would rightly like to put before the government.

First nations have culture, traditions, history and electoral processes that have been in place in many nations from time immemorial. They have long traditions of self-governing, yet we continue to see an Indian Act system that undermines and devalues those systems of governance.

It would seem that any move toward changes in elections should be governed by first nations. It should be proposed by first nations. It should be developed by first nations. This act simply does not do that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one shakes one's head as one begins to discuss this bill. It could have

been a bill that got total support across the House, but yet again, the government just cannot help itself. It cannot help itself putting something in that is just totally unacceptable to the majority of first nations in this country.

It is about two paragraphs. First, all the government had to do was not put in the two paragraphs. Second, it should just remove them. The official opposition, ourselves, the Green Party and everybody else is asking the government to take out these two paragraphs. Then, we would finally get on with a piece of legislation that is first nations-led and supported by the House of Commons. It could have begun a process of first nations being able to suggest and put forward legislation that Canada would expeditiously get through and support. Instead, the government just cannot help itself.

The process began, as we say, in a good way. It began with the development of a bill that was led by first nations. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs worked closely with the government to develop a new set of optional election rules that first nations could choose to adopt and remedy many of the flaws in the Indian Act election rules.

Both the AMC and APC facilitated consultations. Many of the issues identified by those consultations are reflected in Bill C-9.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

The bill would establish a regime, alternative to the one under the Indian Act, to govern the election of chiefs and councillors of certain first nations. This regime would provide that chiefs and councillors hold office for four years; provide that the election of a chief or councillor may be contested before a competent court; and set out offences and penalties in relation to the election of a chief of councillor.

The bill would also allow first nations to withdraw from the regime by adopting a written code that sets out the rules regarding the election of the members of their council.

[*English*]

Both the AMC and APC-facilitated consultations, again, are reflected in those clauses. That is why it is such a shame that the minister has insisted on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory with this current version of Bill C-9, with these two totally aggravating paragraphs.

While much of the bill is largely based on the consultations with first nations, the Conservatives included elements that were not supported during the consultations, and have refused to remove or amend the offending sections.

Yet again, the government does not seem to understand what consultation means. Consultation means actually asking the opinions of first nations and listening, and then doing what has been suggested. Instead, yet again, the government thinks consultations are actually information sessions that just tell first nations what they are going to do and presume they will just accept it, love it and live with it; and indeed, it is the ultimate paternalism to put in these two paragraphs that give the minister these unprecedented powers.

Government Orders

In particular, Grand Chief Nepinak, grand chief of the AMC, has highlighted the minister's ability to bring first nations under the legislation without their consent. As we know, the AMC was one of the proponents of this bill and now the grand chief is seriously clear that the lack of a first nations appeal process and the conduct of draws to resolve tie votes in elections for band council chiefs and councillors are areas of real concern.

However, what is most appalling is Grand Chief Nepinak's first point, which was the minister's refusal to keep the bill truly optional, unlike how it was sold during discussions with first nations.

In fact, Bill C-9 would give the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development broad discretionary powers that go against the opt-in nature of the legislation. The opt-in nature of this legislation had total support, and instead the Conservatives have inserted these two paragraphs.

In paragraphs 3(1)(b) and 3(1)(c), the bill would provide the minister with explicit powers to bring a first nation, currently under the Indian Act system or a custom code, under Bill C-9 when the minister finds "...that a protracted leadership dispute has significantly compromised governance of that First Nation", in paragraph 3(1)(b), and the Governor in Council has, under section 79 of the Indian Act, set aside an election of a first nation on the basis of the minister's finding of "...corrupt practice in connection with that election", in paragraph 3(1)(c).

Given the opt-in nature of Bill C-9, it is completely unacceptable that the Conservative government has included a clause that would provide the minister broad discretion to force first nations under the act. Forcing first nations under an act is not exactly opting in. Opting in is what first nations agreed to in their support of this legislation. Now we have clauses that would allow the minister to force a first nation under Bill C-9.

The minister's power grab has turned what could have been a positive tool for first nations governance into unnecessarily divisive legislation. In fact, one of the two initial first nations partners in creating this legislation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, is now strongly opposed to the bill. Further, while the level of consultations may have been sufficient if the bill were truly voluntary, opt-in legislation, the minister's insistence on inserting discretionary powers to force a first nation under the bill means that much broader consultation across the country would have been required.

According to the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs' report on the engagement process, the level of feedback received from first nations was uneven across the country and, the report notes that little or no feedback was obtained in Ontario and Quebec. This may well be because, in a truly opt-in piece of legislation, the first nations understood that they would have the ability to opt in or not. The fact that now the nature of this legislation has totally changed, giving the minister these unprecedented powers, means this level of consultation is totally unacceptable.

AFN regional chief, Jody Wilson-Raybould, representing the AFN before the Senate on this bill's predecessor, stated:

In terms of clauses 3(1)(b) and (c), I believe that if those clauses remain in the bill, the consultation of which you are asking for clarity and the depth of consultation you are seeking would be greatly increased if those clauses remained, or the obligations would be greatly increased if those clauses remain in this bill.

She went on to say:

If those clauses are removed, it is simpler. The bills become simpler and the consultation would not be required in that this is a First Nations-led initiative and it's entirely optional, which it is not right now.

Although there are other improvements that could have been made, such as creating a new independent and impartial first nations elections appeal body instead of relying on the courts, returning the bill to a truly optional piece of legislation would have made it more acceptable.

Grand Chief Nepinak told the aboriginal affairs committee, while he still had concerns over the bill, "I think it does become a little more palatable if you remove that broad discretion of the minister".

If the Conservatives had agreed to our proposed amendment to remove this discretion, this would have been a much more acceptable piece of legislation to both first nations and the Liberal Party. The minister has suggested this power is necessary to fill a gap that would be created if he did not have it. He also stated that if he is going to impose an electoral system on a first nation, as he currently can under the Indian Act, he would prefer to impose this one.

● (1210)

What the minister does not seem to understand is the inherent paternalism in that statement. The minister does have similar powers under the Indian Act. However, this legislation was sold as purely opt in during all of the consultations. The minister is essentially saying that unilaterally changing the fundamental character of the bill is acceptable if it gives him a better option when he decides to step in.

This new optional legislation should not be used as a vehicle for the minister to have another option when imposing any electoral system upon a first nation.

Further, the degree of discretion the minister has given himself is truly worrying. The terms "protracted leadership dispute" and "significantly compromise government" are not defined in the legislation. These terms, which would trigger the minister's ability to impose the legislation, are therefore extremely broad in nature.

This is not, as the parliamentary secretary tried to frame it at committee, the "ability to opt in" and as he stated in the answers to the questions in this debate so far.

Government Orders

This is clearly the ability of a minister to impose a set of rules on a first nation that has not chosen to adopt it. This is therefore not opt in legislation. This is not voluntary legislation. This is legislation which would give the minister the ability to force a first nation under the power of this act.

We truly feel this is insulting only because all of the work that the AMC and APC put into this project. Here is this impressive piece of work that was generated bottom up by the AMC and the APC. It is really upsetting to us, as the Liberal Party of Canada, to have to impose what could have been a very important precedent in first nation generated legislation because of their inability to remove these two egregious subclauses in what could have been totally acceptable legislation.

The government's insistence on inserting this ability to impose these rules upon a first nation has really squandered an opportunity to develop practical legislation in partnership with first nations rather than for them. In fact, this was actually led by first nation organizations and this is the way I think all of us believe we should go forward in the future.

It is too sad that the government just cannot help itself. It had a perfect piece legislation, but it had to insert the poison pill to ensure it could be on the wrong side of what was to be the future of first nations, legislation that would affect them and their people in keeping with the Constitution, and the duty to consult in keeping with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the idea of free, prior and informed consent.

Here it was, a first nations' initiative, a first nations' legislation that they put forward, that they consulted on and that everybody was ready to help.

The government cannot help itself. It had to put in some stupid little clause that would ensure we could not support it nor could first nations support it. This is a really sad moment in that there was an opportunity for the government to at least listen to the first nations in the consultation, or remove these clauses at committee or at report stage. No, it is just charging on, forcing this legislation through, which would give this unacceptable power to the minister to force the bill upon first nations that do not opt in, that do not accept or need the legislation in their community,

It is quite clear the government is just continuing in its paternalism, continuing in the way that it has dealt with matrimonial real property, the way it has dealt with the water bill, with the governance act and is threatening to deal with the education act.

• (1215)

I do not know how the Conservative members of the aboriginal affairs committee can continue to listen to witnesses after witnesses telling them not to go forward on this, that they do not agree. Those Conservative members of Parliament continue to not hear anything that is said at committee or anything that is said in consultation and press on forcing through legislation against the wishes of first nations in the country. It is totally unacceptable.

Maybe those Conservatives will come out to the rally at 1 o'clock today. Maybe they will come and hear what first nations and Idle No More have to say about the education act coming up. Maybe they will have a sober second thought when it comes to forcing through

even more legislation against the wishes of first nations in the country.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech.

This is not the first time that she has spoken in the House about the first nations, whom she is very committed to. She is very knowledgeable about the issues facing them.

The member mentioned a number of times that the current Conservative government seems to be failing in its commitment to have a real, constructive dialogue with the first nations.

I would like to hear more of what she has to say about that. Based on her experience, how does she think we could have a constructive dialogue with the first nations?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

It is absolutely essential to hold genuine consultations and to listen to the needs and wishes of the first nations of Canada. The problem with this bill is that it contains a provision that makes consultation voluntary. This means that the consultation, which is very important, will not necessarily be as extensive as consultations on other bills that have to do with the first nations.

It is very sad to see a bill that makes consultation optional. Ultimately, the government will not do the consultation that is needed, since the two other clauses in the bill override that by giving much more power to the minister.

[*English*]

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to provide first nations with the option of holding their elections. They have been asking for this.

The member for St. Paul's stated in her remarks that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs no longer supported the bill. I want to state for the record that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, under the leadership of former grand chief Ron Evans, was instrumental in the development of the first nations elections act. Mr. Evans recently appeared before the steering committee on aboriginal affairs and northern development where he reiterated his support for the bill.

Is the member for St. Paul's suggesting that we should only be listening to the current grand chief and forget about all those first nations that have called for this legislation?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, there are individual first nations members who have put a lot of time and effort into the bill. I respect the work that former grand chief Ron Evans put into the bill.

Government Orders

As we said before, in the original proposed bill, these provisions to the minister were not there. I understand the former grand chief really believes that it is important to go forward with this, in spite of these provisions, but the elected Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs has decided not to. It thinks these provisions are unacceptable and therefore the current leadership of AMC is opposed to the bill. We are listening to it.

I only wish the member would understand that we in this chamber supported the Kelowna accord. I wish you had listened to the Kelowna accord based on what the former leadership of this chamber had put forward.

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to questions, I would like to remind the member and all others to direct their comments to the Chair rather than to their colleagues.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the member has reiterated what we have heard in the House of Commons, time and time again, and that is how in a lot of bills that we study here there is a common thread of ministers having extended decisional power on the direction of some of those bills. I would like her to comment on the paternalistic approach the Conservatives have toward, in this case, first nations.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member asks a very important question. From the apology that the Prime Minister gave in this chamber to the very important meeting that took place last January 11, in terms of the Crown-First Nations Gathering, there was supposed to be a reset. There was supposed to be a new way of going forward that was promised to first nations.

However, this is again unfortunately a continuation of paternalism, which is really a continuation of colonization. It is no longer acceptable. This was one little step the Conservatives could have done in terms of a first nations-led piece of legislation that would have been acceptable. It could have been a precedent. Instead, we have this “father knows best, top down, you will like it, we might need this because there are these generic problems in first nations”. The government does not seem to think first nations can sort this out for themselves.

In nation-to-nation government-to-government relationships, this is unacceptable and a continuation of the paternalism and the reason why the relationship between first nations and the Crown in our country is broken. This legislation would do nothing to put it back in a good way and on the right track.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than one-third of first nations people have in government jargon a “core housing need”, meaning their homes do not meet the most basic standards of acceptability. Only 4% of natives have a university education, one-quarter the rate of the rest of society. One-third of aboriginal people do not graduate from high school, three times the rate of non-aboriginals. With regard to infrastructure, overcrowded houses, lack of running water and inadequate sewage are the norm in many native communities.

As the bill is now, it would give the power for the minister to intervene and declare that self-government and the people who are

elected by their own community are somehow not good enough. Would the bill actually deal with any of those fundamental issues facing people in first nations?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member knows the answer is “no”, but it was an important bill to bring forward because it was led by first nations. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Atlantic Policy Caucus had seen a need and were going to put this forward.

We know if first nations have control over the things that the member mentioned, such as housing, infrastructure, health, governance, all of these things, all of those statistics would actually improve.

In the Chandler Lalonde report out of the University of British Columbia, communities that are back in charge of their government, health, policing, education and doing their ceremonies, the horrible statistics on suicide radically improve. This is really important.

I cannot help but remind the member that the things she mentioned were well looked after in the Kelowna accord, another process that was first nations, Inuit and Metis-led. The Government of Canada supported them in their priorities. Almost eight years later, things would have been in much better shape, including the 10-year commitment to having high school leaving statistics at the same as the Canadian average. That was in the Kelowna accord with the money assigned. Instead we are no further ahead than we were when the Conservatives took office.

• (1230)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to speak in this House on Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations.

I stand with my colleagues in the NDP to oppose this bill in the House of Commons. This bill is very important to me as a New Democrat, but most importantly, as the member of Parliament for Churchill.

In northern Manitoba, I have the honour of representing 33 first nations. These first nations and the leadership of these first nations have often been at the front lines calling for a nation-to-nation relationship with the federal government. They have been at the front lines pointing to the way in which the Indian Act and a colonial system of legislation imposed on first nations has led to nothing but trouble.

These first nations have made clear the connection between the paternalistic attitude of successive federal governments and the way first nations are not able to deal with the serious issues they face at home, such as the third-world living conditions.

Government Orders

They have talked about the way in which, because of the approach of the federal government, they have not been able to get at the table or have had to struggle to get at the table to discuss basic things such as ensuring proper water and sewer services in their communities, ensuring that there is adequate housing for the people who live in their communities, and ensuring that there is equal funding for education in their communities. At every step along the way, these first nations have been told that the federal government and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs know best.

It is 2013, and if there is anything we have learned from our history, it is that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the federal government do not know what is best for first nations. There are many incidents in our history that indicate just that, such as the residential schools, a policy that was supported by the federal government, a policy that was seen by the federal government overtly as a tool of assimilation and as the way to go. We know that it was a policy that has created long-term trauma and damage for first nations people in our country.

We had the Prime Minister, a number of years ago, doing something that many first nations took very seriously. He apologized to first nations, Métis, and Inuit people for the federal government's approach towards them. He committed to a new day, a new chapter, when it came to indigenous people in Canada.

That day has not come. First nations people in Canada are still waiting for that day. Allies of first nations people are still waiting for that day. Instead, the Prime Minister and his government have used that important symbol, the apology, as a tactic to wash themselves of the responsibility and duty to truly change course.

What they did after that apology, and every step along the way, was adhere to the same old paternalistic approach, which is that the federal government knows best. However, it makes it look as if it is engaging in some consultation. We do acknowledge that in the context of this bill, there were discussions and round tables that took place around the country. Unfortunately, the government took the feedback it got at these round tables and basically shelved it.

The government chose the discourse that suited it and came up with a bill that does not reflect the needs of first nations people. It does not reflect the real issues first nations people face in terms of their electoral system.

Instead, what the government's bill would do is give greater power to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to decide how electoral systems exist in first nations. It would take away power and models that first nations people have developed that work for them. The government has made it more difficult in terms of the appeal process.

It is really a slap in the face of first nations people when we are talking about that new chapter.

• (1235)

I have stood in the House far too many times in the last five years to speak out against bills from the Conservative government that would have a negative impact on first nations. I do not speak about them in theory. I have seen what they mean on the ground.

I have visited these first nations. I have heard from people firsthand what it is like to feel as if they still live in a time when paternalism rules the day. I have talked to chiefs who have fought to come to Ottawa to sit at the table with the minister, if they get that meeting. They have poured their hearts out about the pain in their communities, whether it is about housing, water and sewer services, or health care, only to be told to wait longer or that the federal government will come up with something. Instead, all we see, bill after bill, are bills that exclude first nations' voices.

It is great to have a process that listens to people, but if the final result, the final bill and the final piece of legislation, do not reflect what these people said, the Conservative government is not living up to its duty to consult. The constant paternalistic tone of knowing better has a detrimental effect on the ability of first nations to push forward.

Yesterday I was part of the special committee on missing and murdered indigenous women. It is a perfect example of the way the Conservative government is refusing to listen to first nations on the issues that really matter. A constituent of mine, Brenda Bignell, said that we need a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. We are a committee. We are looking for recommendations. Brenda Bignell's recommendation is one we could consider for our report. However, we have already heard from the Prime Minister that he does not feel that there needs to be a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women.

What do we tell Brenda Bignell? She has lost her stepmom, her cousin, and her brother. She talked about all of these stories. Do we say that we want to hear from her but that what she tells us will probably not end up in the end result of what we are doing here? That deeply saddens me. It saddens me to be part of a committee, when I know that the Prime Minister has set the tone on a very important issue for first nations people.

It also saddens me that day after day, week after week, month after month we have proposals by the Conservative government and bills that would change laws in our country that are created without hearing the views of first nations people. The government may have heard them, but the end result certainly does not reflect them. As I said, this has an impact on that working relationship.

Idle No More was a movement that came out as a response to Bill C-9, Bill C-27, Bill S-2, and all of the bills that have come forward that do not reflect true consultation with first nations people. Idle No More was people at the grassroots level standing up and saying "enough". It was the first nations, Métis, and Inuit people and their allies who stood up and said that there is a pattern here and they have had enough of it.

We know that there is a long-term negative impact when it comes to the lack of consultation and the tokenistic approach of picking testimony that suits the government but not actually listening to what everybody has to say. We know that all first nations people suffer when their electoral and governance systems are not allowed to be developed based on what they think is best.

Government Orders

I thought we were past this. I thought that in this year, 2013, we were past this. I thought that after the apology six years ago, we were past this. I thought that after Idle No More, maybe the Prime Minister and his government had gotten the message. Business as usual is not going to work. I thought we were past this, but we clearly are not.

• (1240)

In addition to all of this, what bothers me is that the government uses its bills to divide our society. I have seen how it has done it in the communities I represent.

Parts of my constituency have high numbers of first nations people. Some parts do not. Interestingly, in the last election, the Conservative Party shared literature in the parts of the constituency where not many aboriginal people live that talked about corruption in first nations. It also talked about the chiefs and the councillors and those people who were using taxpayers' money. The government did not engage in a conversation with the people who live on reserve. There were some materials with vague references to accountability and transparency, which are issues we all think are important. Rather, it chose to speak in parts of the constituency and to fan the flames of division and racism. It chose to use examples of legislation to say that it is keeping people in line.

That was not just an election tactic. Unfortunately, it is a governing tactic that I have seen from the government too many times. The Conservatives go out there and use material that says that they know best and will tell the first nations how to run their business. However, they will not invest equally in first nations education or make a difference when it comes to the highest dropout rates in our country. They do not talk about the fact that, on average, aboriginal people live shorter lives than non-aboriginal people in our country. They do not talk about the fact that young first nations women are five times more likely to be killed than young non-first nations women. They do not talk about the fact that, on average, aboriginal people live in more precarious conditions, in poverty, compared to other people in our country.

The government talks about bills that will fix how things get done. The Conservatives will tell aboriginal people how to do it. They will point to a few people who maybe gave some testimony that sounded like what the Conservatives would like to say. They will not listen to people like Grand Chief Nepinak of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, who currently represents first nations from across Manitoba. He said that there are problems and that they have made recommendations, and those recommendations have not been heard.

The government will not listen to Jody Wilson-Raybould, the Regional Chief of the B.C. Assembly of First Nations. It will not listen to Tammy Cook-Searson, the Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. It will not listen to people like Aimée E. Craft, the past chair of the National Aboriginal Law Section of the Canadian Bar Association. The government will not listen to first nations people who live in places like northern Manitoba. It will not listen to people who want to come to the table, want to work on a nation-to-nation relationship, and want to talk about what is best for their communities.

I have heard vague references made by some members about how they have been on a reserve or have worked on a reserve. Somehow that gives them the authority to know what is best.

Thirty-three first nations helped send me to Ottawa. What I have heard from people in my constituency, not just from the leadership but from people on the ground, is that they are still waiting for that new chapter from the Prime Minister. They are still waiting for consultation and for the word of the AMC Grand Chief to be taken seriously. He said that we have to go back to the drawing board when it comes to first nations electoral reform.

We in the NDP agree that changes need to be made, but this bill is not the way to do it. I could take any bill the government has put forward in the last five years related to first nations and raise similar issues and poke holes in the kind of paternalistic discourse it tries to use to divide Canadians and keep first nations at arm's-length. Unfortunately, it perpetuates the problematic relationship that sets so many first nations back. I wish the government would take on some of the serious day-to-day issues first nations people face with the same energy and passion.

• (1245)

Maybe government members could spend some time talking to the chiefs of the Island Lake First Nation. I would be happy to take them on a tour. We could visit houses that do not have sinks because they do not have running water.

Can members imagine that, in 2013? This is their regular house. They have a counter, but where there should be a sink, there is not one because there is no running water. Guess what that means? There is also no bathroom. One has to go to an outhouse.

I remember visiting an elder who had mobility issues due to diabetes. In -30° weather—the way the winter gets in northern Manitoba—he has to trudge out to the outhouse, with mobility issues, because he has no indoor bathroom. This was not 50 years ago; I was there just last year.

I could talk about other instances, such as in communities like Gods River where the chief is extremely passionate about people in his community succeeding when it comes to education. This is a community that has grown significantly over the last number of years, and the school is so overcrowded that the science lab and home economics room have been taken over for regular classrooms. This means that these children are obviously not getting the one-on-one attention they need. It also means that these kids are not able to access specialized programming because the needed classrooms equipped to do that have been dismantled and made into regular classrooms.

Often these kids see a system that has given up on them. They see their chief fighting for them, but they know that, although the chief has gone to Ottawa and Winnipeg fighting for a new school to fit their needs, year after year, that demand is denied, and many lose faith and hope.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, in communities like Gods River, Gods Lake Narrows, Shamattawa and Pukatawagan, too many kids have gone down that path too far and have not turned back. They have committed suicide, fallen through the cracks of our society or moved to urban centres where they have been lost and have never come back.

There would be an opportunity for change. It is not because their chief, their leadership, and people like the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs have not said what needs to be done, but that the current federal government does not listen.

Not only do the Conservatives not listen, but they choose to drive an agenda that suits them. It is an agenda that sucks up wedge issues, pits people against aboriginal people in our country and tells first nations and aboriginal leadership that they do not know how to run their business. It is an agenda that fundamentally keeps us on the path of a history that has only created trouble, is based on paternalistic colonial views and has been proven wrong.

I am proud to stand with a party that seeks justice when it comes to first nations people, which is why we are opposed to Bill C-9, and why we are opposed to so many of the first nation-related bills that the Conservative government has put forward. It is why we are asking for change, for a better future for first nation people and all Canadians.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to commend my colleague's commitment and devotion to her constituents. She speaks about them from experience. I would also like to acknowledge her struggle for the cause of aboriginal women. We are facing not only a broken relationship between the Conservative government and our first nations, but also a totally dysfunctional relationship between this government and first nations women.

I wonder if the member could elaborate further on this issue. Perhaps she could also offer us possible solutions to give a little hope to aboriginal women.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I would also like to thank her for recognizing the NDP's advocacy in support of aboriginal women and their families as well as all missing and murdered aboriginal women.

The government denies the need to ensure justice for the families of missing and murdered women. This is part of its agenda, which opposes the voices of first nations, the aboriginal peoples of our country. As I said earlier, many aboriginal peoples believed the promise made by the Prime Minister six years ago. He said he was ready to begin a new chapter and to work with others to change the colonial and paternalistic relationship that still prevails today.

Investments in the education system are not equitable when it comes to education for first nations. We cannot start a new chapter with Bill C-9. Government relations with first nations are still the same and the way it works with first nations is still the same. That is precisely what needs to change.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague from Churchill is aware that this bill was led by the first nations in her own province.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, under the leadership of former grand chief Ron Evans, was instrumental in this first nations elections act. Chief Evans led an extensive engagement exercise in Manitoba and visited almost all the first nations in the province that hold elections under the Indian Act, to discuss his recommendations and obtain feedback, but he also appeared in committee just last week on this very bill.

Ron Evans also met with first nations organizations in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia and wrote a letter to every chief and council in Canada that holds elections under the Indian Act to explain the recommendations for electoral reform. He remains supportive of this bill and recently wrote to the minister, saying that the proposed first nations elections act would change the way first nations are governed, create stability and credibility, strengthen self-governance and allow first nations to move forward.

Could the member for Churchill please explain why she is opposed to this important first nations-led initiative?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, given that question, I want to take the opportunity to read into the record a quote from the current grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Derek Nepinak, who stated:

This proposal does not fulfill the recommendations put forth by the AMC. It appears to be an attempt by the Minister to expand governmental jurisdiction and control the First Nations electoral processes that are created pursuant to the Indian Act or custom code. I am hopeful that Canada will engage in meaningful consultation with First Nations in Manitoba in order to fix some of the problems, instead of unilaterally imposing a statutory framework that will greatly affect the rights of First Nations.

• (1255)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we speak, there is a large group of first nations people coming to Parliament Hill. They may even have arrived. They are asking Parliament to seriously focus on the needs of children. We know that aboriginals can expect to live, on average, a decade less than other Canadians. In terms of infant mortality, we know that aboriginal children die at three times the rate of non-aboriginal kids and are more likely to be born with severe birth defects and conditions, such as fetal alcohol syndrome. The rate of suicide is six times higher. First nations young people are in desperate need of hope and better education, and that is what the people out on Parliament Hill are demanding.

Perhaps the member could talk about how this bill does not deal with the fundamental questions of respect, self-government and providing hope for the future of first nations people.

Government Orders

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate contribution to this debate and also to this issue for many years. I know that her work as a child advocate here in this province has also been very much connected to seeking justice for first nations children.

Do we need a more obvious message than the fact that aboriginal people are coming to Parliament Hill, taking time away from the AFN assembly where they have serious issues to discuss as well, to call upon us to shape up, to do the job they want us to do?

First nations people in the ridings of so many Conservative MPs want them to do that job, to look at funding for education, to look at employment opportunities, to look at ways in which first nations youth can have hope for the future, can have opportunities in the future.

Why must they come out to Parliament Hill to tell us, once again, and to tell the current government, once again, that it is not doing its job?

The trend, the constant way in which the government has chosen to impose legislation, has failed to consult, has failed to listen to leadership across this country that is saying “We want to work on this; we need to do a better job on this”, the way in which it keeps saying it knows better is appalling. It is not fitting of a government that said, six years ago, it would do things differently. It certainly speaks to its lack of fundamental respect for first nations people, and its ignorance when it comes to the real needs on first nations.

Frankly, I share the sentiments of the people who will be coming to Parliament Hill to tell us that they are watching, that they want change, that they want justice.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise to speak on this topic. I am very proud to rise in opposition to Bill C-9, an act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain first nations and the composition of council of those first nations.

I want to acknowledge at the outset the amazing work done by a colleague of mine from Nanaimo—Cowichan. She has been an amazing advocate for this file, along with my colleague from Manitoba who just spoke.

I am a very optimistic and hopeful person, but there are moments when I despair. When I look at the role of the federal government when it comes to the first nations people, to our aboriginal and Inuit, I think here we are in 2013, the 21st century, and we have people living in our first nation communities that absolutely bring tears to our eyes when we see the way the children live and the way the communities are surviving.

I have had the privilege of visiting many first nation communities in my previous life. Every time I went to those communities, I was so impressed with the strong feeling of community, with the strong feeling of hope that something will change. These communities are asking us the biggest question of all: When will things change and get better for first nations people in many parts of Canada?

Since I have been in the House, we have dealt with a lot of pretty tragic cases. Attawapiskat is a fine example. The report from the United Nations is another fine example. All of the information we

have says that some urgent action needs to be taken on a whole lot of issues to address concerns with the first nations people.

I was pleased when I heard the Prime Minister say there would be a new way of moving forward with our first nation communities. Being a hopeful and optimistic person, that actually made me feel good. However, since I have been in the House and have heard some of my colleagues from the other side on the way our federal government is dealing with the first nations people, none of that has come to light. What we get are lots of words. Words are good because they are a first step, but it is absolutely imperative that we take the next step and the next step in order to put right wrongs that have existed for hundreds of years.

This is the 21st century. We are beyond colonialism, I hope. We talk about respect for our first nations, nation-to-nation relationships, moving forward nation to nation, but in reality, what we have is more paternalism, and “We might have talked with you, and we did, but we know better what will work for you”. It is that kind of paternalism that is at the root of why I am opposed to this piece of legislation.

No one is saying that we do not need to address some of the problems that exist with the Indian Act and the election provisions within it. We agree that we need to make some changes, but those changes cannot be railroaded and they cannot be imposed. Yes, consultations occur, but when the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, not just one person but the assembly, says that this is not good and this does not reflect what we said, then surely it is time to take a breather and go back to try to build consensus and to try to address the concerns that were raised.

● (1300)

Instead, the government is going to say that they talked with them, they had round table discussions and they came, and that they found the APC does support Bill C-9.

We agree that the APC supports this. However, there is not overall support. For the government to say one group supports it and the other group does not and therefore it is going to do it anyway, it seems a little top-heavy and unnecessary. If the government had taken the time to address some of the issues, we would not have this dilemma today. If it had even accepted the amendments, we would not be here debating the bill in this way today.

Everyone wants to see elections fixed, or whatever they are, and to make sure things go right. We agree with that. However, we do have the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs saying this does not cut it. One of the reasons it does not cut it is that to opt-in to this scheme it just takes a vote by the council, but to opt-out is a very cumbersome affair. Surely, opting-in and opting-out should be similar mechanisms.

The other thing is that we know the ministers under this government love to have more and more power centralized in the ministries, but in this, the minister could even impose a first nation to come into this system, even if it decides not to go in. That seems way over the top and totally unnecessary. Once again, what it would do is give far more power to the minister, and in that process, it would diminish the nationhood of the first nation groups that it impacts. We should really be paying attention to that.

The Assembly of First Nations, when it came and gave witness to the Senate, said:

What, in fact, is missing from our toolbox to move beyond the Indian Act is an effective and simple mechanism for a First Nation to remove its core governance out from under the Indian Act when it is ready, willing and able to do so and after its citizens have legitimized governance reform through a community referendum.

Is that really too much to ask for? That seems to capture what would have made the first nations people support Bill C-9. Instead, we would give more power to the minister and then we would move the appeals toward the court system, which is already overburdened. It would be a lengthy, cumbersome and expensive process.

I was so impressed by the first nations people wanting something similar to what we have when it comes to federal and provincial levels of government. All they wanted was the creation of an independent first nation election tribunal, very similar to Elections Canada, yet we cannot even move toward that.

During the time I have been here I have seen legislation after legislation that impacts first nations people. Every time, I have had to stand up in the House and oppose it, yet if it was changed to actually respect the nation-to-nation relationship with our first nations, then I could have supported it.

• (1305)

This bill would have taken very few amendments to get my support as well.

As members know, there are many things, when it comes to our aboriginal and first nation communities, the indigenous people of Canada, that we should be addressing. A lot of that comes from identity and who we are. There are huge issues of loss of language. There are huge issues of isolation. However, there are also huge issues around identity and also of not having that independence that is so critical. With that comes a certain amount of, I would say, mental distress.

As a high school counsellor for years, I am always appalled at the very high levels of suicide among our first nation communities. All I know is that when things should be getting better, in many ways things are getting worse. Maybe things are getting worse now because we can actually see it. Because of our technologies such as television and satellites, we can actually see what is happening in some of our remote communities. I would invite my colleagues across the way not just to drop in but to actually go there and visit people's houses, not the ones that have been specially cleaned for them but visit the houses and some of the seniors and even some of the schools. I would really invite them to do that.

More than that, I would urge our government and our Prime Minister to live up to the words he gave to the first nations people. I can remember the look of excitement and anticipation on Chief

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Atleo's face when the minister made his speech, and I know how full of hope and optimism the first nations people were that this was a way forward. However, I would say that since then the words do not look so shiny. As a matter of fact, they have been muddied because over and over again we have not responded to the needs of the first nations people, nor has the government, despite all its words, respected that nation-to-nation way of moving forward, getting out of colonialism and out of this paternalistic type of governance, and moving into true nation-to-nation governance for our first nations. With that comes rights, and with that comes responsibilities.

However, it is very disturbing for me when we hear some of the comments. For example, children who go to first nation schools should surely get the same dollar amount as the students who go to public schools, K to 12, in Canada. Surely when we have communities up in the north, we have to build into the budget the cost of heating and transportation. If we do not, once again that takes away from the dollars that can be used to educate our first nations' children.

We have a huge responsibility as a nation. As a country, Canada has given me lots. It has given me not only my beautiful children and grandchildren, but an opportunity to have a wonderful life, to teach for many years and now to be here as a member of Parliament. I could not live with myself if, sitting in this House, I did not use my voice to advocate for our first nations people, but not in place of them. We have colleagues in here from the first nations community sitting on this side who will be speaking and have spoken.

• (1310)

As Canadians, we have a responsibility to set things right. We have it within us. We have the words. What we need now is the will to take action, meaningful action not just words for the sake of words that sound good when there is a camera shot, but take real steps to build a strong, meaningful relationship with our first nations people.

Our first nations people are in territories that are very rich in resources. I also know they are very concerned about the environment as each and every one of us should be. If we only talk about extraction of resources without thinking about the impact it is having on us globally, then we do our children a huge disservice.

We need to pay special attention to our first nations people who are raising red flags, who come on television and say "Look around us. The ice is melting, folks. This is not a textbook issue anymore." It is real. It is happening around them. We need to pay special attention. We also need to pay special attention to what we are talking about, and that is our first nations people, our aboriginals and our Inuits.

As the Prime Minister has made a commitment on building a relationship nation-to-nation, we need to have real action to take us forward in that direction.

Getting back to this legislation, I am from the beautiful province of British Columbia. Every one of our provinces is beautiful, as well as all our territories and regions. B.C., my home province, also has as its emblem, "Beautiful British Columbia".

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Most of my knowledge of first nations and their communities is about British Columbia. Jody Wilson-Raybould, B.C. regional chief, Assembly of First Nations, had this to say on clause three:

These provisions essentially give the minister the ability to impose core governance rules on a First Nation, which, if ever used, would be resented by that First Nation, would not be seen as legitimate in the eyes of that nation, and would probably add fuel to an already burning fire. Ultimately, each nation must, and will, take responsibility for its own governance, including elections.

I could not put that more eloquently than my friend, Jody. When Jody says that, she is not using words lightly. It actually makes common sense. As a teacher, one thing I have learned is that when teachers are teaching children, they cannot talk at them, they must work with them, with their learning. We know that about children.

Here we are talking about first nations and surely when we are talking about first nations, we cannot, in the 21st century, be so paternalistic and think that we know better than they do. Even though 50% of the group we consulted was opposed to the changes, the government will make those changes anyway.

Surely this is the time for common sense to prevail and for my colleagues to oppose the bill. Let us send it back and get it fixed, so all of us can support it and respect the nation-to-nation commitment that the Prime Minister made to the first nations people not so long ago.

• (1315)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's speech occasionally touched on Bill C-9. As well she quoted Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould, the B.C. regional chief of the band.

In an appearance before a Senate committee, Chief Wilson-Raybould said:

In conclusion, for nations that want to use them, there is no question that the election rules that have been developed in Bill S-6 and that will be expanded in regulations are superior and more thought through than those under the Indian Act.

Obviously this is opt in legislation. The provision the member talked about where the minister could put a first nation operating in custom code back into the new code envisioned by Bill C-9, that power has only been exercised three times in the history of our country. It is a last resort when there is a protracted leadership dispute where grassroots first nations people are not getting the services that are delivered.

Will the member accept the words of Jody Wilson-Raybould, who said that this was far superior to the Indian Act system, and accept as well that only in the most extreme circumstances where first nations grassroots members do not get the service they require, the minister would intervene?

• (1320)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased that my colleague agrees with me that the final power still rests with the minister to impose this system on first nations and there is no criteria set out for when the minister would do this.

Yes, the bill does have improvements and we are not saying it does not have some good parts to it. However, categorically in there is that the system to opt in and opt out are two totally different systems, which does not seem right to me. They should be the same.

Further, the minister still retains that paternalistic power to opt in any nation when it chooses not to. I do not want to say that ministers could be political, but they could be and use that.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about first nations, I remember the Marshall decision. At the time, Marshall went to the Supreme Court and the first nation got the right to fish, cut wood and work in the forestry. I remember at that time I was in Parliament and the government members were grabbing their heads because they wanted to have powers. It seems to me the Conservatives just want aboriginals on the reserves and not do anything. They do not want them to be self-determined and do things by themselves.

For example, when British Columbia wanted the Nisga'a bill to pass, and the Liberal government at the time supported the bill, the Reform Party or the Alliance Party at the time voted with its amendments. It had 471 amendments to the bill that the first nations wanted. We voted 471 times against those amendments of the Conservative Party, the then Reform Party. We voted from Monday to Wednesday morning to say that we had to respect what the first nation was asking for.

Is it asking too much to say go back to the drawing board? Go back and look at some amendments that first nations will accept. Go back where the Constitution of our country gives them that power. The government has a responsibility of consultation with the first nations. By having a minister just impose something on them goes against the Constitution of our country.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for capturing a historical perspective so well. Once again, here we are that when the opposition brings any amendments forward or even the ones suggested by the first nations people, the Conservatives really cannot have anyone else amend their legislation. They seem to have an allergy to that, to changing their mind once they put something out.

It is a sign of maturity when we can actually listen to the concerns, take them into account and rewrite what we have so it builds consensus and builds that nation-to-nation relationship that the Conservative Party has paid so much lip service to over the last number of years.

We are not asking for too much, nor are the first nations people. All they are asking for is to have the right to determine things for themselves.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for again giving a speech with all the passion and verve she is known for.

I would like to go back to a point that she mentioned repeatedly and knows well because of her experience in education.

What impact does the lack of funding for education have on first nations? Would she care to talk about this particular issue?

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•(1325)

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, it is totally puzzling to me. All my life, I have fought for equity. Equality is sometimes misleading, but equity I can understand.

If we were to see what is happening in our first nations communities and the state of education there, I could put forward a very coherent and economically sound argument that we should be investing more per child right now in order to build true equity and for the sake of social justice. Instead, I am at a loss for words as to why the Conservative government is not even willing to give the same amount per child to first nations for education as it does to children right across Canada.

Surely the amount that is spent on education should not be decided by whether a child is aboriginal or non-aboriginal? However, that seems to be the defining moment for us.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech. I have been listening to the speeches since we started this morning, and there really are two opposing viewpoints.

On the one hand, we have a government that seems to have adopted the policy of taking baby steps, which is clearly insufficient, and on the other we have the opposition calling for a paradigm shift, a new way of looking at relations with the first nations.

Could the hon. member please tell us how she sees the paradigm shift we need to get tangible results? We cannot always do little things and get them wrong. I think now is the time to do big things and get them right. I would like to hear what she has to say about that.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, very simply, let us respect our first nations communities, first nations leadership and first nations people. Let us start behaving nation-to-nation and start putting the words that the Prime Minister has used into action.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9, an act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain first nations and the composition of council of those first nations, also known as the first nations elections act, is what I will be speaking to today.

The bill was first introduced as a senate bill earlier this year and now comes to us at third reading in this House as Bill C-9.

The bill came out of a series of regional round tables centred in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba. The round tables focused on making elections work better for first nation communities.

There is no doubt that there are many problems with how elections currently function in many first nation communities. Indeed, there are problems with how elections function at the federal level in Canada too, including expense claims scandals forcing resignations of sitting MPs and the robocall scandal whereby voters were systematically misled in the hopes of tricking them out of their right

to participate in our democratic process. There is room for improvement on all sides.

A troubling feature of first nations elections on reserves is the low voter turnout. As with other Canadian and provincial elections, low turnout is problematic, and it is a sign of more complex underlying issues that need to be addressed.

In terms of first nations elections, New Democrats agree that there is room for improvement, but we also believe there are some significant issues with the bill. I would like to go into a few of those issues.

Bill C-9's key provisions include an election cycle longer than two years.

We agree this is necessary. We support four-year election terms. With a two-year election cycle, disputes can take most of the two-year mandate to solve through the current appeals process, which lacks rigour, transparency, and procedural fairness.

Another provision in the bill is the ability to have a common election date. This is also a reasonable provision. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs has called for a single election day so that a region can standardize time spent electioneering.

Another provision gives the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development the power to order a first nation with community designed elections to adhere to the new regime.

New Democrats believe Bill C-9 could allow for more effective self-government if it is limited to opt-in legislation, but the current provisions allowing the minister to determine a band's future without consultation contradict the spirit of self-government.

Another provision is for elections appeals through the courts, rather than through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and for penalties for breaking election rules. Let me speak to these. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has spoken in this place about our concerns with these two provisions.

This act would not specifically allow for either an independent tribunal or an electoral commission, similar to what federal and provincial governments have in place. In this legislation, disputes would have to be resolved in the courts. This requirement could mean increased legal costs for first nations, which already tend to be cash-strapped. Why did the government not consider an independent body that would oversee disputes, as was recommended by the Senate, as well as by the joint ministerial advisory committee's report?

I would like to turn to consultations now.

As I said before, New Democrats want to see first nation elections improved, but this legislation would not amend the Indian Act where some of the most egregious powers of the minister reside.

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What concerns me most about the bill is the government's approach to its relationship with first nations. The process seemed to start out relatively well, in terms of the AMC and the APC holding regional round tables on how to improve the elections process. Then, with the support of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, consultations were held on developing new opt-in legislation.

However, as the bill was developed, it seems the government's willingness to work together with others waned. The government had an opportunity to create this legislation in consultation with first nations, but instead it ignored recommendations it received and has refused to make amendments to the bill that were requested by first nations.

● (1330)

The concept of consultation has been disregarded time and time again by the government. Where is the government's commitment to working in consultation with first nations and ensuring consent before legislation is unilaterally imposed?

This strikes me as very similar to some of the issues I worked on in my capacity as deputy critic for Fisheries and Oceans. When the government's omnibus budget bills were introduced, there was much concern over the gutting of habitat protection legislation, as well as a unilateral change to the definition of the term "aboriginal fishery".

We talked to the government, which insisted it had consulted with first nations on these massive changes, but when we talked to first nations, it was clear that the government's view of the term "consultations" is very different from how anyone else would define that term.

One would think "consultations" would mean a somewhat rigorous process whereby input is legitimately sought and incorporated, or at the very least valued, in the decision-making process. However, what I heard was that these consultations often just meant a brief meeting at which government officials informed stakeholder groups of their plans. It was very one-sided. There was no real effort made to gather input, let alone to reflect this input in the final outcome.

The result of this approach is troubling, and we see it with the bill before us today. Without proper consultation, there is a serious lack of buy-in on the final product, in this case Bill C-9. It means complexities and potential issues in proposed legislation are not fully fleshed out.

I, for one, was not surprised to hear the government's legal bills have soared to exorbitant levels over the past few years. The government has made massive changes to dozens of pieces of legislation, and its approach has tended to be unilateral in terms of lack of consultation and lack of proper debate and review in the House.

We have seen dozens upon dozens of time allocation motions. We see that government-controlled committees refuse to incorporate reasonable amendments to problematic legislation, and then they go in camera so that there is not even a public record of their shenanigans. I would prefer that bills be given thorough study and due process so that hopefully the government can avoid these exorbitant legal costs to fix their mistakes. In terms of the omnibus

budget bills, the lack of meaningful consultation with first nations was a key driver in the Idle No More protests across the country.

In conclusion, the Conservative government has promised a new relationship with Canada's first nations, but it is all talk and no action. At every turn, the government prefers to impose legislation without truly consulting with first nations first. First nations have the right to be involved in and consulted on every decision that affects them. The government should work with first nations to solve the problems they are confronting instead of always resorting to knee-jerk paternalism.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan as well as her hard-working staff, who put a lot of effort into understanding this bill and its various propositions and provisions. I would like to thank as well the official opposition critic for aboriginal affairs. She has done an amazing job over the years. My hat is off to her and to her critique of this bill.

While there are a number of good provisions and goals in this legislation before us today, I cannot, in good faith, vote in support of this bill at third reading.

● (1335)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a little confused when he said that the government was unilaterally imposing opt-in legislation. I do not know how one would impose opt-in legislation.

I want to ask him to react to a quote from Ron Evans, Chief of the Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, who stated:

...when enacted, Bill C-9 will change the way first nations are governed, create stability and credibility, strengthen self-governance and allow first nations to move forward...

The current Indian Act election system is not working. It is proven to be weak and creates instability for our communities and their economies.

I know the NDP does not like to support government legislation, but would it maybe take the words of Ron Evans, former grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and current Chief of the Norway House Cree Nation, that he wants this legislation and he wants us to pass this bill so that his first nation can have this option going forward?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, certainly the NDP is happy to support good legislation at any time. In fact, that is the intent behind the amendments and the comments we have made at committee. I think it would be a good parliamentary process if the government actually listened to not only the official opposition but to first nations.

The parliamentary secretary quoted one first nation chief. I also want to add a quote from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Grand Chief Derek Nepinak, who said:

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This proposal does not fulfill the recommendations put forward by the AMC. It appears to be an attempt by the Minister to expand governmental jurisdiction and control the First Nations electoral processes that are created pursuant to the Indian Act or custom code. I am hopeful that Canada will engage in meaningful consultation with First Nations in Manitoba in order to fix the problems, instead of unilaterally imposing a statutory framework that will greatly affect the rights of First Nations.

I think that is something that the government should heed.

• (1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Nepinak makes a valid point. It is something we have talked a great deal about with regard to legislation that impacts our first nations, which is that we have to respect the fact that there is a very strong, able, and capable leadership within our first nations. Far too often we do not allow them to lead the way in legislation, as is required to hopefully enable and foster a better overall relationship.

I wonder if the member might comment on the importance of acknowledging the strong and powerful leadership that is currently in place within many of our first nations and doing what we can to enable them to provide the leadership in making the necessary changes to have a positive impact on our first nation people.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question from my colleague and I think it is a very good point.

In terms of consultation, I think first nations across this country really want to be listened to, have input, and actually lead legislation. They do not just want to be listened to and then be put aside and left out of the legislation.

We have seen a real development over the years with first nations in their capacity and their willingness to be involved in the process and in their desire to be self-governing. I think that is to be commended. We should, as a federal government, work with the first nations and listen to their comments.

I want to make a point regarding subclause 3(b) and 3(c) in the proposed legislation, where there are some specific concerns over the ministerial power in the bill. Many first nations have spoken about this, and the government needs to listen if we are really serious about consultation, self-government, and listening to first nations. There are real problems with that subclause.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to speak to Bill C-9, for several reasons.

Twenty years ago, I was in Vienna for the World Conference on Human Rights. I am proud to say that I was thrown out of the Vienna conference centre because I dared to stand up for something that was important to me, and that was the recognition of aboriginal peoples as peoples, just like all other peoples on the planet. I had a poster with a big “S” on it because I was insisting that people call us “indigenous peoples” instead of “indigenous populations”. I hope the same thing will not happen in this august chamber if I stress certain points today.

I would first like to address a number of aspects of this bill that really fascinate me, because there are several aspects of the government's behaviour that I find completely ambiguous. Everyone is supposed to understand that aboriginal peoples are the only

distinct group mentioned in the Canadian Constitution and the only one that is referred to separately. In that regard, I think the Constitution should allow a nation-to-nation relationship with those peoples.

However, that is not the case with this government. This government is not taking action on these relationships, which should have taken on a new scope in January 2012. The way this Conservative government treats the first peoples in this country is certainly not the way partners of Confederation should be treated. There is a problem across the way with relations with aboriginal peoples.

I mentioned the fight to get recognition for aboriginal peoples as peoples, which took several years to accomplish. Today, I can also tell you that it took us 23 years of discussions, negotiations and drafting to create the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Those 23 years of negotiation took a lot of energy, effort and emotion because it is never easy to work multilaterally, as was the case for those negotiations. It took 23 years to create that declaration, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2007.

I am proud to have been personally involved in this process, even though it took a very long time. We are used to that. For aboriginals, patience is in our genes, in a way. Sometimes we do not have the choice.

Sometimes we do have the choice though. Article 3 of the declaration I just mentioned establishes the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination. I mention it because the basic right to self-determination belongs to all people, this right to freely determine their political status. The word “freely” is important here.

Yet that is not what we have here today. This bill goes against the spirit of self-government that aboriginal peoples should be afforded. It is not in this bill.

• (1345)

I would like to quote a witness who appeared before the committee, I believe. Her name is Chief Tammy Cook-Searson of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. She said:

My main objection to this bill is the lack of positive change from the old Indian Act. Neither the Indian Act nor Bill [C-9] incorporate the constitutional principles of the inherent right to self-determination and governance. The authority in this bill remains with the cabinet and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada instead of moving towards a greater responsibility with First Nations for our governance.

That is what I was saying. This opinion is shared by many people.

There is something about this government that I do not understand. It seems to ignore major global trends.

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Today we are celebrating the life of the great Nelson Mandela. He got rid of a system that had no place on this planet, namely apartheid. While his life is being celebrated, what are we doing here? We are trying to improve a system that does not work. Those are the parliamentary secretary's words. I think that apartheid was largely inspired by the Indian Act and the way aboriginal people were treated in this country. That is an issue.

In my opinion, another worrisome aspect is the government's lack of willingness to listen to first nations. I want to stress that, because when aboriginal peoples speak of consultation, they are not indulging in political whims. I said that to the House as recently as last week. Calling for consultation is not just a political whim. It is a constitutional duty to consult with first nations and accommodate the concerns expressed during that consultation.

The government has a dual responsibility, a dual constitutional duty concerning aboriginal peoples; however, it seems to have forgotten that.

I am always surprised to see that this government does not seem to want to take the path of partnership and co-operation with aboriginal peoples. There is a need for mutual respect. The aboriginal peoples are the original partners of Confederation. It is important to constantly remember that. The government should have really consulted with and listened to the first nations. Changes to this bill have been proposed by a number of aboriginal groups across the country. The intent behind the bill is right, but people have proposed changes and amendments.

It is important to always remember that we have the constitutional obligation to consult and accommodate aboriginal peoples.

I have participated in negotiations with the government for many years. That is the only way to move forward with aboriginal peoples. We are certainly not going to accomplish anything by excluding first nations from the table or from discussions.

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, in the last couple of debates on Bill C-9 and Bill C-15, the NDP members have brought forward witness testimony that they say the government should consider. However, at the same time they refuse to consider the witness testimony of people like Ron Evans of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, who say that they want this bill, they want it the way it is, they want it to go forward and they want to be able to opt in.

The one thing I have heard the most from the NDP members is concern about clause 3, that the minister can choose to put a first nation into this election provision as opposed to back into the Indian Act. I find it ironic that they are concerned about that, when members of the NDP have contacted the minister recently and demanded that he intervene in an election in a first nation in Ontario.

The NDP members do not seem to want the Bill C-9 provisions, but they have no trouble asking the minister to intervene under the current act.

Maybe the member could address the hypocrisy of that position of the NDP.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, the members on the other side of the House often miss the mark by trying to portray the NDP in this way or that way. That is not what matters today. That is completely ridiculous.

When we try to present constitutional arguments to the government, the government does not want to listen. Aboriginal people are marching in the streets. In fact, I just came back from one of those demonstrations where people keep repeating that the principle of consultation with aboriginal peoples is vital. It is actually a constitutional obligation. We are not talking about political whims.

When will this government get the message?

• (1355)

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague and I now have to say that it is unacceptable that this government does not consult more with first nations. They play a key role in our Canadian Constitution and we all should be very proud of this.

My hon. colleague, who made such an impassioned speech, is very well known. I recently saw a documentary on the great explorers of northern Quebec in which he was praised for being among those who listened to our first nations. I also think that he understood them, and I am very proud of him and his work. I think we should pay much more attention to his perspective on this issue. This is important, because I know that many Canadians share this view.

I would also point out that his work is recognized even beyond our borders. When I travel, I see what the Conservatives are doing to our international reputation and to the way we treat others—because the debate is about that too. I am really disgusted with that attitude.

I hope that in 2015 we can do some housecleaning. We will quickly clean things up so we can enjoy a truly international reputation.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate and humbly acknowledge the comments made by my colleague from Québec.

I have been working very hard and very patiently on these issues for over 30 years. Often, people tell me that aboriginal affairs are complicated and complex legal issues. However, we have to understand that this does not have to be the case. These issues do not have to be complicated or complex.

When we find the political will, our political creativity will emerge and allow us to address these issues, which, in my opinion, have been dragging on for far too long.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, which is a vast region in northern Quebec.

Today, a group of aboriginal people is on Parliament Hill, and I think groups often come to protest the government's actions.

If the government consulted more with first nations, would there be as many demonstrations on Parliament Hill as there are now? What does my colleague think?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that I was just there. I spoke to the protesters outside. One thing I said was that this would not be the last time we see each other, because the government has not changed its attitude toward the rights and interests of aboriginal peoples across the country at all, even though the Prime Minister promised in January of last year that there would be a radical change in the government's relationships with aboriginal peoples.

It was just rhetoric, which is unfortunate.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

NELSON MANDELA

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on this day of special remembrance, I rise to pay tribute to Nelson Mandela.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would first like to extend our deepest sympathies to his family, to the people of South Africa, and to everyone who has been affected by the life and the loss of this extremely compassionate man.

Nelson Mandela will always remain a model of determination, courage, dignity and strength of character in the face of hardship and turmoil. Mandela was a rare giant of a man. It would take an entire library to capture his life's work and the lessons he taught us.

Mandela's life, marked by his political struggles and his willingness to sacrifice, is an example for each and every one of us. His ability to resist pressure, his integrity and his desire to focus on openness and understanding, rather than vengeance and hate, are a testament to his virtue. The courage of this leader, who refused to accept injustice, changed the world.

May he be an inspiration to us all. Thank you, Madiba.

* * *

● (1400)

[*English*]

OPEN GOVERNMENT

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been much discussion of late on the topic of increasing democracy and how we can improve Parliament. On that note, I would like to take a moment to recognize the excellent work of the Open Parliament website. Openparliament.ca is a valuable online resource that allows Canadians the opportunity to keep up to date on the work we do here in this place.

I would also like to recognize Mr. Michael Mulley for his significant work as the one-person driving force behind openparliament.ca, and the Canadian not-for-profit organization Open

North, which helps provide financial support for Open Parliament. Citizens like Mr. Mulley and the Open North organization may not be household names, but I hope that all members of the House will join me in recognizing the good work they do in making democracy work better for Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOLIDAY WISHES

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to use my last member's statement for 2013 to wish all my constituents in Laval—Les Îles happy holidays and a happy 2014.

Allow me to wish members and their loved ones peace, health, happiness and prosperity for the new year.

Let us not forget that many of our constituents will continue to struggle with financial and health woes over the holidays.

I ask members to spare a thought for them and to give generously during this month of December to our local community organizations such as Meals on Wheels, Moisson Laval, Agape, and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, to name a few, since my time is limited.

Let us stand together and continue to work hard on creating a society where no one is left behind. Together we can accomplish a lot. Merry Christmas and happy new year.

* * *

[*English*]

TERRY FOX RUN TAIWAN

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce great news for cancer research and to make all Canadians proud of the results of working together, without barriers or frontiers, for the benefit of all.

The Terry Fox Run in Taiwan had been going for 13 years, but paused in 2007. I commend Judith Fox-Alder, sister of our national hero, Terry Fox, for working together with our Canada-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group, legislators of Taiwan, and the National Taiwan University to resurrect the Taiwan Terry Fox Run in 2014.

I quote from a letter written by Ms. Fox-Alder:

I could have never imagined...as I watched my brother Terry run his Marathon of Hope in 1980, that I would one day have the great...honour of representing the Family and Foundation at Terry Fox Runs throughout our world...

We have all been touched in some way by this terrible disease. Terry's vision and strength of conviction accomplished more than we could have ever imagined...

Thanks to the power of international collaboration, we are one step closer to fulfillment of that vision. Let us give a big cheer to Judith, the Terry Fox Foundation, Canada, and Taiwan for this incredible accomplishment.

*Statements by Members***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I met with representatives of the National Trade Contractors Coalition of Canada, a group representing 12 trade organizations, including the Mechanical Contractors Association of Canada, the Canadian Electrical Contractors Association, the Contractors Division of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors of Canada, and the Canadian Institute of Steel Construction.

As a person whose household made its living from construction for more than 30 years, it was a pleasure to reminisce with many of the people from these groups this morning. As the Liberal critic for industry, I was especially pleased to have the opportunity to discuss their proposal for a prompt payment plan. In short, this plan would help to ensure that the government pays its bills on time, just as all other Canadians are expected to do, and that the money paid goes to the people who actually do the work, including the subcontractors.

I hope that all members will join with me in supporting this prompt payment plan. Let us make sure that contractors get paid for the very great, dependable work they do for all of us as Canadians.

* * *

● (1405)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently Warren Buffett and Jorge Lemann, after buying Heinz, announced that they are padlocking the Leamington plant next year, throwing 740 people out of work. This is devastating for workers, farmers, and the supply chain and for Leamington, Kingsville, and our region. The billionaires apparently have money to burn, just not to invest in Leamington.

Even lower than two billionaires bottom-lining was the ambulance-chasing of the federal and provincial NDP, falsely blaming a regulatory change that never occurred. Canadian container-size regulations remain in place for the food processing sector.

By contrast, our government will help these workers through EI and job retraining. Our economic action plans have put in place millions for the processing sector and have renewed FedDev Ontario with nearly a billion dollars, in spite of NDP opposition. Local efforts are in full gear to find a new proponent with a plan to restore hope and opportunity to our region. With our programs, our government is ready to help.

* * *

MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the Special Committee on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women heard from families from across Canada. We heard powerful messages from families whose loved ones were killed or are still missing.

I want to thank the families from northern Manitoba who came to Ottawa to share their painful stories. I want to thank Wesley Flett, Brenda Bignell, Brenda Osborne, and Bernadette, the sister of Claudette Osborne.

The committee did not have a chance to hear from the Nepinak family. Gail and Joyce Nepinak were invited to speak on behalf of their sister and daughter, Tanya Nepinak. Her murder is thought to be linked to a serial killer in Manitoba. They are known as fearless advocates in our province.

On Sunday, like on many days, they faced systemic discrimination when they could not board the plane to come to Ottawa. Systemic discrimination too often denies aboriginal people the right to the most basic services, even the right to vote, and the most basic right to security for them and their families because of their marginalization. We can do better.

* * *

INDIA

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, on Human Rights Day, it is important that we remember the thousands of innocent Sikh men, women, and children who were killed in the streets of New Delhi and other parts of India in 1984. In 2005, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh apologized for this brutal massacre, saying, "I bow my head in shame that such a thing took place".

One of the survivors, Bibi Jagdish Kaur, is currently in Ottawa to tell her story. She lost her husband. She lost her son. She lost three cousins during this terrible attack. She is still seeking justice for her family and other victims. I had the opportunity to speak with her and to hear her tragic story.

Prime Minister Singh has stated that the perpetrators of these crimes need to be brought to justice. I agree. I invite all of my colleagues in the House to join me in condemning this massacre, remembering its victims, and encouraging the Indian government to actively pursue those responsible to ensure that justice is served.

* * *

MICHAEL PEGG AND JOHN ZIVCIC

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my great honour to rise today to remember two great men who lost their lives in the service of our communities, and indeed, our country. York Regional Police Constable Michael Pegg and Toronto Police Constable John Zivcic both gave their lives answering the highest human call, that being public service.

I offer my condolences to the Pegg, Zivcic, York Regional Police, and Toronto Police Service families. I am incredibly proud to take this moment to say "thank you". Canadians from coast to coast should take time to pay tribute to these true fallen heroes and to our heroes still selflessly serving Canada in all sorts of uniforms.

We are forever in the debt of Constables Pegg and Zivcic. Their legacies will not soon be forgotten, and we will strive each day to serve as honourably and as selflessly as they both did.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, in recent days, four Canadian soldiers have taken their own lives. We extend our condolences to the families of Warrant Officer Michael McNeil, Master Corporal William Elliott, Master Bombardier Travis Halmrast and Master Corporal Sylvain Lelièvre.

Canadians were shocked to learn of the tragic deaths of these heroes. It is not enough to lament this phenomenon; we must take action to prevent the suicide of our military personnel. Unfortunately, 71 soldiers have committed suicide since 2008, and that does not include reservists.

It is our collective duty to help those who made sacrifices to resume a normal life when they return from their mission. It is the government's responsibility to allocate all the resources required to do so. Unfortunately, the government is going in the opposite direction. At a time in their lives when they have the greatest need for human contact, JPSU does not have enough staff to meet needs, and our veterans are being forced to use Internet services because the government is closing nine Veterans Affairs Canada offices.

These heroes may not have been killed in action, but we believe that they nevertheless sacrificed their lives for their country. Nous nous souviendrons d'eux. Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

SENIORS

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with Christmas approaching, I would like to take a moment today to talk about Canadian seniors. For most of us, the holidays are a time filled with laughter, fun, family and cheer, but a lot of seniors face social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation can be very serious. It can lead to loss of well-being and even premature illness and death.

Our government is taking steps to tackle this important issue. Today I ask all members, in fact all Canadians, to help. It is simple. All they have to do is to connect with Volunteer Canada, at 1-800-670-0401, and be referred to opportunities to help seniors over the holidays. Also, people can call United Way's 211 line and be connected with a senior who is alone over Christmas.

I ask all residents of my riding of Calgary Centre, all MPs in the House and all Canadians to please reach out and help a senior this Christmas.

* * *

[Translation]

LAVAL VOLUNTEER CENTRE

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the year is coming to a close. As they do every year during the holiday season, residents of Laval are working together to help the less fortunate. Along with community organizations and health care centres in Laval, the Centre de bénévolat et moisson Laval is collecting donations in order to make the 29th Christmas basket campaign a true success. The people of Laval are generous. Last

year, over a million kilograms of food were distributed to Laval residents in need. This was made possible in part by the work of hundreds of volunteers. I would like to thank them.

Congratulations to the Centre de bénévolat et moisson Laval for its hard work and its dedication to this cause in these difficult times. We all want a society where nobody is left behind, which unfortunately is not the case right now. However, we will not lose hope and we will continue to fight together every day to eliminate inequities.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for most Canadians, the holidays are a time of celebration and festivities. For some Canadian families, however, it can be a time of exceptional hardship. Thankfully, charities like the United Way are there to provide some relief. Our government recognizes the important work that charities do for our communities, and we want to ensure we do all we can to encourage charitable giving.

In 2012, tax relief from charitable donations was over \$2.98 billion. We want to see that number grow. That is why in economic action plan 2013, our government proudly introduced the first-time donor super credit. This provides an additional 25% to first-time donors, in addition to existing federal and provincial credits. Our government will always be there to support the work of charities.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

'Twas the week before Christmas and the Prime Minister's cast;
Were haunted by the scandals of ghosts from his past.

The PM denied when the first ghosts came calling;
That was Duffy, Brazeau and Pamela Wallin.

They attacked allegations with yuletide vendettas;
By stretching the truth and talking poinsettias.

The next ghost wrote a cheque that caused quite a fuss;
In no time at all, he was under the bus.
They tried what they could to keep it from worsening;
But then Deloitte got a call from Senator Gerstein.

The emails police found that the boss wasn't sharin';
That was thanks to the ghost of Benjamin Perrin.

Rob Ford's an old ghost that no one's enjoying.
He's really not scary, more so just annoying.

But it's ghosts of the future, who could possibly threaten;
Think Tkachuk, Stewart Olsen and Marjory LeBreton.

Like Dickens' great tale of the bitter old miser;
We'd expect those in power to conduct themselves wiser.

The truth will come out, we hope and we pray
Cause Canadians know even Scrooge found his way.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was thrilled to join the Minister of Public Safety in Montreal to announce our government's next step in the fight to combat human trafficking, our modern-day slavery.

As committed by our government in the 2012 national action plan to combat human trafficking, the Minister of Public Safety announced the launch of a special RCMP enforcement team to combat human trafficking, which will be based in Montreal.

Members of the special RCMP team will work closely with law enforcement partners in the province of Quebec and all across Canada to tackle and dismantle vicious human trafficking rings and bring freedom to their many victims. In fact, only hours after yesterday's announcement, the team arrested four massage parlour operators as part of project combative, which has been targeting a ring of traffickers responsible for luring young Romanian women to Canada.

I want to thank the Minister of Public Safety for his particular dedication to ending modern-day slavery. I invite all members to join me in commending the work of the RCMP's new integrated enforcement team.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we witnessed a travesty of democracy: another Conservative attempt to cover up for a scandal-plagued Prime Minister. Our ethics committee is considering an NDP motion to study Ben Perrin's infamous disappearing emails. Conservatives once argued for open government, but now they prefer to debate in the shadows, away from the public view.

[Translation]

This morning, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister led the effort to make sure that the Conservatives can continue to keep Canadians in the dark.

The Conservatives' contempt for democracy and transparency continues to grow. They misled the House and Canadians. They made Parliament into a circus with their stories about pizza. They applauded the Prime Minister when he washed his hands of a crime committed in his own office by his own staff.

As time goes by, Canadians are realizing more and more that they deserve better than a government that is constantly wheeling and dealing. They deserve an alternative to the old party that is jaded by power and has lost its principles in an effort to hold on to that power. The alternative is the NDP.

* * *

[English]

CHRISTMAS

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is approaching soon. In an effort to be inclusive and to avoid causing offence, some Canadians are trying to dampen its

spirit. Political correctness and commercialization dilute the true meaning and the spirit of Christmas. Christians must not be denied the right to openly celebrate it. Christmas cannot be Christmas without Christ in it.

How can we justify wishing someone a happy Diwali, Vaisakhi, Eid or Chinese New Year while avoiding the words "merry Christmas"? As a Sikh, I am not offended when Christians celebrate Christmas in a traditional way, and I rather enjoy celebrating with them and participating in the spirit of giving.

Canada stands as a symbol of tolerance and religious freedom. We must continue to respect and uphold religious rights. Freedom of religion means that all Canadians have the equal opportunity to openly practise their faith, including Christians.

I ask that members please join me in wishing everyone a merry, merry Christmas.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, before forcing the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to go in camera, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister opposed the NDP motion calling for an investigation into the Benjamin Perrin emails that were deleted by the Privy Council Office.

Who in the Conservative government instructed the parliamentary secretary to do such a thing?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the committee in question was meeting in camera, so I was not aware of what was going on.

I can say this. The Privy Council Office has taken responsibility for the technical, even inadvertent, problem with respect to the emails in question. The moment the mistake was brought to our attention, we immediately informed the relevant authorities.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the minister that Conservatives went in camera because they were scared of an NDP motion to investigate the deleted emails, but before the Conservatives shut out the public, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs said that no investigation was necessary.

Does the Prime Minister share this view? Does he believe, like his parliamentary secretary, that no investigation is needed into how the government handled these missing emails?

●(1420)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the Privy Council Office has taken responsibility for this issue.

Oral Questions

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we started this scandal with a Conservative cover-up, and today the cover-up continues. Conservatives evaded questions, they misled the public and they kept crucial information secret. If Conservatives really do not think that an investigation is necessary into what happened to Ben Perrin's emails, then why do they not just give Canadians a little bit of accountability, maybe an early Christmas gift? Why do they not actually release all the relevant emails to the public today?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what did happen is that the Privy Council made the office of the Prime Minister aware of this mistake and immediately the relevant authorities were advised and we said we would make all these emails available to them immediately.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we want to know why Benjamin Perrin's emails were deleted.

Mr. Perrin was the Prime Minister's legal advisor. Anything that relates to the Prime Minister's Office and the attempt to cover up the Senate scandal is the administrative responsibility of the government, since it has to do with the management of the government's affairs.

Do Benjamin Perrin's emails contradict the claim that there was no legal agreement?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister has been very clear in responding to those questions about the fact that he was not aware of the actions of Mr. Wright in this regard. We have said that all these emails, which have been recovered, will be made available to the authorities so they can look at all these issues.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to what happened this morning at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Could government ministers tell us what instructions were given to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister about that meeting?

Did my colleague opposite receive an order to oppose the motion? If no one gave him that order, why did he oppose the motion?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office has publicly written and taken responsibility for the inadvertent and technical issue with respect to these emails. The minute that letter from the Privy Council Office with its apology was received, we informed the relevant authorities and they can have access immediately to all the emails whenever they like.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, six out of ten first nations youth do not complete high school. With population growth over four times that of the rest of the country, this impacts all Canadians. The crisis is evident with a funding gap of thousands less

per student, but proposed federal legislation offers no clear funding and a total lack of consultation. First nations leadership calls it unacceptable.

When will the government be bringing forward a real proposal to deal with aboriginal education?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our first nation children must have access to a comprehensive education regime that is currently available to other Canadian students, and this cannot be achieved without legislation.

This government remains committed to working with first nation leaders, parents and educators to fix the current loan system that has been failing students for too long. As I indicated yesterday, our government will invest new funds in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12 education on reserve, once our new legislative framework is in place.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been dragging their feet for years about the Champlain Bridge. They have made no commitment to the province, have not held a public consultation and signed a contract without a bidding process. They do not even have a plan. All we know is that Montrealers will have to pay dearly to use this bridge.

When will this government give Montrealers a full, clear and coherent plan to replace the Champlain Bridge?

• (1425)

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, after 13 long years of inaction by the Liberal government, our government stepped up to make the necessary repairs to the Champlain Bridge. We promised that the bridge would be done in 2018 with a public-private partnership, and that it would be a toll bridge and involve public transportation. I call that a very clear plan.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives stonewalling on the PMO scandal defined this session of Parliament: nonsensical answers in question period; lost, then found, email evidence from the PMO's lawyer; blocking testimony and investigations in both the House and the Senate.

Looking back on this fall, will anyone on the other side stand up and express their regret to Canadians for the approach this government has taken over the past month?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Liberal Party certainly knows how to see the glass half full.

Obviously one person has taken responsibility and two people are being investigated by the authorities, as they properly should. We await the outcome.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night the CBC released documents concerning the activities of Communications Security Establishment Canada. CSEC cannot spy on Canadians, but the documents allege that the agency invites the United States National Security Agency to operate inside Canadian facilities in this country and inside CSEC facilities in approximately 20 countries around the world.

Can the government confirm that this is the case? What plans does the government have to beef up parliamentary oversight of this agency?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on specific intelligence activities or capabilities, but I do have good news for the hon. member.

There is a commissioner who looks into CSEC. Every year for 16 years, the commissioner has confirmed that its activities have been lawful here. The commissioner has done that for the last 16 years, and he is an independent individual, so I am sure that will assure the hon. member.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question is not whether Communications Security Establishment Canada is supposed to obey the law, but whether CSEC actually did obey the law. The documents uncovered by Snowden indicate that the Americans operated in Canadian facilities here and abroad. It therefore seems that the Conservative government was complicit in spying on some of our trade partners.

Can the government confirm whether that is indeed true? If so, who approved this operation?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would point out to the hon. member, as I did to her colleague, that there is an independent commissioner who oversees and looks at the activities of CSEC.

Not only has CSEC complied with Canadian law this last year, but it has done so for the last 16 years. If she is looking for information or proof, I suggest she look at that. It is on the record of Parliament.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us come back to the Senate. The Prime Minister said in the House, more than once, that Nigel Wright was the only one involved in the secret repayment agreement. We know that is not true. We also know that

the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary opposed the NDP motion to shed light on Perrin's deleted emails.

Why? Did he know that these emails prove that the Prime Minister misled the House?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just a bunch of rubbish.

The committee made no decision. They are still debating this right now. The committee made the decision to go in camera when the NDP chair seemed to lose control, because the NDP members seemed to find it more interesting to point-of-order themselves than to actually deal with the motion that was on the table.

It was amazing how much debate got done once the cameras were off, and the committee will make its own decision with respect to that going forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the art of not answering a question.

The parliamentary secretary can try to deflect responsibility away from the Prime Minister, but he is the one who told the House, verbatim, that Benjamin Perrin was not involved in a legal agreement. Now that his office and the police are in possession of the emails that magically reappeared, can a government member tell us what role Benjamin Perrin really played in this scandal?

● (1430)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, as soon as the Privy Council found out that these emails were available, it made them available to the RCMP. That, of course, is the kind of leadership that one would expect. It is the type of leadership that this Prime Minister has displayed. When he found out in May that this had actually been taking place in his office, he ordered his office to fully assist the RCMP.

I contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who for 17 years thought that hiding something was the appropriate course of action. Clearly, there is a lack of it.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are wondering what is really in those emails. Do the Conservatives feel so threatened that they are trying to prevent an investigation into the mysterious temporary disappearance of the emails, which reappeared not so long ago? When will the government finally make public the content of the Prime Minister's former legal adviser's emails? When?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the committee is still considering the motion that was brought forward.

Oral Questions

However, as I have said, as soon as the Privy Council Office found out that these emails had been put into a separate file that had been sequestered, it immediately made them available to the RCMP to review.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would it be possible to have a minister respond? After all, this scandal is due to an administrative error on the part of the government. Could a minister confirm whether Benjamin Perrin's emails contain information that incriminates the Prime Minister? Could any information incriminate the Prime Minister, yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our ministers have been working extraordinarily hard, not only on this but on all kinds of different files. That is why one million net new jobs have been created in this country. That is why the Minister of National Defence is busy ensuring that our forces have the equipment they need. That is why the Minister of Justice brought forward a victims' bill of rights. That is why the Minister of State for sport is undertaking the Pan Am Games. That is why the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is ensuring that our forces have the equipment they need. That is why the Minister of Natural Resources is making our resources available. That is why the Minister of International Trade is working on a free trade deal. I could go on and on.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once the Prime Minister claimed Ben Perrin was not involved in the legal agreement, but the RCMP proved that wrong.

The Prime Minister then claimed that no one except Nigel Wright knew about the deal, but RCMP documents proved that wrong too.

Is there any other information about this cover-up that the Conservative government would like to share with Canadians before the RCMP releases more details?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP indicated that the Prime Minister, as soon as he found out, ordered his office to assist the RCMP so that it had all the information it needed to uncover what had happened.

The Prime Minister also said that had he known, he would have in no way accepted such an agreement.

Again, I contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition who, when given the opportunity 17 years ago to admit that he had been offered a bribe, decided to tell nobody. He waited until 2011 to tell anybody that he had been offered a bribe.

That is not really the type of leadership Canadians expect. That is why he is in opposition.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this politically wounded Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary are having a hard time keeping the lid on.

This morning at the ethics committee, the parliamentary secretary forced out the media from hearing a motion on studying Ben Perrin's

mysteriously disappearing emails, emails that were hidden from the RCMP for six months.

If everything is on the up-and-up, why cover up such shambolic handling of police evidence? If there is nothing to hide, why not just allow the investigation?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the committee is obviously still reviewing this motion, but the NDP chair seemed to be losing control when NDP members started point-of-ordering themselves in committee. That did not seem to be an effective use of the committee's time. There were three other motions that we had to discuss at the same time.

What is clear is that the RCMP has stated that the Prime Minister insisted that his office assist it and provide all the information that is needed. That is real leadership. Also, on page 72, the documents clearly outline that the Prime Minister had no knowledge of what was going on. As the Prime Minister said, had he known, he would have put a stop to it.

• (1435)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that, speaking of shambolic and all.

Here is another question from the RCMP files. We have seen from the RCMP that the Prime Minister's Office was panicking that the Duffy residency issues were going to expose other senators. In fact, on February 15, Nigel Wright wrote that he was concerned that Mike Duffy's residency problems would expose Senator Patterson in B.C.

Why would the Prime Minister's Office refer to a senator from Nunavut as a senator from British Columbia? Does the government believe that Senator Patterson actually meets the legal requirements to sit in the Senate?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly he does, but at the same time let us recognize the hard work of that senator for his region of the country. Senator Patterson, a former premier of the Northwest Territories, has also been very active and aggressive in making sure that the people of the Northwest Territories have access to better jobs and that their resources are used to improve the economy of the Northwest Territories. Of course, this government has taken the north very seriously, unlike the opposition.

Of course, we are even defending the north further by making a claim on the North Pole. We know that the Liberals do not think that the North Pole or Santa Claus is in Canada. We do. We are going to make sure that we protect them as best we can.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for eight months Canadians have been demanding answers about the Wright-Duffy affair. How did the PMO know in advance what would be in the Deloitte audit? Why did no one in the PMO tell the RCMP about the two illegal payoff schemes? Why do the staffers involved still hold on to their government jobs?

Oral Questions

Would someone on the government side give Canadians an early Christmas present and answer even one of these questions?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we know what time of year it is when we get silly questions like that.

The reality is that the RCMP is investigating this matter. The RCMP has identified that it is Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy who are the subjects of the investigation. The RCMP has identified that the Prime Minister did not know what was being undertaken. The RCMP has also highlighted the fact that the Prime Minister ordered his office to work with and assist the RCMP, providing as much help as it could to help the RCMP get to the bottom of this. The RCMP is investigating, and we will let it do its job.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at other questions that the Prime Minister has refused to answer in the past eight months.

Did the Prime Minister know about Irving Gerstein's decision to pay Mike Duffy \$32,000?

Did he know that Irving Gerstein secretly contacted one of his Conservative friends at Deloitte?

Did he order his ministers to hire his former employees who were involved in this affair?

Will this government give Canadians a Christmas present today and answer at least one of these questions?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Senator Gerstein has made it quite clear that he did not and was not going to be paying back Senator Duffy's expenses. The Prime Minister has already identified that.

With respect to giving Canadians a gift, it is hard to take that party seriously when the person who we most look to this year to give gifts, including my daughters, is Santa Claus. All of a sudden the Liberals are suggesting that Santa Claus is no longer Canadian and that they would abandon the North Pole and abandon Santa Claus. On this side of the House, we are going to stand up not only for my daughters, but for your family as well, Mr. Speaker, and for all those young Canadians, in the spirit of Christmas, who are waiting for Santa Claus to come and visit.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims his ethics scandal is confined to just two miscreants: Duffy, the greedy senator, whom the Prime Minister once called his best appointment, and Wright, the great deceiver, whose ethical advice the Prime Minister praised in his book on hockey.

However, there are more: van Hemmen, Rogers, Woodcock, Byrne, Hilton, Novak, Perrin, Hamilton, Gerstein, LeBreton, Tkachuk, and Stewart Olsen, all named by police in relation to the cover-up.

Which of these people have now been interviewed by the Mounties, not just once but twice? Which ones?

● (1440)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP are currently undertaking an investigation.

The RCMP, I am sure, will ask anybody they feel they need to ask with respect to this. They have identified that Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy are the subject of the investigation. I trust that the RCMP will continue to do the work they need to do to find whatever information they need.

At the same time, I ask the Liberal Party to join with us in protecting the citizenship of Santa Claus, join with us in making sure the North Pole remains part of Canada. For all of those kids around the world who are depending on Santa Claus, I ask them to abandon their ideas and stick with us, and keep Santa Claus Canadian.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very nice to believe in Santa Claus, but we also have to believe in the people who live in the north.

There is growing anger against the Conservative agenda on education for first nations. From the members of Idle No More who are protesting on Parliament Hill today to the Assembly of First Nations, which is holding its special assembly, everyone agrees that the minister needs to redo his homework.

Instead of confrontation, the minister could choose co-operation and consultation to truly ensure that aboriginal children have equal access to quality education.

When will the minister listen?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member may well want to play politics at the expense of children on reserves, but the fact remains that this issue is far more serious than his little game.

We introduced a legislative proposal concerning the first nations, and we are ready to continue working with them and engaging in dialogue with them so that we can correct a broken system that effectively fails most students on reserves across the country.

We will continue to work constructively to that end.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, investing in first nation schools is in the interest of all Canadians.

However, this minister is promising new funds only if he gets his way on the first nations education bill. This is just plain wrong. The funding gap must be closed now.

A generation of first nations children is looking to Ottawa. How much longer will the government make these kids wait to get equal funding for their education? When will that minister stop playing politics with first nations education?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will stand and correct the hon. member.

First nation students are not looking to the federal government. They are looking to first nation band councils in their communities and their parents to make sure they have the tools to provide them access to a good education system.

Again, notwithstanding the rhetoric on the other side of the House, my point is that we must work together, first nations, governments, stakeholders, parents and students, in order to ensure that we have a system that can provide first nation students with a good education system—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is Conservatives have broken faith with first nations on education, and also in their failed approach to the northern gateway pipeline.

This project faces overwhelming opposition from first nations and local communities because people know it is not the right way forward for the economy or for the environment.

When the joint review panel delivers its verdict later this month, will the Conservative government respect local opposition to the project and will it finally start working to achieve co-operation rather than conflict with first nations in Canada?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member opposite, our government will wait to hear from the independent scientific review before it makes its determination.

I have spoken to many first nations and they understand the importance of the transformative opportunities of responsible resource development to the economy and to the communities in their area.

I am very encouraged by their response to the Eyford report. Going forward, we are going to work together in their best interests.

* * *

● (1445)

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, time and time again Conservatives put partisan politics ahead of sound policy.

Instead of listening to the concerns of Canadians, the Conservative government is targeting environmental groups. It has spent millions investigating 900 groups that disagree with its agenda, and the Canada Revenue Agency has found only one with a problem. Meanwhile, the Conservatives have gutted the CRA unit tasked with going after organized crime.

When will the Conservatives stop this taxpayer-funded witch hunt against Canadians who happen to disagree with them and start going after the billions lost to tax havens?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, section 241 prevents me from commenting directly on any specific case. However, our government understands that registered charities are an important part of our society and encourages Canadians to donate generously but also to do their homework, such as on our first-time donor super credit that we announced recently.

In order to protect Canadian interests, we have a duty to ensure that these organizations are operating properly and in compliance with our laws. In cases where the activities of a charity are suspect, CRA will conduct a review and take action as appropriate under the act, and does so free of political direction.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our country's economy benefits from the natural resource sector with nearly 20% of our GDP and 1.8 million jobs being supported.

While our government understands the importance of our resources, the NDP want to shut it down. The leader of the NDP referred to our oil sands as causing a disease to our economy, which is a theory that has been debunked across the spectrum.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources update the House on the benefits of natural resource development?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Prince Albert for his insightful question.

Recently, the NDP leader escalated his shambolic opposition to resource development by saying that he would overhaul the regulatory process and prevent some projects from applying for an independent regulatory review.

This sends a very unsettling message to capital markets about the NDP at the very moment domestic and international investors are considering multi-billion dollar investments in energy projects. In contrast, our government allows the regulators to do their job.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by voting against last night's NDP motion on CPP, the government made it clear that retirement security for people in northern Ontario and right across Canada is not a Conservative priority.

In June, the Minister of Finance promised to work with the provinces on fixing CPP. Experts agree a modest phased-in CPP increase is the right way to go, but the Minister of Finance now does not believe the experts and is breaking his promise.

Why is the minister letting politics trump good public policy?

Oral Questions

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the provinces and territories to improve the Canada pension plan. However, we do not believe that this is the right time to be increasing the burden on employees and employers by increasing premiums while the economy is fragile.

The NDP plan to raise CPP costs will kill up to 70,000 jobs in our economy. Those members should know that it is difficult to have a healthy retirement plan for tomorrow if there is no job for today.

Despite the NDP's reckless plans, we continue to stand up for lower taxes, job creation and economic growth for all Canadians.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP approach is the responsible approach. No one is buying this ridiculous Conservative fearmongering.

People in British Columbia and across Canada want a strong, sustainable CPP. People know that a modest phased-in increase is affordable and will pay dividends down the road.

Why is the minister breaking his June promise to work with the provinces and fix CPP? Why are Conservatives putting attack politics ahead of Canadians who want to retire with dignity?

• (1450)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we do continue to look at Canada pension plan reform.

I can assure the House that the NDP's plan to double the CPP premiums while the economy is still fragile is not a moderate proposal. The irresponsible NDP plan could force a family with two workers in the home to pay as much as \$2,600 a year more. In this fragile global economy, Canadians simply cannot afford the NDP.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Employment shamefully accused Sylvie Therrien of lying. She blew the whistle on the employment insurance quotas created by the Conservatives.

If anyone is lying here, it is not her. Ms. Therrien disclosed that first nations, new Canadians and seasonal workers were a huge target for inspectors.

Does the government understand that it is highly discriminatory to profile the unemployed based on their employment sector or ethnicity?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are no quotas. Second, the government has not changed its policy in that regard. Third, the idea that Service Canada is targeting certain groups when it comes to employment insurance fraud is completely, 100%, false. It is totally false. We completely reject this false allegation, which is totally unfounded. It is completely irresponsible to repeat those false allegations.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ms. Therrien first blew the whistle on the quotas and the government

claimed that there are none. It took leaked documents to prove that there are. It is incredible.

Meanwhile, Ms. Therrien continues her courageous crusade—perhaps the minister should go out there and check on the situation—by revealing how the government has a bias against specific groups and targets them. She knows what she is talking about. She received those instructions. The Conservatives want people to believe them, even though they have been shown to be in the wrong.

Are they going to end the practice of treating entire groups of Canadians like criminals? The minister should go out into the field to see what is really happening.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these questions and the way in which they are asked are frankly ridiculous. Let me be perfectly clear: there are no quotas in employment insurance fraud investigations, either in the system or at Service Canada. Absolutely no specific groups are targeted, including new Canadians and aboriginal people.

To say the opposite is completely irresponsible. I am asking the NDP to show some responsibility in this matter.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I joined those gathered on the steps of Parliament Hill to echo the message delivered in rallies across Canada last week. The government's proposal for first nations education is not acceptable.

The minister still refuses to discuss equitable funding for first nations education until after his bill has passed. Will the minister put forward a fully funded plan that includes language and culture, and respects, supports and empowers first nations to control their own education systems?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing the same call to throw money at an old system. First nations across the country, stakeholders and education experts in the field, the Auditor General and the Senate committee all agree. Everyone has recommended that we get a legislative framework to provide a good education system for students on reserve.

As I indicated yesterday, of course the government is committed to funding the necessary system to accomplish this goal. Instead of just spinning our wheels on this false debate, let us get to the substance—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are failing our armed forces members. The Minister of National Defence claims that mentally injured troops simply need to step up and ask for help.

Last week in Petawawa, I was told something different. I was told that to seek help is to risk getting kicked out of the armed forces and that the injured need twice the peer support that they are currently getting. I was told that delays in hiring health professionals are due to budget cuts.

Why is the minister blaming the injured and denying the critical gaps in the necessary supports for our women and men in uniform?

• (1455)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those comments by the hon. member are completely untrue. The government has made it a priority to reach out to ill and injured members of the armed forces. We work with them. There have been unprecedented investments in this area. We have the highest ratio of mental health workers of all our NATO allies.

We are getting the job done and we will continue to support the men and women in uniform, as well as the veterans in this country.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are a little more than three years away from the 150th anniversary of Confederation and the Conservatives have barely started organizing.

Frankly, I have seen surprise parties that were better organized than this. All the Conservatives have done is waste \$40,000 on embarrassingly amateur logos and sign the Canadian civilization and history museums up for a partnership with oil companies. Cities like Boucherville wanted to build a legacy, but they were told that there is no plan for that.

Can the government tell us when it will at least have a budget, a plan or a direction to celebrate this important anniversary?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my department is working on plans to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation. In a few days we will be launching consultations in Canada.

As for the logo for Government of Canada activities, we are listening to what Canadians have to say. We will continue with our planning. This will be an extraordinary celebration for our entire country.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government keeps telling us it is going to be great, that we should believe it because we should believe it about everything else.

The Conservative government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I do recall asking members many times previously to wait until the hon. member has finished her question. If they choose to applaud her question at the end of it, then they can feel free to do so, but not in the middle of her question.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River has the floor.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has been misusing and mismanaging advertising and funds. They have wasted millions on economic action plans that just do not work. Now, they are wasting even more money presenting Canada's 150th anniversary logo designs to focus groups. After spending tens of thousands of dollars, the government's proposed logos were so underwhelming there was no clear winner.

How can Canadians trust the Conservative government to organize these historic celebrations when it cannot even manage to pick a logo?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of all Canadians, this government has done a lot to ensure Canadians' voices are heard. When we plan the 150th anniversary of our country, I can assure Canadians that their voices will again be heard. Whether it be the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the national flag, whether it be the commemoration of First and Second World War events, whether it be the celebration of the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences, Canadians can count on this Conservative government to be present and listening.

While the NDP may stay home, we are going to be there celebrating the 150th with all Canadians.

* * *

SPORTS

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians love sport and we love even more getting others into sport. Sport is a key part of our culture and our identity. It has the ability to bring us closer together and instil national pride. Of course, many of us will fondly remember what a great job Canada did hosting the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, where we finished number one in gold medals and third overall in the medal count.

With just 59 days to go until the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, could the Minister of State for Sport please tell the House what our government is doing to ensure Team Canada is well prepared for these upcoming games?

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to be the single largest contributor to sport in our country. In fact, our winter athletes have benefited from a 112% increase in funding from the previous Liberal government.

Oral Questions

This support has allowed Canada to emerge as a leading sport nation and provide our athletes with cutting-edge science and research, a world-class training environment and the best coaching in the world. The 2014 Sochi winter games is an occasion to come together as Canadians to support our athletes in their pursuit of excellence. I call on all members to say “Go, Canada, go”.

* * *

● (1500)

HEALTH

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with over 55 concerned constituents on Saturday, who fear the current mean-spirited government will cut their health care benefits. They are among thousands of retired public servants who have paid into a health care plan for decades to ensure they would be looked after in their senior years.

Now they hear the Conservatives plan to unilaterally double their monthly payments and restrict access to their health care. Will the President of the Treasury Board stand today and will he promise today to keep his paws off their benefits?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, discussions are ongoing, but I can tell the House, it is a repeat of the language in the budget.

We are seeking fair and reasonable discussions with the public sector representatives of the various bargaining tables. We want to protect the taxpayer from loads that are not sustainable in terms of public sector salary costs, and we will continue to represent and protect the taxpayer.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2014 Rhubarb festival put on by the Toronto theatre group Buddies in Bad Times is celebrating its 35th year, but after 34 successful years and hundreds of outstanding original Canadian performances, the Conservatives terminated their partnership and cut funding without any warning.

Why are Conservatives suddenly turning their backs on one of the leading and longest-running LGBT performance festivals in Canada? Will they now do the right thing and restore funding to this groundbreaking festival?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question allows me to stand and celebrate the fact that Canadian Heritage is responsible for providing funding to over 1,100 festivals across the country from coast to coast to coast.

In fact, all of them go through a rigorous procedure to meet the criteria that are set, and as always, I will continue to work with the very capable public servants in the Canadian Heritage Department to ensure that those festivals that qualify do in fact get the funding they require.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the final day of 16 days of activism against gender violence in Canada. It is also International Human Rights Day.

Over the past 16 days, Canadians have taken action by talking with family and friends, wearing a white ribbon and attending vigils throughout the country.

Could the Minister of Status of Women please reaffirm for the House our government's commitment to ending violence against women and girls?

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Mississauga South for her outstanding work on the committee for status of women on this final day of the 16 days of activism.

Preventing violence against women is a priority of this government and that is why we have taken decisive action, whether it be launching our popular proposals for local community projects to prevent cyber and sexual violence or introducing legislation that would give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying. Just yesterday, our government announced the RCMP enforcement team to combat human trafficking.

We are focused on ensuring Canadians are supported. I thank all Canadians who participated in the 16 days of activism against gender violence. By working together, we will actually deal with this issue.

* * *

[Translation]

LABOUR

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have mastered the art of ruining labour relations.

After Canada Post, Air Canada and so many others, now things are deteriorating at the CBC. Indeed, 1,600 employees at Radio-Canada—the French network—in Quebec City and Moncton have been in negotiations for the past 18 months.

They simply want to discuss bringing their salaries in line with those of their anglophone colleagues, but the Conservatives refuse to listen.

Will the Minister of Labour act now and give mediators the powers they need to find a solution and settle this matter while respecting these artists?

● (1505)

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CBC is a crown corporation that operates at arm's length from the government. It is responsible for its own operations, including labour negotiations.

I hope the negotiations will reach a successful conclusion, but that remains in the hands of the CBC and its employees.

NELSON MANDELA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's ties to Nelson Mandela and South Africa are well established and undeniable.

In 1998, Nelson Mandela became a Companion of the Order of Canada. In 2001 he was the second foreign national to obtain honorary Canadian citizenship. I am therefore renewing my request, so that future generations remember the work of Nelson Mandela and Canada's international political action, both of which helped make the world a better place.

Would the government consider devoting a national day to Nelson Mandela?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her interest in this file.

Obviously Canadians from coast to coast to coast are celebrating the amazing life that Nelson Mandela led. They are celebrating the choice that he made, reconciliation over revenge. They are celebrating his moral leadership.

All Canadians, including the Government of Canada and Parliament, want to reflect on what we can do to remind future generations of his remarkable leadership.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, which relates to the ability of the Speaker to provide guidance as to the quality of answers. I know this is not a power of the Speakers that has been used in recent years. However, I do believe the power exists.

When a question was asked that did not pertain to the Arctic or the north and the response was that Santa Claus is a Canadian citizen, I think that is far off point.

I am also advised by Santa Claus that there will be a lump of coal in the member's stocking.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will just say this. I am now shocked to learn that the Green Party itself no longer believes that the north is an important part of Canada.

I will of course do my best to stand up for Santa Claus each and every day in this House, that includes in question period. He is a Canadian citizen, and we will defend him all the way to the United Nations when we make our claim for the North Pole. I am proud of that.

* * *

NELSON MANDELA

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC) moved:

That this House expresses its sincerest condolences to the South African people over the passing of Nelson Mandela, a great moral leader, statesman and Honourary Canadian Citizen;

Government Orders

that this House recognizes the invaluable contributions and achievements of Mr. Mandela, not just his fight for an end to the system of apartheid in South Africa, but also his worldwide leadership on freedom and human rights;

that this House sincerely notes the grace and humility Mr. Mandela demonstrated after being imprisoned for 27 years;

and that this House reaffirms Canada's condolences to Mr. Mandela's family and all citizens of South Africa.

He said: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions between the parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the motion regarding the passing of Nelson Mandela.

The Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FIRST NATIONS ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in this House, as always, representing the people of Timmins—James Bay on Bill C-9, an act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain first nations and the composition of council of those first nations.

This is yet another bill that is being brought forward to tinker with the highly problematic Indian Act. It comes at a time where the breach in relationship between the Government of Canada, the Crown, and first nations across this country is at a very stark moment in our Canadian history, where government seems to believe that it can move back toward a colonial relationship with the first peoples of this country and that it is in the power of the minister to make decisions that really belong in communities.

There are elements in the bill about tinkering with the problems of the elections act, which we have seen. There are elements in the bill about trying to alleviate some of the problems we have seen with the Indian Act, but the fundamental problem is the breach of trust in relationship that is not being done with the communities.

Once again, it is Ottawa, the Department of Indian Affairs, imposing upon the people themselves how situations are going to be resolved, rather than recognizing that in the 21st century it is not acceptable to treat an entire section of our Canadian population, basically, as a hostage people under a bureaucracy.

Government Orders

As we speak, in my communities we are now in probably the 15th state of emergency that I have seen in the James Bay region, due to chronic infrastructure and failed government plans for basic health and safety and housing. We have 70 people who were burnt out of a construction trailer.

For the people back home to understand what this is, this is not living quarters. This is a bunkhouse that was brought in on an emergency basis after a 2008 infrastructure collapse in Attawapiskat, where the sewage system failed.

Now, most people in Canada have no concept of how a municipal infrastructure like sewage would fail, but in each one of my communities on James Bay, I have seen the complete collapse of sewage or water from underfunding, from poorly planned projects: Fort Albany, a complete collapse of infrastructure in the winter of 2009; Kashechewan, in 2005-06, an entire evacuation of 2,000 people; Attawapiskat, in 2008 and again in 2011.

In 2008, when the sewage backed up and destroyed numerous houses in Attawapiskat, the community called upon the federal government for help. Here is what the federal government did. It just said, "You're on your own".

We talk about the financial problems in these communities. It was the communities themselves that were forced to evacuate 80 people to accommodations in Cochrane and pay for hotels for months on end at the expense of the band, which put the band seriously in debt.

We just had a report from the Auditor General on the complete failure of basic safety protocols from the federal government, that the government sets aside \$19 million to deal with emergencies across Canada, whether they be fire, flood or other needs for evacuation, when what it spent in 2009-10 was \$286 million; \$180 million of that went on response and recovery, but only \$4 million went toward prevention and mitigation.

That means that it had to take money from building schools, it had to take money from safe water, it had to take money from building houses to deal with whatever the emergency was at the time.

I want to put this in context. There is not a single non-native community in this country to which, if there were a fire, the government would turn around and say, "Well, guess what? There are no more schools in your district for the next five years". It would say, "We're not building you a hospital. You know why? Because you people ended up getting flooded out".

We saw the incredible response in High River and Calgary, from across Canada. The federal government and the provincial government helped the residents there.

However, when our communities are flooded out, we see the derision and the abuse from the trolls all over the main media sites blaming the people, laughing at the people for being the victims of a natural disaster, and we see the government choosing to ignore them.

This destabilizes band councils in their ability to deal with the developments in our communities because they are always having to try to find money to deal with the fundamental problem, which is the failed infrastructure.

● (1510)

While we are talking in the House about this government-imposed bill that has not been done with proper consultations, I want to also speak about the deep sense of broken trust that exists with first nations communities and this government—in particular, the abuse of the aboriginal residential school apology.

It was the proudest moment of my life as a parliamentarian to stand in the House and see the Government of Canada acknowledge what had been done in the residential schools. Since that proud day, I have seen systematic attack on the survivors of these institutions by the federal government—in particular, the victims who survived St. Anne's residential school. In the long histories of abuse and degradation that happened in the residential schools, St. Anne's stands out as a particularly dark and brutal story.

In 1992, the Ontario Provincial Police launched an investigation into the abuse that went on at St. Anne's. It was probably the largest police investigation into child torture and abuse of its kind outside of Mount Cashel. More than 900 witness statements were gathered. Thousands of pages of documents were subpoenaed and obtained from the Catholic Church in Montreal and Moose Factory. The OPP did an extraordinary job.

Survivors of St. Anne's finally came forward to be part of the independent assessment process, which the government had set up. It told the people who survived this brutal institution that, if they came forward and told their stories, it would work this out with them. The legal responsibility of the federal government at that time, laid out in the terms of agreement under the independent assessment process schedule D, appendix VIII and appendix X, was that the federal government would provide a narrative, a written record of all the known documentation of abuse that occurred at St. Anne's. The federal government, though, chose not to tell any of the survivors, or their legal teams or their adjudicators about the thousands of pages of police evidence that the federal government was aware of, thereby undermining and compromising the independent assessment process.

I wrote to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs about this breach, because this is serious. The obligation to disclose evidence is a fundamental principle of justice. The minister wrote on July 17: "Canada is, of course, aware of the Ontario Provincial Police investigations regarding St. Anne's Indian Residential School and the resulting...trials". However, he said that it was not their job to obtain this evidence and it certainly was not their responsibility to tell the survivors.

He also claimed that the evidence was not even admissible. He said: "...statements made to the Ontario Provincial Police in the course of investigations...cannot...be used as evidence in the Independent Assessment Process. ...only the oral testimony of a witness is considered evidence". He then referred me to page 10, paragraph 10, of the terms of agreement. I read that and it says nothing of the kind.

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I have the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs putting on record something that is completely false, regarding the withholding of evidence about the abuse and torture of children. In fact, the terms of agreement of the independent assessment process says the exact opposite to what the minister is claiming. It says "...findings in previous criminal or civil trials...may be accepted...without further proof". This is the key issue.

The poor survivors who chose to come forward. However, I know many in our communities in Fort Albany, Moose Factory, Attawapiskat and Peawanuck who have not participated in the independent assessment process because they could not bear the trauma of being challenged and having to go through the process again. Yet, the government knew. All the evidence was there, particularly evidence that the administrators of the school built an electric chair to electrocute children, for the kicks of staff. That was in the police affidavit. The survivors coming forward would have to tell this, only to be challenged by federal lawyers who would say that it is not true or not admissible. This is the real key of the breach of trust that shows the dark, dark heart of this government.

When the issue of the fact that it had suppressed evidence and compromised the truth and reconciliation process was brought out and exposed, the government admitted that it needed to deal with this at the Ontario Superior Court. Next Tuesday, December 17, this issue will be addressed at Ontario Superior Court.

• (1515)

What we have found out since the July 17 letter from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is that the federal government had this evidence all along.

The federal government went to Ontario court in 2003 and demanded access to all of the police evidence. The government was not doing that on behalf of the victims. It said that it was its right, as the defendant and the entity responsible for the abuse of these children, to access the thousands of pages of police testimony and the 900-some witness documents about the abuse that was perpetrated against the children.

In 2003, the federal government got that evidence. In his 2003 decision, Justice Trainor said that this evidence was to be used and should be used by future plaintiffs. However, the future plaintiffs were not told that. They were lied to in the legal process that they participated in. The evidence was suppressed.

This is a very serious breach of fiduciary and legal obligations. The federal government acts as the defendant in this case against the abuse of these children, but it also acts, under the obligation of the independent assessment process, to provide all the evidence so that it can be adjudicated by the legal teams. The government decided to suppress this evidence and say that it did not know where it was or have access to it. The government even tried to claim privacy right provisions to prevent the survivors from seeing it.

The people that I represent in our communities still live with the abuse that went on at St. Anne's. There is not a family I have met who is not still trying to put the pieces back together from the intergenerational damage that was done and the outright attempt to destroy the James Bay people through this horrific institution.

The federal government knew the extent of the abuse. It knew the number of perpetrators of the abuse. It sat on it and it told the survivors who came before a legal process that there was no evidence to back up their claims. When I go home to James Bay and to see the survivors in Fort Albany, I really do not know what to tell them about a government that could be that mercenary and cold-blooded.

When the Conservative government comes forward with its colonial attitude about first nations education and its spin and misinformation and attacks on the leadership in these communities, and its blame about it being a big waste on the taxpayers, the communities that I represent know that the Conservative government is one that has not shown any good faith toward them. They know that the Conservative government is one that has breached the fundamental promise that the Prime Minister made when he stood up and talked to the survivors about the residential schools.

That system was set up to destroy the Indian in the child. Under Duncan Scott, going back, it was meant to eradicate a people. The Conservative government is continuing on a process of treating the survivors, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren who suffered under this system, in a manner that is abusive and fails to show respect.

We could continue to talk about tinkering with the Indian Act. We could talk about long-term goals, but I have never heard any long-term goals from the government when it comes to first nations. Otherwise, we could say that something fundamentally wrong happened when the treaties were breached and the children were sent off to the residential schools. It is up to the House of the common people of Canada to repair that breach. We need to do it by moving away from the abusive, uninterested, arrogant, and incompetent attitude of this government when it comes to first nations communities, first nations governance, and first nations children.

Right now, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has his first nations education act. I have never seen a man have to run so fast from legislation that he said was going to be a great benefit to all first nations children. He is having to run from it because the government has not consulted with the communities. It is again attempting to impose a model that no other community in this country would allow.

Education is about children. Education is child-centred. The government believes that it can bring in some edicts and change things, but the government does not understand that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is de facto the education minister of one of the largest school populations in this country.

• (1520)

He cannot even tell us how many schools are condemned. He cannot even tell us how many schools need building. He cannot tell us the per person cost of educating a child under his watch. That level of negligence is astounding, because we are talking about children.

Government Orders

The threat the government is making now on the first nation education act is that it is going to put a little money on the table, and either everyone plays ball or it will take the money away. It has the attitude that it can dangle a carrot in front of communities that have substandard education. There are communities in my riding like Attawapiskat where, after 13, 14, 15 years, they may finally get a school. In Kashechewan in my riding, grade school still does not exist. I can name communities across this country where the schools have been condemned for years.

The government is offering to put a little money on the table, and then people will either do what the government tells them to do or it will take the money away. One has to ask what kind of government would use children as bargaining chips. We used to hear the minister say that the government gives more money to first nation children than the provincial system, but of course he was laughed out of the room for that one, so now he is saying the government will provide a little money and people will come along or it will pull the whole project.

I asked what kind of government would use children as bargaining chips. I remember when the federal government imposed a third-party manager on the band in Attawapiskat in 2011-2012. It thought the community would fold, but the community did not fold, and they went to court. When they went to court, the government cut off all the funding to the community, including for education, and the community went two months without education dollars. That would be illegal in any other jurisdiction.

There have been many fights with municipal governments, but imagine a fight with the municipal government in Toronto if it were told the money is going to be cuff off to all the schools until it complies with its mayor. That would never happen, but that is what happened in Attawapiskat. The government imposed a third-party manager at \$1,800 a day, who I think was making more money than the Prime Minister, yet students were being evicted from college because the money was not being transferred for their college funds.

There are some fundamental problems with the relationship, and I would like to tell my hon. colleagues that it does not have to be this way. When I look at first nation communities across this country, I see such immense possibilities. I see inspired young people coming forward as leaders. On the James Bay coast I have seen a whole new generation of young, articulate leaders who see a much bigger world and want to be part of that world. I see industry saying it wants to find ways to get peace on the ground so development can occur, saying that for development to happen, it needs trained, empowered first nation communities, but I do not see the federal government at the table.

For example, the government claimed that the Ring of Fire—

• (1525)

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. Minister of State.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I believe we are debating the first nations elections act, and I think the record will reflect that we have not heard the member even come close to the ambit of discussion around the first nations elections act. I can appreciate that his next sentence was going to be expressing his appreciation for what this government has done to invest in educational opportunities

for the Ring of Fire, which would be a good talking line for him, but unfortunately this debate has to do with the first nations elections act and nothing to do with what he has said since he started his speech.

The Deputy Speaker: I came to the chair part way through and I must admit I have not heard anything about the elections act.

The member for Timmins—James Bay has only about a minute left, so perhaps he could address his closing comments.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly send you the blues to help you out so that you will understand the erudite nature of my speech.

Before I finish up, I would like to point out that I think my hon. colleague was getting a little tense because the Ring of Fire is near his area, and the government blew it. I do not want to embarrass him, but this is why I go back to the issue of governance. We need to deal with this issue of governance. The issue that we are talking about is the breach of faith. The governance between first nations and the government needs to be based on trust, and we have not seen any of that level of trust.

We can hear all the talking points we want on how the government blew it on the Ring of Fire, but the communities do not trust the government, and neither should they. As I said earlier in my speech, we can tinker with the problems of the Indian Act, but the fundamental problem is the relationship.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have several questions for my colleague, and I will go ahead because what this bill shows is the Conservatives' attitude toward first nations. Again, this is a paternalistic attitude that aims to impose a decision rather than take into account the consultations held with first nations.

In the NDP, we are fortunate to have an excellent critic, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, who discusses issues on a nation-to-nation basis. This very capable member has done a remarkable job on this file for several months using this nation-to-nation approach, which is very different from the Conservatives' paternalistic tactics.

Today at noon, there were protests outside Parliament to show the government that first nations want an approach that is more respectful of aboriginal rights and more in line with this practice that the NDP has begun to adopt, that is, a nation-to-nation approach.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague whether he thinks that the Conservatives, in this bill, showed respect for our first nations and what they asked for.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the excellent question and for the reference to the phenomenal work of the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. He is a man who has represented us at the United Nations on the issues of first nations.

Government Orders

As he always points out, we can look to La Paix des Braves in Quebec. The signing of the James Bay agreement with the Grand Council of the Crees was a historic moment. The Government of Quebec recognized that it had to deal with the land issues of the James Bay Cree. It set the first modern treaty, but it was with a provincial government, because the feds were not at the table. We can see from that model that when something is done with respect and involvement, change is possible.

When I look at the east side of James Bay on the Quebec side and then I look at the west side in Ontario, I see vast differences between the poverty and lack of infrastructure in our region and the development that has happened on the Quebec side. That is not to say that it has been easy. It is not to say that the treaty principles of La Paix des Braves have not been breached, but there is a mechanism in place.

Unfortunately, we are still tinkering here with a broken act, a colonial act, a 19th century act. We can talk about tinkering, but I think we need to look at the models that work and we need to learn from the people who know how to make things work.

My hon. colleague who represented the Grand Council of the Cree at the United Nations and in the negotiations with Quebec would certainly be well positioned to be an Indian affairs minister. He could actually deal with some of these fundamental problems that need addressing.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member how he feels about the process of consultation, because I think that is one of two issues with the bill. In addition to the lack of respect for self-government, there is a lack of consultation on so many issues.

Yes, there were some first nations that wanted to talk about elections, but when they said things the government did not want to hear, the government proceeded with the bill anyway. It is going ahead without respect for what consultation really means, which is not just to let people speak but to hear what they have to say and act on it.

I wonder what the experience of consultation with first nations in the member's riding might be.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have had the great honour to work with some of the Algonquin communities in northern Quebec and really learn on the ground how the governance structures need to work. I have also had the great honour to serve the Cree communities of the upper James Bay region.

We certainly know that the two-year cycle of elections has been very disruptive and we are glad to see that is changing. Two years is not sufficient time to build any kind of sustainable governance structure.

The problem with what continues to be imposed is that it is an inverted model of accountability. It is that the band and the band council are responsible to the minister, not to the people.

In our regions in the north, 180 years ago we had the Hudson Bay agent, who lorded it over the land. Then we had the Indian agent. Now we have the INAC bureaucrat. As far as I can see, they are all the same guy and they all stem from the same problem, which is this

idea that they are the ones who will make the decisions and not the people whose lives are being affected. That is not a democratic model.

• (1535)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very passionate and well-informed speech.

When speaking with aboriginal people in the community, they tell me that what we saw in South Africa, the apartheid movement, was actually inspired by the Indian Act in Canada. At first, when I heard that, I was so disheartened. What we are seeing today is a continuing lack of consultation and a lack of respect for our first nations aboriginal and Métis people in this country.

With this change in Bill C-9, what we are seeing is a further lack of respect, not consultation with the communities or with the people who will actually be impacted by the changes. This is a very non-democratic process disguised as a democratic process.

I was wondering if my hon. colleague could comment.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, certainly on this world freedom day, the day we remember the great Mandela and his walk to freedom, I really believe that in northern communities, there are young people who are the next Mandelas. What Mandela showed is that it is possible to reconcile after years and years of injustice. The word I hear all the time in first nation communities is “reconciliation”. I hear that the treaties will be honoured, that we committed to the treaties for as long as the sun shines, as long the grass grows, and as long as the river flows.

We have a fundamental duty. It is our primary relationship as Canadians, the relationship formed when those treaties were signed. Everything else comes after that.

It has been a broken relationship, but in first nation communities, I hear the word “reconciliation”. I never hear it from government. Never. I have never heard the word “reconciliation”. There is no understanding of what it means. Reconciliation is to come together with respect. I think when we come together with that respect, we will actually be able to start re-understanding how to build a governance structure that is forward-looking and accountable to the communities. Fundamentally, when it comes to education and children, no child in this country should ever be thrust into fourth world conditions in marginalized communities across the far north of Canada.

When we look at Mandela and what he stood for, I think Canada is on the verge today, so we need to take that next step. It is what the world expects of us and what we need to expect of each other.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say, in the spirit of reconciliation, that when the hon. member for Drummond mentioned, after the long and somewhat rambling, off-point speech by the member for Timmins—James Bay, that the current system of elections in first nations communities is paternalistic, I could not agree more.

Government Orders

Perhaps distracted by his colleague's speech, the hon. member for Drummond did not read the bill that is up for debate today. If he did, he would see that it is designed to take the minister out of the day-to-day governance of on-reserve elections. This, in fact, has been the request of multiple first nations, from Manitoba to the Maritimes.

Although it takes a little more time, I would urge my colleagues across the way to actually read the bill and see that it is designed to increase self-government in an opt-in manner for first nations communities.

• (1540)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to finally get a question from the shy Conservatives over there. It is interesting to hear the member talk about the opt-in mechanism, but he does not talk about the opt-out mechanism, and that is one of the key issues raised by the first nation communities. The fact is that “[i]t continues minister discretion to exercise control over First Nations governance and it would result in some First Nations being subjects of the act rather than the participants”.

That was Aimée Craft, chair of the National Aboriginal Law Section of the Canadian Bar Association.

I know that the group over there does not want to debate these issues. I want to thank the member for having the courage to rise and ask a question.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I am going to share my time with the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

I rise at third reading to speak against Bill C-9, which has a very long title, and to demonstrate that I have actually read it, I am going to go through the title. It is An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations.

I am always a bit resentful when members on the other side imply that disagreement means that we have not actually read a bill. In fact, I am disappointed to be in this situation of opposing this bill, because there was actually a promising start with some first nations in terms of trying to come up with a bill to reform the regulations under the Indian Act for conducting elections. However, somewhere this went off the rails, I believe. It is also disappointing because we have been discussing these kinds of issues of governance for a long time. I want to spend some time on how we got here, or more accurately, on how we are stalled at the place where we are now.

When I said I wanted to talk about how we got here or about how we are stalled here, I am really referring to the broad underlying issue of first nations self-government. This is a principle that was first recognized by this Parliament more than 30 years ago, when all parties agreed to support what was called the Penner report, in 1983. This report was named after the chair of what was called the Indian self-government committee. This was an exceptional committee in the House of Commons in that it invited a first nations representative, Roberta Jamieson, a very respected Mohawk leader, to sit as a full member of the committee. It was certainly the first and perhaps the only time any committee of this House of Commons has had someone from outside the House sit on a committee. The reason

for doing that was that we wanted to make sure that first nations were heard.

The committee travelled the length and breadth of this country, literally from coast to coast to coast, to hear directly from first nations and their communities. I know about this committee quite well, because as a young researcher at the House of Commons, I was actually attached as staff to the committee, and I travelled across the country for nearly a year with the committee.

What the Penner report did was groundbreaking in what it recommended and in that it actually listened to first nations in their communities. In adopting the Penner committee report, the House of Commons broke new ground, because the House of Commons said that Canadians needed to recognize the right of self-government for first nations and needed to entrench that right in the Constitution. Then there needed to be legislation to implement self-government by recognizing first nations as a third order of government, independent of federal and provincial governments, in their own areas of jurisdiction.

This marks a journey that began 30 years ago to make first nations self-government a reality in this country, and unfortunately, Bill C-9 indicates that we still have not gotten there.

The new approach taken by the Penner committee was entrenched in the Constitution Act, 1982, which recognized and affirmed existing aboriginal rights and treaty rights and provided for constitutional conferences to be held later to define and implement those rights. Unfortunately, in the four conferences held between 1983 and 1987, there was a failure to get agreement on how to define those rights and on how to move forward with legislation to implement them.

The year 1987 marked the biggest setback for the recognition of self-government we have seen in this country, with the failure of that constitutional conference on self-government and with the exclusion of aboriginal people from the talks leading to the Meech Lake accord. Of course, fate sometimes has a way of paying back, so when it came time for the Meech Lake accord to be approved, it failed. It was defeated in the Manitoba legislature by a single vote, that of the respected first nations leader Elijah Harper.

There was an attempt to reset the debate at Charlottetown, and aboriginal people were included in that next round of constitutional talks. The Charlottetown accord would have explicitly entrenched the right of self-government in the Constitution, but it was subsequently, unfortunately, defeated at referendum.

I am going to continue just a little longer down this road of talking about history, because it explains what is fundamentally wrong with Bill C-9, as it is presented to us.

In 1996, we had the publication of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which echoed what had been said in the original Penner report, now some 13 years before. It said again that we needed to recognize and entrench the right to self-government; to recognize first nations governments as a third order of government, equal in every way to federal and provincial governments; and to reorganize our federal institutions to reflect those facts.

Government Orders

•(1545)

Unfortunately, the response of the Liberal government in 1998 was simply that they were open to talking. The Liberals did not actually do anything to implement those recommendations.

Alongside this halting political process, there were important legal developments based on the recognition of aboriginal rights in the 1982 Constitution. This refers to the Supreme Court of Canada decisions, beginning with *R. v. Sparrow* in 1990, which established that the federal government has a duty to consult and to accommodate first nations when considering any infringement or abridgement of an aboriginal treaty right. The Supreme Court of Canada has found this duty to flow not only from section 35.1 of the Constitution Act but also from the fiduciary responsibilities of the Crown to aboriginal people and from the duty to uphold the honour of the Crown by dealing with aboriginal people in a fair and just manner.

Returning to Bill C-9 directly, no one argues that the election process under the Indian Act could not be improved, but there are two much more important questions at play here. How does Bill C-9 stack up when it comes to these two constitutional principles governing relationships between the federal government and first nations: the recognition of the right of self-government on the one hand and the duty to consult on the other? I submit that on both grounds, the bill fails and fails miserably.

Consultation means more than just asking people to speak and then ignoring their concerns. Again, a process that started well with the first nations in the Atlantic provinces and with the Manitoba chiefs went off the rails when people raised concerns about particular aspects of the bill. The government decided to press ahead, despite losing the support of its partner in those consultations. This is not what consultation means in Canadian law. Consultation means to hear the other side, to take seriously their concerns, and to accommodate those concerns when it comes to first nations' rights. This has not been done in the bill.

Respect for self-government also means that we recognize first nations governments as equals in the constitutional order. What is fundamentally wrong with the bill, and what first nations object to, is giving the minister the right to decide which kind of election first nations should use.

The bill would allow even those using custom elections to be forced under the provisions of this new parallel process, even over the objections of that first nation. If the minister believed there was something wrong in the first nation in terms of corruption or the election process, the minister could unilaterally decide to force them into a selection process for their leaders that they did not choose. This fundamentally disrespects the right to self-government.

I have five first nations in my riding. Elections in four of those are conducted under the Indian Act. The Songhees Nation, Scia'new First Nation, T'Sou-ke Nation, and Pacheedaht First Nation are running under what, admittedly, is an act with some problems, in particular the two-year term for leaders. However, they were not consulted directly and have not asked for these changes.

One of the nations in my riding, Esquimalt Nation, operates under custom, and certainly Esquimalt has not been consulted and would

object strenuously to giving the minister the power to force them away from their customary elections.

First nations in my riding should be concerned about that lack of consultation, but they are even more concerned about the lack of respect for first nations as equal partners in Confederation.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development confirmed earlier today in the House the bullying attitude of the Conservatives when it comes to first nations by restating his position, once again, that he will not discuss funding for first nations education unless they first agree to accept his bill to reform first nations education. Again, it is fundamental disrespect for consultation and fundamental disrespect for the equality of first nations.

I see that I am running out of time. Let me say that in my riding, certainly, we have no problem with the leadership of first nations. We have a large number of initiatives that have been undertaken by chiefs in our ridings, including Chief Rob Sam, of the Songhees Nation, which is about to open a wellness centre; Chief Andy Thomas, of Esquimalt Nation, which has entered a partnership for apprenticeships in the shipbuilding industry; Chief Russell Chipps, who is in a partnership to build a new housing development on the Scia'new Reserve; and Chief Gordon Planes, who has led his nation in becoming a solar nation, according to a division of his elders, and has taken the first nation off the grid, with solar hot water in every nation and solar cells on the first nations office roof. It is certainly a great initiative. The Pacheedaht Nation, under Chief McClurg, recently purchased a tree farm licence to provide sustainable care of the forest and sustainable economic development in his community.

•(1550)

This is a bill that tries to fix a problem that does not really exist in my riding. It would do so without consulting the first nations of my riding, without listening to them and without respecting their right to self-government.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned the five first nations in his riding. This bill would have no effect on the first nations in his riding if they chose not to opt in to the provisions of Bill C-9. He should be telling his members that.

As for the Esquimalt Nation, which operates under custom code, the minister currently has the power under the Indian Act to take it out of custom code and put it into the Indian Act code if it has a prolonged dispute. That power currently exists. It is not a new idea.

Routine Proceedings

What this legislation proposes is that the minister would be able to, in extreme circumstances, put them into the more robust system proposed under Bill C-9. The current rules have only been exercised three times in Canada's history, when a first nation has been taken out of custom code election and put back into the Indian Act because of a prolonged dispute. On those extremely rare occasion where a first nation has been unable to internally resolve a leadership problem, Bill C-9 would allow it to be put into this more robust system.

This is not a new power. The member should know that. If he paid attention to the debate and what was discussed in committee, he would know that this is the case. It has only been done three times. I wish he would recognize that fact.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's questions illustrates my point. I have paid attention. I know he has that power now, but what did first nations say when they were consulted about what should happen in disputed elections?

First nations actually made a proposal that we should establish a commission of first nations representatives who would hear disputes about leadership and elections in first nations communities. Instead of the minister making a decision, first nations themselves could govern themselves and appeal to a commission of first nations that would make those decisions.

Again, it illustrates my point exactly, that true consultation means hearing the other side and what it has to say and making a legitimate effort to include those suggestions in the bill. In doing so, that would provide a fundamental respect for self-government for first nations. Unfortunately, the government failed to do that. That is one of the reasons I am opposing the bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the speaker made reference to Elijah Harper. Elijah Harper served in a period of time when I was inside the Manitoba legislature. I am very familiar with the Meech Lake debate and discussions and why it did not pass the Manitoba legislature. At the time, I was a member of the Manitoba legislature, as was Elijah Harper.

There is no doubt about the number of protests, particularly the number of first nations people who came into the rotunda of Manitoba legislature. It was not just our first nations community, but the community as a whole that ultimately saw what was necessary. What the first nations were really pushing back then was the fact that they were not a part of the process.

Even though we see some changes through Bill C-9, it is important to recognize that there is a lack of consensus from within the first nations leadership in working with the government and bringing the legislation forward to the point where it is. We need to do more to enable that leadership to bring the solutions to the problems that we have.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question raises a question for me. If he was a member of the Manitoba legislature and first nations had failed to be consulted in the Meech Lake accord, why was the single vote that defeated it Elijah Harper's? Why was it not the member's also, if he claims to recognize the failure of consultation and the exclusion of first nations at that time?

It is a good example of what happens when first nations are excluded from the process in which they should rightfully be included in.

• (1555)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to revert to tabling of reports from committees.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member for Edmonton—Leduc have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled, "The Future We Want: Recommendations for the 2014 Budget".

[*English*]

I understand the member for Parkdale—High Park has a response to each report. Do you wish her to do that now or for me to present the other report?

The Deputy Speaker: We will do them one by one.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his chairmanship on the finance committee. We have had a very busy agenda this fall. Our pre-budget consultations are very important because we are still dealing with the after-effects of the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. We have heard from many Canadians who expect us to work together to make life more affordable, to help them in their retirement and create good middle-class jobs.

The majority report contains important summaries of the testimonies from many excellent witnesses. However, it fails to present comprehensive solutions to the important issues raised in the hearings. We need solutions like good middle-class jobs that have continued to disappear under the government. We need concrete measures to help people save for their retirement years. We also heard concerns about the process of this consultation, that the restrictions placed on consultations were too narrow and restrictive. We heard that from witnesses.

We also heard concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability for the budget process as a whole. We have called on the federal government to introduce more transparency in the budget process, as recommended by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

In our supplementary report, we have submitted a number of proposals about the creation of good jobs, investments in infrastructure, the need to save and invest in retirement security for Canadians. Sadly, the government just voted against making improvements to CPP and QPP yesterday. We also made recommendations about making life more affordable for Canadians, how to address the issue of household debt and about improving the programs and services that Canadians rely on.

We believe these concrete measures should have been included in the main body of the report and that did not meet the approval of the government. While the other opposition party was supportive in defining the problem again, we found a lack of concrete solutions in many cases. We believe our supplementary report presents a fuller picture and concrete recommendations that we hope will help the Minister of Finance in his deliberations for the budget of 2014.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled, “Income Inequality in Canada: An Overview”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I will take this opportunity to thank all members of Parliament on that committee who worked extremely hard this fall session. I want to thank our clerk and analysts for their extraordinary work, all committee staff and the interpreters. The finance committee sat an enormous amount of hours this fall to get these reports tabled. We have done an awful lot of good work and I want to extend my best wishes to all who made these reports possible.

• (1600)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I echo my colleague and thank all who have worked so hard on this committee. We had a very busy fall agenda.

The report on income inequality in Canada is unfortunately all too brief. There is a disturbing growth in income inequality in Canada over recent decades. We heard stark testimony about the social and economic ills associated with it, but we had a mere three public hearings on such a huge topic. It was also very limited in scope. We believe that on both these grounds, the limited time and the limited scope, were grossly inadequate to address the fundamental problems facing Canadians.

The report successfully details many of the key elements of the inequality problem. We believe the recommendations of the report fail to fully confront the problem that we are facing, so we had a whole range of supplementary recommendations, things like calling for a thorough review of Canada's tax and transfer system to see where the greatest increases in income inequality are located, and we urge that the government review all tax expenditure to assess their cost effectiveness and fairness. We also urge the government to really crack down on tax evasion and go after that revenue, which is badly needed for our economy.

Government Orders

We had strong recommendations about retirement security, improving OAS, reversing the cuts that the government made, improving GIS and improving the Canada and Quebec pension plan, expanding the working income tax benefit and increasing the federal minimum wage.

We also called for stronger measures to allow people to engage in collective bargaining, which we believe would improve their working lives and their incomes, so we had a range of concrete recommendations.

We believe income inequality is not only a terrible personal and social ill, it has an impact on our overall economy. It is bad for economic growth and we believe strongly that with the concrete measures we are proposing, Canada can marshal the resources to address this serious and urgent problem, and growing problem, and that we should be doing this without delay.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

FIRST NATIONS ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House to speak to Bill C-9, which establishes an alternative electoral regime that the first nations can adopt to replace the current regime.

The bill proposes a number of improvements to the current systems, and many first nations said they were satisfied with the proposals when they first appeared before the Senate committee. This was a Senate bill, Bill S-6. In the House of Commons it became Bill C-9.

However, we know this government. Things are not always what they seem. The witnesses also raised a number of concerns about some of the measures in the bill, and most of those concerns are shared by experts.

According to the government, this bill is meant to update the first nations electoral system. However, while almost everyone agrees that the Indian Act is paternalistic and must be replaced, one of the most controversial clauses of Bill C-9 is modelled on it.

Government Orders

The greatest similarity between Bill C-9 and the Indian Act is the fact that the minister is given the authority to subject a first nations community that has its own election code to this new, so-called voluntary, system by order. That led Jody Wilson-Raybould, AFN Regional Chief for British Columbia, to say the following:

...subclauses 3(1)(b) and (c) permit the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to add the name of a First Nation to the schedule without its consent; this is not appropriate. First Nations are in a period of transition and moving towards increased autonomy and self-government [where] appropriate accountability is to our citizens.

Ultimately, each nation must, and will, take responsibility for its own governance, including elections.

When he presented the bill to the Senate committee, the then minister of aboriginal affairs and northern development wanted to clarify certain myths surrounding Bill S-6. He said that the clause was not problematic because the legislation controlled its use by imposing specific prerequisites. That is a half-truth because subsection 71(1) of the Indian Act states that the minister can use the order whenever he deems it advisable for the good government of a band.

Bill C-9 specifies the circumstances under which he can do so. However, some of them could be seen as rather subjective, especially in the hands of this government. For example:

[when] the Minister is satisfied that a protracted leadership dispute has significantly compromised governance of that First Nation;

[when] the Governor in Council has set aside an election of the Chief and councillors of that First Nation under section 79 of the Indian Act on a report of the Minister that there was corrupt practice in connection with that election.

The main idea behind the bill is that these provisions give the minister the power to impose rules of basic governance on a first nation, rules that the first nation may find illegitimate, which will no doubt add fuel to the fire, considering the current conditions.

According to the Assembly of First Nations, this is not simply a political problem. According to the AFN, if there is one aspect of the inherent right to self-government that we can all agree on, and that must absolutely be constitutionally protected under section 35 of the Constitution Act, it must be the ability of our nations to determine their own method of selecting leadership. Otherwise, section 35 is meaningless.

If the right of first nations to choose their own means of election is protected under section 35 of the Constitution Act, how can we justify the spirit of this legislation, which could quite simply allow the government to legislate unilaterally and to violate this right?

If I recall correctly, I believe that one of the witnesses who appeared before the Senate committee even referred to the fact that this provision could be challenged on the basis that it tramples, without justification, the right of a nation to self-determination. The government is contradicting itself by being so spiteful with this bill while claiming that it wants the first nations to become autonomous. We are still a long way from nation-to-nation dialogue.

I will quote Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada:

Canada's economic and social well-being benefits from strong, self-sufficient Aboriginal and northern people and communities. Our vision is a future in which First Nations, Inuit, Métis and northern communities are healthy, safe, self-sufficient and prosperous—a Canada where people make their own decisions, manage their own affairs and make strong contributions to the country as a whole.

●(1605)

That quote is from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's website.

Some aboriginal leaders have said that certain aspects of this bill are problematic. In Canada, a chief can be elected in three different ways. Bill C-9 offers a fourth option.

The three systems we have now are: the Indian Band Election Regulations, elections pursuant to the custom code, and self-government agreements. This bill offers a fourth option.

According to Jody Wilson-Raybould, regional chief of the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, the fact that the government is not necessarily making a distinction between the first nations that use different systems:

...[could have] an unintended consequence...that could lead to political and perhaps legal problems for a First Nation and Canada...This could mean that a chief and council, by resolution only, could overturn a community-approved custom election code. This raises some flags, and it might be seen as a step back along the governance continuum in empowering community.

In addition, a number of witnesses who appeared before the committee pointed out that the system the department is proposing is too complex. Candice Paul, co-chair of the Atlantic Policy Conference of First Nations Chiefs, had concerns about a number of aspects of the proposed electoral system.

Ms. Paul had questions, for example, about the mandate of band councils elected under the Indian Act. First nations communities are almost constantly in an election campaign, which is detrimental to the stability of band councils and their ability to develop long-term projects. She was concerned about the weakness of the nomination process, which could result in a large number of candidates—sometimes more than 100—running in the same election.

She also questioned the postal ballot system, which may be open to fraud. The process of appeal to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is paternalistic and complex, and it sometimes takes too long to come to conclusions and to issue binding decisions. Finally, the lack of specific election offences and associated penalties in the Indian Act leaves the door open to fraud, as well as to other illicit activities, such as buying and selling votes.

However, the harshest and most common criticism is about the lack of consultation with first nations. The chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band took exception to the fact that she had only a few days in which to prepare for the hearing that took place in February 2012. When she was asked to appear before the committee, she had never even heard of the bill. The community is concerned, because its elections are going on under its custom code.

However, the chief stated that:

Our First Nation, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, is signatory to the adhesion of Treaty 6, signed in 1889. We have treaty and inherent rights to First Nations governance.

Government Orders

In its media release, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada stated that Bill C-9 was the product of collaboration. However, according to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, the bill was not examined by their band councils, the Prince Albert Grand Council, or the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. I am being sarcastic when I suggest that this is one more fine example of true collaboration.

The government claims that it held consultations before it introduced the bill. The government also claims to be helping first nations with the electoral model. However, it is clear now, as it has been in the past, that the Conservative government did not understand the concept of nation to nation negotiation and nation recognition.

First nations have established governance principles. Indeed, some aspects deal with governance in the Indian Act. It is also widely acknowledged that the Indian Act is extremely problematic and that the House should have a real debate on this matter.

This bill does nothing of the sort and, like many other bills—whether they deal with the economy, immigration or other issues—it confers additional rights or discretionary powers on ministers to the detriment of organizations that, in this case, want to self-govern.

In that sense, we can think of no justification for this bill and the new process that the government is proposing. That is why we will oppose Bill C-9.

•(1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member raises concern with the necessity of ministerial intervention in a first nation's protracted governance dispute.

Only recently the NDP asked the minister to intervene to remedy an ongoing dispute in the case of one particular first nation by ordering an immediate election. It is quite ironic, given the NDP's position on Bill C-9 where they have consistently stated their opposition to ministerial intervention in future protracted governance disputes.

Is the member suggesting that the first nation communities under a protracted leadership dispute should not have access to the same robust electoral system that would be available to other first nations? Can the NDP members across the aisle come to a coherent policy or will they continue to speak to the bill as incoherently as the member for Timmins—James Bay?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I admit that I read my speech. I think it was quite obvious. I therefore thank my colleague for reading his question.

We are talking about a case-by-case situation. I am not familiar with the specific situation that the hon. member for York Centre is referring to. However, his question brings the whole issue into perspective.

We currently have a situation where a member took action. I am not sure whether it was in a consultation with first nations in his area. However, there is a big difference between a case-specific situation,

where a representation is made by a member with regard to a local situation that may cause problems, and a situation enshrined in law, which gives the minister power to make a decision that affects an entire community, with little or no consultation.

In this particular case, I assume there was consultation. If not, I assume it was, at very least, a local situation, which required the minister to make a local decision that did not apply to the entire country. Right now, we are having a debate. Ultimately, we will vote for or against a bill that would grant discretionary powers to the government for all situations.

It is really not the same thing. That is why I do not really understand why the hon. member is asking this question. There is a big difference between anecdotal situations, situations that are resolved on a case by case basis, and situations that will then extend to an entire department.

•(1615)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his excellent speech on Bill C-9.

Today, we are looking into an extremely important issue. In fact, it is the very essence of this Parliament, namely, what to do about first nations issues. Do we want to have a nation-to-nation dialogue, as the Prime Minister promised us, or is the government going to continue with its paternalistic attitude toward first nations? The hon. member's speech was most enlightening.

That being said, my question will deal more with the consultations. I know that my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, like most of my colleagues on the NDP side, has been conducting many public consultations. He has held many discussions with his constituents to find out their priorities.

A number of first nations communities—primarily in the Maritimes and Manitoba—have been consulted in connection with Bill C-9. However, the recommendations that came out of those consultations were not necessarily taken into consideration.

What does my colleague think about the fact that consultations were held but that the government did not consider the recommendations that were made?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, this is quite an important question. The government may hold consultations without ever implementing any of the recommendations that were made during those consultations.

I know that with Bill S-6, which originated in the Senate, the first nations were initially receptive to the bill. The bill was then changed. There are now a number of serious issues with the final wording of the bill that the first nations are opposed to. Their opposition was made clear in committee and also in the public arena.

The definition of paternalistic legislation is when the government is aware of the problems caused by a bill that should be prepared in consultation and in co-operation with the first nations and still tries to pass it without the agreement of the first nations.

Government Orders

I hope that the government will respect the meaning of real consultation and take into account the various issues raised by the first nations. The future legislation could then respect their wishes and their ways of doing things, which in many cases are traditional. If any problems arise, they could then be resolved by the community.

In a previous speech, one of our colleagues mentioned that any problems that arose during an election could be referred to a first nations community, like an appeal process, for instance. Why must the minister assume the authority to deal with these matters, rather than letting the community deal with them itself?

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

SAFEGUARDING CANADA'S SEAS AND SKIES ACT

The House resumed from November 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. That is not my introduction. It is simply the title of the bill, which amends a number of things.

First, I would like to point out that Bill C-3 has already been debated in another form, as Bill C-57. Before supporting that bill at second reading, the NDP asked that it be reviewed to broaden its scope and reverse Conservative cutbacks and closures regarding marine safety and the negative changes to environmental protection.

Those topics directly concern the purpose of the bill. That request was refused—no surprise there—but the NDP still moved forward.

I am speaking to this bill today to indicate why I will support it, what reservations I have, and what additional measures I would like to see in order to ensure true protection, much more extensive protection of what this bill is designed to protect.

As I said in my introduction, this bill changes a number of things. I would like to highlight some that I find most important. First, the bill seeks to indemnify air carriers for damage caused by war risks. The intent is simply to make sure that, in dangerous situations, air transportation can continue, come what may. It is quite interesting. The bill also grants powers to investigate aviation incidents or accidents involving civilians, aircraft and aeronautical installations. Put simply, the power of investigation increases when an accident occurs, and that too is very interesting.

The only reservation I have about this measure in Bill C-3—and I hope I will be able to deal with it in committee after this vote at second reading—pertains to the discretionary power being given to the minister. I want to make sure that he is not given too much.

Let me digress a little. As the critic for citizenship and immigration, I have a good deal to say about the discretionary powers that are increasingly being given to ministers in a number of bills, including this one.

In our immigration system, we have seen a number of amendments in bills that have changed the system and given more and more discretionary power to the minister. I find that worrisome. We have a very complex and elaborate system, with very competent officials. Yet the minister is being given more and more discretionary power. That worries me. I am not pointing the finger at any minister in particular. I am simply talking about a principle that opens the door to decisions being made in back rooms, where we have no ability to seek real accountability or point out where mistakes have been made here or there. That is the end of my digression. Making that point made me feel a lot better.

In short, the clause in Bill C-3 that deals with the Aeronautics Act must be examined closely to make sure that the discretionary powers given to the minister do not go too far. I hope that we will hear from a number of people who can give us the benefit of their wise counsel.

Bill C-3 also proposes to amend the Marine Liability Act. The bill seeks to implement an international convention that Canada signed in 2010, the Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea. Canada is a signatory to this very important international convention and today's bill seeks to implement it. The convention defines the liability of vessel owners for the costs incurred when oil or other similar materials are spilled. It is very important to highlight and clarify the liability of companies and vessel owners when a spill like that occurs and when damage is caused.

Government Orders

•(1625)

Finally, the amendment to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, is also very important. It introduces new requirements for operators of oil handling facilities, which is somewhat along the same lines as the amendment I mentioned earlier.

The amendment also proposes the application of new measures and monetary sanctions, with new investigative powers for Transport Canada investigators. Once again, we see the same idea. Those two amendments are the most important.

As another aside, I would like to refer to what happened recently in Lac-Mégantic. I agree that it is not really the same thing, but we are still talking about the same principle of owners and operators being liable.

After the recent Lac-Mégantic tragedy, we saw how the province took action. People on the ground and Quebecers from across the province joined forces to provide assistance to victims and to raise funds for reconstruction and restitution after this oil-related accident.

It is unacceptable that it is the people who must come together and pay for that damage. People were kept in the dark for so long before finding out whether the company's insurance was going to pay for the damage. In the end, a large part of the cost had to be covered by the province and by generous and compassionate individuals.

That is the link I want to make here. These amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and the Marine Liability Act may provide a solution by ensuring that companies at fault in the case of spills or catastrophes like that one will be a little more liable.

I will now continue with the bill. I said earlier that Canada was a signatory to the 2010 International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea. Yes, I said the 2010 Convention. Well, not so long ago, in the autumn of 2012, two big transport ships sank off the west coast because of the current traffic.

Today, we have the impression that the bill that we are debating is a means for the Conservative government to apologize for its failure to act all these years. By signing the 2010 international convention, perhaps the government was demonstrating goodwill, but too much time went by after that. Catastrophes happened, and spills happened on the west coast, and it is only now that I am debating this bill at second reading. That is much too long.

Yes, Bill C-3 introduces corrective measures, and once again I will be supporting it at second reading. It may be too little, too late, but I just wanted to raise the matter.

What will the next step be? The Conservatives have set up a three-person tanker safety expert panel. In November 2013, the panel was to publish a report on how to reform the oil spill response regime. I am mentioning it because all too often we have seen very interesting reports being tabled without their recommendations being taken seriously or implemented quickly.

I hope the Conservatives will show good faith when this report is tabled and that they will implement meaningful and serious reform measures as recommended by the panel, in order to improve

companies' safety and liability. Oil tanker traffic is increasing and we must ensure that our regulations keep up.

•(1630)

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague finished her speech on the impact of oil tankers. People in Quebec are concerned about the transport of oil by pipeline or over our beautiful gulf, which also has fossil fuel potential. Canadians have concerns, especially when the federal government is the one managing this. Does my colleague think that Canadians are justified in their concern about the Conservatives' management of this matter?

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and his community involvement. As a member of Parliament, he does a very good job of representing the people in Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

Yes, there are some concerns. I will explain why I think these concerns are justified. Despite Bill C-3 before us today, we are aware to what extent the Conservatives have gutted, or at least significantly reduced, environmental protection measures. That is the cornerstone of the concerns. When you want to develop natural resources responsibly, you do not lower environmental standards and drop the number of inspections. On the contrary, you increase resources for scientists and inspectors. When you give a natural resources development project the green light, you should have every available credible study and an audit system. That way, you can assure the population that it will be done properly, in a way that respects the environment and sustainable development, and that avoids disasters. Canadians do not trust this government right now. It is understandable when we consider everything that has been done to reduce environmental protection.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the Auditor General recently told us that, in his report, roughly 25% of the audits had been done on the rail transportation of dangerous goods.

He did not say so in so many words, but I gathered that he thought this might be due to a lack of resources. That is not what he said, but that is what I understood.

Does my colleague not worry that even with a bill like this, and given the government's cuts in this area, there could be problems preventing tanker oil spills?

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I understand where her question is coming from. I understand her concern because on the one hand, a host of regulations has been implemented recently by the Conservatives, who boast about having done something tangible, and on the other hand, there are not enough resources to ensure that the new regulations are implemented effectively.

Private Members' Business

If I may add to the discussion: oil tanker traffic has increased tremendously. In fact, oil tanker traffic tripled between 2005 and 2010. It is supposed to triple again by 2016. You can see how important this is.

I am pleased to support Bill C-3 at second reading stage, but frankly, we must continue in this direction and ensure that our regulations are appropriate for the current situation.

• (1635)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 second time and referred to a committee)

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it you shall find consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the chief government whip have consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PROTECTING TAXPAYERS AND REVOKING PENSIONS OF CONVICTED POLITICIANS ACT

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC) moved that Bill C-518, an act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act (withdrawal allowance), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to start the debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-518. Quite simply, this bill would penalize crooked, law-breaking politicians who fleece taxpayers by taking away their pensions.

I was the national director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation when the scandal surrounding former senator Lavigne unfolded. Like many Canadians, I was appalled at the details of the case. He quite literally stole money from taxpayers. He was ordered to repay tens of thousands of dollars for improper travel expenses. He used publicly funded staff to do his own personal chores. He was convicted in a court of law for breach of trust and fraud. Yet, while that man currently sits in prison, he is still collecting a taxpayer-sponsored pension because of a loophole.

Mr. Lavigne technically resigned as a senator before he was kicked out. According to the rules, when senators resign they get to hold on to their pension. Only when senators are forced out of office for breaking the law, or are otherwise disqualified, will they lose their pension. However, if they quit before they have the chance to get fired, they will be paid a parliamentary pension. That is exactly

what Mr. Lavigne did. He fleeced taxpayers while in office and now he fleeces them still.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation calculates that former senator Lavigne is receiving \$67,000 per year from his publicly funded pension. That is more than most Canadians earn from honest work in a full-time job.

More recently, we saw Mac Harb retire from the Senate after it was discovered that he had also been fleecing taxpayers. He qualifies for a pension estimated to be over \$100,000 per year. The police are investigating his actions. Should he be charged and convicted, he will be in the same boat as disgraced former senator Lavigne, with taxpayers footing the bill again.

This situation is unacceptable. That is why I want to change the law to close the loophole that is currently letting politicians who abuse their office and swindle taxpayers get a taxpayer-funded retirement. That is what this protecting taxpayers and revoking pensions of convicted politicians act will do.

First, it would add a clause to the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act to take into account the situation where a senator or a member of Parliament is convicted of an offence that arose out of conduct that occurred while that individual was in office. It would do this by using the same mechanism that is already in place for politicians who become disqualified from holding their office. The law already takes into account a situation where senators are deemed disqualified. It states that senators will receive their pension contributions plus interest and not a penny more as a lump sum when he or she "...ceases to be a Senator by reason of disqualification or was expelled from the House of Commons".

Whenever senators or members of Parliament are found to have committed reprehensible crimes while in office, whether or not they are still holding that office, they should have their pensions taken away. I am sure my colleagues will agree with me that we must get rid of the loophole that currently lets crooked politicians keep their pensions if they quit before they get fired. Thus, under my bill, convicted parliamentarians would not receive a pension but would be reimbursed only their pension contributions plus the earned interest.

Second, what I also want to accomplish with the bill is to make sure it will be applied for all future convictions of politicians, including for past malfeasance. For this reason, I have included a section clarifying that the charges contained in the bill would apply with respect to any person who is or was a member of the Senate or House of Commons and convicted after the date I introduced the bill, which was June 3, 2013.

Police investigations are currently under way to look into possible criminal breach of trust, theft or fraud. Charges may be forthcoming. If any of these potential charges result in a conviction, I would want to know that this loophole was closed in time.

Private Members' Business

Some have wondered if this bill, which would revoke the parliamentary pension of convicted politicians, is legal and have asked the following. Can the law be modified to repeal an entitlement? Can it be applied retroactively to the near past when the bill was tabled? Can it include a crime that occurred before even the tabling date?

● (1640)

I can answer with certainty; the answer is yes. Yes, we can repeal a parliamentary entitlement and, as I mentioned previously, the law already provides under what circumstances that can be done.

Indeed, I believe most analysts would agree there is not an issue on a go forward basis, that is, when the crime, the criminal charge, and the conviction, all happen after the bill is law, should it become law. However, of course, life is not that simple. We have several difficult cases before us now. They demand a remedy to protect taxpayers.

With regard to retroactivity to convictions after the tabling date of June 3 for crimes committed before that date, the answer again is yes and yes, and again with certainty. It can be done, for it has already been done.

Legislation passed earlier this year in Nova Scotia strips the pension of any lawmaker convicted of a crime for which the maximum punishment is imprisonment of no less than five years. The start date for that law was May 6, which was when the bill was tabled in the provincial legislature. The result was that in June an independent MLA lost his pension after pleading guilty to fraud and breach of trust charges arising from an expense scandal. He collected tax dollars after filing ten false expense claims in 2008 and 2009. Today he is not eligible to receive an MLA pension.

I believe that taxpayers expect similar accountability from Parliament. We have an opportunity to stand with taxpayers, should any parliamentarian be found guilty of a serious crime in the future.

Some have expressed concerns that the bill is too harsh. The bar that I have set in the bill would strip the pensions away from any MP or senator who commits a crime with a maximum punishment of two years or more.

During my consultations, it was brought to my attention that there are some crimes in the Criminal Code with a maximum penalty of two years, for which I do not think a politician should lose their pension. There are many different crimes. I will not go through the entire list, but I hardly think that a member of Parliament should lose their pension for being convicted of blasphemous libel. Neither do I think it is necessary to strip a pension away from someone who gives a false alarm of fire. It is also conceivable that somebody could technically be guilty of crimes without the offence being so egregious that it should be grounds for losing a pension.

I think all hon. members would agree that if we were to proceed with the bill, we should do so thoughtfully and carefully, to avoid unjustly revoking a parliamentary pension. I am therefore open to suggestions for improving the bill in this regard.

The best suggestion I have heard so far, and with which I agree, is to limit the scope and to raise the bar. The bill currently would apply to any federal statute, again, with a penalty of two years or more as

the maximum. I think it would be fair to limit the scope to only include the Criminal Code.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the bill would apply to violations for which the maximum penalty is two or more years. It would be fair to raise the bar and only consider indictable offences in which the maximum penalty is five or more years. I will therefore be moving and endorsing this higher five-year threshold at amendment stage. In doing so, this federal act would be virtually identical to provincial law in Nova Scotia.

I believe that my bill is an appropriate response to the unfortunate actions of a handful of people. Both of these modifications would keep the spirit of the bill entirely intact. Fraud and breach of trust would both still result in a loss of pension.

The message I want to send is very simple. If a senator or an MP steals from taxpayers, they do not deserve to have taxpayers buy them or fund them a gold-plated retirement. I trust all hon. members would agree.

● (1645)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the recognition. I thank the member for putting forward the bill, which the NDP members will be working to support at second reading.

The hon. member mentioned in his speech that he would be looking to change the convictions within Bill C-518 from two years to no less than five years, which is parallel to the Nova Scotia law that the NDP government put in place.

I certainly appreciate that the member brought forward that he will be bringing in those amendments, but the other concern that has been raised around the bill, and that is contained within the Nova Scotia NDP bill, allows for a former spouse having court-ordered restitution that can be deducted from the salary or pension of the member of the House of Assembly.

I would ask the hon. member if he is looking, as well, for those amendments, so that the spouses or ex-spouses of those MPs who are convicted would have access to that pension. That was the other concern that was brought forward in terms of his bill.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, I have been asked about that, the question of a spouse or dependent and how they might be impacted by the bill. I have a couple of thoughts on it.

The first is that we should not treat ourselves in a manner that is terribly different than ordinary Canadians. For example, if someone goes to prison today and that person has a spouse, it is difficult for that family but it is something they do without support from the state. Similarly, in my riding, if someone, for example, defrauds a government program, they not only could go to jail but they also lose the funding of that program, say employment insurance as an example. We do not, as a government or a country, make special restitutions for those kinds of examples.

Private Members' Business

Therefore, I am a bit wary of proceeding on a path as they did in the other place, where members are ejected but continue to collect their benefits in a way that I think is a bit offside with Canadian taxpayers.

My solution is that, should a member find himself or herself in a situation where they were disqualified from their pension, under Bill C-518 the amount that had been contributed by the member would be returned to the member with interest. That is no small amount. We currently pay about \$11,000 or \$12,000 a year toward our pensions. That is going to rise to about \$38,000 a year, starting after 2016. If we look at that amount over 6 or 10 years, we begin to approach a fairly healthy amount, between \$300,000 and \$500,000 approximately. Therefore, that addresses the hon. member's concerns to a degree.

Having said that, if that is an avenue that other members want to pursue, I would be open to hearing about it. However, again, I would not want to have a loophole that is too large here, because the point of the bill is to send the signal to people to not break the rules. If they do not break the rules, the pension will be there for them.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point something out to my colleague. He mentioned that for some of the offences with penalties of up to two years, he would not be in favour of revoking pension benefits to any particular member of either House. However, does five years really do that in some cases? Remember, this is just what he says is a maximum sentence. It is not what they have been convicted of necessarily. It runs up to a maximum of five years, which certainly could cover a whole array of charges. I am just trying to test whether he can say definitely that five years gets over that level of comfort that he is talking about.

• (1650)

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, I believe it does because if we go through the Criminal Code we will see the crimes that are generally covered by that, first and foremost, involve a kind of scheming. They are not crimes that one would fall into by accident. More to the point, it is a maximum penalty of five or more years. That does disqualify a whole range of activities that someone could fall into through a lapse of judgment, for example. I would have to ask the member, because I am short on time, to review the Criminal Code.

What is important to avoid here is an example where someone like Lavigne is found guilty of breach of trust and then sentenced to six months, keeping his pension. This bill was designed, not with the penalty that was handed out, the jail time, but with the crime the individual is charged with. It would have to be a serious crime to trigger the loss of a pension.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-518.

As I mentioned in my question to the member a few minutes ago, members of the NDP will be supporting the bill at second reading.

However, I want to raise the caveats right off the top. The two caveats that we have raised are with regard to the Nova Scotia model. The Nova Scotia NDP government brought in the model legislation that basically stood by the principle that Canadian legislators should abide by the law of the land. That legislation was

put in place by the NDP government in Nova Scotia and ensured that for a maximum of no less than five years any offence punishable by imprisonment would mean that the member, in this case the member of the House of Assembly in Nova Scotia, would see his or her pension benefits removed.

As members well know, what that does is allow, still, for the lump-sum payment on pensions, but what it takes away, if somebody has committed this criminal offence, is the additional pension top-up that the taxpayers normally would provide for a pension, whether we are talking at the provincial or the federal level.

We agree with the principle that once a member of Parliament is elected, the member of Parliament has the responsibility to abide by the law of the land. Because of that, we say that this kind of legislation is welcome.

However, as the member has already indicated, we would be looking and seeking amendments to change it to five years for a criminal offence and we have seen, I think, from the member, some willingness to compromise on that. That is welcome.

The other concern that we have raised, though, and it is not a little one, is that former spouses or dependents not be penalized by this.

In the case of the Nova Scotia law that the Nova Scotia NDP government put into place, it ensured that any entitlement a former spouse may have in court or a court-ordered restitution would be deducted from the MHA's pension. What that means, in the context of Bill C-518, is that it would assure that those expenses, in the case of a former spouse or a court-ordered restitution, would be taken away and sent to the spouse or to the victim who receives the court-ordered restitution. That is still an open question for Bill C-518.

Though we are in agreement in principle on second reading, we are certainly hoping at the committee stage that the flexibility that the member has shown with regard to the move from two years to five years would also be considered, in terms of former spouses or court-ordered restitutions.

We agree with the principle of the bill. We do believe some of the details need to be worked on. That is our role here in Parliament, in the House of Commons. NDP members work very diligently to correct, often, mistakes or weaknesses that happen in government bills. It is our pleasure to do it up until 2015 when, of course, we will be producing the type of legislation that we are sure Conservatives will be supporting because we will actually do the work beforehand so that the problems are worked out prior to.

However, it does raise a question because here we have a bill from a Conservative member, which is a welcome bill, that says very clearly Canada's legislators should abide by the law of the land.

It just brings to mind the concerns that we have been raising in the House of Commons over a wide variety of offences that have taken place by Conservatives, and also Liberals, in the other place. We have seen this repeatedly. We have been raising these questions in the House of Commons, repeatedly, trying to get answers about the types of offences we are seeing.

To our mind, abiding by the law of the land has to start at the very top. It means answering clearly when questions are asked. In this House, we have been asking clear questions for a number of weeks and have been getting answers, but the answers, tragically, seem to change. Depending upon the day of the week or I guess whatever the Prime Minister had for breakfast, we are getting different answers back.

That is not the way Parliament should function.

We did, as members know, put out playing cards a month ago at the Conservative national convention, talking about some of the Conservative—

• (1655)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kitchener Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, the understanding I had when I sat down to listen to my colleague across the way was that we were debating a bill proposed by a private member, yet I hear him talking about entirely different things. He is now mentioning playing cards.

I would simply ask the Speaker to rein him in and ask him to keep his comments to relevant comments regarding the bill under debate.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the member for Kitchener Centre has a somewhat valid point. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster is at some degree of variance from the main topic. Perhaps he could bring it back on topic. He only has about four minutes left in his time slot.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the real question is accountability and transparency.

The responsibility of the government is to show that accountability and transparency in the House every single day. The point I am making is that the bill, which talks about accountability, says that Canada's legislators should abide by the law of the land. That is not reflected in the daily practice of government. I think that is a valid point to make.

As far as the concerns that have been raised regarding many of the senators, I will just go through the list. We have Senator Mike Duffy claiming to represent a province that he did not live in. We have Senator Pamela Wallin who was doing fundraising campaigns, again at taxpayers' expense. We have Senator Patrick Brazeau who has been charged with assault.

These are all examples of what happens when a legislator does not abide by the law of the land, and by the laws of Parliament.

The point I am making is this. It is all well and good for a government member to put forward a bill that says that if members violate the laws of the land, they will be punished. The responsibility that the government has is to make sure that the laws of the land are respected each and every day. It is not one private member's bill that makes the difference. It is the overall attitude of the government.

The government's actions every day undermine the bill that has been brought forward. That is the issue. That is what we are debating right here on the floor of the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

We have gone one further, in terms of accountability and transparency, because that is what is purported to be proposed in the bill. What we said last June and what we brought forward to procedure and House affairs was a series of accountability mechanisms, as members will recall, in terms of members' expenses, which is also something that needs to be carefully governed by the law of the land and by the laws of Parliament.

We have said, in agreement with the Auditor General, that the Auditor General should be able to audit MPs' expenses. Unfortunately, Conservative and Liberal members have said no to this. We have also said that there needs to be independent oversight, doing away with the secretive bureau of internal economy and putting in place an independent oversight body.

There again Conservatives and Liberals have said no to that. In response to the Information Commissioner saying very clearly that MPs' expenses should be subject to access to information, we have said yes. Conservatives and Liberals have said no.

My point is this. The NDP has no lessons to learn from either of the old parties around accountability and transparency. It is not one bill that we put forward, it is the actions that we bring every day to the floor of the House of Commons that show the Canadian public that indeed in our case we believe in responsibility, we believe in transparency and we believe that Canadian values should be reflected on the floor of the House of Commons every day.

What are those Canadian values? Those Canadian values are fairness. Those Canadian values are truthfulness, actually having the Prime Minister respond truthfully to the questions that are put to him in the House of Commons. We also believe that Canadian values are that of responsibility. We take responsibility for our actions and we are transparent at all times with the Canadian public.

That is our approach. That is the NDP approach. Like so many other Canadians, I am excited that in 2015 we will get the opportunity to put those values front and centre in the House of Commons each and every day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, on behalf of my colleagues the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Industry, and as part of the government's seven-point plan to replace the CF-18 fleet, the following three reports.

[*English*]

They include the next generation fighter capability annual update, the Canadian industrial participation in the F-35 joint strike fighter program, and the final report of the independent review, "2013, Department of National Defence annual update on next generation fighter capability life-cycle costs".

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***PROTECTING TAXPAYERS AND REVOKING PENSIONS OF CONVICTED POLITICIANS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-518, An Act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act (withdrawal allowance), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time to speak to Bill C-518 from my colleague from New Brunswick who brings it to the floor of the House, based on the conviction of members of Parliament as well as members of the Senate who face a sentence up to about two years, but I guess with amendments now we will go for closer to five years.

As my hon. colleague from the NDP pointed out, talk about public trust has come up quite often in the past couple of years and certainly there are ways by which we can set examples for ourselves as opposed to predominantly going around saying “do as I say, not as I do”.

In my opinion, today we are taking a step further as to the public trust and telling the public, showing the public and displaying to it that this measure has to be taken so people who come here set the right example for the rest of the country.

For the record, within our caucus this is a free vote as this is a private member's bill. That being said, I personally will be supporting the bill for many reasons I have just mentioned, when it comes to areas of public trust and the malfeasance that has been practised by several members on the Hill, whether they be members of Parliament or also the Senate.

I did have some concerns, which have been addressed, one of which the member already addressed and said that he would be seeking amendments to raise that to five years. My only hesitation on that though is this opens up a whole array of offences, anything that could serve up to a maximum of five years could be looked at.

I am always the one to say that sometimes when we bring legislation into the House, we make them overly prescriptive which puts people into a large straitjacket by legislation becoming law and then bringing it forward to the country so we can convict people who are wrongdoers.

However, in this situation maybe a list of offences should have been necessary for the sake of providing more sunlight and looking at ways in which some of these offences, as the member mentioned earlier, and I know it carries a maximum of around two years, I am not sure specifically, but certainly when it comes to issues of libel. I think false alarms was another one that he mentioned, blasphemy was another. Maybe providing a list of offences, even if it is just an illustrative list, could certainly go a long way. I do not know if the member is open to an amendment, but a lot of these offences would be taken care of. I appreciate that if we raise that from two years up to five years.

The other question I had was about the idea of the maximum penalty, and I will go back to the original bill as it stands now, which is two years. It is concerning that these people who are convicted and

face the maximum penalty, despite the circumstances, will have their pensions revoked, as far as what benefits would be accrued to them. Obviously we are not talking about what they put into the plan themselves, they would get that back, but the benefits would have accrued from the taxpayer.

When I first read the bill, I thought it was a bit onerous for people who would find themselves in a situation where they only would get a small sentence given the circumstances around this conviction. However, dealing with that, the member did say that some people might get small offences, and maybe we do not agree with it. However, in this case I will still be supporting this for that discussion. I assume amendments of that nature will be coming forward depending on the situation.

I am reticent to bring in legislation that forces a judge in the position to carry a sentence where the penalty is overly prescriptive. It puts judges in a position that takes them from why they are there in the first place, which is to exercise judgment, to judge.

● (1705)

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member is elevating the maximum sentence from two to five years. That may cover my concerns, but the overall principle, I believe, is that we must be careful when we look at this situation in the sense of there always being that minimum.

The other thing is that my hon. colleague from the NDP talked about spouses and dependents. I know this is a private member's bill and it is not part of an ongoing dialogue where there are questions and answers after each speech, but I would like to know what the private sector standard is, after someone is convicted and put into a place of incarceration, for dependents or spouses who have no connection to the crime whatsoever and were banking on the fact that they were going to receive this money, the maximum amount available, including what was put into the plan in addition to the benefit received from that plan.

I understand him saying that in most cases, probably all cases according to what he is saying, in the private sector that would not be the case. In other words, the family would have to tough it through. I do not know if that is always the case. I will be interested to discuss that within the committee structure itself and look for a possible amendment. My hon. colleague from the NDP brings up a good point about the idea of how spouses and dependents, who are depending on that, will be hard done by in this situation. I think in other areas it has been available in some cases, but although we may be eager to say that the loophole has been closed, this is one loophole that deserves sober second thought, if I might use that expression these days without being ridiculed.

Subclause 2(2) states:

There shall be paid to a person who ceases to be a member, if he or she has been convicted of an offence under any Act of Parliament that was prosecuted by indictment and for which the maximum punishment is imprisonment for not less than two years...

Private Members' Business

I addressed that. However, he also talked about while they were serving, which is also very important. In certain scenarios, to take people outside of serving, whether they were in the private sector or doing something else in life in other facets of the public sector, will not be looked at. Personally, the committee should look at that and see what happens outside of the jurisdiction of Parliament, whether it is the House of Commons or the Senate. However, in this case, he confines it to the subject and the people at hand, which would be, using recent examples, the senator he mentioned, along with people who may be facing charges down the road and facing conviction perhaps for certain shenanigans that are happening right now in the Senate. I will not go into the names of the senators as I do not think that is really necessary right now.

In this bill, which is not a particularly long one, there is one principle I personally would accept. I would like to remind the House that within the Liberal caucus it is a free vote. I will be supporting this certainly going to committee because I am interested in all these questions that I have about this situation. I would like to know how the private sector handles this.

The overall narrative of this, which the member has pointed out and it is germane to this conversation and to me makes sense, is that there is an example that we should be setting for the Canadian public as we are entrusted public officials. Whether we are elected in the House or appointed in the Senate, there is a certain behaviour model that surpasses other occupations throughout the country. For those who conduct themselves in a way that is by far below the ethical standards we expect, then they should be punished not just by the actual conviction itself, but the benefits that would accrue by serving in the House should also be considered.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-518, an Act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act.

When I became elected as a member of Parliament, one of the first messages that I heard loud and clear from the citizens in my area was the need to take action on gold plated MP pension plans. One of my first commitments to my constituents was to publicly support changes to the MP pension plan that were more respectful to the taxpayer. I was proud that it was our Conservative government that took historic action to reform the pensions of members of Parliament and senators. I would also like to recognize my colleagues from all sides of the House, who also supported these important changes.

As we know, changes to the MP pension plan and equal cost sharing ultimately mean that the pension contributions of members of the House of Commons will have to be nearly quadrupled from \$11,000 to \$38,000 and some change a year. I mention this because pension contributions are a key part of what is proposed in Bill C-518.

We know Canadians expect that if parliamentarians are convicted of egregious crimes, they should face consequences. No different from everyday Canadians would expect to face consequences if convicted of an egregious crime, yet we also know that this is currently not the case. I would like to commend the member for New Brunswick Southwest for his work to attempt to remedy this.

Currently, if a senator or member of Parliament retires or resigns prior to being convicted, or otherwise manoeuvres to avoid being expelled or disqualified from Parliament, that individual is still entitled to his or her full pension, including the employer's share, which is funded by taxpayers. In other words, if one retires or resigns before being convicted of a crime, one still benefits from a generous pension plan. This is, in itself, an outrage to many taxpayers. I would submit that this sentiment is shared by members of the House. That is why this is a very important issue for discussion.

Again, I would like to commend the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest for bringing this issue forward. His work on this file and his commitment to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are always respected is laudable. As it stands, the bill before us would automatically revoke a member's pension where certain criteria, as defined in the bill, are met, regardless of whether the member had already retired or resigned from his or her seat in Parliament.

Specifically, the bill would disentitle the taxpayer funded pension of a member who met the following criteria: a member is convicted of an indictable offence under an act of Parliament that carries a maximum prison sentence of not less than two years, or the offence arose out of conduct that occurred before June 3, 2013, while this person was a member.

I should also point out that the member would still be entitled to a withdrawal allowance, which is a single lump sum refund of the member's personal contributions. However, the employer's pension contributions on behalf of the member, the portion which is publicly funded, would not be refunded. That is an important distinction. Moreover, the member would no longer be eligible for post-retirement health or dental benefits, since entitlement to these benefits is predicated on eligibility for a pension.

• (1715)

We know that Canadians expect all senators and all members of Parliament to be held to the highest standards of accountability. Canadians have told us that they expect their representatives to protect the integrity of public office in our public institutions. As I stated earlier, as members of Parliament we have voted in support of pension changes that are more respectful to taxpayers.

Our government is also taking historic action to reform the pensions of public servants. The contribution rates for the public service pension plan are also moving to a 50-50 cost-sharing model by 2017. We have also increased the age at which members of Parliament can retire with an unreduced pension. It will rise from 55 to 65 as of January 1, 2016. In addition, newly hired public servants will become eligible to collect their pensions at age 65 instead of 60.

Private Members' Business

Over the next five years, these measures will save taxpayers \$2.6 billion. These are substantial savings. They are also savings realized by fairness. Moving MP and public sector pensions to equal employer funding and raising the age of retirement are principles that are respectful and equitable to taxpayers.

Bill C-518 proposes similar respect to taxpayers for those parliamentarians who would retire or resign prior to a conviction and still collect a fully funded pension plan.

While I support the principles in this bill, I do have some concerns. Many others have raised concerns as well, some of which the member has addressed. Specifically, it is imperative that a bill of this nature clearly establish where and how the bar is set that would enact this legislation. As the bill is currently proposed, I believe greater clarification on this question will be beneficial.

I was going to cite an example. However, as the member for New Brunswick Southwest indicated in his comments that he is already contemplating changes in this area, I will simply point out that as parliamentarians, we must be cognizant that what a bill intends to propose may not necessarily be interpreted in the same manner by our successors.

In summary, I believe that Bill C-518 proposes to take action on what I would characterize as a loophole that allows parliamentarians to avoid full accountability and still collect generous taxpayer-provided pension benefits. While this is an important area to examine and consider, and one that I believe Canadians support, it is equally important that as members of Parliament we must ensure that the wording in this bill is clear to the intent of its stated objectives.

To that end, I am hopeful that further revisions at committee stage will enhance the clarity of this bill.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-518, which would amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act.

This bill would revoke the privilege of a retirement pension or compensation allowance for former members of the Senate or House of Commons who are convicted of an offence under an act of Parliament.

Parliamentarians must have been indicted for an offence with a maximum punishment of imprisonment for not less than two years. The offence must have been committed, in whole or in part, while the person was an MP or Senator. Most Criminal Code offences fall into this category.

The idea of punishing these offenders is not new. Nova Scotia's NDP government has already passed similar legislation. Under that law, all entitlements of a former spouse, or any court-ordered restitution, can be deducted from the pension of the MP in question. This is a very important point because it is not included in the bill that I am debating.

In a few moments, I will give an example that demonstrates how this gap in the law can lead to the victimization of someone who is already a victim of an act of violence. I will come back to that shortly.

We know that a parliamentarian sentenced to a jail term of less than two years does not lose his status as a parliamentarian and may continue to sit, unless he is expelled by the Senate or the House. However, this power is rarely used. Some charter provisions could potentially protect parliamentarians.

The proposals include parliamentarians found guilty of crimes subject to sentences of more than two years, but they could be punished with a shorter jail term or perhaps even a suspended sentence or community service. The proposal is more specific with regard to the fact that the crime must be committed when the parliamentarian is in office. This is an important point. The crime must be committed while the parliamentarian is performing his duties, not before and not after. In any case, if it were before he was elected, the bill would not apply to him.

Today, a parliamentarian may commit a crime, complete his term as a parliamentarian and be convicted a number of years after completing his term in office. Current sections 19 and 39 of the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act do not take this situation into account. Right now, senators and members of Parliament must have been defeated or expelled before they can be penalized. The new proposal would be retroactive to June 2013 for a parliamentarian found guilty well after the period when the crime is committed.

What is the loss for a parliamentarian who commits a crime? They are just going to lose the additional contribution by Parliament. Parliamentarians lose a privilege, not a pension entitlement.

Of course, with all the scandals we have heard about, the general public and we ourselves are sick of all these stories and we want justice to be done. It is not surprising that sometimes, when we are taking part in an activity, people ask us to give them money. They make inappropriate comments because they perceive politicians as corrupt. This must be stopped. More than just changing the legislation, we—senators and members of Parliament—must change our behaviour in Parliament. It is the culture that must change.

Of course, the legislation goes with the culture, and with the changes, but to date we have put up with too much. People have even decided not to vote because they no longer have confidence in us. They say that they vote, but nothing changes. They think that parliamentarians commit fraud and they are paid by taxpayers. We must bear in mind that the money we receive is money that comes from taxpayers.

All this is important, and this bill aims at improving the situation. However, some things are missing from the bill. We cannot just change the legislation; we must change our behaviour and the way we engage in politics.

I would like to mention two examples, one of which is Senator Brazeau, who is accused of sexual assault. The Prime Minister told the House that it was a personal matter that made it necessary to remove him from the Senate caucus. He is still a senator.

• (1725)

He said:

Our understanding is that these are matters of a personal nature rather than Senate business, but they are very serious and we expect they will be dealt with through the courts.

Private Members' Business

I am mentioning this because the man in question assaulted his partner in their home. There is another case, that of Raymond Lavigne, the former senator who is currently in prison. He was convicted of fraud and breach of trust. However, he committed the offences in his role as a senator, using public money.

I am raising these examples because when we were discussing the Nova Scotia law earlier today, it was said that the spouse of the accused still has the right to part of the pension. However, under the new proposal, if Mr. Brazeau is convicted, he will lose his privileges and, since the law is retroactive to June 2013, his partner, the victim, will lose them as well. It will be his ex-wife, since I imagine that they will divorce. She will be a double victim. We need to take those aspects into consideration in order to improve this bill. That is why the NDP is committed to supporting it at second reading, so that the committee can address certain gaps in the legislation.

However, in the case of Senator Lavigne, the legislation unfortunately came out too late. He was convicted of misappropriating Senate funds. He is presently in prison, but, for the six years that the trial lasted, his pension fund continued to grow. This legislation therefore still lets him profit from his transgressions because it is retroactive to June 2013.

The task I am giving to committee members is to improve some aspects of the legislation. Just now, I mentioned that Mr. Brazeau's wife is twice a victim, but I have a bit of a problem with something else. It has to do with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the idea of a double penalty. We have to be careful because we are talking here about a punitive sanction on a privilege. We agree on that. However, say a senator leaves a Christmas party having had a bit too much to drink and hits someone with his car because he is driving while impaired, he will be convicted and will pay for what he did. However, at the same time, he will be punished again. I am just concerned about that. It must be improved.

With people using public funds, like Mr. Lavigne, or like the others we have spent a lot of time talking about here—Mr. Duffy and Ms. Wallin—we get it. The money belongs to us all. It is related to their duties. We must therefore pay attention and specify the penalties more clearly so that we do not descend into an inequality of sorts. That is what concerns me.

The NDP will be continuing to discuss that aspect. As parliamentarians, it is in our nature to believe deeply in democracy. In committee, we must work to improve the legislation, because what we have to stand up for above all is the greater good and the advancement of democracy.

It is fine to sanction people who break the law in the performance of their duties. However, as I said, we have to be careful not to victimize someone a second time, as in the cases I mentioned.

We must change our way of engaging in politics. We must not shelter those who commit fraud. We must not become complicit. I am sure that many of us feel ashamed of the actions of some people, who shall remain nameless. Those of us who are seriously committed to our work feel tainted by things not of our doing. We must have the courage to say that it must stop.

● (1730)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Don Valley West. I would advise the member that he will have approximately six minutes before we have to finish this debate.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the principles involved in Bill C-518, an act to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act (withdrawal allowance).

As we know, the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act is the legislation that governs pensions for members of the House of Commons and for senators. The bill being discussed today proposes to change that legislation. It proposes to disentitle a parliamentarian to a taxpayer-funded pension if he or she is convicted of an indictable offence under an act of Parliament that carries a maximum prison sentence of not less than two years. In addition, the offence must have arisen out of conduct that occurred before June 3, 2013, and while the person was a member of Parliament or a senator.

As well as disentitling the person to a taxpayer-funded pension, the legislation would cause him or her to lose eligibility for the post-retirement health and dental benefits that normally come with the pension plan. The person would, however, be entitled to receive a refund of the monies that he or she contributed to that pension.

We believe the work that the hon. member has put into this bill is laudable. As parliamentarians, we have a tremendous responsibility to Canadians, and the citizens of our country have the right to demand the highest standard of ethical conduct from us. This is part and parcel of our job.

People elected to the House of Commons and those appointed to the Senate are expected to craft the laws that govern the land, and for the laws to be right, the people who make them must be right. Indeed, the highest ethical standards are an integral part of the jobs with which we are entrusted. Canadians expect nothing less.

When we compromise that trust, Canadians deserve recourse, and justice demands recourse. Let me also reiterate that one of the abiding beliefs of our government is that people in public office must be accountable for their actions.

Strengthening accountability is one of the hallmarks of our government. On coming into office, our first order of business was to introduce and implement the Federal Accountability Act and the accompanying action plan, which demonstrates our commitment to that accountability. This act provides Canadians with the assurance that the powers entrusted in the government are being exercised in the public interest.

Private Members' Business

Through the Federal Accountability Act and the accompanying action plan, we brought in a series of accountability reforms. Among these reforms were the designation of deputy ministers and deputy heads as accounting officers and the requirement that they appear before parliamentary committees, the five-year review of the relevance and effectiveness of departmental grant and contribution programs, the new mandate for the Auditor General to follow the money to grant and contribution recipients, the law requiring departments to send results of public opinion research to Library and Archives Canada within six months, and the removal of the entitlement of political staff to priority appointments in the public service.

These reforms were followed up by others, including new electoral financing rules and restrictions on gifts to political candidates; the Public Service Disclosure Protection Act; the new Conflict of Interest Act; tougher penalties and sanctions for people who commit fraud involving taxpayers' money; clarification and simplification of the rules governing grants and contributions; the extension of the Access to Information Act to cover agents of Parliament, five foundations, and the Canadian Wheat Board; and regulations to ensure lobbying and government advocacy was done fairly and openly. In all, our Federal Accountability Act and action plan made substantive changes to some 45 federal statutes and amended over 100 others, touching virtually every part of government and beyond.

• (1735)

As a result of these efforts, the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and other public service employees are more accountable today than ever before in Canadian history. Our commitment to accountability has not waned one iota.

I conclude by saying that this bill is consistent with the principles behind those measures to which we have spoken. Since our government came to power, we have worked to protect the integrity of parliamentary office and the conduct Canadians expect of their members of Parliament and senators, strengthen accountability in our public institutions, operate with respect for taxpayers' dollars, and punish those in a position of power who break the law. We will continue to do so.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(7), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-479 under private members' business.

* * *

AN ACT TO BRING FAIRNESS FOR THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENT OFFENDERS

The House resumed from October 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-479, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fairness for victims), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the second hour of debate on this legislation, which was introduced in the last session of Parliament. It is Bill C-479, the fairness for the victims of violent offenders act. I will support this legislation going to committee for consideration and, where necessary, for amendment. I want to underline the fact that Liberals want some amendments to this bill.

Again, the intent of this bill is to provide additional measures for victims of crime, in this case the ability to ensure that victims of violent crime have a greater legislated role in any parole actions related to offenders.

The major elements of the bill are that the bill would extend the period between parole reviews from two to five years for violent offenders who are not granted parole at first or subsequent reviews or whose parole has been revoked. This change would apply only to offenders incarcerated for violent crimes.

Ostensibly, this bill is aimed at relieving the victims of violent crimes or their families from having to attend frequent parole hearings. That is a good intent.

The bill does not alter the rules governing initial parole eligibility. The bill also contains uncontroversial changes that codify victims' rights already recognized and applied in the parole process.

However, the bill's evidentiary basis remains entirely unclear. The rationale for choosing a maximum interval of five years between parole hearings for those denied parole instead of, for example, four, as in the previous iteration of the bill, remains unclear. The impact of extending the maximum time between parole hearings on offender rehabilitation is also unclear. Study at committee would allow members to debate the bill's merits on the basis of evidence from expert testimony.

I would reiterate the concerns expressed by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis with respect to the constitutionality of the legislation. I note that the courts are now beginning to challenge the efficacy of the mandatory minimum sentencing and the manner in which the government has attempted to alter the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to support an ideological agenda based on public fear of criminal activity.

This is another in a long list of private members' bills coming forward from Conservative backbench members. They all may be great in terms of their intent, but these are members of the government, and this is the Criminal Code that we are dealing with. It is a complex, massive code. Coming forward with off-the-wall requests for legislation could jeopardize the very intent of what members want to do with this legislation.

I see members smiling on the other side. This is not a joking matter. We are talking about the Criminal Code of Canada. What is happening on that side of the House is that they are allowing Conservative members to come forward with little private members' bills from their own riding so they can cater to their own power base. Do they not realize that they could, in the process, have a court throw out the legislation and make a victim of the very person we do not want to make a victim? That is the possible consequence.

I will turn to the Correctional Investigator's message in terms of how the government is really dealing with its tough-on-crime agenda. In the beginning of the report, he speaks of the time in 1973 when the first correctional investigator was appointed for federally sentenced inmates. It was a time when there was rioting in prisons. There were burnings and real trouble within the prison system.

He made a point in his report that I want to quote.

● (1740)

He stated:

Today, as my report makes clear, many of the same problems that were endemic to prison life in the early 1970s – crowding; too much time spent in cells; the curtailment of movement, association and contact with the outside world; lack of program capacity; the paucity of meaningful prison work or vocational skills training; and the polarization between inmates and custodial staff – continue to be features of contemporary correctional practice.

He is basically saying that what we are seeing under the government's justice, as it calls it, is moving back to a time that created riots in the prison system in the first place. That is not the answer to dealing with the justice system in a smart way.

With this specific bill, I would request, and will do so at committee, that the member present a list of experts and the evidence they provided, which he referenced in his remarks on May 10 of this year, as to his claim that “this bill has a sound legal and constitutional foundation”.

I will also be requesting that the member provide the evidence upon which this legislation was based. For example, upon what evidence did the member opposite base the determination that a period of five years between subsequent applications is justified? I trust that the member will provide that evidence at the committee.

I make note of the concern, given the recent case of Bill C-489, introduced by his colleague the member for Langley. In the course of second reading of that bill, the member gave the House the assurance that the bill was well drafted and was adequate. He did acknowledge that he was open to amendments, and indeed the elements of the bill were subsequently amended.

With regard to the amendments, there were six amendments to a bill with five clauses. Let me repeat that: six amendments to a five-clause bill. They were moved by members of the government on behalf of the Government of Canada. During this process, a representative of the Department of Justice was in attendance to ensure the amendments accorded with what even the government determined was the need to ratchet back on some of the extreme and likely challengeable features of the member's original bill.

It goes to my point. The government has all these backbenchers over there, but it is not bringing forward legislation in a comprehensive way on an issue as important as the Criminal Code

Private Members' Business

of Canada. I believe we are getting 16 private members' bills on various subjects by members. As this bill clearly shows, it needed to be amended or the Department of Justice knew the bill would be thrown out by a court. The extent would be that it would create new victims as a result of the bill.

In the end, the bill was attempting to institute a mandatory minimum distance for offenders to have to maintain from the dwellings of the victims of specific crimes. It was amended in such a way as to add to the list of locations already in the Criminal Code from which a judge can currently apply a limitation on that of dwelling. We were told the whole intent and purpose of the legislation was so the judge could not use discretion, but the end result was that the ability of the judge to use discretion remains within the code.

In conclusion, we will support the bill going to committee. We will see if there will be amendments.

In closing, I want to underline that while we see some merit in this bill, we would prefer to see legislation from the government after they have talked in their caucus on various proposals in an all-encompassing way, in a way that fits legitimately within the Criminal Code of Canada. We do not want to see it add more risk to what a court might do in terms of challenging that legislation and throwing it out. It should be done in a comprehensive way, rather than these simple bills coming forward to play to the Conservative base.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to speak to the bill we have before us today, Bill C-479, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fairness for victims).

This bill is based for the most part on the recommendation made by the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime and seeks to pay special attention to the perspective of victims in the criminal justice process.

Bill C-479 broadens the rights of victims under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. It incorporates into law some of the elements that are already part of the current practice in parole hearings. Some of those elements are in fact consistent with the recommendations made by the former ombudsman in his special report.

Under this bill, victims would have more opportunities to attend parole hearings, and offenders would have considerably less access to reviews.

The NDP, however, is concerned that the bill adds five years to the interval between parole reviews for violent offenders.

This goes against the ombudsman's previous recommendations that this extension apply only to dangerous offenders and those serving a life sentence.

Business of the House

The people working with victims and those working with inmates agree that parole is an essential component of public safety. This change could prevent some offenders from having access to parole and, by extension, deny them the benefits of a supervised release in the community.

This amendment therefore would lead to a situation where many violent offenders would reach the end of their sentence without having had access to supervised release. They would then be out in the community for the first time, fully free and without any supervision at the end of their sentence.

On our side, we work tirelessly to improve the safety of the public. We believe that one way to achieve this goal is to implement a parole process that helps people reintegrate safely, and I emphasize the word “safely”, into the community to reduce victimization and the risk of reoffending.

We also support the victims and their families, and we want to work with them to ensure that in addition to taking legislative action to help them, we also provide them with the services they need.

Instead of focusing on the shortcomings of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as a whole, this is yet another Conservative piecemeal bill that actually does very little to ensure the safety of our communities.

I will briefly run through the changes, or, more specifically, the amendments, proposed in Bill C-479: the parole review of offenders who are serving a sentence of at least two years for an offence involving violence; the attendance of victims and members of their family at parole review hearings; the consideration of victims’ statements by the National Parole Board when making a determination regarding the release of an offender; the manner of presentation of victims’ statements at a parole review hearing; the providing of information under consideration by the Board to a victim; the cancellation of a parole review hearing if an offender has repeatedly refused to attend, or waived his or her right to attend, previous hearings; the providing of transcripts of a parole review hearing to the victim and members of their family and the offender; and the notification of victims if an offender is to be released on temporary absence, parole or statutory release.

We think that this bill has several good points. That is why we will support it at second reading so that it can be sent to committee.

● (1750)

We also believe that it is appropriate for victims to attend parole board hearings, for example, when it is likely that the offender will return to live in the community where he committed the crime, or when a victim is asking for specific condition to be placed on the offender after release, such as a non-communication order. We also think that allowing victims to attend hearings via video conference or teleconference is a valid point in Bill C-479, especially for victims with mobility problems.

We also want victims and their families to feel that they are really involved in the process. However, we must also ensure that offenders have access to appropriate services, whether in the correctional system or the parole system, such as supervised release, so that recidivism rates fall after offenders have served their full sentences.

We do see some weaknesses in Bill C-479, however, and it is important to point them out. For example, an offender who serves a sentence of less than five years might have only one chance at parole under Bill C-479. If his first application is denied, it is quite possible that he will serve his entire sentence without ever having been granted conditional release. This means that offenders will be released at the end of their sentences without any conditions, and more importantly, without the benefit of any rehabilitation or reintegration programs. It goes without saying that this poses a risk to public safety and that such a practice would likely result in higher recidivism rates and therefore an increase in the number of victims of crime.

Society would be better served by the gradual, supervised release of offenders who pose a risk. Such release helps offenders reintegrate into society safely and with the supervision they need to facilitate their reintegration, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will commit other criminal acts. If the Conservative government is truly serious about helping victims and their families, it will provide them with services and reintegrate criminals into society in such a way as to prevent the risk of victimization and recidivism.

In closing, the NDP's message to victims and their families is simple: we support greater victim involvement in the parole process. We also support many of the recommendations made by the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime, as well as his criticisms of Bill C-479.

We are working tirelessly on making our communities safer. Our plan goes beyond the Conservatives' simplistic ideology and really gets to the heart of the problem, rather than just scratching the surface. We want to help victims create a safer process that will reduce the risk of recidivism.

We hope the government will be receptive to the suggestions we will be making in committee.

* * *

● (1755)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do want to propose a motion.

[Translation]

First, I want to wish all members and all the staff who help us here in the House of Commons a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

*Business of the House**[English]*

I want to thank everybody who has been part of what has been a very productive and successful year in the House of Commons, with a record amount of legislation having achieved royal assent through our efforts here.

I particularly want to pay special tribute to the special folks who are in our midst from time to time and who help us out a great deal, and those are the parliamentary pages. They do a great deal to assist us in our daily functions.

For them, it is a special experience. As I have often said, my wife was a page in 1987, and she refers to it as the best year of her life. I know that many of the pages who have followed her have reported the same kind of experience.

This will, of course, be the first opportunity for many of them to return home to their families. They will no doubt have a chance to share some interesting stories about what their members of Parliament actually do in the House of Commons when they are doing all the good work for the people of Canada.

With that in mind, I want to remind everyone that this is a tremendous opportunity for us to slow down a bit, reflect, and get to know our families a little better after the time we have spent away.

We appreciate all that everyone has contributed to what I think has been a very good year.

[Translation]

There have been discussions among the parties, and after exchanging some fine words with my counterparts, I expect there will be unanimous consent for the following motion. I move, seconded by the Chief Government Whip:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, when the House adjourns today, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, January 27, 2014; and that, for the purposes of Standing Order 28, the House shall be deemed to have sat on Wednesday, December 11, Thursday, December 12 and Friday, December 13, 2013.

[English]

The Speaker: Before I seek unanimous consent for the motion, I understand the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley would like to say a few words.

[Translation]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sometimes it is possible to feel a sense of joy here.

I would like to wish all parliamentarians and their families a merry Christmas and happy holidays.

[English]

There are times, although they may be rare and increasingly rare, where we can find agreement in a common cause. I think there is strong sentiment and appreciation from all of the MPs on all sides of this place to thank the parliamentary team that supports us in our work. Canadians might not realize when they watch question period or the events of the House that behind us, and with us, is an incredible team of employees who broadcast, for good and bad, all of the words that we have to say on various topics and bills.

We thank the Sergeant-at-Arms and his most capable team that provide security for all of us in the House of Commons as well as to all of our guests who visit Parliament, keeping us safe on a daily basis.

We thank the somewhat long-suffering pages of this place, who now need to have the best year of their lives. It is a good and wonderful opportunity for us to get to know them and for them to get to know the House of Commons.

In particular, we thank the clerks of the House, who provide all MPs with incredible advice in a most professional and non-partisan way. Without them, we would sound less coherent than we do from time to time.

Last but not least to you, Mr. Speaker, and your family, we hope you have a wonderful holiday in Saskatchewan and connect back to all those things which we stand for in this place, our friends, family and communities, who we attempt to serve each and every day.

● (1800)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the government House leader, for having proposed a motion, which you will seek consent for in a few minutes.

For my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, I wanted to simply add on behalf of our colleagues in the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus words of thanks and good wishes for the holiday season.

[Translation]

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons acknowledged the importance of thanking the young men and women who work here as pages in the House of Commons. I share his sentiment.

[English]

I was surprised that the government House leader would reveal his wife's age by saying that she was a page here in 1987. He could have said in the early nineties. There may not be as toasty a reception when the government House leader calls home tonight to say, "Good news, honey. We adjourned tonight, but unfortunately I announced your age to everybody". I thought the government House leader's wife was a page in 1997, so I am shocked.

However, I want to join our colleagues in thanking the pages. They will soon be or are in the middle of their first year of university exams. We wish them all well on the exams. They will get the results soon. Because they are an outstanding group of young women and men, I know they will succeed. We are lucky to have them with us.

[Translation]

My colleagues acknowledged the important work of the clerks of the House.

*Business of the House**[English]*

We are lucky to have professional women and men who serve as clerks of the table, interpreters and who work in the Library of Parliament. They make the parliamentary experience for those of us who are privileged enough to serve here as members a wonderful and valuable experience. That is largely thanks to their professionalism and advice.

My colleagues underline the security staff and the people who work in building maintenance, the bus drivers, the people who serve Canadians who visit this magnificent place and those who are lucky enough to work here as well. We certainly wish all of them a very happy holiday season and a merry Christmas.

Finally, to you, Mr. Speaker, your good humour, your even hand, your way of reminding us sometimes that we get close to rules in the House, which are sacred for the effective functioning of Parliament, is something that I admire. I very much appreciate your service here, sir. I wish you and your family a merry Christmas.

We look forward to seeing colleagues on all sides of the House and the people who work here back safely and in good health in 2014.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to repeat my colleagues' greetings, but this is the time to wish you and all my colleagues, as well as the House of Commons' staff, a very merry Christmas and a happy 2014.

On behalf of the Leader of the Bloc Québécois and my colleagues, I would like to say that this is a good time of year to be very humble. We can do this by participating in the fundraisers that are taking place in our ridings and by providing Christmas meals for the poor.

Every year, I organize a downhill ski day for underprivileged children. Their laughter and the fun they have keep me grounded.

It makes you realize that being elected is not like winning the lottery. Of course, it is a great opportunity and a great privilege, but it is also a great responsibility.

At this time of the year, we have to lead by example, and also realize that many people in our immediate circle, our riding, across Quebec and Canada and throughout the world, cope with many difficulties all year long.

I believe that we will keep that in mind when we return in 2014, and that we will be better people. That is my wish for you, Mr. Speaker, for your family and for all the people who help us do a good job as parliamentarians. I would like to thank you for your efforts these past few months, and I look forward to seeing you in 2014.

Merry Christmas and a happy new year to everyone.

• (1805)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year. All members of the Green Party would like to thank the MPs and the entire parliamentary team.

[English]

We are all very grateful for the hard work of those who have been mentioned by my colleagues.

I know this is not a moment for partisan comments, but I just want to trespass on a matter of some controversy and try to clear it up before we break for the holidays, and that is the citizenship of Santa Claus. I know it came up a few times today. I want to make it clear that on behalf of the Green Party, we are happy to join in claiming the North Pole. However, it is important to say that Santa Claus does not carry a passport, that Santa Claus is beyond citizenship and lives in the hearts of children all around the world, regardless of citizenship.

In the real spirit of Christmas, we celebrate Christmas with a lot of shopping and we mark it with a lot of parties. Forgive me for saying for those who are atheists and of other religions, but I think they will allow me to say on this occasion of the expectation of the birth of our Lord, that we await His coming and we celebrate Christmas in the spirit of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For those of us who are Christians, it is a very important occasion and we are happy to share it and happy to be able to say merry Christmas. For everyone else who is not following this observance as a religious event, happy holidays. May everyone have a wonderful time with family.

[Translation]

Thank you very much. Merry Christmas.

[English]

The Speaker: I would like to take just a few seconds to echo some of the comments that were made. In particular, I thank the hard-working table staff, the table officers and the clerks, and of course the pages. I know in each one of our offices we have very hard-working staff who support us in what we do, whether they be chiefs of staff, whether they be special advisers, speech writers or administrative assistants. It takes a lot of effort to make this place function in the high calibre in which it does.

I very much appreciate the very kind personal best wishes for me and my family. I know many of us have children and spouses back home who eagerly await and when we can come a little bit early, that is much appreciated. The last time that happened to me, one of my daughters said, "Oh, weekend Daddy is home a little bit early this week".

I know we are all looking forward to returning to our constituents and our families. I wish everyone a very merry Christmas and a safe and happy holiday season.

With that, I will put the question on the hon. government House leader's proposed motion.

Does he 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)

* * *

AN ACT TO BRING FAIRNESS FOR THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENT OFFENDERS

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-479, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fairness for victims), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour in the House to speak to Bill C-479, an Act to bring fairness for the victims of violent offenders. I am dedicated and passionate about seeing this bill through because the changes it would bring about for victims and their families are overdue. Today marks one step closer in the legislative process in seeing these changes become a reality.

First, I would like to thank the hon. member for Scarborough Centre, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, for her strong support the last time we debated Bill C-479 in the House. In her role, she has been a strong advocate for victims in her community and across the country, and I congratulate her on her work.

The parliamentary secretary, the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Justice were busy this past summer, hearing from victims across the country. We look forward to hearing more from them in the months ahead on the federal government's support for victims.

I am proud that Bill C-479 complements our government's work to support victims and their families from coast to coast to coast.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the hon. members for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Winnipeg North, Alfred-Pellan and Abitibi—Témiscamingue for the support they offered in the House to bring this bill to committee. I appreciate their kind words on my intent in bringing forward this bill. While they have raised some points that will be further debated in committee, I have no doubt that their hearts are in the right place.

All of us on both sides of the House should desire to do everything we can to bring about fairness for victims and their families and act on some of the recommendations of the victims ombudsman. Contrary to the member for Malpeque's comments, this bill is not about the Criminal Code, but the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and victims' rights. This is all about that.

I offer special thanks to the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Sue O'Sullivan, for meeting with me and my staff and for all of her advice and support in the development of this bill. Many of the provisions of Bill C-479 stem from the recommendations made by Ms. O'Sullivan and her office. I appreciate and respect the work that she and her team do on a daily basis to advocate for victims. It is tough, emotional and unrelenting work and they do it effectively, professionally and compassionately.

I have also heard from victims. To me, that is the ultimate litmus test of this bill. When they tell me that it will make a difference and that we are on the right track, I know that this makes sense.

Government Orders

Please allow me to conclude this debate at second reading where I began. That is by reiterating my intent in bringing forward this bill. As I have said at each stage of the process, it was an eye opening and heart-wrenching experience at a hearing of the National Parole Board of Canada in the summer of 2010 that led me to introduce this bill. Invited to observe as a guest of my constituents, I witnessed first hand how the system revictimized the people who had already suffered enough for a lifetime. Since that time, I have witnessed many more meetings, all just as gut-wrenching and painful.

Constable Michael Sweet's story and his family's reasonable request to have more information has profoundly affected me as well. Their point is well taken that their father and husband's life was taken from them publicly. The offenders were tried publicly, with all of the evidence being introduced publicly. Victims, their families and all Canadians should have some public assurance that those convicted of violent offences are doing what they can to be rehabilitated and become contributing citizens.

If an act to bring fairness for the victims of violent offenders eases the revictimization of just one family, it will be worth it, but I am convinced that it would do much more.

Merry Christmas. Joyeux Noël.

• (1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SITUATION IN UKRAINE

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 5, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): moved:

That this committee take note of the situation in Ukraine.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold.

Government Orders

• (1815)

[*English*]

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. Members may divide their time with another member. The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to the order made on Monday, December 9, 2013, the Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

[*English*]

We will now begin tonight's take note debate. Debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is great to be here tonight. Before I begin my speech, I just want to say that we are doing some last work of the House of Commons before we go for our Christmas break, but certainly it is not the least work. This is an extremely important discussion we are having tonight.

I, as well as others, certainly want to wish the staff and pages a good vacation away from here for a few extra weeks. As the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands pointed out, I think we also need to remember that this is the season we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and all that it means.

Tonight I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the Ukraine at this very important and troubling juncture. Canada was both shocked and disappointed when the Ukrainian government suddenly announced, on November 21, that it would not be pursuing an association agreement on a deep and comprehensive free trade area with the European Union.

This was an abrupt reversal from years of planning and earnest negotiations on the part of our European partners and a divergence from Ukraine's promised path of deeper partnership and integration with the west. All indications until that point had been that the Ukrainian government would make its best effort to reform its institutions, its economy, and its legal system in the best interest of its people and the country's future.

The European Parliament's special envoys, former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski and former European Parliament President Cox, had travelled together to the Ukraine some 27 times since 2011 in an impressive display of shuttle diplomacy. They had worked hard to find a solution to the issue of selective justice in the case of imprisoned former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, an issue that had to be resolved before an EU-Ukraine deal could be agreed upon.

In one instant, those efforts were swept aside by President Viktor Yanukovich. This regrettable decision by his government came just days ahead of the EU's eastern partnership summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where the association agreement was scheduled to be signed. Yanukovich instead turned his back on the European Union, and worst of all, on the will of his people.

As soon as this decision was announced, ordinary Ukrainians took peacefully to the streets. They unfurled their blue and yellow Ukrainian flags alongside the blue and yellow banner of the European Union. Their hopes had been dashed by a decision taken by a government out of touch with the will of its people.

As the date of the Vilnius summit drew near, more and more Ukrainians gathered at Kiev's Independence Square, by the tens of thousands, amid the bitter cold, recalling scenes of the spontaneous Orange Revolution of 2004-05. That people-powered revolution sought to bring accountability, democracy, and the rule of law to the Ukraine. Today those values again are in jeopardy.

As the Vilnius summit came and went and a deal was left unsigned, more concerned Ukrainians, determined to ensure that their European aspirations not be squandered, streamed into the squares and streets of Kiev and other Ukrainian cities. According to reliable estimates, as many as 800,000 protestors marched in Kiev on December 1 in a display of solidarity against the government's decision.

Thousands of concerned Canadians, as well, demonstrated that day in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Ottawa and in towns and cities across this country. Canadians were taken to demonstrate not only in support of the aspirations of the Ukrainian people but also in response to the egregious acts of violence carried out by Ukrainian authorities the day before, on November 30, against peaceful protestors in Kiev's Independence Square.

On that day, the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed Canada's strong condemnation of this deplorable use of violence. He called on the Government of Ukraine to respect and protect the rights of its citizens to express their opinions freely and to respect the freedom of assembly as rights inherent in any truly democratic country.

As we know, such values and principles are the cornerstones of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE, an organization that has been chaired in 2013 by none other than Ukraine.

On December 5 and 6, the OSCE's annual meeting of foreign ministers, the ministerial council, took place in the Ukrainian capital. It was an egregious affront to OSCE values and principles that so many of them, including freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and the protection of journalists, had been violated in the host city on the eve of the ministerial.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, who attended the OSCE ministerial on behalf of Canada, made it clear that such actions were unacceptable and an affront to the values that we all, as OSCE members, strive for. He expressed Canada's deep disappointment that the Ukrainian government had, in balking at implementing the measures necessary to sign an association agreement in Vilnius, effectively suspended the country's path toward democratic development and economic prosperity. This was clearly not the wish of the people of Ukraine.

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• (1820)

While in Kiev, the minister met with his Ukrainian counterpart, Minister Kozhara, to express Canada's grave concerns about the Ukrainian government's crackdown on mass protests against its decision to suspend negotiations. He also met with leaders of the Ukrainian opposition and with representatives of civil society to voice Canada's support for the democratic rights of all Ukrainians. He also visited Independence Square, where he met personally with many of the protesters. People on the square chanted, "Thank you, Canada", and cheered when he arrived.

The clear signals of the Ukrainian people have been broadcast around the world. The most concerning and disappointing aspect has been the Ukrainian authority's reaction to those peaceful protests. We will continue to stand with those Ukrainians who believe in freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Canada hopes that preparations for a Ukraine-EU agreement can resume in the near future. This recent development must not stop the Euro-Atlantic and European integration processes, as they reflect a genuine aspiration among Ukrainians to embrace the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Canada will continue to be there for help. Our development assistance programs in Ukraine will continue.

It is worth noting that at this moment, Canada has over two dozen election observers either deployed or being deployed to Ukraine to monitor the parliamentary by-elections being held on December 15 in five electoral districts where electoral fraud invalidated the results during the nationwide parliamentary elections of 2012. This is only our most recent and current demonstration of our government's ongoing commitment to Ukrainian democracy. Since Ukraine's renewed independence in 1991, Canada has played a pioneering and influential role, and I would say a continuing role, in promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights in this important country with which so many Canadians share deep historical, cultural, and people-to-people ties.

We are determined to continue to assist the Ukrainian people in achieving their aspirations for a fully free and democratic society while helping to transform Ukraine's economy into a better, more transparent, rules-based, and liberalized marketplace that is better equipped to integrate with a diversified global economy.

In conclusion, our Canadian values and our deep and long-standing friendship with the Ukrainian people demand nothing less of us.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we go to questions and comments, I just remind hon. members, that take note debates are rather less formal affairs. Members are encouraged, if they wish, to sit anywhere in the chamber it becomes appropriate to have a good exchange across the aisle.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention. He gave a fairly thorough overview of what Canada has been doing, the position we have taken, and the actions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In 2011-12, the Government of Canada funded, to the tune of \$25 million, projects in Ukraine. Some of these had to do with democratic developments. Some of the monies were invested in the election observations the member just referred to for the by-election that will take place.

Could the parliamentary secretary inform the House and Canadians what other investments the government is contemplating at this time on a go-forward basis? Will the government continue that amount of money? Could he give us a breakdown of where those monies would be invested in the next fiscal year?

• (1825)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, we have been actively involved and have been a great contributor to the efforts of the democratic strength-building efforts in Ukraine for a few decades.

I should just point out that we are actually the sixth largest donor of technical assistance to Ukraine. We have invested over \$410 million in the official development assistance program we have been part of. We are contributing about \$20 million annually, as the member opposite pointed out, which is geared toward issues of democracy, improving things around the rule of law, and increasing economic opportunities for Ukraine and Ukrainians.

One of the reasons this is so frustrating is that the leadership of Ukraine has decided that they are not that interested right now in pursuing this agreement with the EU. We have spent a lot of time and effort working with folks there trying to set it up so that they have economic opportunities. We do not see them turning eastward rather than coming into and integrating with the EU, which would be a development that would be in their best interest economically.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his remarks and for opening this debate tonight.

Canada has always stood with the Ukrainian people through the long relationship between the Ukraine and Canada. I think of Mr. Mulroney being quick to recognize the Ukrainian independence in 1991 and Mr. Martin being quick to acknowledge the Orange Revolution toward democracy in 2004.

Sometimes over the course of those years our support has been rhetorical. Other times it has been specific and tangible. In the present circumstances, it is important to find the ways to move our position from rhetoric to concrete action.

Obviously, we need to make sure that any action that is taken does not impinge upon the Ukrainian people in a negative way. It is the behaviour of Mr. Yanukovich that is the problem here. In the past there has been some discussion about Canada or other countries leading an international dialogue toward a set of Yanukovich-specific sanctions, so that we are not imposing any burdens upon the Ukrainian people but are focusing our attention on Mr. Yanukovich himself. That could include the group of oligarchs who support him.

Government Orders

Is the government prepared to consider that type of measure, at least to have some discussion with our allies, the United States and European allies, specifically about what the world community can do to focus a set of sanctions, such as freezing assets and limiting travel, aimed specifically at Mr. Yanukovich and the oligarchs around him to make sure that they cannot conduct their campaigns against the Ukrainian people with impunity, and just get away with it and go on a holiday when they feel like it?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, what I should first point out is the importance of the Ukrainian heritage and Ukrainian ties to the province of both the member who just spoke and myself, particularly the northeast corner of our province. People from eastern Europe and particularly the Ukraine played a huge role in the development of Saskatchewan and the benefits that we are seeing now. Therefore, it is important to us that we address this issue seriously.

We are at the point where we see these political trends as being very troubling. However, our policy in the past is one that we believe we should continue, and that is a principle of engagement with the Ukraine. We have consistently messaged and urged action from the Ukrainian authorities that they protect the rule of law, work toward human rights and strengthen democracy. We continue to carry that message to them. We want to support those folks who are out on the streets who believe that those are important principles, that the Ukraine continues to move in the direction of seeing stronger democracy, a stronger rule of law, and in particular, seeing human rights protected.

What really concerned us was that when the attacks took place in the Independence Square, the first people who seemed to be attacked were journalists. It looked like there was some attempt to keep the story from getting out and to limit that. The principles of freedom of association, freedom of speech and protection for journalists are very important and need to be protected in the Ukraine.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary and all hon. members for their questions tonight.

It is important that we maintain engagement with the Ukraine. Canada has over 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian heritage. They work hard.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the League of Ukrainian Canadians, League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Canadian Friends of Ukraine, and so many others are highly engaged in making sure that Ukraine achieves its full potential, which it should. There is no reason Ukraine cannot be one of the great nations of Europe today. However, there are these troubling events going on in Ukraine today, such as the present rejection of the EU association agreement and the Euromaidan protests in the square.

More troubling than that is the crackdown on some of these protesters. I would be interested in the parliamentary secretary's view on Canada's view of the harsh treatment some of these protestors have received from the security forces.

• (1830)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, around the world, we stand as a country that respects the rule of law, respects human rights and insists on the development of democracy wherever we go. Certainly it has been a great disappointment over the last couple of weeks in

particular to see Ukrainian authorities taking the measures they have. As I mentioned a little earlier, the first thing that seemed to have happened was that journalists and foreign journalists were being attacked so they could not get the story out to the rest of the world.

Certainly, protesters are in the streets. They want to be peaceful and they want to get their point across that they really do see their future in EU integration. The authorities need to listen to that.

What could be negative about giving citizens greater mobility, greater and closer political co-operation to support the consolidation of democracy and giving them more economic opportunities? Those are the kinds of things that will come forward if the Ukrainian leadership finally listens to its own citizens and allow them to have a say in the direction the country goes. Then we will see those kinds of things that my colleague from Etobicoke Centre, who has done such strong work on the issue of Ukraine, would love to see develop, as would we all.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, one of the measures I know the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is looking for is Canada's help internationally in cracking down on money laundering in Ukraine, which is a tax haven. I am wondering if the government has plans to work with the international community to help crack down on money laundering in Ukraine?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, there are countries around there where that is a huge problem. We know that for sure.

Around the world, we stand with people who want to see human rights in their country. We want to see them develop. They want the rule of law and want to see democracy developed. We want to work. We want to defend those folks in Ukraine who are standing so solidly in the squares, who have come out onto the streets, who have insisted that they do not want to go back to where they were before.

Those issues of building the institutions and of strengthening the rule of law in countries are important to us as Canadians. They are something we have taken around the world. We believe that other countries can learn from us in those areas and that it would be in the best interests of Ukraine to take a look to the west to see those structures that it could maybe put in place that would then deal with some of the issues that the member opposite addressed.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleagues who are here to focus on Ukraine because as we have noted already in this debate, it is a topic of great importance, not just for us here but for the world.

I want to start with a personal story. It was in 2004 when my mother went to Ukraine to be an election observer. She came back moved by the fact that the people of Ukraine had taken it upon themselves to really embrace something we take for granted here. That was democracy. She came back with such wonderful stories of people who had participated in the democratic franchise, who had participated in politics in its best form.

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It was an exciting time. It was the time of the Orange Revolution, which obviously predated any orange wave. It was a time where people had hope and optimism for the future. It was a dream that was being laid out for the people of Ukraine. This was not a dream that they had to strive for beyond their lifetimes; this was a dream they could live right now. It was the dream of living in a country where people were able to decide with a democratic franchise who was to decide the fate of their future.

It is with some concern and sadness that I am gripped with what is happening right now. My mother spent her Christmas there and she just had a couple of Christmases with me after that before she passed away, but I will never forget the excitement that she had for the people of Ukraine. She told me about a very long train ride she had to take to go to the area where she was an election observer and the people she met.

I think the magic of 2004 needs to be remembered right now, needs to be remembered with the people who are now in Independence Square who are saying, “We will not forget the dream. No one is going to steal the dream away from us. We stand for the dream of Ukraine to make sure it is free, it is democratic and no one is going to take that dream away from us”.

It is about people and it is about democratic franchise. It is about those things we take for granted here. I am proud to stand tonight in support of the people of Ukraine and in support of the democratic liberties, their human rights, their vision of a peaceful and prosperous country. Just as in 2004, Ukrainians are demonstrating that they will be masters of their own destiny.

I have been monitoring the situation closely as to what is happening in Ukraine, along with many of my colleagues. I am deeply concerned by the government's use of force against peaceful protesters. There is no place in a democratic society for the use of force by the state against peaceful protesters, and of course we want to see that ended.

Free speech and the right to peacefully protest are fundamental to any democracy. Around the world and throughout history, these are among the most basic rights people fight to obtain. It is worth noting that on the day that we are celebrating the life of Madiba, of Mandela, that the people in Ukraine and Independence Square are fighting for what he was fighting for. They have different contexts in terms of being in different situations, but the same ideals, the ability to speak freely, not to be jailed because of one's beliefs, not to be beaten because of one's want to protest civilly.

I think Canada should continue to send a clear message to the government of Ukraine, to respect these democratic freedoms and work with our allies to support a political resolution to the crisis. Of course, this situation has arisen as a result of the disappointing decision of the Ukrainian government to suspend negotiations for an association agreement and deep and comprehensive free trade with the European Union as was already noted.

Soon after the announcement of this decision, as the protests were just getting going, I issued a statement on behalf of the New Democratic Party on November 25, expressing our concern and urging all sides to exercise restraint and for the government to do that as well, and to commit to a dialogue between government and

opposition parties and civil society. Unfortunately, as we saw, the Ukrainian government did not follow through on those demands, which many of us were making, did not show restraint. In fact, it did the opposite.

• (1835)

Of course, we are deeply concerned with the continued police crackdowns, which have reportedly included the use of tear gas, stun grenades, and batons against peaceful protesters, bystanders, and journalists. This must end, and we must speak clearly and with unanimity in this place to condemn the violence that we have seen against peaceful protest. We deplore these attacks on peaceful assembly.

There are numerous reports of injuries and arbitrary political arrests. These actions by Ukrainian security services are simply unacceptable, and they must be prosecuted. Ukrainian authorities must not only refrain from violence, which is obvious, but must respect the democratic freedoms of the Ukrainian people. The government must also respect due process and fundamental justice for all who may be detained, and the rule of law must reign supreme.

The use of divisive rhetoric against the protesters by the Ukrainian government has aggravated tensions and undermined democratic discourse. Dialogue among Ukrainians, supported by the international community, is essential for reconciliation and democratic progress in Ukraine. The actions of the Ukrainian government have put this process at risk.

Let us be clear: all Canadian political parties are united in their desire for a free, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine. Last year, on the foreign affairs committee, as the vice-chair working with my colleagues, we studied the situation in Ukraine. I was pleased that the committee recommended that the Government of Canada should call for the prompt release of all political leaders who have been convicted as part of apparently politically motivated prosecutions. This is incredibly important for any democracy. There cannot be free and fair elections when opposition leaders are imprisoned.

The committee also called on the Ukrainian government to strengthen the rule of law, respect for human rights, media freedom, religious freedom, and academic freedom. At the time, the NDP also added its supplementary report, which called for any economic negotiations between Canada and Ukraine to be coordinated with demands that elections be free, fair, and transparent in accordance with international standards, along with the release of all politicians who had been convicted as part of apparently politically motivated prosecutions. We also recommended that Canada should coordinate its actions with the European Union.

Now is another opportunity for such coordination. Catherine Ashton, the EU's foreign representative—and this is news I received just before I came to the House—is there. She has actually been to Independence Square and has met with people in the square, as well as with government officials. We are also hearing about talks with the opposition leaders.

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Canada has a very strong relationship, as we know, and that strong relationship can be used for the benefit of the Ukrainian people. The government should use our status and the strong ties with Ukraine to push for change at the top. This is international Human Rights Day. It was 65 years ago today that a Canadian-inspired document, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was adopted. Let us be inspired to carry that mission through when it comes to the people of Ukraine.

I want to finish where I started. This is about a dream of a people. We have a responsibility to see that dream through. We have a responsibility to make sure that the people of Ukraine know that the Canadian people are with them.

Let me finish by simply saying *slava Ukraini*.

● (1840)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, once again I appreciate the remarks of the foreign affairs critic for the New Democratic Party. I want to underline the critical point that he made toward the end of his remarks, which was that all Canadian political parties are very much on the same page when it comes to dealing with this issue.

We are deeply concerned by the news reports that we see emerging from Ukraine. We are concerned about the brutal treatment of the demonstrators, where ordinary human rights seem to be totally disregarded. We are concerned as well about the offices of political parties being raided and ransacked. This is a very troubling situation, and that is why we are having this special debate tonight.

I wonder if the hon. member would agree that it is important for Canada, with its international partners the United States, the European Union, and elsewhere, to pursue all means by which we can apply appropriate diplomatic pressure to bring about a change in attitude with the Yanukovich regime.

I am thinking particularly of the way in which that regime—the president himself, members of his government, the oligarchs that support him—seem to be able to carry out these actions to which we object with complete impunity. They have a disregard for the rule of law, a disregard for human rights, and a disregard for democracy.

Would it be possible for Canada to lead an initiative in the world that would bring the United States, European countries, and others together to develop a set of specific actions that would not be focused against Ukraine as a country or focused against the Ukrainian people, but would be focused directly against Yanukovich, his henchmen, and the oligarchs who back him up to make sure that they cannot enjoy their wealth, their assets, their ability to travel with impunity without regard to what they are doing to their own people back home?

Can Canada lead that kind of an international effort to develop that action plan, if necessary?

● (1845)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, let me give some very concrete suggestions that we have had put before us. They are actually from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. I will just enumerate them quickly.

Very smart things that we can do, and some of the things that our party has already called for, include engagement. We are hearing that this is absolutely critical. I was glad to see the foreign affairs minister go to Ukraine recently, and we have to keep that up. First is engagement with our allies by the government so that we do not see Ukraine slip back into the pocket of Russia.

Second, we can call upon Ukraine's president to respect the freedom of its citizens to assemble peacefully. We can call upon Ukraine's authorities to respect this right and to apply restraint in interaction with peaceful protestors.

Third, we can demand that the governing authorities of Ukraine respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Ukrainians, release from jail all peaceful protestors, and refrain from the use of force, as I had mentioned.

I will quickly enumerate the other points that the UCC has mentioned.

One is to reiterate the firm commitment of Canada to Ukraine's European integration and the signing of the EU-Ukraine association agreement on the basis of the clear, united, and undeniable call of the people of Ukraine as manifested by the people of Ukraine as they are speaking right now in Independence Square.

Another is to develop a sound policy and plan to address Russia's violations of its international commitments, particularly the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This is very important.

Another, in concert with the U.S. and European authorities, is to play a leadership role in the G8 and the G20. This point gets back to the question I was posed.

I cannot see that there is anything controversial in what the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is asking. This is a good road map for Canada to embrace, to get behind, and to lead on. I would encourage the government to do just that.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, each of us has Ukrainian-Canadian communities in our ridings. Certainly across the province of Alberta there is a strong, proud Ukrainian Canadian contingent.

I had the privilege, as the member is aware, of travelling to Ukraine a year and a half ago as part of a foreign affairs delegation. We were precisely looking into these matters. There were concerns with the erosion of democracy and the rule of law in Ukraine and whether or not there would be a fair election. The election was held last October. Of course, we are into elections again.

In the feedback we were given, in addition to what the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is calling for, we had strong presentations from civil society and the media calling for more support by the Canadian government—for example, through CIDA—to enable young Ukrainians to come for visits here and to provide more internships, and also for visits by people working in municipal governments. They have not had a democratic regime for long. They do not have the experience of observing and being part of a democratic regime.

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I have not yet heard mention of strong support for freedom of the media. What is going on right now in Ukraine is not different from what we have been hearing has been going on for quite some time. There have been politicians imprisoned for quite some time.

Could the member speak about broader support that Canada could give to help build a democratic foundation in the Ukraine?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, that is a superb question. That is why these take note debates are really important. We can discuss ideas, put proposals forward, and have a good discussion when we have more than 35 seconds.

It is really important that we focus on the media. These elections were not fair because the ability of everyday people to get their message out was being controlled by the media. It was the same with the incarceration of political opposition leaders. There cannot be a full debate if people are restricted because they are incarcerated, obviously.

However, what my colleague from Edmonton said that is equally important is that Canada can help with democratic development here by supporting civic development through exchanges. We have seen young bright people here in the internship program, for instance. We should be doing more of that. We should be opening our doors to all those young people who believe in that dream I was talking about. That way, the dream cannot be stolen, because they are going to be equipped with the right skill sets to go back and build up their communities at the civic level and the municipal level as well as at the state level.

However, we need to see the media question put on the front burner, because we have seen a restriction of freedom of speech and a clampdown on media that are not in line with the government's party line. These are very important initiatives, and we can help by funding those projects in Ukraine and inviting those young, bright, talented Ukrainians to come here to learn how we do things. Then they can bring that back home.

• (1850)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the discussion that is taking place tonight. I want to ask my colleague a couple of questions.

I actually had the chance to be at the Vilnius summit and to see the disappointment that was so obvious there that Ukraine would not be signing the agreement. Three opposition leaders were actually there and hosted a panel. Two of the things they talked about were, one, the importance of making sure that the demonstrations and their opposition to the government's position were done peacefully and, two, the real need for them to be working together, not separately.

I would be interested first in the member's comments on the necessity for the opposition in Ukraine to work together. Second, we have had some differences across the House in terms of the importance of integrated trade deals and those kinds of things. How does his party see the importance of the EU-Ukraine integration agreement?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, to be clear, it is more than a trade agreement; it is a political agreement as well. The strategic partnership agreement framework that the EU has, which we have

not signed on to yet, I might note, is an important model. Actually, the agreement with Ukraine is even bigger than the strategic partnership agreements that they normally negotiate along with their trade agreements.

We need to see this happen because we know what is happening right now. We have a president who is pulling Ukraine away from Europe towards Russia. We know the people do not want that. We have to show that we are interested in Ukraine having full and open access to the west through the European Union. We support this political economic agreement that the president walked away from and is playing games with, as members know. There is no question about it.

We believe it is important for the opposition to unite around a similar position. That is where we can help. As we speak, I note that Ms. Ashton is there from the EU, engaging diplomatically. Hopefully, we will see a change of mind.

I would also note, just off the BBC wire, that we now have the president saying he might go to Brussels next week. Well, would that not be interesting?

We cannot turn our backs. We have to turn the pressure up. On this side, we believe in that political economic arrangement. We believe we should be pushing for it and that we should see a united opposition. We believe we should be doing everything we can with our diplomatic muscle to encourage that engagement with the EU, absolutely one hundred per cent.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I do believe it is a very important debate, and I appreciate the opportunity to express a few thoughts and share some ideas that the Liberal Party has come up with.

In Canada, it is estimated that we have over 1.2 million people of Ukrainian heritage. There are literally hundreds of thousands of people who are watching every day as to what is taking place in Ukraine. They care about the future of Ukraine. Whether it is the person on the street or individuals here inside the chamber, that caring attitude is there and it is very real.

I know the foreign affairs critic has had communications with organizations such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. We have been kept fully informed of what people from our communities are saying, whether it has been the leader of the Liberal Party or the member for Wascana, and even our new member for Toronto Centre, who has also been addressing this issue that she feels quite passionate about.

I want to start with an event that I attended. The member for Wascana spoke on it, and it was dealing with the issue of the Holodomor, an issue that anyone of Ukrainian heritage, and many more, recognize as a genocide of sorts that occurred during the 1930s. I say it for this one specific reason; I want to be able to quote something that was being circulated at the 80th anniversary. The booklet states, in reference to the Holodomor:

Those who were untouched by this tragedy do not understand us. But they need to understand us. So that our memory of the victims remains eternal. Only then will we not be simply people or a population, but a nation.

This was written by Semen Rak, a Holodomor survivor.

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I have had the opportunity to see the memorial in Kiev that is featured on the brochure that was being circulated for the recognition of the 80th anniversary.

I understand and appreciate the resilience of Ukrainian people. Through that resilience, we have something that is happening today, and we recognize what happened in the past, the whole orange wave, the Orange Revolution that was made reference to.

All of that has had a very profound impact on a population in Ukraine that so many here in Canada are following and want to see some sort of positive resolve. We need to come up with ideas and suggestions as to what will ultimately go a long way toward bringing more peace and harmony, thinking, of course, of the importance of issues like the rule of law, democracy and human rights. These are all fundamental principles that we believe are important for everyone throughout the world.

We have seen the carrot dangled in front of Ukrainians for many years, and at times we have seen huge steps forward indicating that Ukraine is on the right track.

I believe that when President Yanukovich decided not to move forward with the EU agreements, we saw a reaction from the population. The population reacted virtually immediately. We saw protests in the square in downtown Kiev in front of government buildings, a square that I personally have had the opportunity to be in. I am very familiar with the surroundings and the emotions that no doubt would be flowing.

● (1855)

These are the types of responses that we have seen, even in the cold and miserable weather at times. People have taken to the streets, not only in Kiev, but in Lviv, smaller cities and in the countryside.

The people of Ukraine are concerned about the future of their country. We are so blessed here in Canada that we take a lot of things for granted. However, we do have something to offer. Whether they are constituents living in Winnipeg North, in Regina, Toronto or wherever it might be, people are following this, and they want parliamentarians to assist in whatever way we can. A part of that means listening to the communities we represent.

That is why the Ukrainian Canadian Congress has played a very strong leadership in informing members of Parliament. I compliment individuals like Taras Zalusky and Paul Grod for the excellent and wonderful job they have done in ensuring that whether a member is the leader of the Liberal Party, members like myself, members of the Conservative Party or the New Democratic Party, we are kept abreast of their point of view on what is actually taking place.

There are many other individuals whom I have had the opportunity to talk with. I can tell the House that there is a consensus forming, which is that we need to emphasize how important it is that Ukraine respects the importance of restraint. It has to allow people to vent their ideas and their positions when things occur, respect peaceful rallies and allow people to get together to protest in a peaceful fashion.

We have to look at where there have already been allegations of serious violations of human rights. There needs to be some sort of investigation that is legitimate and shows we are respecting human

rights. From what I understand, we know there has already been some armed intervention on some of the protests. We need to be concerned about that.

We have to be very much aware of the importance of democracy. We have to do what we can to encourage it. We feel very strongly and passionately. I, for one, have had the opportunity to visit and monitor an election at the grassroots level, particularly in Lviv during the last election. The people there value democracy. They value the economic opportunities that could be there for them.

It does not mean that Russia does not have a role to play. It means that we have to recognize that the European Union also has a role to play in the future of Ukraine. Even Canada has a role to play in looking at potential Ukraine-Canada trade agreements. Obviously, it would be with caveats that deal with things such as human rights and democracy.

These are things that we need to look at. We need to maintain the issue of engagement with the different levels of government, whether it is with universities, municipalities, national governments or the many different links that are there. As I said, 1.2 million people of Ukrainian heritage call Canada home. Many of them have family, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and so on, who live in Ukraine today. We need to maintain and enhance those communications.

● (1900)

Whether it is the grassroots level or here in this beautiful chamber that we maintain those communications, we should stay engaged and see if we can help our Ukrainian brothers and sisters into the future so they will have a rule of law, democracy and human rights of which all of us can be very proud.

● (1905)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise today with a very heavy heart and great concern for the people of Ukraine. I come from a consistency where probably a third of my constituents are from Ukrainian heritage and many kept contact, even through the darkness of the Soviet period when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. They kept contact, maintained relationships and sent care packages to their families in Ukraine. That has been sustained and today they still feel an extremely close connection with their country of origin.

I feel great concern because not only has President Yanukovich put in place a customs union with Russia, which, in itself, would not be a bad thing, it would be a good thing, but that he has ended negotiations on the association agreement with the European Union. That is what really leads to a concern.

I have a question for my colleague. My friends and neighbours, who have now become my family through marriage, in the constituency are concerned that what is happening in Ukraine may be a re-Sovietization of the area, that what is happening may be the start of a movement to an expansion on the part of Russia to a new Soviet-style regime. We do not know how far that would go or whether that would happen. We all hope and pray that it would not. Is it beyond the realm of possibility? Sadly, I fear not. I think it is possible and I hope and pray that it is not the case.

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I want to ask my colleague whether he sees a danger that this movement could be the start of a process that could, in fact, lead to that tragic outcome.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I do not necessarily want to play up on the fear. There are people across Canada who are virtually in tears because of what they see taking place in Ukraine today. The sense that we need to do something exists. It is very real and tangible. I believe it goes far beyond even the Ukrainian community or people of Ukrainian heritage. If we care about what is happening in Europe, about democracy, the rule of law, human rights and we want to see the Ukrainian people to move forward, we cannot help wanting to get engaged in this. It is causing people, as I say, in many regions to break down into tears because they are fearful of the direction we might be going in.

There are two things that we have to maintain. One is the idea of engagement, which is critically important. The other thing is what we can do that can have a very real message or tangible result. I loved when the member for Wascana, for example, talked about not punishing the Ukrainian people and pointed to the president. Is there some way we can prevent him from travelling anywhere in the world, create some sort of sanctions or something else that could be done? We need to approach this with an open mind in an apolitical fashion and see what pressure we can apply.

Canada has recognized Ukraine for its independence in the past and we need to continue to be there for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters overseas.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Chair, could the hon. member tell us what economic and political ties between the European Union and the Ukraine mean for this country's future?

• (1910)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I suspect we will find that many economists will say that the economic opportunities will be greatly enhanced by a European trade agreement with Ukraine for the simple reasons that there are really two trading partners.

There is Russia, which makes up a huge portion of trade with Ukraine, and there is that vested interest there. On the other hand, there is the European Union, which is growing by huge amounts. I could not say how many millions off hand, but I do know from discussions with people when I was in Kiev, in particular, that they were very optimistic that the future in getting freer trade with the European Union was going to enable all sorts of economic opportunities and prosperity.

At the same time, I do not believe that people want to get rid of the trade that is happening in Russia, but there seems to be a lot more optimism in terms of the freer trade with the European Union.

We should look at ways we could go across the Atlantic. Canada could in fact play a much more important and significant role in regard to freer trade agreements.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, while we are meeting tonight, news reports out of Kiev indicate that large numbers of police are once again moving closer to the Maidan.

There is no action yet. However, there appears to be large numbers descending on Independence Square and the risk of violence is obviously in the air. That will be of great concern to a great many Canadians, the 1.25 million Canadians who can trace their heritage to Ukraine, 13% of the population of the province of Saskatchewan and even more so, I think, in the province of Alberta.

This is a very troubling situation. We need the means to get the attention of President Yanukovich so he knows the world is watching, the world is deeply concerned and the world is not prepared to turn away or to turn its back.

That is why I make the suggestion of trying to bring together the international community in an effort to develop a set of very targeted, very specific Yanukovich sanctions that are aimed at him, not at the country, not at the people, but at him so he is not free to use his assets with impunity, he is not free to travel with impunity and that the world will hold him to account for how he is handling this situation.

I wonder if my colleague from Winnipeg North could indicate his view on that specific suggestion. Canada could not do this alone, but we could in concert with other countries. I do think it would be useful for Canada to start that international dialogue so President Yanukovich will understand very clearly that the world treats this situation in a very serious manner and there will be consequences for behaviour that violates human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the former minister of finance, brings an immense amount of credibility to the issue of working with other nations to try to have an impact on the current president of Ukraine.

I believe, at the end of the day, it is going to have to be world leaders coming together and trying to address the solutions that are there, if we are prepared to do it. The member for Wascana brings up a valid point in regard to President Yanukovich, putting in some sanctions on the individual and looking at other opportunities.

It is interesting to contrast. We have the potential of violence in a square. I have been to that square and it would be a scary situation because of all the buildings around it. It is huge, but it is confined. It is full of thousands and thousands of people right now.

We can contrast that to the world leader of Nelson Mandela. It is truly amazing. What we need is strong world leadership to come to the table. We should not underestimate the potential that Canada could play a very strong leadership role.

• (1915)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very proud to be here tonight and speak in this very important debate as chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group.

We are very special partners, Canada and Ukraine, and in over 20 years we have worked very hard together. Canada has been mentioned many times as home to 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian heritage and that includes my own mother-in-law.

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In 2011, we celebrated the 120th anniversary of the first Ukrainian Canadian settlement in Canada. We are very proud of that achievement, very proud of what the Canadian Ukrainians have produced and have contributed to our history and to Canada.

Recently in the House we commemorated the 80th anniversary of Holodomor, one of the worst, most heinous genocides, the murder of millions by famine by Josef Stalin and the Soviet Communist totalitarian state in 1932-33.

However, on December 2, 1991, Canada became the first western nation to recognize Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union. Since then we have invested \$410 million of official assistance in Ukraine and we are still providing \$20 million a year in technical assistance to advance democracy and the rule of law. We have drawn bilateral road maps and we continue on with free trade negotiations.

Canada is very engaged with Ukraine. We will not disengage with Ukraine because it is very important that we maintain that engagement to be able to influence the events within Ukraine. In fact, last year we sent over 500 election observers to Ukraine, the most ever. I was part of that as were a few members of the House who participated in that. In fact, we are also sending over 25 election observers later this week. I will be one of those to go over and monitor those rerun elections.

Ukrainians are rejecting their Soviet past and instead want to embrace western ideals of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and balanced justice. That is what the people in the Maidan are trying to say. They are fighting for their futures. They are fighting for hope. They are fighting for freedom and democracy. The people of Ukraine only want what people everywhere want. They want their kids to go to school. They want their kids to get a good education. They want their kids to have a great opportunity for jobs and a future and prosperity.

There is no reason that the nation of Ukraine cannot be one of the great nations of Europe today. Ukraine has the size. It has the potential to grow food. It has been the breadbasket of Europe. It has minerals. It has enough energy to create its own wealth. It just needs the opportunity to do that and to be able to catch up with its neighbours. It wants a vibrant civil society. For example, Ukraine's neighbours like Poland, is Ukraine's best friend in the world right now.

I commend the Poles for everything that they have done for Ukraine. I commend Mr. Cox and Mr. Kwasniewski for their multiple repeated visits to Ukraine on behalf of the EU and pulling Ukraine toward the EU and to Europe. I commend all the work that the EU has done. I commend the work that Sweden has done as well in being able to help Ukraine move that way.

We have engaged Ukraine on many levels, including free trade negotiations and we hope to resume those free trade negotiations because Ukraine has the capacity to be a great nation and we would very much like to see them achieve that and see them become a partner of Canada.

That is why events in Ukraine are so tragic. This EU association agreement that has been rejected is the same agreement that has been provided, as I said, to Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and others in the mid-nineties. It is an agreement that allowed those nations to achieve

tremendous prosperity. In fact, Poland is one of the fastest growing EU countries right now economically. It is in fact often referred to as the Canada of Europe. Poland has tried very hard to assist Ukraine in being able to sign this deal and come over.

Many of us have had Canada-Ukraine parliamentary program interns who have worked for us over the many years. I have had three since I have been a member of the House of Commons. These kids are bright, smart, talented, ambitious and they want opportunity and they want to do it in their home country. They want to go home and they want to lead. These kids do not want to leave for other nations in Europe, they want to go home to Europe and they want to stand up and they want to contribute to the prosperity of their nation, in the bosom of their families, in their towns. That is what they want.

● (1920)

That is what those protests in the Maidan are about: freedom, hope, a future. That is what they are looking forward to.

It is Russia that is making this an us-or-them proposition. It is Mr. Putin who is unfairly leveraging Ukraine with the hold he has on Ukraine right now with Gazprom and the other trade levers he is pulling. There is no reason Ukraine cannot trade with the European Union and trade with Russia. There is absolutely no reason why this has to be an us-or-them proposition.

Ukraine should be able to have the freedom to choose who it trades with around the world. It could make trade arrangements with the TPP, perhaps, in the future, or other trade blocs or partners, for mutual benefit. That strengthens the economy and jobs. It allows people to prosper. That allows a nation to develop itself in a democratic, free, and fair way. There is absolutely no reason the Ukraine should be put in a corner where it has to choose one or the other. It is not fair. It is not necessary. In fact, it is a form of blackmail, and it is unacceptable.

Ukraine has a long way to go. For example, in the area of justice, selective justice is unacceptable. Yulia Tymoshenko is still in jail, and there is no reason for that. Part of the deal with the EU was that she might be pardoned, or at the very least, sent to Germany for medical treatment. She is in very bad medical condition with her back. I call on Mr. Yanukovich to show clemency and allow Mrs. Tymoshenko to travel to Germany for the medical treatment she badly needs.

The member for Wascana mentioned earlier that he just got a tweet about security forces moving into the square in Kiev. This is very disturbing. I would like Mr. Yanukovich to know that the world is watching. These people in the square only want freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, balanced justice, and an economy they can rely on. This is not happening.

If there is further violence in the Maidan, Canada is watching. Europe is watching. The United States is watching. All the world is watching. This will fall at the feet of Mr. Yanukovich if there is tragedy at the Maidan because of any orders he or his government give to harm any of those protesters. If there is further bloodshed, it is on his hands. We are watching, and the world will hold him accountable.

When the Parliamentary Chairman from Ukraine, Mr. Rybak, and his delegation were here two weeks ago leading the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, we told them that they were wrong, wrong, wrong to reject the EU association deal. It was the wrong course of action. Some members of the Party of Regions outlined to me the deal they had with Gazprom. My reply to them was this: "What is the matter with you if you are prepared to sign a deal with a country that is siphoning billions of dollars out of the Ukrainian economy and denying the people of Ukraine the economic prosperity they need? Why would you sign an agreement with people like that?"

Mr. Putin can have one word with Gazprom and they could realign that gas deal. That is not happening. They are just being leveraged and put in a corner where they have to choose one or the other.

What is happening to Ukraine is wrong, wrong, wrong. Canada is watching. Canada will remain engaged with Ukraine and will stand with its Ukrainian diaspora here in Canada to make sure that Ukraine follows the path of freedom and democracy. All Canadians and all members of this House are unified in standing with the Ukrainian people.

• (1925)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for his comments and for his leadership in the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group.

I know that another member mentioned this in the House, but I have been looking at the BBC website, and as we are having this debate in the House, it is reporting that hundreds of police have moved on a large protest camp in the centre of the Ukrainian capital. That would be the Maidan square.

Ukrainians in Canada have been very concerned about the use of force and the government there not allowing the right to democratic protest, the right to free speech, and the ability to gather in this public square. There is great concern about the use of force in breaking up these demonstrations and about undue pressure being put on those demonstrators gathered in Maidan square. A number of students were arrested earlier, and there is concern about their treatment.

I ask the member if the government is sending an urgent message, especially this evening, as we are having this debate, that the government refrain from trying to remove the peaceful protesters and that it stop any undue force so that people's rights to free assembly and free speech are respected. That ought to be a basic right as we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park for her role as the vice-chair of the Canada-

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Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group. We have had a wonderful working relationship and co-operation for the diaspora in our ridings and across Canada. I also thank her for her question.

I know that the Ukrainian government is listening right now to what is being said in the House and to the fact that Canada supports the tenets of free speech and freedom of assembly. We are very concerned about any violence against the protesters in the Maidan.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs was in Ukraine just a number of days ago. He has already laid out his concerns. We continue to remain engaged not only with the diaspora but with the government of Ukraine on a daily basis. Canada's views on any injury or bloodshed in the Maidan are well known to the Ukrainian government.

As I said in my speech, if any harm comes to those protesters, the blood will be on Mr. Yanukovich's hands.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, obviously the concern about Ukraine is universal in the House this evening. It is being well expressed on all sides.

I wonder if the hon. member could advise the House on the state of communication between Canada and a number of allies. I am thinking about allies in Europe, other than the Ukraine, the United States, and other parts of the world. We share a common concern about the deterioration of events in Ukraine. How well are we communicating with our allies and potential allies?

Do we have the capacity, perhaps under Canadian leadership, to pull together a group of like-minded countries to develop a specific action plan for what we could do to have a very real impact on the behaviour of President Yanukovich? He seems to be able to act with impunity and sort of thumb his nose at world opinion. It is important that the message be driven home to him in a way that does not damage the Ukrainian people or the economy of the Ukraine. It needs to be driven home to him directly that this behaviour is unacceptable.

The world is watching, and there will be consequences if, for example, there is bloodshed or violence in the Maidan.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Chair, Canada communicates with our allies very closely. In fact, as I mentioned, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was just in Ukraine with the other ministers from the OSCE. Many of those ministers, including our own Minister of Foreign Affairs, walked through the Maidan and talked to the protestors, opposition groups, and demonstrators. He told them in no uncertain terms that Canada supports them. That has been made very clear. As to communications from here, what is said in this House tonight will be in that square in minutes. I would like to assure the hon. member of that.

We cannot, of course, tell members what other nations are going to do. Canada can only say what we are going to do. However, we do co-operate with all of our allies. We do suggest courses of action to all of our allies.

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Canada will be watching very closely and communicating what we think to the Ukrainian government. Mr. Yanukovich, I believe, is starting to feel the world pressure, because as this mounts, all eyes are on him. He will be responsible for what happens in Ukraine. Whether he allows freedom and democracy to flourish and the economy to flourish will be up to Mr. Yanukovich. However, if he continues to drift toward authoritarian rule, I think, on the world stage, woe be to him.

• (1930)

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my friend from Etobicoke Centre for his leadership on the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group and also for the great interest and advocacy he has shown for Ukraine over the last number of years.

What is happening in Ukraine is very disheartening to all of us. Peaceful protestors should be allowed to be on the streets. They should be allowed to let their opinions be known. I wonder if the member for Etobicoke Centre would be so kind as to talk about the efforts of our foreign affairs minister, who recently was in Kiev for the OSCE meeting of ministers. Could he talk to the fact that we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine? Could he also talk about how this plays back in his own riding of Etobicoke Centre, in the Ukrainian diaspora in Toronto, and across Canada, for that matter?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his question and for his leadership with his bill in 2008 recognizing the Holodomor as a genocide. Canada was the first nation to do that, and I thank him for his work and his efforts.

Our Canadian Ukrainian diaspora is the strongest Ukrainian diaspora anywhere in the world. It is the best organized. It is the best administered. It is the best educated, and it is the one that is best positioned to educate people about Ukraine and the issues going on there. Many of the members of this House have benefited from it. Members of the Ukrainian diaspora sent along the briefing note this evening that I think all of us have read by this point. It was very insightful and very detailed. I thank the members of the diaspora for providing all those details on what is currently going on. I also thank the members of the League of Ukrainian Canadians, who have preserved much of the history of the former Ukraine through a lot of their work.

In our diaspora and in Canada, the Ukrainian community is highly mobilized and highly vocalized on this issue. Many have gone over there. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs was recently there with the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, whom I would like to congratulate on his recent re-election for his third term.

Our minister, as everybody will know, is not a shy man. He was very clear and unequivocal in talking to his counterparts from Ukraine as to Canada's views on the situation in Ukraine today, and in fact, in communicating the views of the Ukrainian diaspora here. Both have tremendous influence. We will continue to engage with Ukraine with that level of intensity.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am honoured to rise this evening to participate in this debate on the situation in Ukraine, which is incredibly troubling and urgent as Ukrainians live through this crisis. The world is clearly engaged and

watching what is happening in Ukraine and I am very thankful that we are having this debate tonight.

I want to first say, as firmly as I can, working closely with my colleague from Ottawa Centre who is the NDP official opposition critic on international issues, that New Democrats stand firmly with the people of Ukraine in their hour of need. We are with them, we are here in solidarity and we support them in their struggle.

I want to pick up on what others have said here tonight. I believe all parties in the House are of one mind and one voice when it comes to support for the people of Ukraine in the situation they are in this evening. We are very concerned about the current crisis, the use of force against protesters, the denial of free speech and the increasingly eastward drift of Ukraine, turning away from the west and increasingly, we believe, turning away from democratic engagement.

I am very fortunate, as the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park, that I represent a very large Ukrainian Canadian diaspora and I am very proud that this community has stayed together so tightly and has such a strong culture. People have preserved their language, their art, their community and their engagement with what is happening in Ukraine, as well as contributing for generations to the building of our country, Canada.

I am very honoured that I have had the opportunity to work with the Ukrainian Canadian community and have come to understand the difficult, troubled history that Ukrainians have faced in their country, everything from dictatorship and the suppression of rights to the ultimate horror of the Holodomor in 1932-33, the famine genocide. It is absolutely unbelievable what the Ukrainian community has had to suffer and I am very proud that it is our country, Canada, that was the first to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide and has worked so closely with the Ukrainian community.

Because of the experience I have had in Parkdale—High Park, I have used that opportunity to engage with Ukrainian people. I first went to Ukraine as an election observer in 2004 during the Orange Revolution. Yes, I was in the Maidan square and it was this time of year. It was very cold, but the energy, emotion and passion of Ukrainians as they jammed into that square was absolutely palpable.

Of course, we were neutral election observers. We were there to observe, but I was sent to Zaporizhia, which was an all-night train ride into the central eastern part of Ukraine. We arrived exactly at 6 a.m. on December 25. It was an incredible experience. The reason we were there was that the presidential elections were deemed fraudulent and were being rerun. There had been a huge initiative undertaken to train all of those who were participating as staff in the election and the people who volunteered. I saw first-hand how passionately Ukrainians wanted the democratic process to work. I believe in that case it did work, because the results were overturned. They elected a different president and there was so much hope in the aftermath of those elections.

I had the opportunity to return to Ukraine twice after that to be part of subsequent elections, most recently in 2012 for the parliamentary election. There are some re-runoffs of those elections taking place in the near future.

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●(1935)

I have seen first-hand the passion of the Ukrainian people, who want what they have described to me as a normal country, a normal society and a normal democracy. Normal means that opposition leaders do not get jailed right before an election. They do not get hauled off to trial on trumped up charges and then thrown in jail so they cannot participate in elections. Normal means the media does not get completely controlled in the months running up to an election. It means that people have the opportunity to freely and peacefully demonstrate and engage in their society.

I want to thank the many colleagues in the House who have been part of these observer missions and who have worked on the Canada-Ukraine parliamentary friendship committee. This is so important. I also want to thank those involved in the internship program. Through this program, I have seen first-hand, in my office here in Ottawa, smart, educated, talented young people from Ukraine, full of hope, who want to learn, who want to build their country.

I have so much hope for the future of Ukraine, yet here we are in these dark times right now debating the situation, all because the Ukraine government turned its back on its negotiations and its long-standing opportunity to form a trade partnership with the EU after years of negotiations. President Yanukovich turned his back on this and instead, when protestors start filling the streets in Kiev, he cracked down on them. He sent in the armed police who threw people in jail and beat people. That is not the way a democracy ought to function. Young people know better and that is why they are standing up against this brutality.

We are all here tonight with Ukraine. We have to ensure that whatever actions we or the international community take, there is engagement. We need not do anything that further isolates Ukraine.

I want to commend the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his recent trip to Ukraine and meeting with the protestors and engaging with the government. I believe we cannot just criticize Ukraine. We have to engage with it, but exert pressure as we engage also with civil society. With all of the work we have done, sending more election observers than any other country, we have the opportunity and we have the obligation to engage with Ukraine and advocate for it on the international stage.

We do have to call on the president of Ukraine to respect the rights of the citizens of Ukraine, to respect democratic assembly, to respect free speech, to respect the right of people to have fair and free elections and to respect their desire when the majority of Ukrainians want to have engagement with the west. We want to urge the government to allow that to happen.

We support the engagement of Ukraine with the European Union. We think that is a positive development. We also need to put pressure on Russia because we believe its undue meddling in Ukraine's affairs is really behind what is happening. We believe this is in violation of treaties that Russia has committed to in terms of submitting Ukraine to economic pressure. It needs to cease and desist from doing that.

There are many other measures that we support. We support the Ukrainian Canadian Congress's demands for a crackdown on money laundering and corrupt business practices. We support the desire of

Ukrainians who come to Canada to have greater access to visas and an accelerated process.

●(1940)

I see my time is just about up, but just let me say:

[Member spoke in Ukrainian]

●(1945)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, before I make remarks and comments to my colleague from Parkdale—High Park, I would like to say that the Government of Canada's aspiration, desire and goal for the people of Ukraine is the same as for everywhere else in the world. We want to see peace, prosperity, and most importantly, freedom. These are incredibly important values, Canadian values, that we want to promote around the world.

I just want to make a brief intervention on behalf of the government and on behalf of myself about the Ukraine. They are facing some real and significant challenges.

I listened with great respect to my friend from Parkdale—High Park, the member opposite, to her advice and her intervention. I want to say this. She is a true friend of the people of Ukraine. She should talk more to her friend, my friend, her foreign affairs critic, the member for Ottawa Centre.

I should say we all seek a peaceful resolution to the current conflict. We want to see the government dial down its rhetoric. We want to see an engagement with the opposition. If we could encourage anything to happen, it would be for the government to engage the opposition to look at the current conflict, to dial back its rhetoric and to look at its association with the European Union. That is exactly what I did on my recent visit to Ukraine.

I would be remiss if I did not say at the outset that I appreciate the strong commitment and leadership of the member for Parkdale—High Park on these issues. I am sure she will use this in her election pamphlets. I do appreciate it. She is a strong advocate for the people of Ukraine, and I want to thank her for her very thoughtful speech.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague opposite, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I think the Christmas spirit is breaking out in the House of Commons.

In all seriousness, it is indicative of the seriousness of this place and the seriousness of the issue that all parties have come together to have what is not really a debate but a discussion about this serious issue.

I thank the minister for his kind words. Again, I thank him for being in Ukraine, for being in the Maidan square. I have been there myself. I know how electric that can be when people come out in the streets and how passionately people want this change. People want to know that their country is truly evolving, that they are no longer living under a dictatorship.

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The Berlin Wall has fallen. We are in a post-dictatorship era, yet some of the vestiges of dictatorship remain. I believe that is what is happening here. I join with all my colleagues in supporting the minister's comments, that what we really want to do is to encourage the government. We do not want to isolate them. We want to encourage them to reach out to engage with the opposition, and to find a way forward so that the democratic will of the people is represented and the democratic aspirations of this country can be fully recognized.

I think there is good will around the world for this to happen. We can reach out to the government of Ukraine and urge it to pull back from its suppression of demonstrators, and reach out to them instead to engage in dialogue.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, again I note the sense of unanimity in the House tonight, among all members on all sides, with respect to the situation in Ukraine, and the deep concern we all feel with news reports tonight that riot police have taken some action in the Maidan and that water cannon may have been used and other forms of suppression. Some of the tents apparently have been torn down. At the moment, the situation may not have turned a corner to severe violence, but the risk is certainly there and that troubles us all deeply.

I think we all agree with the point that the member for Parkdale—High Park has made, and the minister referred to this, about finding the means to seek engagement and encourage dialogue and get the government and the opposition in Ukraine talking to each other in civil terms toward constructive solutions. One of the big problems seems to be getting President Yanukovich's attention. He seems to be prepared to act with impunity, perhaps because he believes there will be no consequences for him.

I wonder if the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park could share some of her thoughts about how to get Yanukovich's attention. Other than rhetorically criticizing his behaviour, how, in a tangible way, can we bring this man to understand that the world is watching, the world is deeply concerned, and that there will be consequences for behaviour that violates civil rights, democracy and the rule of law?

• (1950)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, I think one of the things we need to do is exactly what we are doing tonight, which is to show that the Parliament of Canada is seized with the situation in Ukraine.

I want to thank my colleague the official opposition Foreign Affairs critic, the member for Ottawa Centre, for his efforts on this, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and those who are speaking here tonight.

President Yanukovich has said he is considering going to Brussels, and I think we should bring to bear international pressure on him should he choose to make that visit. We need to keep that international pressure on to show that the world is watching. That is not to alienate him, but to pressure him to engage so we can find a resolve here. It is not to shut the door on his presidency, and not to have him shut the door on the west. I think that would be a big mistake.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague for being a stalwart defender of

the rights of those in Ukraine. I know she has taken that position for quite some time.

I think we need to remind ourselves that in making the statements that we are tonight in support of the people of Ukraine who are fighting against severe suppression right now, that they democratically chose a constitution which has extended to them the human rights and freedoms that we enjoy in Canada. We are not speaking about rights that they should have if they had a democratically selected government; they actually have adopted this constitution, which so far has not been shredded.

I had the honour of going to Ukraine twice last year, once to monitor the elections in the fall, with many colleagues on the other side as well, and with the Foreign Affairs committee, looking at the erosion of the rule of law and democracy.

One of the things that we discovered was that many people are being imprisoned for speaking out politically. I am wondering if my colleague could speak to the fact that this might be something that Canada could offer, to ensure there is legal representation for those who are being inappropriately arrested and jailed.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, my colleague is absolutely right. Ukraine does have a constitution. It does provide protection against human rights abuses, and I think that is an excellent idea. Canada engages with Ukraine on so many levels, whether it is with business, with education, with civil society. Given our history around human rights protection, and, again, the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, perhaps there is a way for us to reach out and provide some legislative support to help ensure its constitution is enforced, given what seems to be a situation of massive human rights abuses. I thank her for that suggestion.

• (1955)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a great pleasure for me to take part in this debate.

I have had an opportunity with some of my colleagues here to attend Ukraine's elections, on two occasions. I have had the opportunity to see the desire that the people have for democracy and the rule of law. Certainly it has been a struggle, and I appreciate that there are many aspects to it and that it is more complex than we can sometimes see. However, overall, the desire is to go forward. There have been obstacles along the way in many situations, but the desire is always for this to go forward.

The situation, of course, has deteriorated over the last little while. It is understandable that many Ukrainian people are disappointed with the negative direction the government took most recently when it turned its back on signing the EU-Ukrainian association agreement.

I think the Ukrainian Canadian Congress stated it quite well when they said that this “puts a stop to reform and the path of European integration and the modernization of the Ukrainian economy to put in line with the international standards. It further impedes the path to democracy and protection of human rights”. There is no question about that, and I think that is sort of the central core of the upset by the people.

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The Ukrainian Canadian Congress also expressed disappointment, as it has become clear that Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich arrived in Vilnius without any intention to reach an agreement. They say this is extremely disappointing and counter to the formal position taken by the government of Ukraine, the Parliament of Ukraine and the expressed will of the Ukrainian people, who have taken to the streets across Ukraine to peacefully demonstrate their opposition. They know instinctively that the president was heading in a direction that was taking Ukraine further away from the free and democratic nation that they desire and expect for Ukraine, a nation governed by justice and the rule of law.

Many see this direction as a regressive step at a pivotal time in the nation's history. As one young demonstrator stated, "I don't want to go back to what my parents lived under the Soviet Union. When I am old, I want to live like people in Europe. I want to live in a normal country".

The pressures on the president to align with Russia may well have been great, especially given the fact that Ukraine's economy has been in recession for more than a year and the government is in desperate need of funding to avoid default. No doubt, Moscow has worked aggressively to derail the agreement with the EU. However, this must be resisted at all costs by the people of Ukraine and must be taken into account by western democracies and other countries in the world to work with Ukraine to help it see its way through this current financial crisis.

Most Ukrainians would agree that a signed agreement would provide a baseline for Ukraine's reforms, with guidelines for Ukraine's development by changes in Ukraine's legal system, a stop of the misuse of courts for persecuting political opposition leaders, and observing at least some elementary and rudimentary rules of law and basic democratic standards. An independent and impartial judiciary is the essence of a democratic society governed by the rule of law. Justice must not only be done, but it must also be seen to be done.

Fundamentally, I found it remarkable that one of the most likely contenders in the political elections was charged and convicted prior to the elections on what would appear to be politically motivated actions, and here I am speaking of Yulia Tymoshenko, former prime minister. It is remarkable that political losers end up in prison.

As many have stated, this is symbolic of Ukraine's clinging to the Soviet past. Anyone looking at the situation objectively would find it remarkable to see political opposition members tried, sentenced and jailed to remove them from political contests. Another arrest relating to Yuri Lutsenko, Ukraine's former interior minister, also raised the same concerns.

I would say this is a pivotal time in Ukraine's history and choices must be made. The people have made that choice by taking part in the demonstrations in the streets throughout Ukraine.

● (2000)

Many in Canada have supported that action, through demonstrations taking place in Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Regina and other places. However, it was those who gathered in Kiev's Independence Square who ended up being targeted by government forces. They

were there simply and peaceably expressing their desire to integrate into the European Union.

Many see the suspension of continued discussion as a signal that the current leadership is veering away from the ideals, goals and aspirations of most Ukrainians, particularly the youth. It is no wonder, then, that we have seen many people out on the streets demonstrating.

During the three weeks of protests against Yanukovich's decision to align with Russia, police violently dispersed demonstrators twice, and went even further by storming the office of the top opposition party, breaking glass and reportedly smashing doors. This kind of action is simply unacceptable. It is intolerable. It must cease and desist. It is unacceptable to have peaceful demonstrators seriously injured. That is just a fact.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress was deeply disappointed, and denounced the government's decision to stop the process of preparing for the conclusion of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU and to resume an act of dialogue with the Russian Federation and other countries of the customs union. It said that this unilateral decision by the Government of Ukraine does not further the cause of the Ukrainian people.

When I was there, I saw how the electoral system works, some of the changes that had been made and the actions of President Yanukovich's government. What option do the Ukrainian people have but to protest? The human spirit at some point is prepared to resist wrong simply because it is wrong, no matter what the cost. We have seen good upstanding people, who otherwise might not have been involved and who are not be easily moved, who are prepared to take that stand at some point. That point is here now.

The action that the authorities should take in response to this is to change their direction, to take popular discontent into account, and to take reasonable steps to ensure that peaceful gatherings are not broken up and that the participants are not injured or incarcerated.

It was interesting, and to some measure good, to see a news release where President Viktor Yanukovich promised that some demonstrators arrested in the massive protest sweeping the capital would be released. In that news release, he vowed to renew talks with the European Union, talking to others within the country on concluding a much awaited trade and political agreement. He also said that he was still up to signing the deal at a summit in spring, but only if the EU could offer better financial terms.

This is talk, and perhaps rhetoric, that needs to be backed up by action. However, it is the kind of dialogue that needs to take place. It is the kind of response that needs to happen. Many times when we reach a crossroads or a certain turning point, the end result is uncertain. It is important during those times to be watchful and helpful to a situation that could possibly resolve itself.

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To the participants of the demonstrations, it is a time to be encouraged as each of them takes their stand. They are certainly beacons of light during a dark moment in Ukraine's history. In making their point, they are making their mark, and they are being noticed here in Canada and in other parts of the world. They are on the side of right, and history will show it to be so. Although they do not know the full impact of what they are doing now, know that their actions, words and stand have already changed the situation so that it may never be the same again.

I would say "Take courage. Do not despair. Continue to stand and continue to speak true words that will echo truth into the generations to come". It is through actions like the ones they have taken that change and results will come.

We can only hope in the House that the end result will be better for it.

• (2005)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to read into the record, in a question to my colleague, something we just received about what is happening right now in Ukraine, in Kiev. This is a letter from the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. It states:

Dear Members of Canada's Parliament:

As President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, I address you with complete shock and outrage that as you all express support for the people of Ukraine during the take note debate in the House of Commons, Ukraine's "Berkut" special police forces are attacking the peaceful protesters on Kyiv's Independence Square and taking down the Maidan by force. I am watching several live online feeds as the people in the crowd and on stage are praying and calling on the police to show restraint and to stand on the protester's side. Despite these calls the police continue to clear the Square. I ask you all to pray for the peaceful protesters. We as Canadians cannot stand idle. Immediate action is required by the international community.

Thank you for standing with the people of Ukraine!

I think that is shared with all of us.

I said "now" because when we debate these issues, often it is about things that have happened. This is happening in real time, right now.

When we hear of something like this and we know that there is an abuse of power, we know, as my colleague said earlier, there is a constitution that protects the rights of people for peaceful protest. Then when all of a sudden there is a conversion by the president saying that he now wants to go Brussels, what more should we do? We should obviously condemn, but what else can we do to show that we are with the people of Ukraine and that we will not stand idly by?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, as I said previously, we need more than just words on the part of the government and the president: we need some action, and not of the type that we are seeing today.

Freedom of association, freedom of speech and the freedom to make a point or express one's point by demonstrating, as these demonstrators have peaceably done, are fundamental rights and values that any democracy would cherish. They go to the root of what a democracy is. It is unfortunate to see those kinds of actions. As members of Parliament, we would call on those in authority to cease and desist that kind of action. It is absolutely unacceptable.

The president and the government have a responsibility there. It is fine to say they will release some of the protesters, but this kind of action is intolerable. It cannot happen, and as the member has said, we have to condemn that type of action. We also have to ask the government and those in authority to intervene to make sure this form of expression is not thwarted.

I know that from government to government there are various kinds of actions that can be taken to show how seriously this situation is viewed, but when we are in the midst of history taking place, in the midst of actions by both sides, it is important to be constructive, to try to move the moment forward, and to condemn those things that need to be condemned while yet keeping the lines of communication open.

I think there will be a back-and-forth as we go forward, but it would be my desire that ultimately the president and those in authority would do the right thing and call their people off.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the message that we have all just received from Paul Grod, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which was just read into the record by the member for Ottawa Centre, certainly drives home the crucial nature of the situation in Kiev and across Ukraine tonight. It drives home further the point that having a debate on this subject is necessary, but translating our sentiments into concrete action is even more necessary.

I wonder again whether Canada would be prepared to take a diplomatic initiative with other countries around the world. I am thinking of several in Europe and of the United States. These countries could develop a set of specific sanctions aimed not at Ukraine as a country and not at the Ukrainian people, but at Yanukovich and his government, his henchmen, and the oligarchs who support him. The sanctions would curtail their ability to use their assets, curtail their ability to travel and enjoy the fruits of their behaviour, and say very clearly on behalf of the world that what is happening in the Maidan tonight is not acceptable. The trampling on human rights and freedoms is not acceptable, and there will be consequences for doing so.

Canada could not take that initiative on its own, but we could in concert with other countries. We could lead the effort to bring other countries together to focus attention on this issue and to make it clear to those who are perpetrating this violence that the world is watching this behaviour very closely and that the world deplores it.

I wonder if the government is prepared to at least consider that kind of initiative to help to translate our sentiments into concrete action.

• (2010)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, there is no question that there are all types of potential consequences to this type of action. Other countries, including Canada, could deal with ensuring President Yanukovich and those in authority would understand how seriously this is viewed.

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Obviously I would not be one to suggest or indicate in any way what the foreign minister may do, but I can say that through its foreign minister, Canada has certainly spoken very clearly on this issue. He has not only spoken but has also travelled to Ukraine and has indicated what Canada's views are on this particular point. I am sure that if there was consensus among a number of democratic nations and they were to take some very specific action to reinforce that point, then something could always be considered.

Obviously it is a delicate and complex situation, so it would take the utmost consideration to decide on appropriate steps and measures at this time.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Chair, one of the questions when it comes to concrete actions that we could take is how we can do things that do not hurt the people of Ukraine. There are various forms of sanctions. For example, in the days of apartheid, one particular sanction that the international community took was a sports sanction. In a sports-crazed country like South Africa, it really compelled people to demand change from their government. That is one of the things we could certainly investigate with our international partners.

The other big question is the extent to which we stay engaged with Ukraine. Canada has a lot of investments in Ukraine's development. Ukraine is a country of focus when it comes to international capability building.

I am wondering if my colleague could talk about the importance of staying engaged with Ukraine, despite our disagreement with the current administration.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, it is always important to be engaged, I think. We cannot have one particular incident or situation overbalance what we might do in the big picture.

I know Canada has involved itself financially through a number of programs related to improving the justice system through education and through providing resources to the judicial system and the judges who are involved. Canada is helping along in a number of areas that the Ukraine would need.

That said, there may be specific types of actions that are narrow in scope and that do not harm the people who have a desire to see the Ukraine go forward. Such actions could make a point succinctly while at the same time using all the channels available to exert pressure, not only from within this country but also through a consortium of countries, to make the point that it is important for forward progress to be made.

The financial circumstances of Ukraine and some of the counterbalancing issues draw them either to the Russian side or to the European Union. It is important that all nations look at that and be very constructive and instrumental in ensuring that there is value, not only for the people of Ukraine but for those in authority, to go in the direction that their people would like them to go.

● (2015)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is my honour to join my colleagues on both sides of the House in this take note debate. It is an important debate, as all of my colleagues in the House tonight have stated.

As we stand here speaking and declaring our support for the people of Ukraine, they are being violently arrested and thrown in jail for simply expressing their free opinion, an opinion they have fought long and hard for.

It is my privilege to represent a good number of Ukrainian Canadians not only in my constituency of Edmonton—Strathcona but right across Alberta. As all my colleagues know, many of the members of the provincial legislature, including former premiers, are of Ukrainian descent.

There is a long-standing, deep-seeded respect and admiration for the people of the Ukraine and those who have escaped very difficult circumstances to re-establish themselves in Canada. Therefore, there is this long-standing support for their friends and family who were left behind and a continued support for Ukraine to become an open and free democratic nation.

Last year I had the privilege of taking two trips to Ukraine. The first was with the foreign affairs committee. With the national election coming forward, we went to Ukraine to look into complaints of erosion of the rule of law and democracy. We found very serious evidence of erosion in both circumstances. There was no longer freedom of the press. Those who were free journalists were now reduced to simply online reporting, if they were reporting at all. There was absolutely none of the traditional free media and press. If there was free press, the citizens were so poor that they could not afford it and could only rely on the government-controlled media.

We met with representatives of human rights organizations and civil society, some of whom were simply fighting to get access to the records of the Holodomor, which were being locked away from them, fighting simply to recognize their history of a thousand years of struggle to be a free and independent nation and to ensure the youth of Ukraine understood the repression they had previously existed under so they would understand why it was so critical to fight for a free and democratic government.

As my colleagues have mentioned, I also had the great privilege of having youthful interns in my office. Each one of them have been astounded at the freedom we experience on this Hill. They could not believe that as elected representatives we did not have bodyguards. They could not believe that as simple student interns they could wander about freely and talk to elected representatives, staff and officials in the House of Commons. That is a real wake-up call to us because we take our freedoms for granted, until we run into people who do not experience that at home, irrespective of what their constitution extends to them.

Tonight I want to give credit to my incredible legislative assistant. She has spent a lot of time in Ukraine in successive elections as a long-time monitor. I could not find a more stalwart defender of the rights of Ukrainians. I want to give her the courtesy of respect she deserves for speaking up daily for the people of Ukraine.

Government Orders

I know my Ukrainian Canadian constituents and those across Alberta are tuning in and watching this right now. They value the fact that we are taking the time, even though the House has shut down for the season, to stand in defence of their friends and relatives in Ukraine and the rights that we share here. I have been reminded that there is a time difference as we speak, but today representatives of both sides of the House attended the funeral for Nelson Mandela, who was a global champion for human rights and freedoms.

Today is the 65th anniversary of the international human rights declaration. As we speak here today, the people of Ukraine are being attacked with bludgeons simply because they are standing up and defending their free right to trade and associate with people of other countries with which they would prefer to associate.

I want to share the words of the Ukrainian World Congress, which has reminded us of the words of Mr. Mandela, which are appropriate today.

Mr. Mandela stated, “For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”. That is a good message to us. It is fine that we are free, but we have a responsibility to also speak for others who are still struggling out of those chains.

● (2020)

In a statement issued on December 10, the Ukrainian World Congress stated:

On this day, when we annually vow to reaffirm the dignity and protect the human rights of all citizens, the Ukrainian World Congress appeals to the international community to support the people of Ukraine in their fight for the freedom to chart their course without fear of reprisals or persecution—the foundation of a democratic society...

I do not think the point could have been made any more strongly.

My staff member is very academic and learned and has read deeply on Ukraine. In fact, my most recent Ukrainian intern left me, as a gift, a thick tome on the history of Ukraine and I just did not have time tonight to completely go through it. However, I am reminded that this wonderful nation has struggled for over 1,000 years.

The people of Ukraine have come out of repression after repression, first under Russia and then other nations, then under the Soviet Union. They certainly suffered under Stalin. I had the privilege of participating this year in two Holodomor memorials, one here on the Hill and one in Edmonton. It is a great privilege to be asked to participate.

The Ukrainians are a people who are desperately seeking support to become a democratic nation and at every turn they think they are finally going to be free. In 1990, Ukraine's sovereignty was proclaimed. Then they signed onto their constitution, which guarantees them human rights and dignity, the same kind of human rights that we appreciate in Canada. Then 93% of Ukrainian citizens voted for an independent Ukraine and chose their first democratically elected president.

However, then in 2004 when there was evidence of electoral fraud, they took to the streets in their own Orange Revolution. In our party we have had our orange revolution. They had theirs and so we are brethren in loving the colour orange, as my colleague here wears

proudly the scarf from the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. Still they suffer and they struggle.

When I participated in the monitoring of the election last fall, I was stunned at the turnout. I asked to be in the city of Lviv, because it is such an extraordinarily beautiful old city on the western edge of Ukraine. We went to many places, including a prison and a mental hospital and they were lining up to vote. Then we went out to the suburbs and there were families coming with their baby carriages and they were bringing seniors in wheelchairs. They wanted to participate in a democratic nation. Then of course there were problems again, and we have run-up elections going on as we speak. One has to question how fair these elections will be, given what is happening on the streets of Ukraine. Still, I presume they will come out.

Now we have a president who has espoused that he wishes to enter into friendship with Canada and with our friends and colleagues in the European community and at the last minute pulls out of those negotiations under pressure, we understand, from Russia. Deservedly and understandably, the people of Ukraine, who wish to align with the European community and consider themselves Europeans, have taken to the streets.

What is the response by the government of Ukraine? It responds with bludgeons, arresting people, beating up people, throwing them in jail. We know from our experience in Ukraine. We met with the lawyers and families for at least three of the opposition members who are still jailed. They simply do not have fair representation. They are just simply held and detained. There still is no democracy.

It is important for us to recognize that we continue to try to work with Ukraine, that we continue to try to provide aid building civil society, but we need to recognize that moments like this occur and that we are simply not giving enough support. There is cause. Our House is closing for the season and it is incumbent upon the government because it continues to be the voice for Canadians. We will stand with the government and hope that it will take stronger action.

In closing, I want to share some of the words from the youth of Edmonton. The Ukrainian youth have been taking to the streets as well and Ukrainian students are studying in Edmonton.

They tell the House that 300,000 of the Ukrainian community in Alberta are united with the millions of Ukrainians in the diaspora. They want to ensure the safety of their peaceful demonstrations in Kiev and they are vigilantly preserved until they themselves choose to disperse.

They urge the Government of Canada, all western governments and western media to understand what they are seeing and hearing and to understand much of the street fighting is purposefully instigated by provocateurs.

● (2025)

Clearly they are in touch with their friends and family in Kiev and this is what they are reporting. They are calling for peaceful, safe resolve of the issues. They are calling on Canada to speak to the United States and have the President of the United States also speak out.

Government Orders

Perhaps in questions I can also share the words of some of the other Edmontonians who wish to share with the House their feelings on what is going on.

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is critical that all of us are here tonight, in real time, discussing the problems facing Ukraine. These are problems that have accumulated to where we have these protests taking place. They have accumulated to a situation where the government has decided to use military and police force to clear the streets, to clear Independence Square, to clear everyone out there trying to make their point that the current situation is not acceptable to them and it is not acceptable to us around the world.

I am glad the member for was so respectful in her comments, while taking a fairly strong stance as to what are the next stages of moving forward. I would like her to go on in more detail as to what we need to do as Canada and as individual Canadians who are interested in what is happening in Ukraine and what we expect to see from the government of Ukraine.

What we have experienced so far is an unwillingness to listen to the people, a complete disrespect for democratic processes within Ukraine. President Yanukovich has an opportunity here to right the ship, re-engage the west, re-engage Europe and really meet the needs and aspirations of the citizens of Ukraine. I ask my colleague to talk to those points.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to share more of the words of the people from Ukraine and in Canada. It is always a privilege to work with him. It has been in the past and I hope in the future.

I would like to share some of the appeals of civil society representatives of Ukraine. They issued a release December 10. The civil society represents economists, lawyers, educators, business experts, a wide array of representatives from the people of Ukraine. They are calling on us to condemn the use of excessive force by the special forces of the ministry of internal affairs. They are calling on the government of Ukraine to not simply turn to politicians to resolve this impasse, but to directly engage the active participation of civil society, which is what we have heard. That is where we can help. We can help by standing by civil society.

If the government does not have this release, I would be happy to share it. The representatives list a good number of actions that they are calling on us to support in the action with Ukraine. They want their government to sign the association agreement with the European Union. They want to develop the basic principles under the constitution, which enable the consensus and engagement of civil society. They want the adoption of electoral code. That sounds familiar. They want the re-election of the chairman of the supreme court, high specialized court and on it goes. They have some very specific actions that they want in order to actually make an effective democracy.

● (2030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I do not think we can emphasize the urgency of the matter at hand.

We have the BBC, for example, just 15 minutes ago reporting on how thousands of police officers are now going into Kiev, into the square, against the protestors. Canada can and should play somewhat

of a role in terms of demonstrating leadership in terms of bringing other nations together to try to put pressure on restraint, to challenge the Ukrainian president to pull back and allow protestors the opportunity to express themselves.

What we are seeing taking place, as we speak here in the House, is not acceptable behaviour for a country that wants to have rule of law, democracy and to be positive on human rights.

Does the member believe that the Government of Canada should become more aggressive in terms of working with other world leaders, other nations, to try to put more pressure on those in power in Ukraine to try to ensure that the people of Ukraine are in fact not going to be taken advantage of while having peaceful protests? They are fighting today for their freedoms, but it seems that the local police forces want to step on those freedoms.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I want to share the words of Bohdan Harasymiw, who is a retired professor at the University of Calgary, a very proud Ukrainian Canadian, very engaged in the diaspora in Canada.

He has very clear words. He says:

These demonstrations are therefore about more than the postponement of the association...with the European Union. An entire generation has grown up in an independent Ukraine, a generation with European aspirations, with European ideals of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It cannot be suppressed.

I think that is echoed in the recommendations by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Many of my colleagues have reiterated what they have called for. I think there is an agenda fairly clearly laid out that we as Canadian legislators can follow.

The most important thing for us to keep front of mind is that these demonstrations and this violent response by the government of Ukraine is not the first time. There is a history of violent repression against the Ukrainian people. I think that calls for deeper action, deeper thought, deeper collaboration within Parliament on both sides. I am proud to participate in the Canada-Ukraine friendship organization. We regularly talk about these issues and what we can do to build association.

The most powerful thing we can do as Canadians is to provide more financial assistance so that more of civil society can come to Canada, and our civil society, including municipal officials, student organizations, educators and so forth, can go into Ukraine, and back and forth.

We have to make sure that we are providing legal representation. Right now we have politicians jailed in the Ukraine, and now we are simply adding more people who are peacefully demonstrating to those jail cells. We have to help them to be released in a judicial system that is not fair, open and according to the rule of law.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Chair, in Kiev, riot squads pushed back protestors who were blocking access to government offices. The more than one million Canadians of Ukrainian descent think this crisis situation is completely unacceptable.

Could the member tell us a bit more about Canada's historic and current relationship with Ukraine?

• (2035)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, as I understand, I think there are 300,000 Ukrainian Canadians living in Alberta. I have the privilege each Christmas of spending Christmas Eve with some of those Ukrainian Canadians and enjoying those heritage dishes. It is a great joy to share that experience.

Ukrainian Canadians are like all other Canadians. They are participating in business. They are educators. They are small business people. They are serving in government. As I mentioned, the previous premier of Alberta was of Ukrainian Canadian descent.

I think the most important thing we can do is to not simply leave it to Ukrainian Canadians to have to fight this battle. It is important that all of us who are Canadians stand up. I think it is very important that all Canadians out there who may be watching and observing this debate write to the Prime Minister and write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and say, "We support the actions you are taking, please take even stronger actions. Do not forget about Ukrainians over Christmas."

We have to stand stalwart from here on in and make sure that those people are protected, that they have proper representation and that they are released from jail, so they too can have a joyous Christmas.

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, indeed, it is an honour and a privilege to be in this chamber where we have freedom of speech, where we can speak out on numerous issues and know that there are no repercussions for what we say, where we have a true opportunity to air our grievances.

It is fitting that, tonight, we are having a debate about the situation in Ukraine. To all our Ukrainian friends who are watching us tonight, I say, *dobry vechir*.

While we are here discussing the current crisis in Kiev, Lviv and other communities across Ukraine, we know that Canadians are watching. My email account today has been inundated with Canadian Ukrainians and with civil society organizations feeding me their statements, their concerns, their press releases and background briefing notes on the situation in Ukraine. The media in Canada is watching this story closely. At the same time, many of my friends in Ukraine have also been contacting me, ensuring that I see the live feeds coming in from Independence Square in Kiev on what is happening in the Maidan and wanting to ensure that Canada is fully aware of the strong hand of government, of the police brutality that is taking place at this moment in Ukraine.

I know that the Ukrainian government is watching, following this debate to see what Canadian politicians are saying, monitoring what is happening in our media, what is happening through organizations such as Canadian Friends of Ukraine, the League of Canadian Ukrainians, and of course, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. We just read into the record a letter that was sent from our friend, Paul Grod.

As someone who is proud of my Ukrainian heritage, I have been active in carrying many different issues forward on behalf of Ukrainian Canadians here in the House of Commons, which includes my private member's bill on the Holodomor, which includes numerous election monitoring trips to the Ukraine, which included being in the Ukraine with the Prime Minister when he was the first prime minister and the first world leader to ever say, in Ukraine, that the Holodomor was a genocide. It was something that I was incredibly proud to see happen and something that the current leadership cannot even say within Ukraine itself.

When I first got elected 10 years ago, we witnessed the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine. There was so much hope brought with that. They overturned a debunked election. The person they had thrown out is now the president, Viktor Yanukovych. Their hopes rode on Viktor Yushchenko and they made him president. They thought he would bring about change. It never materialized, unfortunately.

Then we have seen the selective justice process where former political leaders are imprisoned. People are frustrated with that. It is not that they are saying that everything that Yulia Tymoshenko did was right, but they are saying that she never got a fair trial.

It just raises the question of whether or not there is true judicial independence within the Ukraine.

One of the reasons that so many of us in the House, in this chamber, have been to the Ukraine on multiple occasions is to watch elections, to observe how they are carried out, to communicate with people in an electoral system about reform. What we continue to see is gerrymandering, to the benefit of the current party in power.

All of us are concerned about the quashing of civil liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of press, judicial independence, respect for the rule of law. We have had numerous complaints coming from the academics that their courses, their teachings are continually monitored and interfered with by the department of education in the Ukraine.

• (2040)

We have to move the yardstick and that is not happening. We have been reaching out to Ukraine. Ukraine has tried to become more integrated in the world economy. It joined the World Trade Organization. One of the first things it did, although it was legal, was to apply tariffs to over 370 commodities, products and services across this country. We are trying to negotiate a free trade agreement with Ukraine, and that is not negotiating in good faith, in my opinion.

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We know that did not sit well and stuck in the craw of the European Union, which was in the process of closing a deal with Ukraine that was to be signed off on at the end of November in Vilnius, Lithuania, so that there would be a true economic co-operative agreement, free trade and more integration within the European Union for the Ukrainian people. President Yanukovich walking away from that deal has created this huge public outcry.

What we have witnessed over the last 10 years, from election interference and no respect for the rule of law to continued Soviet-style governance systems, has now accumulated with what we see happening with the Euromaidan. We have to continue to engage Ukraine. We cannot allow this to continue to happen. At the same time, we have to see some good faith from Ukraine and we have not seen any good faith in a long time. The closest thing we have seen was when it released Yuriy Lutsenko, who was one of the political leaders and lawyer for Yulia Tymoshenko. That is the only step of good faith that we have seen from this administration.

When I did my last election monitoring in Ukraine for the parliamentary elections last year, I was part of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE, parliamentary delegation. There were a number of us who were part of that parliamentary delegation. We were on the ground doing election monitoring. I definitely saw improvements in the way the elections were being carried out, but starting this weekend there are a number of by-elections in Ukraine because so many results were thrown out for interference, fraud and other corruption charges on a number of different oblasts.

They are redoing those elections and there will again be another Canadian delegation going there, run by CANADEM. They will again be monitoring the situation, but it is going to be under a much more difficult scenario because of the peaceful protests that are taking place. Unfortunately, those protesters are being shoved aside, their tent city ripped down, and Maidan being destroyed.

Just last week, the OSCE had a meeting. Its 20th ministerial council was held in Kiev and our Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has had such a strong, principled stand on how we engage with Ukraine, was there. I was very proud when I saw him and Paul Grod, who is the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, walking through Independence Square with the Canadian maple leaf strapped on their backs, showing the people of Ukraine that Canada stands in solidarity with them, that we will stay engaged and we will make sure that their aspirations will be realized.

I want to make sure we look at what the purpose of the OSCE is. This is an organization that we want Ukraine to use as its basis for moving forward, from a security standpoint, from an economic co-operation standpoint and a democracy standpoint. The OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, on the eve of ministerial council in Kiev last week, said:

Peaceful dialogue is at the core of the OSCE's work and finding common ground through political means is our *raison d'être*...

Respect of fundamental rights, such as freedom of assembly, the right to free expression and giving journalists the liberty to do their work is essential to ensuring cohesive and secure societies.

All we want is for the current administration in Ukraine to allow society in Ukraine to mature, to be free, to be democratic and respect the rule of law.

• (2045)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member, who obviously has a deep commitment to Ukraine and to his Ukrainian Canadian community in Manitoba.

Many tonight have spoken about the briefing note provided by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. There is high regard for that organization in this country in advising all sides of the House on appropriate actions.

Recommendation 6 says:

In concert with U.S. and European authorities, play a leadership role in the G8, the G20, the International Monetary Fund and other international fora to explore all the ways in which the international community can combat money laundering in and through Ukraine. Explore with its international partners the means by which the international travel and illicit "business" activities of corrupt business people, government officials and their families could be restricted in accordance with applicable Canadian law.

When we had our foreign affairs delegation to Ukraine, we had a table of business people meet with us who operate the chambers of commerce for Ukraine, Europe and so forth, and Canadian businessmen in Ukraine. They identified the deep concerns that one has to have deep pockets to invest in Ukraine. We are calling for support and continued investment, and perhaps human rights through trade, but there are deep problems.

I wonder if the hon. member could speak to the recommendation by the UCC and whether we ought to be taking a more strategic approach to our trade relations with Ukraine? Should we try to direct more action on freedom and democracy?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, I would say that the Government of Canada has taken every opportunity to register its deep and ongoing concerns regarding the devaluation of democracy within Ukraine.

In November, just last month, we expressed our deep disappointment over Ukraine's decision to suspend its negotiations. We all expected Ukraine to sign the European Union agreement for increased democracy, co-operation and economic prosperity. That was a missed opportunity. That is why we see the protests on the street.

I appreciate all of the comments and ideas that have come forward from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and there are two issues that it has laid out. One of them is an issue that all of us can rally behind, to call upon Ukraine's president to respect the freedom of its citizens to peacefully assemble, and to call upon Ukrainian authorities to respect this right and apply restraint in their interactions with these peaceful protestors. We are not seeing that.

As we are sitting here right now, Maidan is being taken down and destroyed. That is not being done in a peaceful manner.

Government Orders

We need to continue to look at all avenues. We need to look at the G8 and G20. The European Union has been the strongest leader on this front. I appreciate all of the work it has done in its ongoing negotiations on what were its hopes for a successful conclusion to the current round of discussions on Ukraine's greater co-operation and economic trade with the European Union.

• (2050)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as I indicated earlier when we speak on this very important issue, we know that Independence Square is being covered by literally thousands of police officers. There is a real concern about how protestors are being treated.

I have listened to and I appreciate all of the comments that are being made. We all care deeply about Ukraine. We share the concerns of many of our constituents and Canadians as a whole, especially those of Canadian heritage who might be listening in on the debate. They want to see answers.

I especially appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I know he has been deeply engaged, and I appreciate that when he talks about the Holodomor, he speaks the truth.

As we know what is taking place now, live, because of news coverage, are there some specific things that the member believes we could be doing that could have an impact? For example, the member for Wascana made reference to having some form of sanctions for those politicians, including the President, so they do not have free travel throughout the world.

Are there things that the member believes we could be doing that could provide hope for those who might be listening, or that might have more of an impact on what is happening today, particularly in Independence Square and the many other protest sites?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, there could be two schools of thought on that. There are definitely those who want to see us bring forward sanctions, want to see us be tougher in our dealings, to walk away from any co-operation that we have with Ukraine.

We have the youth mobility agreement. We have had discussions already, which we have suspended, on Canada-Ukrainian free trade. We have military co-operation in training officers and doing officer exchanges between Ukraine and Canada.

Some people would say that we should be stopping that. Definitely we should be looking at the oligarchs and other powerful people within Ukraine who have money stashed around the world, to try to apply some freezes on that.

I am not opposed to some of those ideas. I think from the government's standpoint, especially what I am hearing from the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress and from my constituents who are interested in this, whether they have Ukrainian heritage or not, people want to see us more engaged. They want to see us pulling the people of the Ukraine and the governments they have into more of a western model. If we abandon them now or push them away, and it is seen as pushing them away, it may embolden some of their neighbours.

Right now, one of the reasons we are where we are today is because of some of the bullying tactics that have been implemented

by some of their neighbours to the north. Because of that interference and the fearmongering that has taken place to essentially push President Yanukovich into walking away from the table with the European Union, we need to be out there with the Europeans, the Americans, and with other allies who want to see a stronger, more westernized and more democratic Ukraine.

We will have to be fairly sensitive on how we move forward. We do not want to allow any dollars to flow into the wrong hands. However, we definitely believe that economic prosperity is tied to increased trade with the European Union and the rest of the world. We do not want to be caught up in old imperialistic relationships that have not benefited the people of the Ukraine for the last century.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Chair, some observers have indicated that the European Union could have done more. Ukraine was in a difficult financial situation and had to come up with \$10 billion to avoid defaulting, so the European Union did offer certain things. For example, it offered to sell Russian gas to Ukraine at prices lower than Ukraine actually pays for the gas it currently gets from Russia, and Ukraine walked away from this arrangement. It did not want to jeopardize its relationship with Russia.

There is something going on here that is above and beyond just money. Could my colleague comment on the mindset of the Ukrainian administration, President Yanukovich in particular? What does he think is going on here, and what can Canada do to try to change some of that behaviour?

• (2055)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, we never know exactly what is in the mind of President Yanukovich these days. There is a lot of speculation out there. I believe that what we are living with are the remnants of Soviet mentality, that technocrat approach to the way they govern their people. I have a great concern that the current administration would rather be more tied in to the past than look to the future.

We have to continue to reach out to the people of Ukraine, and hopefully we will see this peaceful protest, the Euromaidan protest we are seeing in Independence Square in Kiev, and in communities across Ukraine, cumulate in a change of heart by President Yanukovich.

I ask that he strongly consider the will of the people, and I ask my friends from the Ukrainian Embassy to carry that message back. I ask them to consider the will of the people and the wishes they are laying out. They are wearing their hearts on their sleeves on the streets of Kiev tonight, and I ask them to listen to their cries and allow their will to come to a final successful conclusion of moving Ukraine into a stronger European relationship into the future to increase their prosperity.

I always say that a rising tide lifts all ships. The great prosperity that we see in Europe today, which Canada will tie into with our own comprehensive free trade deal, will be to the benefit of our friends in Ukraine, if they pull more into integration, both from an economic standpoint and also through co-operation on so many other avenues, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Government Orders

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words.

If I might, the first thing I would like to do is join with others who have mentioned how appropriate it is, during the week of Mandela's death, the celebration of his life around the world, and his funeral, that we would come together on this, the last time we will be sitting here this year.

We are all here for a common cause. We are all here for a very Canadian cause, which is reaching out and helping where we can. That is one of the great things that Canadians take pride in. Not all of the world, but most of it, sees us as help, as friends. When they hear the Canadians are coming, for the most part it is good news.

We know that Canadian Ukrainians and those now in the Ukraine are riveted on what is happening in Independence Square.

I would join with others who have commented on personal attachments. Mine attachment is somewhat different, in that it really was not personal in terms of my own background or even that I have many Ukrainians in my riding.

A number of years ago I received an invitation, as we all do, to come to city hall to make a few remarks about the Holodomor. I confess that at the time, I did not know about it. This was the better part of 10 years ago.

I researched it, as we all do, and I was shocked that I did not know about it. I was shocked that it seemed that most of the world did not know. It has only been in the ensuing years that now it has become, certainly here in Canada, a recognized date and time for us to reflect on those who were murdered by Stalin and the Communist Soviet empire.

A while went by, and just before Christmas in 2004, the word was going around that they were looking for MPs who wanted to go to Ukraine for an election observation mission. The only thing I knew about that was that Jimmy Carter did it. He did Habitat for Humanity, and he did these election observation missions.

When one is in the fourth party in the back row, one really is looking for some means to have some real effect beyond just the seat one has. I thought this was a great opportunity to do that, so I went to Ukraine.

I have been there three times, but the first time I went was in 2004 during the Orange Revolution. I see my friends, some of whom were on those missions with me, nodding their heads. I have to say that for an NDPer to be in Ukraine in 2004 was political heaven. I mean, everything was in orange, evening the Mercedes-Benzes and the banks. Everything was decked out in orange, at least in Kiev, so I certainly felt at home with the colour and the sentiment behind it.

What I remember more than anything about that was getting up in the middle of the night because I was drawn to Independence Square and the tent city that had formed. They had their own security system and their own supply system. They were totally self-contained within the confines of the downtown in Independence Square in Kiev.

What struck me was that the young people were the drumbeat that kept it going. Day in and day out, they would ensure that they did everything that needed to be done to maintain their presence. Now

we hear that forces are moving into Independence Square to try to prevent something like that from happening, it would seem, through violence. That breaks our hearts.

The other thing I want to mention about that particular election is not only what it was like to be in a revolution in modern times, but the impact it had on individual citizens.

• (2100)

I remember specifically one voting station in a village in the mountains. One young man, who was probably in his early thirties, was carrying his young son. They went into the voting area and came out with a ballot. He got right up to the box, and he handed it to his son, who was maybe age seven or eight, and said something to him. Of course, I could not understand Ukrainian. His young son dropped the ballot in and I asked my interpreter what he had said. What he had whispered to his son was, "this is how we keep our future". A whole nation was going through that simultaneously in 2004.

I returned again in 2010, six years later, for the presidential elections, and then returned two weeks later for the runoff. Although I am by no means an expert on that part of the world or the dynamics, it was pretty clear from the results that something like today was going to come.

Those of us who have been following some of the issues there know that language issues, the struggle between Russian and Ukrainian and which has priority and is recognized, is a huge issue for them.

In the election, the country divided right down the middle, not just demographically or even politically but actually geographically. The western part of the country wanted to go more to Europe and to the west and the east wanted to stay closer to Russia. In fact, as one goes closer to the Russian border, as would be expected, there is more and more Russian language.

I am not surprised that this day came. It is still heartbreaking that it is here, but I cannot say that I am surprised. As we stand here, I do not think there is a simple answer to this except that the only way the Ukrainian people can work this through in a way that is acceptable is that there has to be peace. There has to be peace.

I think about the people when their election was fraudulent, back in 2004. What struck me more than anything when the word came out that the election result was not what they expected was that people started coming out of their offices, out of their homes, and out of the schools, and they just started gravitating to Independence Square.

What struck me, to this day, is the fact that none of them knew for certain that there were not going to be tanks coming around the corner. They did not know for sure that they would not be facing a hail of bullets. Yet the desire, the demand, for fairness in their elections and a real democracy was so great that in spite of that possible threat to their own lives, they stayed.

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They came out by the hundreds, then the thousands, then the tens of thousands, and when it got to be hundreds of thousands, finally the supreme court, I believe, and it is just my opinion, caved in the face of that kind of public pressure. It said that the election was null and void and called for the runoff. That is when we came from Canada, as many as we could stuff on planes, and headed over there to observe that runoff to try to assist the Ukrainian people in having a free and fair election.

What I know from that experience is that those who are there now, as we speak, in Independence Square, are not going anywhere. What they need more than anything is to know that the world is with them. They need that critical mass of free voices around the world, as we are doing here today, to speak out for them and say that this is not acceptable and that Ukrainians, like Canadians, are entitled to and deserve free and fair elections. They deserve a transparent democracy. They deserve control of their own country.

● (2105)

It is very rare that we get to end on this kind of note. I just want to say that I feel very good about this place, leaving here knowing that the last thing we were talking about on behalf of the people we represent was someone else. We are putting our voices and support toward their cause. Today, at this moment, we in the House stand united.

I would hope that every free country in the world is standing united and solidly in speaking out, as we are doing here tonight. One of the best things we can do for the struggle happening right now in Ukraine is to let them know that they are not alone. They have the bravery. They have the vision. They just need the support of everyone else to force the powers that be to leave them in peace and let them have the freedom they are entitled to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the words from the member for Hamilton Centre.

As we all have access to the Internet, we are able to watch as we debate the issue. BBC has a picture. A picture says a thousand words. The picture is of Independence Square. We see a row of police officers standing behind shields, shoulder to shoulder. It is important to recognize just what it is we are debating here and the role that so many in society are playing to make sure that the government does the right thing. The right thing is restraint, respect for human rights, and ensuring and allowing peaceful demonstrations.

It was not that long ago that I was standing right below the monument in the picture. As the member said, he has been in that square. There are buildings surrounding it. It is a large square, but it is confined once there are a lot of people in it. When we start seeing the police standing shoulder to shoulder with shields, no doubt there is a lot of fear there.

We need to speak out and say what needs to be said. Perhaps the member could provide further comment in regard to Canada's role in speaking out and expressing the concerns we have. These are reflected by the many Canadians who are not only watching the debate, but more importantly, are watching the news and being in contact with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters abroad.

● (2110)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for the question and his comments. I do know that monument very well.

We have a very strong Canada-Ukrainian friendship group and a great tie with Paul Grod, whose name has been mentioned here, who has been in touch and may even be watching as we speak. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress has put out a nine-step program it has asked us to consider. Certainly we in the official opposition are very comfortable with it and think that all nine would be positive steps forward.

In addition to our voices, we are sending over another planeload of observers for some by-elections to continue our ties and to ensure that the leadership of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress knows that it has the support of this Parliament. Mostly I think the best thing we can do is to continue to raise our voices and lend our voices to this.

As much as I spend most of my time going after the government, on this file I think the government has been responsive to the needs. I would hope that it would look carefully at the nine-step program that has been suggested by the congress. I am sure it will. A positive step in the right direction would be to say to our own congress here in Canada that the nine steps it has suggested to the Canadian Parliament are ones we support, endorse, and will be moving on.

They are sweeping. Some are short-term and some are longer-term. My point is that short, medium or long term, we lend our voices. We lend whatever credibility we can from this place. In the longer term, let us roll up our sleeves and start acting on these nine recommendations that, if implemented, will make a difference. That is why we are here tonight: short-term commitment; medium-term goals; long-term vision. I think that reflects where we all are tonight.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Chair, as some of my colleagues mentioned tonight, it is ironic that at a time when we are celebrating the life of such a great man as Nelson Mandela, who fought for human rights so vehemently throughout his life, we are now having to debate an issue of human rights, but this time in Ukraine.

Even in the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, there are many people of Ukrainian descent. Actually, I worked with a colleague in probation and parole services whose family was from Ukraine.

Christmas is very near, and we know that those people would like peace. Something that our previous leader, Jack Layton, talked a lot about was love, hope, and optimism so that we could build a better world. My colleague mentioned some longer-term plan the government should be looking at. We need to impress upon the government the need to make sure that there is a plan B. It is important for us to raise our voices. We need more people to raise their voices, but we also need a government whose members are going to be steadfast should it have to go a bit further.

As we near the Christmas season, our hearts are with those who are currently fighting for the democracy in their country. There is a need for us, as Canadians, to come together as a whole. Can the member comment?

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• (2115)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, I will respond this way. I will go back to 2004, which was a tremendous turning point for me personally. We were there through our regular Christmas season, and we left a day or two before the Orthodox Christmas. I know how religious Ukrainian people are and how much their faith means to them.

As my friend was speaking, it occurred to me to wonder just how far those soldiers and police officers will go as they enter this season of Christmas and reflect on humanity, love, hope, and optimism. When those bullets start flying, those who are holding the weapons do not know where the bullets are necessarily going to end up.

I have also done observation missions in a number of other emerging democracies in the Soviet bloc, including Georgia, Moldova, and Serbia. I know that there is a certain critical mass when those who have been ordered to commit the violence suddenly see their family members, their neighbours, and their co-workers in the crowd. That is the moment when we see the flower going in the barrel of a gun, and they just stop and say wait, this is not going to happen.

There is already violence. I can only hope that before it gets to that level of violence, the season and the Mandela spirit will take hold, maybe not among those making the decisions but perhaps among those who are holding the weapons and who hold the key to peace or force. Maybe they themselves will say, "This is wrong. It is wrong for my people and it is wrong for my country". Let us hope.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Chair, I recently travelled to eastern Europe. I went to Vilnius, Lithuania, with the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association.

We heard a lot of talk about an agreement. It is important to the people of Vilnius that the Ukraine join the European Union, and not just for economic reasons. It seemed that for them, it would also bring stability to the Baltic countries, a stability that has not been there before.

The fact that a democratic, stable Ukraine was going to join the European Union was very important to them, to the Baltic countries located between the Ukraine and the rest of Europe. A democratic, stable Ukraine could influence the rest of eastern Europe. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

[*English*]

The Chair: I am afraid the hon. member for Hamilton Centre only has about 30 seconds.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, I apologize. I will not even try to fake it. I thought it was a new debate, so I did not hear the question.

I will not waste your time and do any kind of dance. I apologize to my friend. I was packing up. I thought I was concluded, because I talk so much.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

I will speak briefly about Canada's developmental systems in Ukraine and specifically about our continuing commitment to advancing democracy and the rule of law.

Our respective nations share historic ties that extend back through generations of Ukrainian migration to Canada. Ukrainian Canadians have given so much to Canada, and Canada remains committed to giving back to the Ukraine.

In 1991, Canada was the first western nation to recognize Ukraine's independence. Since then, we have devoted considerable effort and resources to support the Ukraine's democratic and economic transition.

Good governance is vital to democracy and for achieving the sustainable economic growth required to move populations from poverty to prosperity. It provides the processes and institutions through which a government is accountable to its citizens.

An election is democracy's fundamental accountability process. It is essential that election processes be fair and free to ensure leaders are genuinely accountable to the people they are elected to represent. As we know, this lack of accountability has been an area of deep concern in Ukraine for quite some time. That is why Canada has provided consistent support for free and fair elections in Ukraine over the last two decades by sending election observers to witness the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections and the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary votes.

In 2012, Canada fielded its largest-ever electoral observation mission, sending 500 Canadians as observers with the Mission Canada bilateral electoral observation mission. Overall, Canada provided \$11.4 million in support for the 2012 election process, particularly through Mission Canada but also through support to Ukrainian civil society organizations that mobilized thousands of young volunteers to conduct their own election monitoring and public awareness campaigns.

Through its development program, Canada has also provided technical assistance to Ukraine to modernize its electoral laws and systems. Through the implementation of an online training system for electoral commission members and observers, this system is now being used for the repeat elections that are now under way.

Canada is known for its ardent support for elections in Ukraine. The observers Canada has sent to Ukraine over the years have seen the reality of Ukraine's electoral processes. They know there is a long way to go for Ukraine to reach the international standards of free and fair elections.

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In 2012, observers witnessed the misuse of state resources, a lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, vote buying, and biased media coverage, but they also observed a real democratic competition, fierce at times, and an unprecedented engagement of Ukrainian youth in domestic electoral observation efforts. This is cause for hope. Without Canadian and other international observers, the situation might have been much worse. Ukrainian citizens are very appreciative of Canada's generous election observation efforts and solidarity. The Ukrainian people yearn to live in a real democracy.

A functioning democracy needs active, informed citizens, well-functioning public institutions, and rule of law. Canadian development assistance to Ukraine reflects this. Despite Canada's ongoing contributions and despite contributions from many other countries wanting and working for a more free and democratic Ukraine, recent events demonstrate that a democratic deficit still exists and indeed appears to be deepening.

Canada has continued to support Ukrainian efforts toward the rule of law. Canadian development assistance work in the judicial sector has helped ensure timely and transparent court decisions in selected courts. This project is introducing a comprehensive curriculum and training program to improve the capacity of judges to streamline the resolution of commercial cases involving small and medium-sized enterprises.

Canada will continue its support for democracy and the rule of law in Ukraine. It continues to be our priority to work in the best interests of Ukraine's citizens so that they can have complete faith in their electoral processes and ultimately reap the rewards of a truly democratic and prosperous society.

• (2120)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Chair, nearly 1.3 million Canadians have Ukrainian ancestors. In 2009, Canada sent \$25 million in aid. The purpose of Canada's international development program in Ukraine is to increase economic opportunities and to promote a healthy democracy.

Could the member speak to the condition of democracy now, as well as before and during the crisis? How does she think Ukraine will be able to emerge from this crisis?

• (2125)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, indeed, we are very concerned about what is going on in Ukraine right now.

I was part of the foreign affairs committee that went to Ukraine in May 2012. We met with people from the opposition. We met with people from the government. We expressed our deep concern for the things that we could see happening with Ukraine then.

We met with a group of people from the media. One thing that we heard from the media was that it was very difficult for the free media to get the voice of the people of Ukraine out to the people because they did not have advertisers.

I was very pleased to support one of the radio stations. It was a free radio station in Ukraine. I gave them a cheque for \$200 of my own money and I bought advertising on that radio station, and just asked them to repeat the message that we wanted to see a free, fair and democratically elected government in Ukraine, and to encourage the people of Ukraine to keep pursuing democracy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to pick up on the point of the benefits of having parliamentarians from Ukraine and Canada getting the opportunity to be engaged in dialogue and the building of relationships between Ukraine and Canada.

One of the ways one can do that is possibly through things such as the establishment, as we have here in Canada, of a Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group. I am one of the co-chairs of the committee. All political parties are able to get together there and share their thoughts and ideas. That could even be extended to go beyond just having meetings here on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, and even looking at the possibility of going to Ukraine as a friendship group.

I would be interested in hearing the member's thoughts on extending the hands of friendship between parliamentarians here in Canada and parliamentarians in Ukraine.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, I agree with my colleague that there is no better way to extend the hand of friendship than to meet people face to face.

For a number of years my family hosted young people from around the world through an organization called AFS Interculture Canada. We were a volunteer host family, and we hosted five students who each lived with us for a full year in our home and attended a local high school. There was no remuneration to the host families; they just do it because they love kids.

There is no better way to have an influence in other countries than to get to know people on a one-on-one basis. When people become friends, there is a real opportunity to speak to each other's lives. I believe one of the areas, as parliamentarians, in which we can engage is to meet with our counterparts in Ukraine and have that conversation with them.

I commend my colleague for being a member of that friendship group. We do not have a lot of time here to put into some of these organizations, but they are very important. I thank him for doing what he is doing.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Chair, this is a very emotional debate for me personally. I am of eastern European descent. My father was born in Czechoslovakia, my mother was born in Poland, and I remember the Prague Spring of 1968. I remember being a young Czech lad in Winnipeg. My father being the treasurer of the Czecho-Slovak Benevolent Association, we hosted Czech refugees in Winnipeg when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia.

Of course, since I was a teenager at the time, the import of this and how important it was really did not sink in. It is only now, as one of the two people of Czech extraction ever to be in the Canadian Parliament, I realize what a significant event that was.

From that point on, tyranny was something that I abhorred and freedom was something that I revered.

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When I look at what has happened to Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic and Slovakia after the Velvet Divorce, and I look at Poland, and I remember that half of the Berlin Wall fell, I see that two and then three countries managed that transition very well. Those three countries are now functioning democracies. They have their issues and their problems, but they are run by the rule of law and democracy.

I visited the Czech Republic a couple of years ago. I was struck by the progress that country has made. It has joined the European family, joined the democratic world, joined with participating in free trade and free markets. The Czech Republic's technology is remarkable, and Slovakia is now the European leader in automobile production per capita, which is something that I did not know.

Therefore, when I look at the success of those three countries, I ask myself what happened to Ukraine. Why has Ukraine devolved into what it is now?

It is not that the people are not innovative. It is not that the people are not productive. It is not that the land is not productive. It is not that there are no energy resources. Ukraine has everything to make itself a successful and functioning democracy.

I should make the point of how proud I am as a member of this particular Conservative caucus to have people like the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, who fought with Solidarity in Poland, and the member for Etobicoke Centre, who fought in Bosnia against tyranny. That is a track record this side of the House has that few others have. I am very proud to be part of a caucus with those two individuals and others.

I must say that I listened to the other side. As a person of east European background, I hear their fine words. They all sound good. However, people on that particular side of the political spectrum were the enablers of Communism for all those many years. They had writers like Walter Duranty lauding Stalin.

I may believe that the other side now has had a change of heart, but deep down inside I am suspicious. They have a lot to atone for and they have not atoned for it.

I think they are just riding on the coattails of this issue. I am happy to have their support, and it all sounds good, but they need to look at their heart of hearts and search where they and their parties came from. They need to think about it.

The promise of Ukraine is, as I said, remarkable. It has the land, it has the energy, it has the resources, but because of where it is located and because of its proximity to Russia, it is, as the saying goes, caught between a rock and a hard place. The tragedy, quite frankly, is epic.

My constituency has the largest population of Ukrainians in Canada. They make up roughly 35% of my constituency. When I look at what the Ukrainians in my constituency have done, it is truly remarkable. They are successful farmers, successful small business people. We have lovingly maintained churches that maintain the Ukrainian culture. In the Ukrainian museums in my constituency, the poems of Taras Shevchenko still resonate among the people there.

● (2130)

There are monuments to the Holodomor, the grotesque villainy that was visited upon Ukraine by Stalin.

Again, I look at Ukraine. I am very proud of the Conservative government and our Prime Minister. I am very proud of the fight that the Ukrainian people are fighting right now. Ukraine needs to belong to Europe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a comment. This evening we have been seeing a lot of co-operation in the House. What I just heard from the member was completely inappropriate. His comments detracted from everything that was said earlier this evening.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Chair, I disagree. The truth never destroys anything. I am very glad that the other side has now come over to our side, but history cannot be forgotten. History must be remembered and the people must be remembered.

● (2135)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I get the opportunity to have discussions with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. One of the things I appreciate is that he does have a very strong passion for our Ukrainian community. He speaks from a riding in Dauphin, with which I am somewhat familiar in terms of its rich Ukrainian heritage. It is much like Winnipeg North. I suspect without people of Ukrainian heritage, there would not be much to Dauphin and Winnipeg North.

I like the fact that we talked about this wonderful event in January. It is like a pierogi luncheon. I have invited the member and one of these days he will take me up on it.

Regarding the community, not just the Ukrainian community or people of Ukrainian heritage in Canada, I wonder if the member could elaborate on the level of interest in Canada on what is happening in Ukraine.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Chair, even though we may be opposite sides of the House, I have enormous respect for the member and what he does.

Canada, with 1.3 million people of Ukrainian descent, has the third largest Ukrainian population in the world, after Ukraine and Russia. People have an extraordinary level of interest in what is going on in Ukraine and it is reciprocated.

I sat in on a meeting of the foreign affairs committee and I asked the delegation what the Ukrainian government thought of what Canada thought. It is extraordinary the influence we have there. We have to use it.

We can never lose sight of our principles, where we came from, what matters and what counts: freedom, democracy and the rule of law. We stand for that.

Government Orders

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, in my speech, I had the opportunity to talk a bit about the investment that Canada had made in Ukraine, first of all in the electoral process. I touched a bit on the investment that we had made in training judges.

I wonder if my colleague could speak a bit about the influence he thinks that has had on our bilateral relationships.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Chair, the rule of law is critical to the development of diplomatic ties, trade ties and industrial ties. The rule of law ensures that contracts are enforced. I know that in Ukraine, the economic development and economic ties with Canada are critically important. We can only have economic ties when company to company negotiations can take place. Under the rule of law, contracts will be respected and the economic job will be done.

That is why what my hon. friend has asked is so very important. It is the rule of law.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate. Like so many of my colleagues, I have been following the situation in Ukraine closely. I meet frequently with members of the Ukrainian Canadian community in Etobicoke—Lakeshore and I know how serious the current situation is.

The concerns are larger than a free trade agreement. We are concerned about the use of selective sentencing in the case of Yulia Tymoshenko and others. We are also concerned about the weakness of democratic institutions, the resulting damage to the Ukrainian economy and, of course, the lack of opportunity and hope for Ukrainians, especially youth.

Our government is deeply disappointed with the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend its association agreement and the deep and comprehensive free trade area negotiations with the European Union. We believe this decision is a lost opportunity and we stand with all Ukrainians who are fighting for a democratic, free, independent and prosperous Ukraine.

Ukraine's best hope for democracy and economic prosperity lies in closer alignment with Euro-Atlantic norms and institutions. Unlike Poland, Slovakia and other eastern European states that have made great progress since the fall of communism, Ukraine's economic transition has been much slower and more difficult. Today, people of Ukrainian heritage make up almost 4% of the total Canadian population. Over the generations, we have developed a close bilateral relationship, a solid economic partnership and strong people to people ties.

I would like to take a few moments today to talk about Canada's work to help Ukraine achieve economic prosperity.

Canada is focusing on three broad areas of intervention to aid in Ukraine's economic growth through our development assistance plan that is focused on building democracy through strong economic foundations.

The first is to strengthen the investment climate in a sustainable way by building economic foundations. This means improving the capacity at all levels of government to deliver on the basic needs of

citizens and to create a supportive framework for business growth, trade and investment.

The second focus area is building businesses, especially those that are micro, small and medium-sized firms, to make them sustainable and competitive.

I want to mention, Mr. Chair, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

As I was saying, this means helping entrepreneurs access business networks and financing, value chains and productivity-enhancing technology.

The third focus area is investing in people, particularly women and youth, to build a skilled workforce that can thrive in a rapidly expanding labour market. Investments of development assistance in these three areas will lead to increased employment opportunities and enhanced business productivity in Ukraine, resulting in rising household incomes and reduced poverty over the long term. Canada's development program has contributed significantly to advancing Ukraine's sustainable economic growth.

One of the key sectors in Ukraine is agriculture. What is required for agriculture is agricultural insurance so farmers can invest with confidence and allow banks to loan to farmers with confidence. With support from Canada, Ukraine has implemented a new agricultural insurance system based on international best practices.

Canadian support has also helped increase the competitiveness of smallholder horticulture and dairy farmers who have invested in improved technology and are working together to market higher-value, higher-quality products demanded by the marketplace. With help from Canada, participating smallholder horticulture farmers in southern Ukraine have sold over 12,000 tonnes of produce for over \$12 million and they have increased their household incomes over 30% since the start of the project.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has worked with municipal partners in Ukraine to develop and implement regional economic development plans that have helped attract projects that total more than \$5.4 million of outside investment.

We are working to improve the planning and delivery of services and we are assisting with the development of a national demand-driven vocational skills training system across the country. Each of these initiatives will help to increase broad-based economic growth in Ukraine critical to creating a healthy and politically engaged middle class.

We are doing all of these things and so much more because we believe in Ukraine and its people and we will continue with this important work. We remain hopeful that preparations for the Ukraine-EU agreement will resume in the near future and Canada has been lending its voice to encourage Ukraine to continue those discussions.

As we know from experience, one trade arrangement with one bloc does not preclude concluding other trade arrangements with others. The fact that we have recently concluded an agreement in principle with the European Union does not prevent us from having a very profitable arrangement with North America, for example.

We assume that the Ukrainian people will continue their struggle and we will be there to support them. Hopefully, they will move forward to a more prosperous future.

• (2140)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Chair, could the hon. member tell us whether Canada has taken any steps with the international community to suggest solutions or to help find a democratic solution to this conflict?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs went to Europe recently. He spoke with his European counterparts to encourage them to continue having discussions with Ukraine. It is important that we give our support not only to Ukraine, but also to our European partners. This economic and social integration is very important for Europe's future.

As everyone knows, the Minister of Foreign Affairs went to Ukraine this week. He expressed his support for the Ukrainian people. His unwavering support over the years shows that we want Europe and Ukraine to work together to build a better future for the Ukrainian people.

• (2145)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments from the member. I cannot help but think in terms of one of the reasons why we have this situation in Ukraine today is because of maybe a fear factor between let us say Russia and Ukraine and the European Union, where there are those who stay closer to the European Union and a smaller portion who want to enhance Russia in a protective mode which is to their detriment. That is just a personal opinion.

The member made reference to the fact that in Canada we had free trade agreements with many countries. This is something in which the population as a whole in Ukraine recognizes the value, that it can continue on trade with Russia and have an agreement with the European Union. Further to that, ultimately it could have a free trade agreement with Canada. It is all a good thing if the political will were to move in that direction. The concern is the political will.

I am wondering if the member might want to provide comments in regard to the political will of the Ukrainian president and if the member has some thoughts on this.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleague's comments. I think the core of the problem is really a lack of political will. On its merits, as my colleague can appreciate, additional free trade agreements are good for everyone involved. Freer trade results in freer opportunities, more opportunities and more prosperity for everyone.

Government Orders

As a distant observer, we shake our heads and ask why Ukraine would walk away from a tighter economic integration with Europe. There was a lack of political will. The Ukrainian administration did not want to get closer to Europe largely because it was pressured by Russia, let us be honest.

I also think there is a lack of political will on Europe's part. We all know that Europe has its own economic challenges. Looking at the prospect of having to extend billions of dollars to Ukraine so it can avoid default was a real challenge. Europe has had enough challenges in its own back yard with Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and other countries and it has really hesitated to say that it should put money forward at this time.

If there had been more political will, there should have been a way to make this happen. Therefore, we will continue encouraging our Minister of Foreign Affairs, our Prime Minister and others to engage with Ukraine and with Europe and drive them toward a closer economic integration.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very honoured and proud to take part in this debate.

I would like to start by citing some historical aspects that have a lot of connection to this debate. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre mentioned that we are remembering Nelson Mandela, a great person who brought freedom to South Africa. As well, my colleague for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette mentioned the invasion on Czechoslovakia, which I remember very well.

I grew up in Poland under a communist system. I was too young to remember the invasion of Hungary in 1956, as I was only two years old, but I remember very well the invasion of Czechoslovakia. I grew up only eight kilometres from the border. I remember the moving troops and planes flying for days in the sky to the south. I perhaps did not have a full understanding of what was going on, but this debate has had a great significance for me personally because the 32nd anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland happened on December 13, 1981. The communist government decided to break the solidarity movement that started on August 1980, the first free trade union in a Soviet-controlled communist country.

It is a kind of oxymoron that countries run by the working people would have a union to allow for human rights for working people, but that was the case. After a year and a half of relatively free movement, General Jaruzelski and the government decided to end this. Troops and riot police were brought in.

I was on strike with my fellow workers facing the tanks and riot police, which at that time in Poland were called ZOMO. Now, in Kiev they are called Berkut. They are trying to restore order.

The reason I speak of all of this is because we are having this debate with support from both sides of the House, and it is great that this is happening in our Canadian Parliament. However, on December 13, 1981, when I and my fellow workers and friends were listening to the radio, it was discouraging that the sitting prime minister of Canada sided with the oppressive regime of Poland.

An hon. member: Who?

Government Orders

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: I guess it was Pierre Trudeau at that time.

That is why it is so encouraging that today we are joining together in support of those in the Ukraine who are asking for the right to decide on their own where their country should go. The decisions of where Ukraine should go should not be made in the Kremlin or anywhere else; they should be made by the Ukrainian people. They have the capacity to make their own decisions on where they want to go.

I would like to express my concern. This is compounded by the current economic situation that will not be improved by President Yanukovich shunning the European Union and the west, nor by his disregard for the collective will of the country's citizens.

• (2150)

The government and the people of Canada are determined to assist the development of the Ukraine's economy to help Ukraine to improve its standard of living and to benefit from the freedom of a rules-based economic system, absent of the constraints of corruption and inadequate governance.

The current economic climate in Ukraine is very troubled. In a most recent report, the World Bank has forecast 0% growth for Ukraine in 2013, citing a weak global environment and delays in domestic policy adjustments. The bank cited high fiscal debt levels and a need to proceed with structural adjustments. Indeed, the IMF has characterized Ukraine as off track. As well, Ukraine faces worsening liquidity conditions and a banking sector that shows structural weaknesses, while access to long-term funding for businesses is difficult.

The Ukrainian government's privatization program has also generated concern, as many believe it will only benefit Ukraine's oligarchs. An association agreement and a deep and comprehensive free trade area with the EU could have put Ukraine on the path to economic stability and prosperity. Instead, the Yanukovich government rejected the opportunity.

In the recent news I read, it is very troubling. Berkut cleared out the Maidan, the Independence Square in Kiev, and we do not know what will happen with the tent city that was set up there, but we should all be in support of the people in Maidan in Kiev in Ukraine.

• (2155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent speech and for his knowledge of this part of Europe.

How does he think Canada could help resolve this crisis that is gripping Ukraine right now? What diplomatic measures does he feel the current government should use to try and resolve this crisis in Ukraine?

[*English*]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Chair, I think that not only Canada but all the countries of the democratic world could contribute pressure for a dialogue to happen in Ukraine.

There is no solution in using force. What we are seeing now is an attempt to do this. Ukraine is not the first country where we have

seen force used to solve a problem, and force should never be used to solve problems. Their problems should be solved by negotiation, by all sides talking to each other and coming to a conclusion that would put the country forward.

Canada and other countries could be really helpful in the dialogue.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Chair, I was very moved by my colleague's reflection on his experience during the period of martial law in Poland. He highlighted how important the views of western democratic leaders actually are in these situations. Not to compare today's Ukraine, as worrisome as the situation is, to the period of Soviet darkness, but the member pointed out how when Prime Minister Trudeau pointedly refused, the only western leader to refuse, to condemn the imposition of martial law in Poland, that was used by the communist regime as a tool of propaganda.

On the other hand, when President Reagan spoke about the evil empire behind the Iron Curtain, the western left may have mocked him, but refuseniks like Natan Sharansky realized that they had friends who were not going to give up on the fight for freedom.

Would the member like to comment on that and also express what I believe is the unanimous sense of this place that we condemn the use of force occurring right now, as we speak, in Kiev against the Euromaidan peaceful protesters, and that Canada will work with its allies to ensure that in the future, people who violate the fundamental rights of free protesters will be held to account.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Chair, what is very important is that those people who are there on the square and of the square know that they have someone to support them. I know from my own experience that when we heard on the radio, as we had no TVs, that there were people supporting us in New York, Washington, Chicago and in Toronto. This is the encouragement and driving force for the people on the ground. They will use that force to make the change and that is why we are so important and that is why this debate is so important.

• (2200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will not hide the fact that it is with emotion that I am speaking tonight on the situation in Ukraine.

That emotion is tied, in part, to the speech and testimony of the previous speaker, who experienced the repression in Poland under the Soviet regime first-hand.

I am also emotional because of the interest I have had in Russian culture for many years now. I have read certain authors who were severely repressed in the Soviet Union. Those readings have helped me discover a rich world with very deep historic roots.

Whether we like it or not, Ukraine's future is closely tied to that of Russia. For the Ukrainian people, living under the rule of Russia and the Soviet Union—in recent history and in the past—was a denial of their culture, their identity and their dreams of controlling their own destiny.

Government Orders

This probably explains the reaction and the strong grassroots movement we have been seeing for the past few weeks. This grassroots movement is an echo of the fabled Orange Revolution, which took place nearly 10 years ago, when people refused to accept a set of circumstances linked not only to their leader at the time, but also to Russian control.

The issues related to this crisis and this grassroots movement are not just democratic and economic; they are also cultural and relate to the Ukrainian sense of identity. I would even say that they are spiritual; they have to do with the Ukrainian soul. This explains why the protesters reacted so strongly to President Viktor Yanukovich's scarcely justifiable decision regarding the legitimate aspirations of the Ukrainian people.

This decision basically constitutes a complete and sudden flip-flop on the part of President Viktor Yanukovich with regard to negotiations and the path his government had been on for some time, which involved creating and maintaining ties with Europe. Those ties were linked primarily to economic exchanges, but could have gone further. They could have allowed Ukrainians to improve their lot, first and foremost, but also to fully express their identity and their culture with real pride.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the people reacted so strongly. Of course, people felt threatened by the old Russian controls, which unfortunately still exist today as a result of current economic ties, the Ukraine's dependence on Russian oil, among other things, and strong economic exchanges.

● (2205)

These factors could well prevent the Ukraine from pursuing its efforts to take full charge of its destiny.

For people who have lived for so long, for centuries, under authoritarian regimes, especially under foreign regimes outside the Ukrainian nation, the path to democracy is obviously challenging, tortuous and very difficult. The current government was democratically elected, but now it is working to turn back the tide of progress, to reverse an entire process, a steady progression towards advances and achievements. It is obvious that President Yanukovich is either refusing to understand or is responding to interests other than the public good, the good of his fellow citizens.

Given these facts, how could we not denounce the government's violence against the protesters? How could we not denounce this denial of the people's will and aspirations? The people cannot act solely through an electoral process, but must also use other options such as the public forum to protest, engage or interact with the officials in power.

We must truly stand by the Ukrainian people. In fact, more than stand by, we must give them our unwavering support. They must be given the opportunity to grow in a process that is brand new, unlike ours. Indeed, we already have a democratic tradition. It is not that old, going back barely 150 years. However, our democratic tradition is the heir to ancient British traditions, a history that spans nearly a thousand years. One might even say it is our western heritage in general. Indeed, our close ties with the United States are also part of our evolution. Our institutions also developed alongside our American neighbours.

Likewise, Ukrainians must somehow respond to their environment, but this response cannot occur in isolation. It must have support, not only from European countries, but from Canada as well, especially since Canada has a reputation, indeed a certain status, that gives it an almost de facto power to mediate certain situations in the world. I have heard this throughout my two and a half years as an MP. In my riding, I keep in touch with various communities, especially in Central Africa. They have praised Canada's voice in the world and clearly told me that it was a voice of authority.

We must really use that voice. In that sense, I join my colleagues from the other parties who spoke about offering strong support to uphold this democratic process and to avoid abuses of power. Canada has to be a major player in Ukraine to help this fledgling democratic process triumph, mature and grow over the coming years. This will not be settled in a matter of days. Everyone agrees on that.

Let us make a commitment to the Ukrainian people and help them realize these legitimate aspirations.

● (2210)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, what was interesting was the cheap shot from the minister of human resources, who hopes to be prime minister some day, in regard to former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, someone who is held in very high esteem by a good number of Canadians.

Having said that, I want to conclude my remarks by reflecting on what Canadians as a whole have shared with members of all political parties on all sides of the House, that is that we are genuinely concerned about what is happening in Ukraine today. Whether one is a current leader of a political party, a critic or any member of Parliament inside this chamber, I do believe that what we ultimately want is what the population of Ukraine wants. What we are asking for is that there is a respect for rule of law, democracy, and that we ensure human rights are being protected. That is ultimately what it is that we would like to see. Would the member care to provide comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his remarks. When we compare their situation to ours, we feel compelled to reach out to the people of Ukraine.

I have lived in a country governed by the rule of law my entire life. It is very upsetting to see people risk their safety and even their lives in pursuit of their right to live in a democratic country. These people want to live in their own country. They want to fulfill their destiny and affirm their identity. This is a call that we absolutely must answer.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are approaching the end of a debate that I believe has been very fruitful, with the exception of a sour note from a member who sees communism everywhere. He might want to lighten up a bit. We would prefer to forget that speech. We must provide our collective support to Ukrainians.

Government Orders

I would like to put a question to my colleague, who gave an excellent speech. Could he tell us how we should support the actions of the Ukrainian people?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for her question.

We can obviously take meaningful action when we are on the ground. We can also offer economic support. Beyond that, we can provide clear, consistent moral support. That is another must.

I repeat: the issues there go beyond the economy and democracy. We are talking about identity, about the survival of a culture that has been largely repressed.

We must take meaningful action and have a presence on the ground. We must bring to order a political power that has completely

forgotten where it came from, that has completely forgotten the progress made in response to public demand in the past 10 years. These demands can never be suppressed or denied.

The Deputy Chair: It being 10:15 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53(1), the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 5 reported)

• (2215)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Merry Christmas everybody. Accordingly pursuant to an order made earlier today the House stands adjourned until Monday, January 27, 2014, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:15 p.m.)

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Mr. Trudeau	2013
Mr. Valcourt	2013
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Mr. Trudeau	2013
Mr. Lebel	2013
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Mr. Nicholson	2014
Ms. Michaud	2014
Mr. Nicholson	2014
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Ms. Pécelet	2014
Mr. Calandra	2014
Ms. Pécelet	2014
Mr. Calandra	2014
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	2014
Mr. Calandra	2014
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	2015
Mr. Calandra	2015
Ms. Charlton	2015
Mr. Calandra	2015
Mr. Angus	2015
Mr. Calandra	2015
Mr. Angus	2015
Mr. Calandra	2015
Ms. Foote	2015
Mr. Calandra	2016
Mr. LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	2016
Mr. Calandra	2016
Mr. Goodale	2016
Mr. Calandra	2016
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Saganash	2016
Mr. Valcourt	2016
Ms. Crowder	2016
Mr. Valcourt	2017
Natural Resources	
Mr. Julian	2017

Mr. Oliver	2017
Canada Revenue Agency	
Mr. Rankin	2017
Ms. Findlay	2017
Natural Resources	
Mr. Hoback	2017
Mr. Oliver	2017
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Mr. Rafferty	2017
Mr. Saxton	2018
Mr. Donnelly	2018
Mr. Saxton	2018
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Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	2018
Mr. Kenney	2018
Mr. Rousseau	2018
Mr. Kenney	2018
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Ms. Bennett	2018
Mr. Valcourt	2018
National Defence	
Ms. Murray	2019
Mr. Nicholson	2019
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Mr. Nantel	2019
Mrs. Glover	2019
Ms. Sitsabaiesan	2019
Mrs. Glover	2019
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Mr. Gosal	2019
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Mr. Regan	2020
Mr. Clement	2020
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Ms. Nash	2020
Mrs. Glover	2020
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Ms. Leitch	2020
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Mr. Boulrice	2020
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Ms. Sitsabaiesan	2025
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An Act to Bring Fairness for the Victims of Violent Offenders

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