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(HANSARD)

Monday, December 1, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, December 1, 2014

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

MAIN POINT OF CONTACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA IN CASE OF DEATH ACT

The House resumed from November 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-247, An Act to expand the mandate of Service Canada in respect of the death of a Canadian citizen or Canadian resident, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, be concurred in.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.) moved that Bill C-247, An Act to expand the mandate of Service Canada in respect of the death of a Canadian citizen or Canadian resident, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Frank Valeriote moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-247, An act to expand the mandate of Service Canada in respect of the death of a Canadian citizen or Canadian resident.

It has been an incredible and surreal experience to shepherd this bill through Parliament so far, and I am honoured by the support it has received on all sides of this House. Through this bill, we have demonstrated what parliamentarians can accomplish when working together with one another to provide for their constituents and all Canadians.

Few things are so daunting as the prospect of losing a loved one. Few things are so difficult as actually settling the affairs of someone after they have died. Over the course of my time as a lawyer and then as a member of Parliament, particularly while preparing and

researching this bill, I have heard countless times of how unprepared people are for not only the grief of losing a friend or family member, but the administrative burden that goes along with the loss.

Marny Williams, vice-chair of Bereavement Ontario Network, put it especially eloquently in her testimony before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. She said:

At the age of 30, I found myself a widow and solo parent to two children aged three years and three months old. My world had been completely turned upside down and inside out. I was so devastated by the death of my husband, Keith, and the reality of supporting my children through their grief, that I didn't have the time or knowledge or desire to struggle through the multitude of paperwork that was required.

As parliamentarians, opposition and government alike, it is among our foremost responsibilities to Canadians to find ways to ease these burdens when the solutions are available to us. We can do that here.

As it stands, there is no single window that one can approach to notify the necessary officials about the death of a loved one. In the absence of a simpler streamlined process, a bereaved Canadian, husband, wife, child, or other estate representative, may have to contact many separate federal government departments and send death notifications to each.

Unfortunately, successfully notifying every necessary department or official can involve the repetition of submitting the same information to different people and is often confusing and tedious, and just as often emotionally draining and painful. More worrying, it may involve such an overwhelming amount of information that someone notifying the government of a death can miss a department, sometimes with detrimental results.

Service Canada lists that it must be contacted with the notification of "date of death" when an old age security or Canada pension plan recipient passes away, and for the application of potential survivor benefits. Similarly, if someone received employment insurance benefits prior to his or her death, there is a separate application to cancel those benefits, or to apply for additional benefits to which he or she may have been entitled. Had the deceased lived in Canada and in another country, their survivor could be eligible to apply for pension and benefits because of a social security agreement.

Private Members' Business

An estate's legal representative also makes a separate effort to contact the Canada Revenue Agency to provide a deceased person's date of death, in addition to preparing final tax returns and stopping payments on any tax credits. If the deceased person were receiving the Canada child tax benefit, universal child care benefit, or the working income tax benefit, those benefits must be stopped, and, if applicable, survivor benefits can be applied for.

That list is in no way exhaustive, but it serves to paint a picture of the myriad approaches to government that one must make after a loved one has passed away.

Jim Bishop, chair of the Funeral Service Association of Canada's government relations committee, related a story of a man who was handling the estate of his deceased father-in-law. After the funeral, he notified all of the departments he thought were necessary, but noticed nearly a year later that money was still going into his deceased father-in-law's account. He had not realized that he had to let Canada pension plan know, and so it was still paying out a pension. When he and Mr. Bishop spoke to Service Canada, they were given the impression that this happens often enough.

That sort of angst is not necessary. We can change it, and this bill would do that.

The bill calls on the Minister of Employment and Social Development to implement all measures necessary to make Employment and Social Development Canada, and more specifically Service Canada, the single point of contact for the Government of Canada programs, for all matters relating to the death of a Canadian citizen or resident.

While consulting with the minister and departmental officials after second reading, I learned that there would need to be some modifications to provide that this is for government programs that are authorized to use the social insurance number of the deceased. This was not provided for in the initial drafting of the bill. However, it became clear that it was essential in order to accurately match data, or, more plainly, to ensure that the person who died is the person receiving x benefit or y benefit.

A single window for death notification is not a new idea. In the United Kingdom, its government has already instituted the Tell Us Once registration process, and, in France, the online service portal "Mon Service Public" has been instituted for death notifications. It is estimated that beyond the more personal costs of eliminating considerable hardship and grief, the Tell Us Once process will save the government over \$300 million over the decade.

Service Canada is ideally situated to perform this function for Canadians. Located within Employment and Social Development Canada, Service Canada already gives Canadians access to a range of federal government services and benefits. It was intended to streamline access to and provision of government programs and services for Canadians.

Bill C-247 is a practical expansion of Service Canada's mandate, and the logical choice for bereavement reporting. It is the first step in a wider strategy towards cost savings and reduction of red tape while improving client services.

The Auditor General found in chapter 2 of his fall 2013 report, "Access to Online Services", that the integration of service delivery and the sharing of information among departments is "limited". As we have seen through the various departments that require notification on the death of a Canadian, their family, friends, or agents often have to work with multiple departments separately, frequently requiring them to provide the same information multiple times to various sources.

The Auditor General also found at that time that instructions provided online by Service Canada about the process for certain life events were incomplete. Additionally, he noted:

[...] departments are focused on delivering the statutory programs and mandates for which they are accountable. There is no incentive for departments to share information.

When it comes to the death of the loved one, the AG similarly found that:

[...] someone must contact each department separately and follow different processes, as this information is not generally shared and departments do not offer the ability to do this online. This makes it difficult for users who may be trying to stop the payment of certain benefits to prevent overpayments [...] while trying to apply for others....

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo said it very well at committee. She said:

[The Red Tape Commission] certainly heard consistently that Tell Us Once wants interaction and how difficult and time-consuming it is for businesses to deal with government. I think we can all imagine what happens when someone who's grieving and the difficulty of finding out many months down the road that they have to pay the government back. That's extremely challenging. It's better to get that stopped in the first place.

The government, for its part, has identified this type of modernization as a priority as well. In this year's report on plans and priorities, the minister's message states:

ESDC will focus on achieving service excellence for Canadians by further modernizing service delivery, focusing on its core business priorities and increasing the use of technology. Through Service Canada, the government will ensure that Canadians quickly receive the benefits to which they are entitled and access to a wide range of programs and services.

It continues later, stating:

Service Canada will continue to work with other departments so that Canadians can better access more Government of Canada services through Service Canada.

What better way to start that process than by facilitating the client experience of Canadians at an incredibly difficult time in their lives?

● (1110)

When I look back on my time in Parliament, one day this bill and the collaboration and good will demonstrated by members from each party will stand out. It is an incredible feeling to know that my private member's bill might pass in the House of Commons.

At second reading, I remarked that members could sit in the House for quite some time without the opportunity to introduce a private member's bill, let alone see it debated, finessed and passed. It is all the more meaningful to me as I will not seek re-election when this Parliament comes to an end. This experience will stand out for me, and I am so very proud of what we have all accomplished with the passage of this bill.

A number of people were essential to the progress of the bill behind the scenes. I wish to thank the Funeral Service Association of Canada, the Bereavement Ontario Network and Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, for their early support, as well as for their testimony on behalf of the bill before the committee.

I wish to thank the Minister of State for Social Development, her staff and the departmental staff that provided invaluable advice and worked diligently to provide the amendments necessary to the bill's success.

I wish to thank Bryon Wilfert for initially proposing this measure, Wendy Leask for her advice on the subject matter, and Elizabeth Cheesbrough for her invaluable assistance.

Finally, I am sincerely thankful for every member from every party who spoke in support of the bill. They have demonstrated to Canadians what a Parliament working in their best interests looks like.

• (1115)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise in support of Bill C-247, An Act to expand the mandate of Service Canada in respect of the death of a Canadian citizen or Canadian resident.

We usually do not think about these kinds of things until we experience it or someone else tells us a story. However, it comes as rather a shock to me that when someone passes away, the bereaving person in charge of the estate is left to contact so many different agencies. It really good to have legislation that will make life less onerous and less emotional in having to deal with so many government agencies. The bill would allow a number of services to be accessed through one phone call to Service Canada upon losing a loved one, and that is a good thing.

I have one concern about the bill, and that is that it is still rather vague. It specifies some of the services, but it does not specify all of them. There is a caveat at the end stating, "and all other services". Like other Canadians, I would have been much happier if there had been more specificity around that so everybody could tell they had done absolutely everything they needed to do and contacted every government department when they made that one phone call. However, that is not in the bill. Nevertheless, the bill would make life less cumbersome and a lot easier.

All of these services would, as we know, be centred in Service Canada, so there would one-stop shopping, as somebody called this, though not quite because we are not sure of some of the other services. We always get carried away with modern technology. We think we only have one department to contact through email, but not everybody is technologically literate. There are technology challenges faced by many, especially seniors, in trying to resolve outstanding departmental issues on behalf of a deceased loved one. Therefore, we have to ensure the services we provide are accessible in a variety of manners: by phone, Internet, mail and in person at Canada depots. That is where the rub is, which is very disappointing.

The bill is good and the New Democrats are glad this is happening, but we have seen an incredible number of cuts to Service Canada. Under the Liberal government, \$10.4 billion were cut over a two-year period, which reduced public sector employees by 45,000.

Private Members' Business

A lot of that directly impacted ESDC. The Conservative government's cuts to front-line services are also harming Canadians. By 2015-16, the Conservatives will have cut \$243 million from services focused on Canadians at ESDC.

While the New Democrats are pleased it would be one-stop shopping, I am still worried about the amount of time people will have to wait if they phone in or the response times once people submit their information in writing. Also, when we deal with people who have lost loved ones, they are very emotional. I hope the front-line service providers will get some additional training on how to deal with people who experience that kind of personal loss.

When my father passed away, I know how difficult it was. I thought I knew my way around the system, but it was still very frustrating at times, at times it angered me, and then when I would get letters, it was even more annoying. Members of Parliament all know how it feels when they send mail to someone and get a note back saying the person passed away a year ago. In many ways, it is time that we centralize our services so people do not have to go through that pain.

• (1120)

I also talked to a constituent of mine who had been left with the burden of paying back an amount of money that had been paid into her and her husband's joint account after he passed away. She did not even know the money was being paid. She had not kept a close eye on that account until she received a letter from the government demanding the repayment of a very large sum. She felt she had taken all the steps and had done all the right things.

This is good legislation. It will make life easier. As I said earlier, it does not list everything, but it is a step in the right direction. I believe this will make it a lot easier for those who are dealing with the loss of a loved one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 98 a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, December 3, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): This House is now suspended until 12 o'clock.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:23 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

●(1200)

[*Translation*]

YUKON AND NUNAVUT REGULATORY IMPROVEMENT ACT

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC) moved that Bill S-6, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has been pursuing the most ambitious northern agenda in the history of this country.

This government has promoted prosperity and development through Bill C-47, the Northern Jobs and Growth Act. It transferred powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories through Bill C-15, the Northwest Territories Devolution Act. Then it had the vision of the Canadian high Arctic research station, which it implemented.

I repeat: no other government in Canadian history has done more than ours to increase health, prosperity, and economic development in the north.

The initiative before the House today, the Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act, or Bill S-6, represents yet another key deliverable of our government's northern strategy and is the final legislative step in our government's action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes.

In total, our government has created or amended eight different pieces of legislation in order to ensure that northern regulatory regimes—across the north—are nimble and responsive to the increased economic activity taking place across the north. This is no small feat.

These legislative changes will allow Canada's north to compete for investment in an increasingly global marketplace, which in turn will lead to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for northerners.

[*English*]

Let me first speak to the proposed changes to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, or, as we refer to it, YESAA for short.

This legislation first came into effect in 2003 and sets out the environmental and socio-economic assessment process for all projects, including everything from small-scale community infrastructure projects to large-scale mining projects in the territory in question.

The need for improvements to the existing legislation first arose during the five-year review of YESAA, which was required under the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement. The review began in April 2008 and included the participation of all parties to the agreement: Canada, the Yukon government, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

Speaking of the Council of Yukon First Nations, I had the pleasure earlier this morning of meeting with the chiefs or councillors of a number of Yukon first nations about Bill S-6. I want to acknowledge their important contributions to the development of the bill and look forward to their continued engagement as the bill moves through the parliamentary process.

The review I referred to earlier was extensive and examined all aspects of the Yukon development assessment process from YESAA and its regulations to the implementation, assessment, and decision-making process, as well as process documents such as rules, guides, and forms, et cetera, and was completed in March 2012.

At the end of the review, the parties jointly agreed to 72 out of 76 recommendations, many of which could be addressed through administrative changes. A few, however, required legislative amendments, including board term extensions; the non-application of CEAA, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act; the requirement to take into account cumulative effects when conducting an environmental assessment; the need to take into consideration activities that are "reasonably foreseeable"; the ability to include the activities of third party resource users in the scope of a project when the government is a proponent of forest resource management planning and allocation initiatives.

●(1205)

In December 2012, after the completion of the five-year review and the passage of amendments to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and following our government's announcement of the action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, the Yukon government wrote to my predecessor to request additional amendments to YESAA to ensure consistency across regimes. That was to include beginning-to-end timelines, ability to give policy directions to the board, cost-recovery regulations, and the delegation of authority.

[*Translation*]

While these amendments were not discussed as part of the five-year review, my department did consult with Yukon first nations on them throughout 2013 and 2014.

The first draft of these legislative amendments was shared with all parties to the umbrella framework agreement, the Yukon first nations and the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board for review and comment in May 2013.

Government Orders

Formal consultation sessions followed, which provided the opportunity for the parties to learn more about the proposed amendments, voice their concerns and make recommendations on how to improve the proposals. The feedback we received informed a subsequent draft of the legislation, which was shared with the parties in February 2014.

At each stage, proposals or drafts of the bill were circulated to first nations, the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board for review. The department carefully considered all comments and, where appropriate, incorporated them into the next draft. This process resulted in further improvements to the bill before it was introduced in Parliament last June.

[*English*]

As members can see, consultation on this bill has been extensive, and while we know that everyone did not agree 100% with each amendment, this does not mean that consultation was inadequate. It is our view that we met our duty to consult and we accommodated where appropriate. Even the Hon. Grant Mitchell, a Liberal senator and the opposition critic of the bill in the Senate, acknowledged this challenge but noted that comprehensive consultation had taken place when he spoke to the bill at third reading in the Senate. The hon. senator said:

There has been, I think, quite adequate consultation. It's complicated up there in these territories. You have federal, territorial and Aboriginal interests.

So it is very complex, and the fundamental core of this bill gets to that and is an effort to make all of that better and to make processes in the North better.

Let me remind my fellow colleagues in this House that this does not mean that the opportunity for providing input has ended. Indeed, as is the case for all other bills introduced in Parliament, the parliamentary review process provides opportunities to engage with parliamentarians on their views on legislation. The Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources has just completed a thorough review of the legislation wherein the committee heard from numerous witnesses from Yukon and Nunavut, including representatives of the first nations and Inuit peoples. At the end of its review, the committee members endorsed the bill unanimously.

● (1210)

Engagement on this bill has continued right up until today. As I have already mentioned, I met this morning with members of the Council of Yukon First Nations to further discuss their views on the bill and I encouraged them to participate in the parliamentary review process so that they could not only make their views known, but, if possible, correct the bill if it violates, as alleged, the Umbrella Final Agreement.

I also wish to acknowledge the member of Parliament for Yukon and the senator for Yukon, who have been very active on the ground. They have met with numerous stakeholders on this bill and will continue to advocate for the best interests of all Yukoners in their respective chambers.

Further, and contrary to some of the myths that have been put forward, I want to be very clear that all of the legislative proposals contained in Bill S-6 are consistent with the Yukon umbrella agreement and continue to uphold aboriginal and treaty rights.

In fact, some of the proposed amendments would actually strengthen first nation roles in YESAA. For example, under clause 29, which sets out proposed section 88.1 of the proposed amendments, when a project reaches the permit or licensing stage, first nations would be able to add to that permit or license “terms and conditions that are in addition to, or more stringent than” the terms and conditions set out in the project's environmental assessment.

I also want to take a moment to address some of the specific amendments that have been subject to significant debate in Yukon and that the Council of Yukon First Nations discussed this morning when we met.

The introduction of beginning-to-end limits for environmental assessments would align the Yukon regime with the time limits in similar acts within the north as well as south of 60 and would provide predictably and consistency to first nations, municipalities, and industry alike.

Some have argued that the time limits would affect the thoroughness of the assessment process. However, when we look at the facts, we see that the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's own statistics show that the proposed time limits are either consistent with or more favourable than the board's current practice. In addition, the amendments include provisions that would allow for extensions, recognizing that there may be situations in which more time would be warranted to carry out a function or power.

The proposed amendment to section 49.1 would ensure that going forward, reassessments would only be required in the event that the project has been significantly changed. In the past, projects that had already been approved and permitted could be subject to a new environmental assessment simply because a renewal or a minor change in the project had occurred. This amendment would help streamline this process and reduce unnecessary red tape where it was not warranted. The amendment also makes it clear that if there is more than one decision body—which can be a federal, territorial, or first nations government or agency—that regulates and permits the proposed activity, they must consult with one another before determining whether a new assessment is required.

● (1215)

Further, the legislation specifies that in the event of a disagreement, even if only one decision body determines that a significant change has occurred, it must be subject to a reassessment. That is an important point because of what we hear and read in the media. This is also consistent with the Umbrella Final Agreement. The Umbrella Final Agreement states, at section 12.4.1.1, at page 107, if I recall, that projects and significant changes to existing projects are subject to the development assessment process. Therefore, the idea of significant changes is embodied in the Umbrella Final Agreement.

Government Orders

Another proposed change is the ability of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to provide policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. The ability to provide policy direction is not a heavy-handed attempt by the government to interfere in the assessment process, nor does it undermine the neutrality of the board. To the contrary, it is intended to ensure a common understanding between the government and the board, helping to reduce uncertainty in environmental assessment decision-making and helping to ensure the proper implementation of the board's powers in fulfilling its role in the assessment process. This is not new. There are also precedents for this power in other jurisdictions. For example, it has existed in the Northwest Territories since 1999, and with the passing of Bill C-15, it was expanded to include all the boards in the Northwest Territories.

As we say back home, the proof is in the pudding. This power has only been used four times in the Northwest Territories. In each case, it was used to clearly communicate expectations on how to address first nations' rights or agreements. For example, it was used to ensure that notification was provided to both the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Deline regarding licences and permits in a given region.

I want to assure the House that this power in no way detracts from the board's independence. YESAB will remain an impartial and independent arm's-length entity responsible for making recommendations to decision-making bodies.

The legislative amendment also makes it clear that policy direction cannot be used to influence a specific project or to change the environmental assessment process itself. Another contentious amendment, which is contentious because it is opposed by some first nations in Yukon, is my ability to delegate certain powers in the act to a territorial minister. To the contrary, that again is not at all inconsistent with the Umbrella Final Agreement.

I want to also address the Nunavut changes. The objective is to make the regulatory system in Nunavut consistent with what is taking place south of 60 and in full compliance with the land claim agreement that governs our relationship with northerners in Nunavut.

• (1220)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his presentation today on this bill, a bill that really has two parts. One part went through an extensive consultation period. The record of that consultation over five years and the resulting recommendations are not really in the public to the degree they should be.

The second part, as the minister has outlined, for the Yukon side of the bill, had a number of amendments put forward. The minister indicated that there was consultation on these particular amendments, which are the controversial parts of this bill for Yukoners, to a great degree.

What the Yukon first nations are saying is that on February 26, 2014, Canada arrived at a meeting and provided only paper copies of these amendments to the people at the meeting. The first nations who were on the phone could not have electronic copies. To look at this and say that there was consultation on these very vital parts of the bill is not correct.

Could the minister show how this is adequate consultation on these major changes to the bill?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, some people have a strange interpretation of what consultation means.

In this case, in December 2011, after the five-year review process, where we agreed to 72 out of 76 recommendations, the government announced its responsible resource development in the north initiative. We held a video conference on it. Then we had a teleconference in April 2013 with the Council of Yukon First Nations on the way forward for amending YESAA.

In May 2013, we had a mail-out to the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon on a first draft legislative proposal, with a request for written comments. In June 2013, there was a mail-out to industry of a first draft legislative proposal with, again, a request for comments.

The consultation process was so long that I am being stopped and do not have time to lay it all out. There has been ample consultation, as attested to by a Liberal senator in the Senate.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister.

Once again, it seems that the government has succeeded in being offside of what first nations groups in the country are asking for when it comes to enacting legislation for partnership in moving forward with development projects.

The minister talks about consulting, but when you consult, you normally listen. When you listen, you normally put forward a partnership to arrive at legislation and policy that works for all involved. What we are seeing here this morning is that there is consultation on some parts of the bill that is before us, and on some other parts there is not consultation.

The minister talked about meeting with first nations groups this morning. Did they tell the minister what they have been telling all of us, which is that if this bill passes, they will have no other choice but to take legal action against the government?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would again remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the chair rather than directly to their colleagues.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's question and her words at the end.

That is the genius of this great country of ours. Yes, indeed, I met this morning with the Council of Yukon First Nations. I explained the bill and those four provisions they opposed. I am still waiting for anyone to show me where these violate the Umbrella Final Agreement. To the contrary, those amendments were all completed in the Umbrella Final Agreement.

Government Orders

The member is talking about the consultation process. If there is agreement by those who were consulted, like there was for the 72 out of 76 they agreed to, it is fine, because they were accepted. That is consultation. That is what the member just said. However, if one does not agree, although we have listened and explained, then it is not consultation. That is the genius of Canada. If the first nations claim that we have failed in our duty to consult, the court will determine the issue, and they are welcome to use the courts.

I know, and I can show clearly, that first nations in the Yukon were comprehensively and substantially consulted on all of the four amendments they oppose.

● (1225)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard from a number of groups at the Senate committee that supported this legislation. There is some great news, from their perspective, about what these changes to YESAA would do. However, I would like to touch on the concerns of Yukon first nations.

There are four points, but I would like to focus on one of the concerns we have heard. The Yukon first nations are concerned that some of the legislation would supersede the provisions of the Umbrella Final Agreement. I wonder if the hon. minister can provide assurances to the House, Canadians, Yukon first nations, and indeed, everyone in the Yukon who has an investment in the Umbrella Final Agreement, first nations treaties, and the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act that the legislation we are putting forward will respect the Umbrella Final Agreement. If he could point to any of the sections to demonstrate that to Yukoners and Yukon first nations, it would be greatly appreciated.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. In Canada, the crown is fully aware of its obligations under the Umbrella Final Agreement to the Council for Yukon Indians. Each and every measure proposed in this bill would be subject to the act.

Section 4 of the act makes it clear that if ever there was an inconsistency between the position of the final agreement and a law passed by the federal government, the Umbrella Final Agreement would prevail. This is repeated in section 4, in chapter 2, and again in YESAA itself.

Therefore, I think Yukoners can have the assurance that none of the legislative measures proposed today could supersede the Umbrella Final Agreement, which has precedence over the bill.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, to that point, this is what the Yukon First Nations said, and they were speaking to the clause in the agreement:

Although the reference to the clause is accurate, and the Final Agreement shall prevail in any inconsistency or conflict, the only way to resolve this when it arises would be to take the matter to the courts.

I would like the minister to comment, because we are ending up with another bill that will end up in the courts to deal with inconsistencies between the treaty and the agreements that have been signed and what the Conservative government wants to pass into law.

Why is the government moving in that direction? Why does it not recognize the nature of the issue it is dealing with and put forward legislation that will not be challenged in court?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the record will show if this ever goes to court. Someone would have to show where these changes would violate the agreement.

Let us talk about, for example, the exemption from reassessment unless significant changes have occurred. Under the Umbrella Final Agreement, at chapter 12.4.1.1, it says, "Subject to this chapter... Projects and significant changes to Existing Projects" will be "subject to the development assessment process". This is the law of the land. This is a constitutional obligation of Canada and the first nations.

We did not invent this. It is in the agreement. If this is opposed by the first nations, we cannot, with an act of Parliament, change a constitutional arrangement between Canada and the first nations.

● (1230)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the bill in front of us, which has found its way here through the Senate, a completely inappropriate way to bring forward legislation. It should have come here first and should be a government bill, but the government chose that pathway. That way it can move things through the House in a fashion and build a case using its witnesses in the Senate, which it controls, and take away the real responsibility for debate in this place.

This bill deals with northerners' rights and first nations' rights. First nations' rights are constitutionally protected, and northerners' rights have constitutional issues attached to them as well, which I will go into as I go forward. Bill S-6 would amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act, known as YESAA, and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act. I will deal mostly with the changes to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act. The changes to the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act are much less profound and not as controversial.

There is a high level of opposition to these changes. In September, I was in Whitehorse and conducted a public hearing on these bills, with the assistance of the Yukon NDP. There was standing room only in that meeting room. People wanted to understand the bills and were concerned about their impact. Yukoners are sophisticated in their knowledge and understanding of legislative changes. They have been through it to a greater extent than perhaps the other territories. It is a territory that has achieved the highest level of devolution prior to this bill. People are on track in understanding what their rights are and what they see as their future.

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However, of course, the Conservative MP, the Conservative senator, and the right-wing Yukon Party government are not listening to the people, not conducting public hearings, and not allowing the people of Yukon to have a say on this bill. They are doing their stakeholder consultation and fulfilling their obligations to first nations for consultations, but where are the public hearings? Where is the engagement of the public at large? They will not do that because they know very well that if they did, the real opposition to this bill would coalesce with the first nations and say no to the bill and the changes.

Why would people in Yukon who are concerned about their livelihoods and futures be concerned about these changes that the minister has presented as simply ways of increasing economic activity in Yukon and making things work a little better? There are four changes that really upset Yukoners. One of them is providing the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development the authority to provide binding policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. This is something that was established in the NWT and there were real concerns with it there. The Yukon, which has been dealing with a different system for the past 10 years, is looking at anything like this as an abrogation of its rights and hard-fought authority over the lands and resources.

The second change is the introduction of legislative time limits for assessments. That is another issue that I will bring up a bit later.

The third change is allowing the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to delegate any or all responsibilities to the Yukon government. That is an issue of huge concern to first nations, and Yukoners as well. Yukon has worked out an arrangement between first nations and public government that is critical to the future of the Yukon territory. I do not think anyone would deny that. That relationship is one that the provinces are having more and more trouble with every day. The failure to deal on a nation-to-nation basis at the provincial level is causing all kinds of grief in all kinds of projects right across this country. Therefore, there is concern about how the delegation takes place.

• (1235)

Then there is the question of creating broad exemptions from YESAA for renewals and amendments of permits and authorizations. People look at that and ask what is going on and wonder how they we make sure it is correct.

Additionally, these amendments favour the Yukon government over Yukon first nations, the other partner in the YESAA process. The Council of Yukon First Nations has threatened legal action should the bill become law.

YESAA was established in 2003 in fulfilment of an obligation in the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement, which has settled many first nations land claims in that territory. In October, 2007, the five-year review of YESAA was initiated and then completed in 2012. The findings of the review were never made public.

Unlike the provinces, the legislative powers of the territories are determined through federal statute rather than through the Constitution. What we have in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut is what Parliament gives us. While section 3 of the charter

of rights, which is part of the Constitution, guarantees that every citizen in Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein, the remainder of the Constitution describes the territories as lesser partners in Canada than the provinces.

We in the three territories have a problem in that we would remain without the authority of this body, the House of Commons, giving us our full due under Confederation. We would not have those powers under the Constitution.

Because of this reliance on the federal government to devolve the legislative powers and authorities that the provinces take for granted, it is really unfortunate and duplicitous that the Conservatives are taking away powers through these amendments to the act 11 years after they were granted.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Some might find it amusing that there are noises in the House, Mr. Speaker, but that is something we all have to live with. The rumbling of discontent in the country toward the Conservative government far exceeds any noise I have heard here in the House.

Yukoners are also angry about the lack of public involvement as Bill S-6 was developed. As I said, I held a public meeting in September. It was a full house. There was another public meeting held later on in the fall in the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, where there was standing room only. A few hundred people showed up.

Why would people come out to a very dry discussion of environmental assessment? It is because they care. They understand and care about how their laws are being developed. If we went into the province of Alberta and said that we were going to change its laws about environment assessment, that this is the way things are going to go from now on, would the people of Alberta not come out and protest? If we did that in Quebec what would happen?

Why are we treated in this cavalier fashion where the federal government can come into a territory, hold hearings with stakeholders only, take the opinion of the people it considers important and not have any public meetings with the people of the territory about what is going on in their own territory?

When the original YESAA was developed, the department released drafts of the legislation in 1998 and 2001 for public review. It also undertook two separate tours of Yukon to meet with Yukon first nations and other residents to review and discuss these drafts. A little different pattern emerges here. Back then, one of the discussion tours lasted for 90 days and went to every community throughout Yukon. Every first nations community not only had an opportunity to send in written submissions on the first draft, but each community also had an opportunity to have an open public hearing. The way that Bill S-6 has been developed is so different. Listening to the Conservatives one would think this has been a multi-year program with incredible input. The reality is much different.

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• (1240)

The parties discussed the YESAA process for many hours between 2008 and 2011 as part of the YESAA five-year review. That review is required under the Umbrella Final Agreement, and not a discussion of a new draft bill.

The amendments to YESAA under Bill S-6 that are of concern were never discussed and never raised by the Conservatives during the five-year review. These new amendments were introduced with little opportunity to ensure there was adequate consultation and accommodation.

On February 26, 2014, as I said earlier to the minister, Canada arrived at a meeting with Yukon first nations and provided paper copies to those in attendance and would not even give electronic copies to those participating by telephone, despite the changes to first nations' relationship with the Crown and the Yukon territorial government. We had meeting where they could not even be there in person and they could not even have copies of the amendments.

What is going on there? They had less than two months to respond to these changes. This was hardly adequate.

Consultation means providing the necessary information to the parties, which the Conservatives did not do. They failed to meet the test of the treaty and common-law duty to consult and accommodate. So there was inadequate consultation with first nations, despite it being required by law. Democracy also requires the participation of the public. On that score, the Conservatives and their elected representatives did very little, and perhaps even nothing.

When I conducted a public hearing there, knowing that as critic I would be responsible for speaking on behalf of Yukoners here in the House, I met with many of the public afterward and the chiefs of the grand council. What did I hear? They questioned the constitutionality of the unilateral changes proposed in Bill S-6, which were not discussed during the five-year review or during the McCrank report.

The government has had plenty of opportunities to discuss changes like these, but did not take those opportunities.

They say that the 16-month timeline is out of touch with the reality on the ground, particularly further north where, depending upon the timing of the review, the project may have only one summer to conduct any necessary environmental work.

When it comes to the timelines, Yukoners, who live there and understand the place, say there are problems with the 16-month timeline, that it may not give them adequate time to provide the information to the board so that the project can be assessed properly.

Also, Yukoners fear that the first nations do not have the financial and person resources to adequately assess proposals and that a timeline like this would artificially strain the few resources they have. This is a common problem across the north, when it comes to environmental assessment.

Companies have adequate resources generally. They do not go into the process unless they do have those resources. Many times large multinational corporations can bring more to bear on the subject than a first nation community that might be the most affected by it.

Yukoners see these amendments as an attack on Yukoners' democratic rights and the constitutional rights of first nations. By ignoring first nations' rights, the bill would create uncertainty in the mining sector, as first nations would now resort to the courts to protect their interests.

We had a system in place that was working. There were some changes required. Those changes were discussed. There were 70 amendments to the act proposed, many of which could have been done in House. People agreed to them, according to the reports that we have heard of, although those reports were not made fully public. Instead, the Conservatives brought in these other measures that would have the ability to upset the operation of Yukon in the years to come, just as in the Northwest Territories they changed the environmental assessment legislation with devolution. We have two first nations now taking them to court over that.

• (1245)

Where is the certainty in the process? Where is the certainty to mining companies? They want to go ahead and do this kind of work, but they are not sure that everyone has come onside and they do not know whether they will end up in a situation where what they propose is in front of the courts?

“Social licence” is a phrase that members of the government need to understand. It should be branded on all their documents. They need social licence to move ahead these days. They cannot simply be the way they have been; that is not working. We can look at all the pipelines and all the proposed energy projects across the country, and we see that social licence has caused grief in almost every case.

We had a system in Yukon that was working. It needed some minor tweaking. What we have ended up with is a series of changes that take it far beyond the pale.

However, I have heard other voices in Yukon speaking against this bill. The proposed amendments in front of the Senate today were not discussed in the five-year process with Canada and the Yukon government.

This is the testimony of Ruth Massie, Grand Chief, Council of Yukon First Nations, before the Senate Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee. She said:

—it is our view that the YESAA has been operating effectively and efficiently since its enactment in 2003. The federal government now wants to unilaterally make additional amendments to the YESAA. We did not request these amendments, nor do support them. These amendments are not necessary.

This is the testimony of Mary Jane Jim, Councillor, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, in front of that same committee. She said:

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Eleven years ago, devolution gave the Yukon government province-like powers for land and resource management. This was an important step in Yukon's history and crucial in Yukon's ability to determine our own future, a future grounded in respectful relationships among Yukon First Nation governments and the Yukon government.

Yukon NDP leader, Liz Hanson, in the Yukon legislature, on October 23, said, "With these proposed amendments to what is a made-in-Yukon environmental assessment process, YESAA, it's no longer ours".

A *Yukon News* editorial, "Environmental assessment reform should be done in the open", on June 13, said:

A long list of people deserve raspberries for this needlessly shady behaviour. At the top of the naughty list are [the Yukon senator and the MP for the Yukon] who are supposed to ensure that the interests of Yukoners are represented in Ottawa. Instead, they've kept the public out of the loop, other than [MP] uttering vague generalities about the forthcoming changes without offering any meaningful specifics. Shame on them.

Here is the final one, and I know the Conservatives do not like to hear the real people talking. The Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, in a November 21 letter to the Yukon MP., said:

We believe that these changes will have a negative impact on the tourism industry, and for Yukoners overall.

As YESAA is one of the cornerstones of the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement, we are concerned with the Council of Yukon First Nations' grievance with the lack of consultation regarding these proposed changes. Moreover, there was no opportunity for the Yukon public and the majority of stakeholders to provide their views through a transparent consultation process.

The members of the House are here to represent the people of their constituencies. The people of Yukon do not want this bill. They do not see the need for it. They do not understand why the federal government is taking things away from them that were well established in Yukon, that do not need to be changed. Why is this paternalistic attitude being foisted upon the people of Yukon?

Democracy is about serving the will of the people. If the Conservatives really cared about what is important for Yukon, they would listen very carefully to Yukoners. They are in an embryonic stage, creating their own society, their own way of life, their own relationships with first nations. This is what they are doing. If the Conservative people want to participate there, then they should go to Yukon and join with them there as citizens of Yukon.

The citizens of Yukon and the first nations people in Yukon should have the absolute right to a final say about how their land is being managed. We have listened to the people of Yukon. We are ready to work to fight this bill.

● (1250)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague was very careful about high grading the testimony he heard in the Senate, only pointing out comments that would fit his arguments. He has used some of his notable and reliable sources, with only the leader of the opposition in Yukon and the NDP, but he does not talk about the comments provided by the premier. He is very much pitching a one-sided piece of a very complex and well evolved story here. That is expected from the member for Northwest Territories.

The member for Northwest Territories is so concerned about the great people of the Yukon territory. The NDP has been obstructing travel non-stop for over a year now for committees to travel across the country and hear from people in their ridings. I have a study that

was passed over a year ago to have the committee go to Yukon to study the Yukon River salmon and the impacts it has on our communities, but the NDP has continually blocked that study.

I have called on the government and the committee to ensure they take this committee to Yukon to hear from the great people of that territory to provide input. Will the NDP support that? Could he commit today that the committee will travel to Yukon to hear from the people, not just stand here and blow smoke, like he is?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, on the point of why the committees are not travelling, I can refer back to the Conservative government and its House leader, who is flat out against any of the changes we want to see at committee. Why are the Conservatives continually blocking all amendments at committee? Why are they not listening to people? That is one of the main reasons why the House is falling into disrepute.

We all trust that in the future, we will build to provide the proper consultation with the Yukon people that they well deserve on this bill. That is unlike the Conservative government, its MP and senator, who have refused to do that in Yukon already.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are sitting here listening to the debate today, and what I am hearing from the NDP side is that it does not want these committees to go out and it does not want to listen to or consult with people. On the other side, we hear the government talking about all the consultation that it is doing, but it is obviously not listening to what people are saying.

I have a question for my colleague from the Northwest Territories. We have consistently seen legislation pass in the House for the territories that has not been supported by first nations and aboriginal groups. What is this doing to relationships between the Government of Canada and first nations and aboriginal governments across the north? What does he see happening here, besides a complete lack of trust in what the government is entrusted with, which is the management of aboriginal treaties and agreements?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the relationship between aboriginal governments in Canada and the federal government is one that is now approaching litigation at almost every point. It is also one where we see confrontations on the street. We see groups standing up for their rights in the public eye, trying to work out relationships with other groups in society that understand their rights are very important.

First nations have the right to a nation-to-nation relationship with the federal government. That is what the treaties gave them. That is the basis of the relationship of Canadians with first nations.

What we are seeing now is this playing of games and small movements by the government in these cases in the north. On the one hand, the government offered us devolution in the Northwest Territories. On the other hand, it took back things from the first nations. It caused a lot of stress within our society in the Northwest Territories. It created a situation where our territorial government, in order to achieve something, had to go back on its word with the first nations about supporting something else.

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The same thing is probably going on in Yukon. The Yukon territorial government understands that there is a relationship there, but it is being forced into taking a position like this, which will actually harm its society in the long run.

I really hope we can work around this, but this is a problem that has been created by the federal government and it is intransigent on these issues.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech and also for how well he represents the interests of the people of the north. When I see the work that has been done by the Conservative members, particularly the member for Yukon, I think that the people of that part of the country could do a lot better in terms of representation.

Frankly, I find it strange to hear the member opposite calling for consultations and asking to travel all over the country. His government could have consulted the people of Yukon and the other territories a long time ago. Now he stands up in the House to say that the Conservatives need to go and talk to Yukoners. Why did they not do that before? I do not understand. Furthermore, if they really did do any consultation, absolutely none of the comments they received were included in the bill.

Indeed, this appears to be another attempt by this government to put its own interests and the interests of friends ahead of those of Yukoners. There are many natural resource development projects in Yukon, a territory I have been lucky enough to visit many times. There are some very troubling issues, especially around the Peel River watershed.

The bill currently before us is further proof that the government does not respect the people of the north, including Yukoners. I wonder if my colleague could talk a little more about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, true democracy demands a public process. Everything should be public. That is the nature of it, especially when we deal with the development of our territories.

People who live in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut do not have the same rights as other Canadians. Therefore, when it comes to dealing with our rights, our development and our opportunities, it should be one of the most public discussions that take place.

I think I showed in my speech how the previous governments actually understood that. It is the Conservative government that has not done this. I would ask the Conservative-elected MP why he has not conducted public meetings there.

Government policy needs to be put in front of the people. It needs the support of the people. The government needs to understand where they are coming from, as well. By neglecting that, it is neglecting part of the responsibility we have as legislators and as representatives of our constituency. We absolutely have to engage in public process.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, the member talked about a public process, yet he has confirmed today that the NDP will deny the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development the right to travel to hear, in a public process, from the people of Yukon.

We travelled to the Northwest Territories to hear from his constituents on Bill C-15, so why will the member now deny the constituents of the member for Yukon that same opportunity?

• (1300)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the record.

To this day the government has not had any public hearings in Yukon on this proposed bill. The MP for Yukon has not held any public hearings on the proposed bill. The bill is now in front of us in Parliament. It has been moved through the Senate. We still have not seen the government do any public process in Yukon.

At this point, the government is saying that a particular procedural issue within the House, of which we have many, needs to be solved. I agree, it should be solved by good will on both sides to get this process back to where it was. However, where is the government with its commitment to public process? Where is it on holding public meetings in Yukon. The government is absolutely nowhere.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today because I feel it is important to speak to Bill S-6. It is important not only to the Yukon and the people who live there, but also to Canadians.

Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act, is one of those bills that we have traditionally seen come to the House for amendments. It is one of those bills whereby there is partly a consultation with people in the region, and then there are sections that are always added by the government for good measure, which often create controversy. In this particular amendment process, through the consultations, there was agreement on substantial portions of change that would occur as part of the bill. However, there were some portions where it did not achieve or did not work to achieve consensus, and because of that, the first nations groups in the Yukon are not supportive of the bill.

As our party's critic for the north, I have had the opportunity to travel across the territories and other northern regions. I have met with many local stakeholders, community leaders, and individuals, and all too often I have unfortunately seen how the government opposite is failing northern Canadians. I have seen it for many years within my own constituency of Labrador, and it is quite evident in all regions across the north as well. The Conservative government has spent the last few years trying to paint a very rosy picture of life in the north. Much of the legislation that it has introduced and pushed through Parliament has been playing along those same lines. Sadly, for those of us who live in the north, we continue to fall behind the rest of Canada, and the federal government has simply turned its back.

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Last week, the Auditor General of Canada released a scathing report on the Nutrition North program, which was picking and choosing which communities received subsidies based on historical levels of support. Many communities that should have qualified for subsidies received next to nothing or nothing at all. The government has also insisted that all is well with this program and that somehow the average cost of food for the north, based on the northern food basket, has decreased. However, we know that the costs for food in northern regions increased by 2.5% last year.

When I stop at a grocery store, whether it is in Labrador, as I did this weekend, or the territories, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, or Nunavut, shoppers are always telling me that there is increasing price gouging and that the food subsidies are not being fully passed on to the consumer. I am explaining this in the House today because it is another situation of where people in the north are giving the government one message, and the government is sending back a different message and not listening. That is the conclusion that the Auditor General reached in his report. I am using this as an example because he quantified the fact that checks and balances were not in place, and that the purpose of the program was not meeting the needs of the people in the north, regardless of the fact the government continues to say that it is.

In addition to the bill we have before us today, this past year the government pushed through a number of other bills in the House on behalf of first nations people that were very contentious. When it brought forward a bill on devolution in the Northwest Territories, we know that process was started by previous Liberal governments. The Liberal Party has had a long history of working with aboriginal people and the territories to give them greater autonomy over their lands and territories.

• (1305)

When we dealt with the NWT devolutions, the bill included very sweeping changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, which served to muzzle the voices of aboriginal governments in the Northwest Territories. What it did, in essence, was to give the federal minister greater authority to make decisions in the territory, which does nothing to empower northern Canadians, aboriginal governments, and residents there. Instead, we heard that territorial governments were acting on the will of their constituents, and therefore they should be the ones making their own decisions on issues that will affect the future of their territory, based on their own treaty agreements that they have achieved.

As I will outline shortly, Bill S-6 is taking the same approach that we saw in the bill on devolution for the Northwest Territories. It is a top-down, Ottawa-centred approach to dealing with northerners, especially those in the territories. I have been troubled when I have listened to Canadians in Nunavut and the Yukon speak about how these bills would impact negatively on the work they do and on their region.

With regard to the proposed changes to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, known as YESAA, some background information is important to understand. I want to point out that the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act was established under the Umbrella Final Agreement between the Government of Canada, the Yukon government, and the Yukon

first nations. The act set out an assessment process for all lands in the Yukon.

Responsibility for the management of that land and the resources was devolved from the federal government to the Yukon government in 2003. That is when it was given this authority under what was then a federal Liberal government. I want to point that out because the goodwill that has been built with first nations by previous Liberal governments is being eroded by the current government, in passing legislation in the House that does not respect the rights of first nations, aboriginal governments, and the people in the territories.

The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act was passed, as I said, in 2003. It was done under the terms of the UFA, as I have already pointed out, the Umbrella Final Agreement. It was a comprehensive review of the act by the parties to the agreement. It was required at that time by the parties, including the Yukon first nations, the Yukon itself, and the Government of Canada, that there would be a review of this within five years of the act becoming law.

That review was completed in March 2012, and at the time the Council of Yukon First Nations, and other groups, voiced many concerns over the government disregarding their input into the review, and subsequently into the finalized documentation. The federal government ignored those concerns, which has left us with the bill before us today in the House of Commons.

My party has always supported accessing resource wealth in the north when it is done right. History has demonstrated that developments can find a way to be environmentally conscience and successful, while also finding trilateral support among aboriginal, territorial, and federal governments, as well as local communities. There is no reason why this cannot continue. Indeed, the only way to move forward with resource development is to work together, not against each other.

This is not just a moral obligation, but I feel it is a legal obligation as well, particularly in regions like the Yukon, which are subject to comprehensive land claim agreements. It is important to remember that the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, which this bill would significantly amend, is strictly linked with the 11 Yukon first nation claims and final agreements. We cannot ignore that fact. Unfortunately, despite spending years of working with Yukon first nations on a comprehensive review of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, the federal government blindsided them earlier this year with a number of key changes that are contained in this bill and were not discussed throughout the process.

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• (1310)

The minister says there have been extensive consultations, and maybe there were on some aspects of this legislation. However, we know that through Bill S-6, the government is now proposing new measures without having properly consulted, and that has been the opinion of Yukon first nations groups and Yukoners as well. These areas include giving sweeping powers for the federal minister to issue binding policy direction to the assessment board, unilaterally handing over powers to a territorial minister without the consent of first nations, allowing government to approve the renewal or amendment of permits and licences for projects without assessment by YESAA, and newly establishing unrealistic timelines for assessments.

Northerners are tired of the federal government trying to retain the final say on important matters that affect their own region. Just as territorial administrations cannot and should not be based out of Ottawa, the time has passed for this level of interference and the hands-on approach by the minister. The assessment board ultimately loses its decision-making authority, and that leaves the door open for the minister to repeatedly interfere with binding policy decisions. This is what first nations are objecting to.

This bill includes the ability for the federal minister to delegate binding policy direction to a territorial minister, which gives the impression of local engagement. It still means that local communities and aboriginal governments may not be included in the decision-making process. Again, this is wrong.

It is not sound policy for the government to allow permits and licences to be approved or renewed without any secondary assessments. These renewals could seriously impact the environment, regional economies, and local communities. It fails to recognize that, over time, changes may occur to climate, wildlife populations, technology advancement, and so on.

It is important that we maintain the timely reviews that had been a part of the current process. Local stakeholders have been vocal on this point, and I fully agree with their rationale. I have had many emails and letters from people in the area who are opposed to these recommendations that have been added to the bill at this late date. They feel it has been done with no consultation.

The imposition of new timelines has left many people in the Yukon confused over the approach being taken by government. They feel that the current process for lower level assessments has already been quick and efficient, and, for larger projects, it is only reasonable for those assessments to take a little longer. Rushing assessments in this process will only lead the board to make rash decisions in its goal of meeting these new arbitrary deadlines.

Yukoners believe in working together toward a successful territory, which includes all aboriginal governments, territorial governments, businesses, and developers. Unfortunately, the major changes proposed in this bill will serve to further unravel an already damaged relationship between many of these key stakeholders and the federal government.

Yukoners have publicly stated their pride in the effectiveness of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. It was a very proud moment in their history when they were able to

achieve that. They are left wondering why the federal government has decided to take unilateral steps to try to fix a system that is not broken. While doing this, it has ignored local communities and aboriginal governments, thinking that this is the best way to continue developing the north. However, we know that is not the case.

We have seen ongoing lawsuits around the lack of adequate consultation in certain regions, which have blocked some developments from proceeding, and resource revenues have been slowed dramatically. If the government persists in ramming these changes through, it will be creating more legal uncertainty and jeopardizing development in the territory.

Time and again, the courts have sided with aboriginal people regarding constitutionally required consultation, yet the Conservative government has continued to wilfully ignore aboriginal rights and pursued a pattern of litigation rather than consultation.

• (1315)

The Council of Yukon First Nations has made it public that the passing of the legislation before us would lead it to consider legal action. On the other side, business and developers have also found the current unilateral moves by the government to be negative for their advancement. They understand the requirement to ensure that the aboriginal governments and communities have a prominent seat at the table. The government should not have to be told this by developers.

We have seen many major projects move forward in the north and in the territories because of good relationships between aboriginal and first nations and the business community. However, the government would now play interference and be blocking a system of negotiation and decision-making that is already working.

The approach that the government is now taking will lead to unnecessary delays, increased costs, and the further erosion of trust, and because of Bill S-6, the mistrust of the people of the north with the federal government will become even more entrenched.

We must return to the original respectful and collaborative partnership with our aboriginal communities, including the recognition of their inherent and treaty rights.

In Nunavut, we see the government proposing changes to the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, which would not benefit the territory. The allowing of "life-of-project" water licences in the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act would not allow for reassessments should the need arise, which is very important.

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We are in an ever-changing society. The northern regions, despite what the Minister of the Environment claims, are dealing with traumatic factors relating to climate change. There should always be opportunity for reassessment by the people in these areas when it comes to these particular licenses that are being issued today, especially if significant changes to a project should occur or there are other defining factors that could affect the project or the previous decision made by the people of Nunavut.

The introduction of timelines for a water licence review is very troubling to the people of Nunavut and to many others who would be affected. As it is with the Yukon portion of the bill, the timelines would rush assessors and projects into finishing reviews that in all likelihood would require additional time. The measure would essentially invoke closure on an important review process.

We have seen the current Conservative government invoke closure on many bills in the House when it has not wanted to continue debate. Again, the Conservatives would bring forward measures that could invoke closure on very important reviews that should be ongoing by the first nation communities that are affected.

We need to ask and understand why these reviews take the time they currently do. What would we lose by dramatically cutting the length of time available for a review? I am not satisfied that the government has made the case for this or justified it appropriately.

The government is proposing sweeping changes in Bill S-6, which local aboriginal governments and communities do not want enacted and who have been vocal about the negative impact these changes would have on the future of Nunavut and Yukon Territory. However, instead of listening to these concerned groups, as is legally mandated, the government has repeatedly refused to make any changes or include any stakeholders in the review process. This is disrespectful of the territories and its people.

I would strongly encourage the government to make sweeping changes to the bill if it is seeking support from the House. There is an opportunity here for the government to make the appropriate changes and to do so in respect of the aboriginal people and the people of Yukon Territory who would be impacted by the bill. I encourage the Conservatives to build good relations with our first nations people and work co-operatively with them.

• (1320)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, whom you quickly confused with being from the Yukon but who is from Labrador, for her remarks today.

I have two questions for her. First, there has already been testimony and a study of this in the Senate. We have heard from witnesses there. The Senate concluded that the bill ought to move forward, and that was done with Liberal senators, or Senate Liberals, or whatever they are calling themselves now. The Senate had the opportunity to hear the evidence, which we will have an opportunity to do at second reading. When it goes to committee, we will have the opportunity to hear from Yukoners so that we can make an assessment based on all opinions, not just a narrow, focused opinion.

The Senate had that opportunity, and the member's colleagues, the Liberal senators, moved this bill forward. I wonder if she is positing then that they did not do their job right. If that is the case, my

concluding question for her is if she will support travel to the Yukon so that we can hear all sides of this issue in our territory from the great people of Yukon. We can get a balanced perspective of what the people's needs are on this important piece of legislation.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the legislation should have come here before it went to the Senate. It disappoints me that it was done the other way.

However, how those in the Senate vote is entirely up to them. I feel that I am entitled to vote as I feel. From the consultation that I have had with Yukoners and aboriginal groups and first nations governments in Yukon, I feel that they have a very legitimate point. These changes, which were slid into this bill unexpectedly by the government, would not do anything to enhance or benefit the ability of first nations to have control over developments in their own areas and to have adequate input.

I have always stood for good relations with our aboriginal peoples in this country. I really feel that developments move ahead and all people benefit when there is good dialogue and good relationships. The Conservative government has not fostered that. In fact, it has fuelled it by not following a process of respect and understanding.

In terms of consultation and going to Yukon, I have absolutely no issue with that. I support it 100%. In fact, we should have been in the Yukon consulting with people before this bill came to the House, instead of having the chiefs and leaders of first nations have to come here to meet with us on the day the bill was called for debate.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her presentation on this bill. Coming from a northern region, I know that she has the same concerns about protecting the people and the land from changes that they do not want, and allowing the people in the north to make valid decisions about how changes should happen. This is what is at stake here.

We are talking about a public process here. We look at the past record, where the government took the time to meet and engage with communities right across Yukon on the original bill. It had public hearings on these original bills, prior to the bill going before the House of Commons.

This is the relationship that we have now. The bill has gone through the Senate. The government has hardened its position on the bill that has been created. Now the government thinks that by going and giving people in Yukon Territory five minutes to speak to the bill, one after another in committee, and maybe giving them an hour or two for debate on it, that it is somehow going to replace the process that the government should have gone through years ago.

What does my hon. colleague think about this process, which is already flawed?

Government Orders

● (1325)

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague from the Northwest Territories that government has a responsibility to hold appropriate public consultations and to discuss changes that are coming forward in legislation with the people who are impacted.

However, I also feel that as parliamentarians who are part of a committee, we also have an obligation to do that as well. When we do that is always up for debate. I feel that consultation before legislation is always better than consultation after legislation.

The other point I want to make is that if the government is going to Yukon to consult without listening to people and without wanting to make changes to the bill, what is the point? What is the point in bringing Yukoners before a committee of people, when the majority has no interest in making changes to start with?

What I would suggest is that any consultation needs to be done with an open mind and with a level of understanding that they are going there to make things better so that changes can be made to benefit all people, and not just for the government to say that it was there. That is not the point.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my seatmate, the member for Labrador, has been in politics for in excess of two decades and has represented the interests of northern and aboriginal Canadians at three levels of government. I know that members probably find that hard to believe, that someone this youthful looking could possibly have had such a long career in politics already, but it is in fact the case.

The member is a very influential and strong voice within our caucus, bringing forward the interests of aboriginal and northern Canadians. My question for her is a general one.

The member talked about the deterioration in the relationship between northern and aboriginal Canadians and government and how there is now constant talk of lawsuits and the lack of consultation. My question for the member, based on her years of experience at all three levels of governments, is how it has come to this. How has the relationship so deteriorated? What is necessary to bring back a positive, trustful relationship?

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, trust is always earned.

What we have seen over the last couple of years is that trust is not being earned by the existing government. I will cite some examples.

We have seen the erosion of the tribunal process for aboriginal first nations in this country, a process whereby they could go and make appeals. We are seeing that process lagging behind. Why? It is because the government no longer sees first nations' concerns as a priority to be dealt with.

When we dealt with the bill on the Northwest Territories that proposed changes to resource development there and the role that aboriginal governments would play in that particular capacity, the first nations were not satisfied. They went to the government and appealed. They wanted change. They were very vocal about the change they wanted, and yet they were ignored.

Again we are seeing it happen right here in the Yukon, where first nations groups feel that these changes are not going to do anything to protect their rights.

We live in a country that has prided itself on negotiating land claim agreements and treaty rights with first nations and aboriginal people. In fact, today, in Nunatsiavut, we are celebrating. This is the celebration date for our self-government in the Inuit territory region.

These agreements are done in good faith. They should be honoured and respected in that way. There is always a way to come to consensus, but it will not happen if the willingness is not there to make it happen. What I am seeing from the government opposite is consultation on pieces that it knows are not controversial, and when it comes to pieces that are somewhat controversial, it takes the power out of the hands of first nation people. It does not consult. It just slides the changes into the legislation at the end of the day.

● (1330)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Yukon, it gives me a great deal of pride to stand here today and speak in support of Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act.

No doubt we will touch on this through some of the questions that are asked, but the member from the Western Arctic rose in the House to talk about public hearings and by implication was making the suggestion that I as a member of Parliament for Yukon have not had public consultation, simply by defining it as a public hearing. I can certainly say that since being elected in 2011, I have met with stakeholders, be those first nations or chiefs individually or as a collective group; with industry as stakeholders, or individuals from it; with government folks; and with citizens.

I heard my colleague from Labrador talking earlier in her address about talking to people in grocery stores. In small northern communities, a lot of time that is how discussions and consultations bear fruit. It is by informal discussions where we take the opportunity to meet with people. We give them the time, hear their concerns, provide them with information on the bills and things that are moving forward in Parliament, and we note their concerns and bring them forward. I have always had the opportunity to bring those concerns forward to any minister on any of the topics.

Before I begin to talk about the specifics of the bill, I want to acknowledge and thank the Yukon first nations leadership, who have come all the way to Ottawa. They have travelled very far to be here to participate and hear members of Parliament from all sides of the House speak about this important bill and the topics that we are here to debate.

I am also pleased that they recognize the importance of this legislation to first nation communities. It was great to have met with many of them this morning alongside the minister and to hear their concerns directly.

Many of those concerns I have heard through the evolution of the bill. For months now, we have had the opportunity to talk about some of the direct concerns they have and talk about some of the changes in Bill S-6 that actually are beneficial and that we have found consensus on and want to move forward with.

Government Orders

I believe the meeting was productive this morning. It is always great to hear concerns, of course, in true northern tradition and in Canadian tradition.

As the minister pointed out in the House, we may not always agree, but we always respect each other's views, and it is clear that we share the same desire for a prosperous, healthy, and sustainable territory that will benefit all Yukoners, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike.

Bill S-6 would amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, commonly referred to as YESAA, which would impact all Yukoners. For the benefit of any colleagues who may not be familiar with the legislation, YESAA governs the environmental and socio-economic assessment process in our territory. The intent of the legislation is to protect and promote the well-being of Yukon first nations persons and their communities and Yukon residents generally, as well as the interests of other Canadians.

Just as importantly, the legislation also seeks to protect the environmental and social integrity of the Yukon while fostering responsible development in the territory that reflects the values of Yukoners and respects the contributions of first nations.

When YESAA was first put in place in 2003, as required under the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement, it was considered state of the art. In concert with devolution, it has certainly served our territory well. I attribute this success to several factors.

First, YESAA respects the co-management structure of the Umbrella Final Agreement among Yukon first nations and governments of Canada and Yukon. This means that the interests of all parties are taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

In addition, the federal government provides significant funds annually to Yukon first nations government to participate in the YESAA process. Last year alone, Yukon first nations received \$1.7 million to participate in the process, and YESAA itself received \$5.7 million to conduct its important work.

Perhaps most importantly, as a result of devolution Yukoners now have greater control over their own resources and decision-making, and the impact of this control can be profound.

Yukon's unemployment rate is well below the national average. Even more impressive, our territory has had nine consecutive years of real GDP growth. That is primarily due to private sector investments, especially in the mining sector.

• (1335)

As proud as a Yukoner must be with this progress, the current system does require improvement in order to ensure that Yukon remains an attractive and competitive place for investment. However, as a result of regulatory improvements in other Canadian jurisdictions, Yukon now runs the risk of lagging behind. The premier of our territory stated, we desire to ensure that the Yukon continues to be a progressive and responsible place to invest and to do business and an even better place to live.

Bill S-6 proposes reasoned and practical amendments to YESAA following nearly seven years of consultation. These amendments would not only ensure the territory remains competitive in comparison with other jurisdictions in Canada but would also strengthen environmental protection standards.

Under YESAA currently, every single project that requires permitting in Yukon must go through an assessment before a project receives the green light to proceed, including changes to existing projects. This includes everything from a septic tank to a winter road to subdivisions to larger projects like placer mining or projects in copper, gold, and ore mines.

The legislation would also establish the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, or YESAB, which is responsible for conducting these assessments and providing recommendations that would eliminate or mitigate significant adverse effects. Depending upon the proposed project's size, type, and complexity, an assessment can take place at three different levels.

The first is the designated office evaluation. The majority of assessments are conducted in the six community-based designated offices, which that are located in Dawson City, Haines Junction, Mayo, Teslin, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse.

The second process can be an executive committee screening. The executive committee of the board will assess larger projects that are submitted to it directly or are referred to it by a designated office.

Third is review by a panel of the board. A panel of the board may be established to assess projects that, for instance, have the potential to have significant adverse effects, are likely to cause significant public concern, or involve the use of controversial technology.

Thus far, a panel review has never taken place in Yukon.

In 2013 and 2014, a total of 165 projects were submitted for assessment; of those, 163 were reviewed by a designated office and two were subject to an executive committee screening. Many of these projects were related to community infrastructure projects, such as roads, residential development, water, and waste sites.

In 2013-14, the Whitehorse designated office, as an example, assessed 26 projects. Land development made up approximately half of the submissions, followed by utility, which made up a quarter of the submissions. Other submissions were related to solid and contaminated waste, geotechnical investigations, forestry, and scientific research. The remaining projects were related to industrial and commercial mining or energy projects.

Unfortunately, it seems as though some confusion has arisen with respect to some of these amendments. Let me deal with a couple of these head-on.

Government Orders

Amendments in Bill S-6 would not in any detract from the board's independence. YESAB would remain an impartial and independent arm's-length entity responsible for making recommendations to decision bodies. A decision body is set out in the legislation and can be a federal, territorial, or first nation or agency that regulates and permits the proposed activity. A decision body can accept, reject, or vary a YESAB recommendation. It would not change the fact that YESAB is a co-managed process wherein first nation participation is guaranteed through having one of three members on the executive committee and three of seven members of the YESA Board, nor does anything in Bill S-6 deviate from the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement or infringe upon aboriginal or treaty rights.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development addressed this concern this morning when he spoke to the committee. He said that there is absolutely no justification for this concern, because the Yukon umbrella agreement continues to remain the law of the land.

First nation rights are not diminished at all. In fact, the protection for these rights may be found in five legally constituted documents of Canada: the Constitution, under section 35; the Yukon umbrella agreement; the Yukon First Nations Land Claims Settlement Act; the Yukon devolution transfer agreement; and the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act itself.

● (1340)

This legislation is designed to make common sense amendments to the legislation that arose out of the five-year review of YESAA mandated under the Umbrella Final Agreement. One such amendment would be that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act of 2012 would no longer apply in the Yukon. This would ensure that YESAA, which has many of the same features as the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act of 2012 but was designed especially for the Yukon, would be the only environmental assessment process to apply in our territory.

Another amendment stemming from the five-year review was also to allow a member whose term has expired and who is participating in an executive committee screening or review of a panel or board to continue to act as a member for the purpose of completing the screening or review until the documents are issued.

At the same time, it would strengthen environmental protection by ensuring that designated offices are obligated to consider the need for effects monitoring when conducting an evaluation. It would also allow decision bodies, including first nations, to impose more stringent terms and conditions than required by a YESAA recommendation. Previously, decision bodies could only accept or reject recommendations; now they would be able to modify them by making conditions more stringent.

It would also reduce duplication for project reviews by implementing the principle of a one project, one assessment timeline and would implement several amendments arising out of our government's action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes. It would introduce beginning-to-end time limits for environmental assessments consistent with time limits effective in the Northwest Territories and under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act of 2012.

According to the board's annual report, among the designated offices' evaluations, the median number of days spent in the adequacy stage equalled 19 and the median number of days in the seeking views and information stage equalled 20. The total median number of days it took to complete an assessment in 2013-2014 from proposal submitted to recommendation sent, including proponent time, was 55 days. Clearly, in many instances the board is already doing great work in meeting all of these timelines. This is also something that we heard clearly through the consultations.

However, that is not always the case, and Bill S-6 is designed to ensure that all projects are subject to legislated beginning-to-end timelines to ensure consistency across jurisdictions and to provide greater certainty to proponents, aboriginal groups, and governments. This amendment received significant support from Clynton Nauman, president and CEO at Alexco. When he testified at a committee hearing of the Senate, he said:

We support time limits for both the adequacy and assessment stages of the YESAA process. I can give a simple example of Alexco's experience. Over the past five years, Alexco has undergone the environmental assessment process — the YESAA process — four times, specifically for mine development and mine operations purposes.

Another amendment would ensure that approved projects that have not been modified do not need to go through a new environmental assessment for a licence or a permit renewal unless they undergo a significant change. For example, mining projects already granted approval are currently subject to new environmental assessment simply because a water licence or a land authorization needs to be renewed, even where there has been no change at all to the project. This has created an uncertain investment climate and generates significant additional work for all parties involved.

There would be an ability for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to provide policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board in order to ensure a common understanding between the government and the board. I would like to emphasize that this legislation specifically states that this power could not be used to influence a decision on a project or restrict or expand the powers of the board. That point is worth reiterating: this part of the legislation would not be used to influence a decision on a project or to restrict or expand the powers of the board.

Finally, the ability of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to delegate certain powers under YESAA to the territorial government supports our northern strategy of improving the devolution of northern governance.

Government Orders

I want to also point out that the amendments we see in the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act have been enriched by Yukoners' input. The Council of Yukon First Nations and other aboriginal groups were deeply involved in the development of the original YESAA, which came into effect in 2003. They were active participants in the five-year review process that informed the current legislative proposals. The development of the terms of reference for the five-year review began in December 2006 and was completed in April 2008, at which time the review commenced. The cost of the review was just over \$650,000, not including federal official time and resources over the five-year review process.

● (1345)

In December 2012, after the completion of the five-year review, the passage of the amendments to CEAA and the announcement of the action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes, the Yukon government requested additional amendments to YESAA to ensure consistency across all regimes, including policy direction and the authority to delegate powers to the territorial minister.

While these amendments were not discussed as part of the five-year review, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada consulted with Yukon first nations in 2013 and 2014. The first draft of Bill S-6 was shared with the Yukon first nations for review and comment in May and June 2013. Formal consultation sessions followed, which provided the opportunity for first nations to learn about the proposed amendments, voice their concerns, and make recommendations on how to improve the proposals.

Feedback that was received informed a subsequent draft of the legislation, which was shared with first nations in February 2014. More consultations and opportunities for written feedback followed. I can confirm that continued opportunities for consultation and written feedback are ongoing to the present day. While there are some significant areas of disagreement, it does not mean that consultation was not done or was inadequate. As the minister articulated, it is Canada's belief that it met its duty to consult and that it accommodated where appropriate.

Input received helped to shape the current version of the bill. For example, the legislation was amended at the request of Yukon first nations to explicitly require that the interests of first nations be taken into consideration when conducting an assessment of a project. Funding has been made available to aboriginal groups each step of the way to ensure that they could participate in the many consultations that were held. In addition to this extensive process, aboriginal groups and Yukoners are also participating in the parliamentary review which is currently under way.

At this point, I would strongly urge the New Democratic Party to support the call I have made to take the committee to the Yukon. I was happy to hear that the Liberal Party has confirmed its support for the committee to travel to the Yukon and get input from the people in the territory on exactly what they would like to do. I hope that the past year-long practice of the NDP obstructing committee travel ceases for the purpose of this important piece of legislation.

The bill has, of course, been subject to significant debate already in the Senate, and the Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources heard from numerous witnesses from the Yukon. At the end of the study in the Senate, both

Conservative and Liberal senators endorsed the bill unanimously. The Senate committee has recognized the importance of the bill for development and investment in the Yukon. In fact, Liberal Senator Grant Mitchell, the opposition critic on the bill, spoke in favour of the bill, stating:

There has been, I think, quite adequate consultation. It's complicated up there in these territories. You have federal, territorial and Aboriginal interests. [...] So it is very complex, and the fundamental core of this bill gets to that and is an effort to make all of that better and to make processes in the North better.

I think that we will find, after the process of reviewing this bill in committee, coming out and summarizing it in third reading, that in fact this bill will have a very good chance of accomplishing what it has set out to accomplish.

The rhetoric from the NDP suggesting that this is supported by just the Conservatives is not factual.

Now that the bill has passed the Senate, it will be reviewed in the House of Commons, and Yukoners will have one more opportunity to provide input to this bill at the House committee. Again, I am urging the committee to travel to the Yukon to hear directly from Yukoners. I invite all Yukoners, as I always have, to provide written comments, to reach out to my office if they would like to learn more about the bill, to talk to me, and to express their concerns. Indeed, on a daily basis, I receive comments from the territory that are compiled, assessed, and reported directly back to the minister. That will be ongoing, in my role and responsibility as Yukon's member of Parliament.

I hope that we can collectively move together to review this piece of legislation with a balanced approach, considering all of the complexities and diversified interests that exist in the territory, with the main objective that I outlined at the beginning of my speech, for a better Yukon and a strong environmental process that respects all Yukoners' needs, including those of our first nations.

I would like to thank them once again for coming to Ottawa to participate in this very important debate.

● (1350)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by the member for Yukon. I want to indicate clearly in this House that the New Democrats have signalled, through our House leader, our interest in travelling to the Yukon. We will leave it to the House leaders to sort out whether that will happen.

Government Orders

The member talked about consultations with first nations. A myth has been put out there that first nations have been consulted over the past seven years. The Yukon first nations have said that is not true, that they were not consulted on the amendments to YESAA under Bill S-6, and that many of these issues were never raised with them. The amendments of concern include giving binding policy direction to the board, handing powers over to the Yukon, imposing maximum timelines for assessments, and not requiring assessments when a project is renewed or being amended.

When we talk about consultation, that means providing all of the necessary information in a timely fashion to all of the parties. Therefore, I wonder if this member would clarify for the House if he feels that the Yukon first nations were given sufficient information and sufficient time to adequately consider the amendments that are proposed.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, there has been a bit of confusion around this topic. Bill S-6 incorporates a good portion of the legislative review. The five-year review process that stretched on to seven years formed the basis for a good portion of the legislation.

What was confusing is that there are four pieces, which I acknowledged in my speech, that were not part of that five-year review. Therefore, there are four concerns that Yukon first nations are concerned about and have taken umbrage with. It is those four pieces alone that they are suggesting they were not adequately consulted on. However, they are not suggesting that the five-year/seven-year review was not an adequate consultation, that they did not provide input into that, or that those pieces did not form portions of this legislation, because they do. They are suggesting that they were not adequately consulted on the four pieces they are concerned about. The minister dealt with that directly. In a clear fashion, he outlined the amount of consultation that occurred. It is the minister's and Canada's belief that they were adequately consulted on that.

In my opinion, as Yukon's member of Parliament, that process is not yet complete. We still have committee, and we still have every opportunity between now and then to hear their concerns and to address them effectively.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Yukon for his remarks today. I know he wants to ensure that we have the strongest working relationships we can with our first nations and aboriginal governments across Canada. I am sure he expects to ensure that the government has that same good relationship with those groups in his riding.

However, I have heard from, I think it is 12 particular first nations groups in the Yukon, who are not supportive of the legislation that the government opposite is bringing forward right now. They want some changes made. There are four pieces in this bill that they were not consulted on, that they feel are infringing on their rights, and that are removing rights and powers they had under previous land claim and treaty agreements.

They feel they have lost a relationship of trust with the government over this. That is because during the consultation process, all of the other changes in the bill were developed and decided upon through a process of discussion, understanding, and consensus. There are four pieces in this bill that were added by the government opposite, which give power to the minister and removes

that power from first nations governments. They are not supportive of them, and they were not appropriately consulted.

I would ask the member opposite how he can stand and support a bill that does not afford rights, responsibilities, and respect to the very people that he represents?

• (1355)

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, clearly we have a disagreement on the consultation process.

The minister outlined quite clearly that there was consultation that in fact occurred. Over \$100,000 was provided in a one-year period to consult on these four amendments that they have a concern about.

There were letters. I have copies of them. I clearly saw an exchange, back and forth, over a one-year period, where questions were posed, embargoed legislation was provided so they could review it, look at it, and make comment on it. They made comment. They asked questions, and they raised these concerns. The minister replied, trying to assure them that their concerns were heard and were being met by this legislation.

That was done over a one-year period, with financial support to allow them to do that. The point is not that there was not consultation. The point is that there is not agreement on that point of consultation.

As the minister clearly stated, if it can be absolutely demonstrated that there is anything that breaches the Umbrella Final Agreement, all the government needs to see is a clear demonstration of that. If that is demonstrated, then we can look at the amendments. Otherwise, consultation has occurred. Funding support was provided for that consultation. What we have is a disagreement. It does not mean that people were ignored simply because we do not agree or that we they were not consulted. It only means that we have reached a disagreement.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Yukon for his work on this, and for the job he does representing the views of his constituents in the House.

I want the member to talk a bit about how Yukon was seen as a leader in terms of its regulatory processes after devolution, and that the mining sector and the natural resources sector look to Yukon and compare it favourably to the rest of the regimes across the country.

Could the member perhaps talk about how that has changed over the last few years, and how we need to modernize Yukon's regulatory environment so we can provide certainty to the mining and natural resource sector in that territory going forward?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the parliamentary secretary. He has been up in the north. He has travelled in our territories, dealing with this file and the NWT devolution.

Statements by Members

This is an important question. As I said in my speech, the Yukon was very proud of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. We had nation-leading legislation. We were taking full advantage of that, with nine consecutive years of GDP growth and support in our mining industry.

What happened is that as changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act came into play, as the NWT devolution act moved forward, the Yukon started lagging behind. It was clear to industry. It was clear to investors. It was clear to the Yukon government. We went from having one of the best environmental review processes to one of the worst in the country, and it was starting to be noticed in our economic development and our opportunities moving forward.

All we are asking is that we have parity, equality, so that the Yukon stands a fighting chance in a competitive market, and at the same time ensures environmental integrity and socio-economic integrity. I think we have achieved that with this bill. We look forward to continuing talking and working with Yukoners, to make it the best piece of legislation that we can.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a special affinity for the Yukon.

I spent six years in Watson Lake. The first thing I noticed when I got there was that outside of town, it was impossible to do anything or carry out any sort of project because of the ongoing territorial disputes.

In the years that I spent there, I saw the local community and the aboriginal people come to some sort of consensus on how to communicate. When I hear the minister say that if some people do not agree with some of the amendments and there is no consensus, then there is always the courts, I wonder whether that is a step backward.

Will this bill end up bringing disputes back before the courts?

●(1400)

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that is the intention or the interest of our government, and clearly not of the minister.

The minister said that we have done the consultation. We have adequately consulted. The minister indicated that he has heard their point of view, but he feels the concerns they have raised have been met by other terms and points that are embedded in the legislation.

He clearly invited the Yukon first nations in particular to provide comment, and I have been present when he has invited them, and to provide absolute clear evidence that there is something different than what we are suggesting. If that is the case, he is prepared to look at that, which is obviously open and in the spirit of consultation.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

42 DIVISION COMMUNITY POLICE LIAISON COMMITTEE

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate 42 Division's Community Police Liaison Committee on its very successful third annual crime prevention conference. This year's theme was the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

I was very pleased to see so many youth in attendance, learning about the issues of peer pressure, addictions and how to make smart choices, as well as to hear from someone who, after making the wrong decisions in life, had turned their life around. It was also inspiring to hear from Canadian Olympic athlete, Ms. Sarah Bonikowsky, on her motivational presentation and her own personal road to success.

The highlight of the evening was congratulating over 30 recipients, made up of students, volunteers, law enforcement and board members, on recognition of their community service.

I hope all members will join me in the House in congratulating 42 Division's Community Police Liaison Committee on a successful conference and its dedication to serving our community in Scarborough by making it a safer place to live, work and play.

* * *

WORLD AIDS DAY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of World AIDS Day, we remember the countless victims of the AIDS epidemic, while paying tribute to the many who have devoted their professional work to advancement in treating HIV-AIDS, like Dr. Julio Montaner, whose groundbreaking "treatment as prevention" method has helped turn the tide on the global fight against HIV-AIDS.

As we celebrate the many medical advances in combatting AIDS worldwide, it is strangely ironic that on this day, Bill C-2 also comes back to the House. This is the government's anti-safe injection site bill. If passed as written, this bill has the potential to undo a decade's worth of stemming the spread of HIV and hepatitis C among injection drug users. Research has clearly demonstrated that harm reduction prevents the spread of HIV-AIDS, and we in the NDP will continue to uphold the rights of individuals to health and well-being.

On this World AIDS Day, we salute the many organizations and advocates who work tirelessly for a world free of AIDS, both in Canada and globally.

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HEPATITIS C

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring attention to the serious health issue of hepatitis C, an infectious disease that, over time, causes significant liver damage, leading to liver transplantation or death.

Unlike other forms of hepatitis, there is no vaccine for hep C. It is estimated that several hundred thousand Canadians are living with hepatitis C and do not even know it, the bulk of them having been born between 1945 and 1975. Prior to the 1990s, they may have contracted the disease through infected blood transfusions or organ transplants, or the use of unsterilized needles or medical equipment.

Thankfully, recent clinical trials indicate that hepatitis C can now be completely cured with new oral therapies, but one needs to be diagnosed and treated early. It is a worthy discussion that anyone should have with their physician, especially if they are in their 40s through to their 60s. For good liver health, it is worth getting this checked out.

* * *

WORLD AIDS DAY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World AIDS Day. AIDS is the world's leading infectious disease killer. The WHO reports 39 million deaths since 1981.

Today, 35 million people live with HIV, mostly in low and middle-income countries. Of those, 24.7 million live in sub-Saharan Africa alone. Some 3.2 million with AIDS are children under 15.

Despite advances in science and significant efforts by the global health community, most people with or at risk for HIV have no access to prevention, care or treatment. While progress has been made in preventing mother-to-child transmission, there is still no cure.

British Columbia plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of HIV-AIDS. The HAART program, available to every positive resident in B.C., has seen a drastic drop in the number of new infections annually. The world calls B.C.'s program "treatment as prevention", since after the second dose, the virus is absent from the blood stream and cannot be passed on.

China, Brazil, the U.K. and Austria have adopted B.C.'s program, yet Canada's federal government has yet to acknowledge its existence.

* * *

●(1405)

CHILLIWACK FOOD MOB

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to highlight an important event taking place in my riding: Chilliwack's first ever food mob.

Like the cash mobs that started in late 2011, a food mob uses social media to encourage individuals to arrive at a set location at a specific date and time. Unlike a cash mob, where participants are encouraged to spend cash to support a local business, participants in a food mob are encouraged to make a donation of a non-perishable food item.

The whole idea of a food mob is the brainchild of Chris Reitsma, who became concerned when he learned that the shelves at the Salvation Army Food Bank were nearly empty. Chris and others want to harness the power of social media to mobilize the entire community to address this pressing need.

Statements by Members

There are two ways to help. The first is to make a donation of a non-perishable food item at the Salvation Army Food Bank warehouse in Chilliwack, on Saturday December 13, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The second is to spread the word of the food mob on Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Together, in the spirit of the season, I encourage those who are able to give and make this a great Christmas for everyone.

* * *

[Translation]

UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL CARABINS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the Percival-Molson stadium in Montreal was host to a sporting event that filled me and all Montrealers with pride.

At the end of a breathtaking game, the Université de Montréal Carabins came away with the Vanier Cup for the first time in their history. The Vanier Cup is awarded to the best university football team in the country. Throughout the dramatic game, the players from both teams, the Carabins and the Marauders, showed courage and determination that should inspire us all.

For the Carabins, Saturday's victory marks the end of a remarkable season and exceptional playoffs. The teamwork by the players and trainers together was the recipe for their success.

On behalf of myself and all Montrealers I want to congratulate the Carabins.

Go Carabins!

* * *

[English]

SPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members should get their seats now. There is a chance to float in zero gravity, to experience weightlessness, the same feeling Astronaut Chris Hadfield felt on the ISS.

Yes, indeed, in second quarter 2015, these affordable zero gravity flights, the most inexpensive in the world, will be available in Nipissing—Timiskaming right from the airport in North Bay in a modified Airbus 340.

The international tour will include several other locations. North Bay is the sole Canadian location.

In March, Swiss Space Systems, S3, will partner with Canadore Aviation to test and launch the sub-orbital satellites in our region. This is an opportunity to market the company as well as generate interest in space.

Statements by Members

Our government encourages private-public partnerships and private sector growth in the Canadian space industry.

I am proud to be a member of a government that is providing great opportunities like this game changer for my region. It is because of our government that Nipissing—Timiskaming, in fact North Bay, is taking off.

* * *

2014 GREY CUP

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a football game we saw yesterday. My heart is still palpitating from those final coronary-inducing moments.

I want to congratulate our Calgary Stampeders for its 2014 Grey Cup win, a hard-fought win over the tough and gritty Hamilton Ticats.

Like many football fans yesterday, I was glued to my screen, except I was waiting to board a plane to Ottawa. When we were sitting at the gate, I do not think there were very many passengers on that plane who had their phones turned to airplane mode yet, because as the final seconds ticked off, there was this huge cheer of victory.

Our hats are off to both teams for their amazing accomplishments and also for providing us with a really thrilling football game.

I want to commend Bo Levi who was magical with 10 consecutive completions. Tomorrow, we will get together in Calgary's Olympic Plaza to give these returning heroes a grand rally.

We are very proud of them. Good work, Stampeders.

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● (1410)

CORNER GAS: THE MOVIE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hear there actually is a lot going on in Dog River, Canada's favourite fictional small town.

Tonight marks the Ottawa premiere of *Corner Gas: The Movie*, after a super fan-based Kickstarter-funded debut in Saskatoon.

I am delighted to share that the entire cast of *Corner Gas* is returning after their six amazing seasons of the show. It all began with Brent's first words, "Want me to fill it up?"

People from all walks of life have connected with the characters, which is what makes *Corner Gas* so popular, including fans in more than 20 countries.

Canadian star, Lorne Cardinal, or as fans know him, Davis Quinton, said in Saskatoon, "The audience loved it. They laughed where they were supposed to, teared up where they were supposed to, and gave a standing ovation at the end".

I invite all of my colleagues in this place to join me tonight at the showing to find out what is going on for Brent, Lacey, Hank, Davis, Karen, Wanda, Emma and, of course, Oscar.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a Canadian, I was very proud this weekend to see Canada's continued leadership in the fight to save the lives of mothers and children in the developing world.

This past weekend, as la Francophonie elected a Canadian to be its Secretary-General, Michaëlle Jean, our Prime Minister and the Minister for International Development announced crucial vaccinations and life-saving nutrition improvements.

Organizations like Micronutrient Initiative work on Canada's contribution that will help deliver and administer 400 million vitamin A and zinc supplements per year to children under the age of five, and increase the production of iodized salt to reach at least 120 million people per year.

As the Prime Minister noted, "In Canada, our newborns and children do not face death from malnutrition. In 2014, we have the means to prevent so many needless deaths."

This government can and will continue to fight for the many mothers and children throughout the developing world. It is because of our Prime Minister's dedication and commitment to saving the lives of mothers and children worldwide, that Canada is continuing in its global leadership and saving the lives of women, mothers and children globally.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHAËLLE JEAN

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the 15th summit of la Francophonie in Dakar, heads of states and of governments that belong to the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie officially chose Michaëlle Jean as secretary general. Canadians, especially francophones across Canada and Canadians of Haitian origin, are delighted with this appointment.

Ms. Jean is the first woman, and also the first person from outside Africa, to hold this position. Her appointment will without a doubt deeply mark the course of la Francophonie for decades to come.

The new secretary general is adamant that she will give a voice to women and youth in order to increase equality and solidarity within la Francophonie and to bolster its economic footing.

In the global political landscape troubled by incidents of religious fundamentalism, the appointment of this strong woman, who is inspired by the core values of freedom, equality and social justice, is a powerful symbol and gives hope for the future of women and democracy.

Statements by Members

[English]

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I was happy to engage in debate on Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act. This bill is designed to help move Yukon along and invest in resource and development projects where they are still safe for the environment and community.

This legislation touches on every piece of a Yukoner's life, from community development, roads, recreational centres, and housing developments to agricultural projects, and small and large-scale development. Not only are these critical community developments important for the fundamental health and well-being of Yukoners, they are also an important source of jobs and income.

Yukon is definitely proud to do its part in the nation by contributing to our development and growth, by supporting our communities and resource projects that protect our environment. This government understands that those two things are not mutually exclusive.

While we move forward studying this important piece of legislation, I look forward to getting support from the opposition to bring this issue right to our territory to hear from the Yukon people on how we could best make this a great piece of legislation for our future.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHAËLLE JEAN

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Dakar, the heads of member states of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie chose a Haitian-born Canadian, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, to become the next secretary general of la Francophonie.

Ms. Jean was the governor general of Canada from 2005 to 2010, and the UNESCO special envoy for Haiti after the earthquake on January 12, 2010. She has also been the chancellor of the University of Ottawa since February 1, 2012.

The OIF has 57 member states and 23 observer countries and represents 900 million men, women and children who speak the French language. Our worldwide francophone and francophile community is constantly becoming bigger and more diverse.

Ms. Jean will be able to showcase that diversity. She will also be able to expand the role that women and children play in our communities. Lastly, she will be able to increase the influence of La Francophonie in the economic development of nations.

Bravo Michaëlle. As your member of Parliament and on behalf of my colleagues, I want to extend my sincere congratulations and wish you a successful term in this new role.

● (1415)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families in my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry have to make decisions every day on how best to plan for their future, be it education for their children, retirement, or how to make ends meet. That is why our Conservative government continues to cut taxes for Canadian families.

Every family in my riding will stand to benefit from our latest tax breaks, including the increase and expansion of the universal child care benefit to nearly \$2,000 per year for every child under the age of 6, and \$720 for every child between the ages of 6 and 17. While we are giving benefits directly to families, the NDP and Liberals have said that they not only oppose these benefits but would also put the money into the hands of big government bureaucracies.

Our government trusts Canadians to spend and save their own earnings based on their own priorities. The Liberal leader has already pledged to reverse family tax cuts, forcing all families with children to pay more. That is his plan. Our plan is to help every family with children by putting more money into their pockets.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Rankin Inlet do not need to deal with a lawsuit by their own member of Parliament, but that is what counts as representation from a Conservative member of Parliament.

The Minister of the Environment's first response, when she heard about people eating out of the dump, was not to provide help. We heard her first response, which was to repeatedly shout in the House that the story was not true.

The Auditor General's review of Nutrition North showed that the program was not based on the needs of every community. There are 50 needy communities that get nothing from the program.

The Conservatives keep claiming that food prices are going down. The Auditor General says those numbers cannot be verified because "...the Department did not systematically verify the accuracy of prices reported".

It is time to end the charade. It is time for the hon. member for Nunavut to do something other than sue her constituents. Canadians deserve better.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHAËLLE JEAN

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canadians were very proud to learn that Michaëlle Jean has been appointed as the Secretary General of La Francophonie.

Oral Questions

Throughout her mandate, she will open doors, implement La Francophonie's new economic strategy and promote French—Canada's founding language—so that francophones can develop closer ties, communicate, share ideas and flourish. Canada is already firmly committed to La Francophonie as its second-largest donor and through its various initiatives, such as maternal and child health.

Michaëlle Jean is the first woman appointed as the head of the La Francophonie and is well suited to meeting this important challenge and continuing the great work of Abdou Diouf. She embodies the Canadian dream and the continuing tradition of francophone countries. She represents hope for the international francophonie thanks to her many strengths, unquestionable experience and charisma, as well as her determination to make the world a better, more united place.

Francophones and friends of the international francophonie, let us all support Michaëlle Jean in this wonderful challenge.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General was unequivocal. He said, “Veterans Affairs Canada is not adequately facilitating timely access to mental health services.”

At the same time, the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced a new six-year funding commitment, but the truth is that the funding was spread over 50 years.

In the ultimate show of cowardice, he not only fled his responsibilities, he fled the country.

Is he not ashamed of himself? Will he apologize for saying the opposite of the truth?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our continued effort to improve veterans' benefits and programs, I recommended that the Auditor General review our mental health program, and I fully accept his valuable recommendations.

I attended a very moving commemoration in Italy involving the soldiers who were there during the war. I saw them visit the graves of their comrades in the various cemeteries and I am very proud of having done that. In my world, “lest we forget” means something.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how about showing up for work and taking care of them when they are alive?

[Translation]

What cowardice. The minister is refusing to step up to his responsibilities. He—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I think that the word “cowardice” is not useful in the context of this debate and that it is actually causing disorder.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, he is refusing to own up to his shortcomings. He needs to stop hiding behind those who have served our country.

Veterans are not the only ones who think so. The Auditor General said that the minister has no way of assessing whether his strategy has worked or whether veterans' mental health needs are being met.

How can the Prime Minister continue to trust someone like the minister who so clearly comes up short?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General actually found that Veterans Affairs spends half a billion dollars each and every year with a mental health strategy in place, with valuable mental health supports like the case management one. While we have already taken action to improve the services and delivery, I can assure the member that we will move forward on the Auditor General's advice to continue to improve veterans' quality of life, as well as their families'.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after holding back \$1.1 billion in funding for veterans, the minister blatantly misled Canadians when he announced \$200 million for mental health over six years, when he knew that in truth it was for over 50 years. He knew that. While a scathing Auditor General's report was released about him and his mismanagement of his department, he showed dereliction of duty by fleeing the country.

Will the minister, for once, do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government introduced a significant improvement to mental health programs for Canadian veterans and their families right around this country. Our announcement will result in the opening of eight new sites across Canada where veterans can get military-gear mental health treatment, partnered with the Mental Health Commission and the Royal Ottawa hospital on cutting-edge mental health research, and result in the opening of seven military family resource centres for medically releasing veterans. Our work has continued from 2006, while the party opposite has consistently voted against our initiatives.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, billions of dollars have been lost by Canadian farmers since the Conservatives blindly dismantled the Wheat Board and lost the ability to get grain to market. In fact, they admit that it is their own fault. They do not even dare fine CN because they know it is their fault. Now it is being reported that the Conservatives plan to sell the headquarters, railcars, and freighters of the Wheat Board to the lowest corporate bidders, and that a private sector investor will assume control and the federal treasury will not even be reimbursed.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food at least release the financials of the Wheat Board so Canadians can know whether they are getting their money back?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing more pathetic than that question were the first three he asked here today.

Having said that, what the CWB is planning on doing is capitalizing, with a partner, from outside the country or inside the country, whoever the successful bidder is, to make itself stronger, to actually have a better footprint throughout Canada, as it has been doing. It has been buying facilities in Thunder Bay to help its exports. It is looking at an entity to come in and help it capitalize and continue to expand that strong response in western Canada.

* * *

●(1425)

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a winner.

On Wednesday—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

We are only four questions in, and I fear we are heading in a more difficult direction than I know I would certainly appreciate, so I will ask members to come to order now. Now that they have gotten it all out, we can proceed.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, now that they are on a roll, let us talk about the environment minister.

On Wednesday, we all heard her shameful response when she heard about people scavenging out of a landfill in her own riding. She shouted from her seat that it was not true. Now she is suing local authorities in Rankin Inlet for daring to say that it is.

Let us look at that style of crisis management: deny the truth, then deny that she is denying the truth, then personally attack the leaders who dare to tell the truth. Will she apologize today to the people of Rankin Inlet for disrespect, her threats, and her dishonesty?

The Speaker: Order, please.

I am sure the Leader of the Opposition knows that “dishonesty” is a word that has been deemed to be unparliamentary.

Oral Questions

I do not know if the minister wants to rise, but if not, we will move on to the hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs failed to deliver over a billion dollars in support for veterans, which was promised by the government and voted on by this Parliament. He closed eight specialized service centres across the country. Veterans are forced to wait months, even years, for the most basic mental health services. When a new program gets announced, the minister misleads veterans by claiming that it will be delivered in six years, when it will really be spread over 50 years.

There is no trust or credibility left. Will the minister simply stop the travesty and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in fact making substantial improvements that are generating better outcomes for Canadian veterans, such as increasing investment while expanding rehabilitation and retraining; faster record transfer between National Defence and Veterans Affairs; and better medical treatments, starting with better research. This is all part of our effort to make things better for Canadian veterans, especially those in greater need, and their families.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the longer the minister clings to the government, the worse they both look. His portfolio has been grossly mismanaged, and when the Auditor General blows the whistle, the minister is AWOL. Worse still, he is fighting veterans in court, denying any special obligation to respond to their needs. He insults 90-year-old veterans who have the courage to complain. He runs away from the spouse of a PTSD sufferer.

He refuses to take any responsibility, so surely the Prime Minister must. To prevent any more trouble for veterans, will the Prime Minister fire this failed minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the opposition resorts to exploiting veterans, fearmongering, and mudslinging, we on this side of the House continue to make real, tangible improvements to the mental health programs and other resources available to veterans and their families.

I do not think we need to take any lessons from that party.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs' level of incompetence is staggering.

Oral Questions

He ignored veterans' pleas and closed eight service centres; he held back a billion dollars even as the government wasted \$743 million on self-promoting ads; and he misled veterans by talking about a six-year, \$200-million program even though he knew it was for 50 years. It is clear that the minister is incapable of doing his job.

When will the Prime Minister show him the door?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I had indicated earlier, our government introduced a significant improvement to mental health programs for Canadian veterans in this country.

We have redirected resources to the front line, where they will in fact achieve the best possible outcome for our veterans. We have opened eight new sites across Canada where veterans can get mental health treatment and have partnered with the Mental Health Commission on various programs, and we are in fact working very closely with other agencies and partners to continue our good work.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's north is facing a real crisis as a result of the Conservatives' failed Nutrition North program. In Rankin Inlet, between 50 and 100 residents have been reduced to rummaging through garbage for food. Instead of helping them, their own member of Parliament is threatening them with legal action.

It is shameful. Will the minister drop this legal intimidation and come to their help, at least?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those allegations are completely false.

Let me tell the House about the record of the NDP on investments in the north. The NDP continues to vote against investments that would benefit northerners, such as the Inuvik Tuktoyaktuk highway, which would significantly reduce the cost of shipping food to the north, and investments in job training that would provide opportunities for northerners to get the training they need for good jobs. That party continues to vote against those types of investments on a regular basis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my record in the north over the past 30 years is a lot better than hers. I have no lessons to learn from the minister.

Does the Minister of the Environment really believe that being forced to pay 10 times as much for milk and to rummage through garbage is a sign that the program is working?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government introduced the Nutrition North program to ensure that people in isolated and remote communities have access to nutritious perishable food, and the results are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is answering the question. Members need to come to order and listen to the answer. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. minister has the floor now.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that they like to listen to the sound of their own voice, but they do not like to listen to others.

The results are clear: through the Nutrition North program, which will be improved by—

[*English*]

The Speaker: The minister is out of time now.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the community of Rankin Inlet deserves more than lawsuit threats from their own member of Parliament. They need to see action to fix the badly broken Nutrition North program. The Auditor General showed that there is no assurance that the subsidy is not just ending up with retailers. The numbers the government is quoting cannot be verified.

Why not replace this ill-designed program with something that actually matches the needs of northerners?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this Conservative government that introduced Nutrition North with the objective of increasing access to healthy food for people in isolated and remote communities.

The Auditor General made recommendations, which the department has agreed it will implement. This will build on the success of this program, which has already seen nutritious food being increased, in the volume of shipments, by close to 25%. The food basket for an average family of four has gone down by \$110 a month.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it sounds like we are reading different Auditor General's reports. Food prices in the north are not going down. Ask any northerner who has to purchase fresh produce, often at 10 times the price we pay here. Ask the Auditor General, who has questioned the numbers used by the Conservatives, because:

...the Department did not systematically verify the accuracy of prices reported.

Can the minister tell us how the government plans to make sure that every northerner has better access to food?

•(1435)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will continue implementing the Nutrition North program and will build on its success by implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General. What more can we do to ensure the effectiveness of a program?

The fact of the matter is that notwithstanding what the Auditor General has pointed to, the program has been successful in increasing the shipments of nutritious food to northern communities and in reducing the cost of the food basket.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now know what the Conservative plan is for the Wheat Board and what it is really all about. The board has assets. It has railcars. It has real estate. It has freighters, but the minister came to the agriculture committee and said that it did not have any assets but is just over-leveraged and in fact is almost bankrupt and does not have any money at all. Then of course, his assistant deputy minister, in the next hour of testimony, said, “Well, not really”. What really is going on is that it is not over-leveraged, and it is actually paying out of its own financials on an ongoing basis.

Clearly, the government has some sort of hidden agenda for the Wheat Board. It intends to sell it off to the lowest bidder, which would give no money back to the public treasury, and worst of all, no money—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said no such thing at committee. What I said was that the so-called assets are heavily leveraged. It has a building in Winnipeg worth some \$10 million, according to the real estate appraisals, which is on the books at \$14 million, because there have been some renovations done. It had a \$75 million computer system that is not needed anymore. It had over \$200 million worth of pension payouts that were required. All of these things start to add up. On the boats the member talked about, there was a deposit of \$20 million against a \$150-million loan.

There is a lot of money that has needed to be paid out. There was some contingency money, which has never been farmers' money. In fact, under the old Liberals, the board went to court to prove that its raison d'être was orderly marketing, not price premiums.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we witnessed last fall what really happened when it came to the rail companies and this government. The government stood tall and said it would be tough with the rail companies. The reality? Grain really did not move. The government said that the fines would be daily, and now they are going to be weekly, so \$300,000 a day has become maybe \$300,000 a week. Now we find out that they have not fined anyone yet; not one rail company has been fined.

CN did not meet its targets. The government did not hold it to account.

Oral Questions

When will the minister stand on her feet and say that the fines have been levied, the fines have been collected, and the government will stand for farmers, because right now it does not?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the enforcement process is under way, but what this government has continued to do is stand with farmers. An order in council has been extended. That is more action and more grain that is guaranteed to be moved by the rail companies. If they do not, they will face the full force of the law.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' old benefactor in Quebec is in trouble again. Apparently, in 2009, \$25,000 from SNC-Lavalin executives wound up in the coffers of the Minister of International Development's riding association.

Given that the Charbonneau commission and the Marteau squad have clearly shown that SNC-Lavalin used false names, is the Minister of State for Democratic Reform not concerned?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we were brought into office, we brought into place the Accountability Act. That was in response to the Liberal sponsorship scandal. We took the influence of big money and big unions out of the political process. We expect all those who donate to all political parties to follow the law.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is part of the administrative responsibility of government to ensure a strong Canada Elections Act. When we learned that SNC-Lavalin set up a scheme of illegal donations aimed at putting corporate money into certain political hands, I hoped the Minister of International Development would reassure the House. When he saw thousands of dollars being transferred from SNC-Lavalin's executives, did this not raise an eyebrow?

Will the minister explain if he has had any relationship with SNC-Lavalin? Has his staff met with it? What has been the nature of his relationship since the transfer of that money?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we banned corporate and union donations from the political process. We expect any individual who makes donations to political parties to follow the law. That is why we were so disappointed on this side of the House when we learned that the NDP accepted \$300,000 worth of illegal union donations and were forced by Elections Canada to return that money. Of course, they still owe the Canadian taxpayers over \$1.5 million for illegal satellite offices in provinces where they have no members of Parliament. I am sure Canadians are as anxious as we are to have that money returned.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate my hon. colleague's travels up in the upper sphere. I would like to remind him that under section 404 of the Canada Elections Act, one is not allowed to hide the identity of a contributor, particularly if it is a political donation, so we have the minister's riding association receiving \$30,000 in transfers, \$25,000 of which comes from SNC-Lavalin executives.

Here is the kicker: illegal political financing was actually included in the job description of several SNC managers. Surely my hon. colleague shares my concern about this. Will he join us in calling for an investigation?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again it was this party that actually took the influence of big money and big unions out of the political process when we banned those donations. It was one of the first things that we did when we came into office in 2006.

Unfortunately, the NDP broke that rule when it accepted \$300,000 worth of illegal union donations. This House has also found the New Democrats guilty of taking some \$1.5 million worth of funds allocated for non-partisan purposes from the taxpayers of this country and using it for partisan political purposes in areas of the country where they actually have no members of Parliament. They have yet to pay that money back to Canadian taxpayers. I hope they will do so very soon.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like veterans, serving Canadian Forces members are also being denied adequate help for their mental health needs. The department's top doctors have pleaded for action, but today dozens of positions at military bases such as Shilo and Petawawa are still vacant. An access to information request has revealed this ongoing shortage exists because the Conservatives are simply refusing to pay the going rate. It is unbelievable.

Why are the Conservatives short-changing our injured soldiers and making them wait for urgent mental health support?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike under the previous government, we have doubled the number of mental health workers who are employed by the Canadian Armed Forces. In fact, we have six uniformed psychiatrists, two who are enrolled in a four-year training program, as well as 25 uniformed social workers, 13 mental health workers, and seven chaplains.

Ninety-three per cent of the mental health positions are now filled by the Canadian Armed Forces. We are getting the job done to support our men and women in uniform, unlike the Liberals.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when Conservatives are slashing veterans' programs and old age security, Canadians rightly expect accountability for how taxpayers' money is spent. Despite this, the Auditor General has again confirmed that the current government is fiscally incompetent. Let us take the case of the 2009 auto bailout; we supported it, but we certainly did not expect a blank cheque with no conditions. Can the Prime Minister explain to Canadians how he spent \$9 billion of taxpayers' money with no oversight?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the steps that were taken by the government helped to save literally thousands of jobs in the auto industry, and of course tens of thousands of dollars in the broader economy.

I understand that the Liberals do not share the same focus on the economy and the same focus on ensuring that Ontario's manufacturing sector is healthy. However, we are very proud of the accomplishments we delivered in order to ensure that our auto sector and our manufacturing sector are strong in the face of a very challenging changing global economy. It reflects the strength of the Canadian economy overall.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a report released in Winnipeg indicates that close to 5,000 seniors will lose their housing due to the current government's inability to renew the co-op housing agreements. Where is the junior minister on this file? He is missing in action.

However, it does not stop there. Across Canada, mayors and premiers are on the same page when it comes to issue after issue. In Ontario today, new mayor John Tory met with the premier. Where is the Prime Minister on this file? He is missing in action.

The Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs is not just missing in action; the funds are actually missing. There has been a 90% cut to infrastructure funding. They are missing in action.

When will the Prime Minister meet with the premier and get down to business?

•(1445)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we are doing. We have signed our investment in affordable housing with the provinces. We trust the provinces and their ability to address their housing needs.

Here is who we do not trust: the member for Trinity—Spadina. When he was a councillor in Toronto, there was a shelter that was supposed to cost \$5 million. Under his watch, it ballooned to \$12 million. Is that a very good use of taxpayer dollars in building shelters? Absolutely not. That is why we are not going to count on the Liberals.

* * *

PRIVACY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's instinct for secrecy has reached new and absurd heights. A newly revealed memo released under an ATIP request shows that when telecom companies decided to tell the public how often they share subscriber information with the police and intelligence officials, it was flagged as a security concern, and the minister's officials scrambled to figure out how to limit what information the telecom companies could disclose.

Why does the minister continue working against data disclosure transparency rather than for it?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes the privacy of law-abiding Canadians very seriously. In the meantime, we are always looking at ways in which we can make sure that our law enforcement agencies have the tools that they need to protect Canadians.

I hope that when we do so, we can count on the support of the opposition.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we knew that the government is not exactly the paragon of transparency, but frankly, we had no idea how bad it was.

Telecommunications companies want to disclose how many times they share subscriber information with the police, but the government is stopping them, supposedly for security reasons.

Why is the minister preventing telecom companies from finally being transparent?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, our government takes the privacy of Canadians very seriously. That is why we expect law enforcement agencies to obey the laws that are in place.

At the same time, I would also like to say that we expect the opposition to support the measures we add to Canada's legislation to enhance the safety of Canadians.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently released documents reveal that hundreds of cases

Oral Questions

of sexual assault, harassment and violence have been reported within the cadet program, which is funded by the federal government. Despite the disclosures, investigations often go nowhere and the aggressors are rarely charged.

Was the minister aware of those reports? What steps have been taken to investigate?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, violence against women and girls, and against any Canadian, is simply unacceptable in our society, and it will not be tolerated. The Government of Canada has been committed to ending such violence and supporting victims.

Whether it be with our Safe Streets and Communities Act or whether it be with our new legislation to uphold the rights of victims, this government is very focused on making sure that we support victims and put those who should be behind bars where they belong—behind bars. We encourage the opposition to get on board and make sure that we are putting criminals in their place and supporting victims.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about gravely serious allegations of a pattern of sexual assault, abuse, and harassment spanning four decades. This involves young people between 12 and 18 participating in the cadet program on Canadian Forces bases, and it includes cases involving Canadian Forces personnel.

We have a solemn responsibility to protect these young people. How long has the Minister of National Defence been aware of these allegations, and what action is he taking to deal with this horrific situation?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take any allegations like that with the utmost seriousness. Allegations of sexual harassment in the military, whether with cadets or anywhere else within our armed forces, are truly disturbing, and we will act on them.

CDS will investigate and look at any allegations in this area, because this is completely unacceptable to all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, la Francophonie is the most important organization in the world when it comes to promoting the French language and culture, and it plays a vital role to promote economic improvement and human rights.

Like many Canadians, I was very pleased to learn that the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean was chosen as secretary general of this prestigious organization.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages inform the House of the weekend activities at the summit?

Oral Questions

● (1450)

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a great weekend for Canada as one of our own was chosen to head up the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. We are delighted that a woman was elected to lead this organization for the first time.

The Quebec premier noted that our Prime Minister campaigned hard to help Ms. Jean's bid for the position.

We wish Michaëlle Jean much success, and we look forward to working with her to promote the French language and Canada's cultural diversity to the entire world.

* * *

[English]

POVERTY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives' economic mismanagement has had grave consequences for Ontario. As good jobs have disappeared, nearly 400,000 Ontarians have been forced to rely on food banks every month. They are doing this just to put food on the table. Most shockingly, the number of Ontario families forced to walk into a food bank for the first time ever rose 20% over the last year.

Counting on food banks to feed families is not a good economic strategy. Why have the Conservatives allowed this to happen?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts.

Under our Conservative government, we have seen a major reduction in child poverty from a high of 18% under the Liberals to 8.5% in 2011. In fact, nearly 1.4 million fewer Canadians are living in poverty under this government.

One of the reasons for that is the universal child care benefit. It is putting money directly in the hands of Canadian families.

David Morley said:

...[This] kept money in circulation ... money goes to poorer families, and that tends to be spent on children and then it kept money circulating in the economy as well.

That kind of investment in children is so important."

We agree with that.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nearly 400,000 Ontarians are using food banks every month, which is all we need to know about the Conservative's economic record. This says it all.

Conservatives have let hundreds of thousands of good jobs disappear while the number of precarious jobs has increased, and 1.7 million jobs in Ontario are considered insecure. Now we have a situation in which people who are working full time need to use food banks.

Where is the government's action plan to reduce food bank use and poverty in Ontario?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is responding to social needs. We have increased social transfers to the provinces.

Ontario will receive \$19.2 billion in federal transfers this year, an increase of 76% over the old Liberal government, with almost \$2 billion through equalization, \$12.3 billion through Canada health, and \$4.8 billion through the Canada social transfer.

Those are transfers that help people, reduce poverty, and help find jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the government announced a change in direction for the homelessness partnering strategy, we knew it would mean fewer resources and more work for community organizations.

In my riding of Hull—Aylmer, a group of non-profit organizations submitted a request and Service Canada asked that the project start date be pushed to December 1. Today is December 1, and the group has yet to receive a response.

Can the minister tell us why Service Canada cannot even meet its own deadlines?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member is absolutely wrong. We have renewed and increased our investment in homelessness with our homelessness partnering strategy and our focus on Housing First. I am sorry that the NDP do not agree with Housing First. It is an evidenced-based model for addressing homelessness.

If the member would like to have specific information about a specific project, question period is not the time to ask about it. Come to me. We can talk about it when we have more than 35 seconds to answer a question.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it would be nice to get some real answers during question period, for once.

Community groups are worried about the change in direction for the homelessness partnering strategy. When asked, the minister herself confirmed that all of the money would be spent during phase two of the HPS. However, the projects must be completed by March 31, 2015, and many have not yet received the money.

Are the Conservatives trying to save money at the expense of the homeless yet again?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of that money is there. I told the member that I would explain the way this process worked to her. She did not bother coming to my office. She is not interested in real explanations, because she does not want to know the answer.

The funding is there for the homelessness partnering strategy. It is all there. We are funding it throughout the country. We are expecting great results through our Housing First initiative.

I would be very happy to meet with you.

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member to address her comments to the Chair and not directly to colleagues.

The hon. member for St. Paul's.

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NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Auditor General severely criticized the complete lack of transparency in Nutrition North and reported that it is not even designed to make food more accessible or affordable. This is what northerners have been saying since the beginning.

Northerners are fed up with the shameless government talking points calling this program a success. Will the government finally commit to working collaboratively with northerners to design a transparent program that will help them feed their families?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the department will implement the Auditor General's recommendations in order to build upon the effectiveness of this program, which has already provided beneficial results for those communities, and we will continue in that direction.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that the Auditor General said that the program was not effective; it is abject failure.

Rather than fixing it, ministers continue to defend the indefensible. Recent footage of residents in Rankin Inlet scavenging for food at the dump did not prompt the Minister of the Environment, their MP, to acknowledge the problem. Instead, she savagely attacked the community's deputy mayor for pointing it out.

Rather than suing community leaders, will the government finally deal with the reality that people in northern Canada cannot afford to feed their families?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those allegations are completely false. If the member has any evidence of that, I would encourage her to produce that evidence so I can deal with it in the House. However, they are absolutely false.

What I can say about the food mail program is that under the Liberal government, no one knew for 30 years there was even a food subsidy going to the North. It was a Liberal decision to have the program fund an airline. The people in the north were the first. The

Oral Questions

last thing on their minds was to subsidize an airline and to subsidize a community in Quebec, Val-d'Or. There was nothing designed to support—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

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[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Coalition d'aide aux victimes de la pyrrhotite, there are apparently 10 new cases of pyrrhotite a week, and 4,000 people in the Mauricie region are affected.

Their properties are losing value, which is causing health and debt problems. There are even cases of suicide. Victims are calling on all elected officials for support.

What will the Conservative government do? Will it respond?

Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows full well, the pyrrhotite problem falls under provincial jurisdiction.

The Government of Quebec has launched a provincial program to provide financial support to owners who are struggling with pyrrhotite damage.

I encourage anyone affected by this issue to contact the Société d'habitation du Québec.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are talking out of both sides of their mouth on the pyrrhotite issue, and they are even starting to believe their own stories.

A few months ago, they committed to changing the concrete standard, but we still have not received a response. That is typical of the federal government.

In the meantime, the problem is growing and this disaster could well happen again anywhere in Canada. Every week we are seeing more and more victims, and their situation is getting increasingly complicated.

Is the minister waiting for an election campaign to change the standard and to provide financial support for victims, or will he show some compassion and sense of responsibility right now and do his job?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I now will answer this in English because when I answered it in French, it seemed to me that there was some miscommunication.

The member knows full well that the pyrrhotite issue falls within the provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the Government of Quebec launched a provincial program to provide financial assistance for homeowners dealing with pyrrhotite damage in August 2011.

Oral Questions

I have said, and I will say it again, I urge those who are concerned about this to contact the Société d'habitation du Québec.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of National Defence please provide the House with an update on Canada's latest contributions in the international effort to confront and degrade the military capabilities of the terrorist group ISIL?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the coalition campaign against ISIL continues and, as always, Canada is contributing.

I can confirm our CF-18s participated in two separate missions since last Friday. Bombs were dropped on two ISIL positions. The military is currently examining the damage and will provide more detail in a technical briefing on Thursday.

The coalition effort against ISIL is necessary, it is just and, of course, we are doing our part. It has never been the Canadian way to stand on the sidelines and let others do the heavy lifting. We can take pride in the professionalism and courage of our Canadian Armed Forces.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Is the program that the government announced last week for \$200 million over 6 years or over 50 years?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have announced new initiatives designed to support Canadian Armed Forces personnel, Canadian veterans and their families regarding their mental health needs. For example, major new operational stress injury clinics will be opened in Halifax, along with additional satellite clinics in St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria, Montreal and an expanded clinic in Toronto.

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[*Translation*]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have won again by forcing the Conservatives to back down: the new bridge will keep the name of Champlain Bridge.

Now that this fake debate is over, and while the government seems to be listening to reason, will the minister listen to all Quebeckers, who are unanimously asking that the toll be dropped?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said recently, the NDP believes that just because it thinks it is going to snow this winter, they can take the credit for it. Nothing changes.

He says that we backed down on something that was never announced, on a decision that had not been made. If I were in the NDP's shoes, I would certainly take whatever credit I could. The Conservatives will continue to build a new bridge, which will be completed on schedule in 2018.

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[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago this Saturday at Montreal's École Polytechnique, a gunman walked into the school and murdered 14 bright, young women. This week, Canadians across the country will be donning white ribbons to commemorate the tragic loss of these women and mark our country's commitment to ending violence against women.

As we begin to honour these victims this week, could the Minister of Status of Women tell the House what Canadians can do to help ensure acts such as this never happen again?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while we cannot and will probably never be able to make sense of the heinous crimes that took place on that day, the moms, daughters, sisters and friends lost and harmed were deliberately targeted.

Violence against women and girls affects all of us. It takes a heavy toll on our communities, destroys lives and weakens the very fabric of our Canadian society. This week is as much about remembrance as it is about a call to action on education and raised awareness, and will, I hope, bring an end to violence against women and girls. Every one of us has the power to have an impact. All Canadians must—

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

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[*Translation*]

QUEBEC BRIDGE

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Minister of Infrastructure put on a big show to let us all know that he was willing to chip in \$75 million to repaint the Quebec Bridge, but only if CN did its part too.

No sooner had the press conference ended than CN refused to foot the other half of the bill. No CN, no paint. It seems we are no further ahead than we were before.

What is the minister planning to do next? What is his game plan?

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, how interesting it is to hear the member say that things were moving along thanks to him, then to see him turn around and ask others for even more when one partner refuses to move ahead. That shows just how powerless he is.

Oral Questions

What has always been clear is that the bridge belongs to Canadian National. With our partners, the City of Quebec, the City of Lévis and the Government of Quebec, we will continue to work on this on our end and put pressure on CN to repaint its bridge.

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TAXATION

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Quebec finance minister, the increase in child care costs for families caused by a special tax when they file their income tax, and not by an increase in the basic rate of child care, will be compensated by Ottawa through an increase in the federal child care tax deduction.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm that he will make the additional taxes to be paid by thousands of Quebec parents eligible for the federal child care tax deduction when they fill out their provincial tax returns?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we always work with our provincial and territorial partners on these matters. I can confirm that CRA officials are actively consulting with Revenue Quebec. Child care expenses are deductible.

I would point out that thanks to recent actions our government has taken, four million families will pocket an extra \$1,100 a year on average.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the question that was just asked by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It was a really clear question.

Will the Minister of Veterans Affairs tell us whether the \$200 million is to be spent over 6 years or 50 years? If the minister respects our veterans, he will give a clear answer.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe our veterans and their families deserve the very best care possible.

Our Conservative government will always ensure that veterans' mental health support is available to them today, tomorrow and for the rest of their lives. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise.

This government has announced and is delivering on priorities for our veterans by moving forward with opening eight new specialized mental health facilities next year, and other mental health assistance and support for them and their families.

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[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, under the new wastewater systems effluent regulations, there are new national standards that will require a significant upgrade to replace nearly one-quarter of Canada's wastewater

treatment systems. According to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, this will cost more than \$18 billion.

The costs to comply with this new standard are forcing many municipalities to decide between increasing taxes or setting aside infrastructure projects that are essential to economic vitality. It would be easier for communities to comply with the established standards if the federal government created a fund to which local and provincial governments could contribute. Does the government plan on honouring the FCM's request to create this fund?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows very well, we just introduced the biggest and most long-term infrastructure plan in our country's history. Wastewater treatment is covered by the excise tax on the gasoline sector and the provincial-territorial transfers.

I remind my colleague that in Quebec—and I repeat this for the members opposite who have been here for more than three years—the provincial government, and not the federal government, is responsible for prioritizing municipal issues.

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[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Speaker Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Pandikar Amin Haji Mulia Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malaysia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

● (1510)

The Speaker: As a member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, I hope members will indulge me, as I am pleased to hear that residents of Saskatchewan's most famous small town, Dog River, are making a return, this time to the big screen.

I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the cast and crew of *Corner Gas: The Movie*, Brent Butt, Eric Peterson, Gabrielle Miller, Fred Ewanuick, Tara Spencer-Nairn, Lorne Cardinal, Virginia Thompson, David Storey and Rob de Lint.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill S-211, national health and fitness day act. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, requesting an extension of 30 sitting days to consider Motion 428 on electronic petitions. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 27th report later today.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, in relation to its study of the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year 2014-15.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, on the public accounts of Canada, 2014.

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CANADA SHIPPING ACT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-638, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (wreck).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Victoria for seconding this bill.

In many coastal communities, derelict and abandoned vessels have a negative impact on their harbours, and some pose a threat to the local environment.

While major environmental dangers from derelict and abandoned vessels are dealt with swiftly by the Canadian Coast Guard, many are simply left to rot away and leach chemicals into the surrounding environment.

If an abandoned and derelict vessel is not a major environmental concern and is not posing an obstacle to navigation, there is usually no action taken.

The Minister of Transport can become involved in the following situations.

Transport Canada can currently take the lead in instances where a vessel is the cause of an obstruction to navigation. However, vessels in the intertidal zone are rarely an obstruction to navigation.

Transport Canada has also been supportive of salvage claims made to the receiver of wrecks when questionable vessels appear ashore or in waters adjacent to communities. However, salvage claims are rarely made against derelict vessels.

Finally, Transport Canada can take the lead in making an assessment as to whether a vessel may pose a threat of pollution. However, an abandoned or derelict vessel that is deemed non-polluting is not dealt with.

Both I, in Nanaimo—Cowichan, and the member for Victoria, often hear complaints about derelict vessels that are not dealt with. Hence, I have introduced this bill, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (wreck).

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

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to move concurrence in the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day.

• (1515)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by dozens of Canadians.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to make several changes to the current drinking and driving laws in Canada, and to make changes to the Criminal Code of Canada, primarily in the area of increased fines for various levels of offence.

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to table a petition with over 400 signatures from Annunciation of Our Lord parish in my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

The petitioners join with thousands of others in endorsing the campaign of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace entitled, Sow much love. It is a global call to action to support small farmers who are the guardians of the world's seed biodiversity. In a very real way, they are fighting to protect the future of food.

The petitioners are asking the government to make two concrete commitments. The first is to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the fight against hunger and poverty. Second, the petitioners want the government to ensure that these policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers and that they protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south, to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

While the rules of the House do not allow me to endorse a petition, let me conclude by saying that I share wholeheartedly in the desire to build a more just and sustainable food system for our human family.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have received almost a thousand petitions on the issue of storing nuclear waste in northern Ontario by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization.

This is in the watershed of Lake Superior, which supplies water directly or indirectly to 60 million people throughout the Great Lakes. The petitioners feel there is significant risk to either storing or transporting nuclear waste from southern Ontario in northern Ontario, so they are asking that there be a moratorium and better consultation regarding the storage or shipment of nuclear waste in northern Ontario.

CANADA POST

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to present a petition signed by over a hundred New Brunswickers. They are very concerned about the government's cuts to Canada Post and the fact that the government has allowed Canada Post to abandon door-to-door delivery. Many rural post offices are threatened. Many employees of Canada Post have also lost their jobs.

The petitioners are asking the government to make changes to the wrong decisions it imposed on Canada Post, preserve rural postal service, ensure that good jobs in those communities remain, and ensure that disabled and vulnerable persons can receive door-to-door mail delivery.

IRAQ

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions today.

The first petition notes that there are hundreds of thousands of displaced Christians in Iraq and that they are refugees in every way except that they are still in their own country. They call on the Government of Canada to try to find a way to help these people who are in effect refugees.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the Canadian government to adhere to the precautionary principle and ban the use of neonicotinoids in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition calls on Parliament to condemn the use of gender selection abortion in Canada.

HEALTH CARE FOR REFUGEES

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today from residents of Newton and North Delta. The petitioners are very concerned about the impact of the recent conflict on the civilian population, especially children.

They are calling on the Government of Canada to support the proposal launched by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish to bring injured Palestinian children from Gaza to Canada for treatment. They firmly believe that only through initiatives like this can we help to heal and to build ongoing peace. They believe that immediate action needs to be taken by this government.

● (1520)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present petitions from a number of constituents who came to my office in Langley. They are concerned about the right of small-scale family farms to preserve, exchange, and use seeds.

They are calling on the House of Commons to commit to adopting international aid policies that would support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their role against hunger and poverty; to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers; and that they protect the right of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights that tragically, 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, called Families for Justice believe that the current impaired driving laws are much too lenient. Petitioners are calling for new mandatory minimum sentencing for people who have been convicted of impaired driving causing death.

FALUN GONG

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my petition is regarding unethical organ harvesting from Falun Gong practitioners in China. Petitioners call for the government to request an independent investigation on organ harvesting; actively discourage Canadians from seeking organ transplants in China, which violates legal standards and medical ethics; reject these applications for anyone who has been found to be involved in organ harvesting; and enact legislation requiring mandatory reporting of transplant tourism.

Routine Proceedings

PROTECTION OF SAGE GROUSE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present today from residents of my riding and from my colleague from Cypress Hills—Grasslands's riding.

The first petition is about the emergency protection order for the greater sage grouse of Canada. The petitioners would like the House of Commons to rescind the emergency protection order and replace it with an order that encourages voluntary implementation, along with a number of other items on here.

The second petition is also with regard to the sage grouse. The petitioners are asking the House to rescind the strategy and replace it to ensure that strategies are created with formal input from the landowners.

SPECIES AT RISK ACT

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the third petition, the petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada rescind the Species at Risk Act and replace it with an act that encourages voluntary implementation, along with a number of other points.

DEMENTIA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to present a petition from about 100 residents of the Lower Mainland in British Columbia, everywhere from the north shore right through to White Rock and Surrey, and, of course, including my constituency of Burnaby—New Westminster.

These petitioners are calling on the government to support Bill C-356, an act respecting a national strategy for dementia, which was introduced by the member of Parliament for Nickel Belt. The bill calls upon the minister to put in place a national action plan to fight the incredible challenges that come with Alzheimer's and related diseases, to produce an annual report that shows Canadians how action is being taken to fight Alzheimer's disease, and to put in place research and development funding and resources to fight Alzheimer's and other diseases related to dementia.

These 100 Canadians are asking for the government to take action very soon on this public health issue, which is Alzheimer's disease and related dementia disorders.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with a group of constituents at my office, where they shared with me concerns related to poverty in the global south and wanting to do something. They provided me with a petition, which I am bringing forward today.

The petitioners are calling on us to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers, and that they protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I submit two petitions from residents across Alberta and British Columbia.

A group of residents believe that the impaired driving laws in Canada are too lenient. They are asking the Government of Canada to make changes to the current drinking and driving laws and to the Criminal Code of Canada, to strengthen the laws and sentences in regard to drinking and driving, including changing the charge of impaired driving causing death to the offence of vehicular manslaughter.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions.

The first is from over 200 residents of my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, calling for the government to institute a proper and full inquiry into the election fraud known as robocalls from the 2011 election.

● (1525)

CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of Vancouver, asking the government to redress the very strange injustice that has been visited on those Canadians who fought and died for this country, but who died before 1947 and are not being recognized as Canadian citizens.

Let us recognize these lost Canadians.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 748 and 763.

[Text]

Question No. 748—**Hon. Ralph Goodale:**

With regard to the Canada and European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), has the federal government done any analysis of the following, and, if so, what are the details: (a) the changes required to provincial laws and regulations in order for Canada to ratify CETA; (b) each province's commitment in implementing those changes; (c) the current status of those changes; (d) when these changes are expected to be completed; and (e) other steps required to implement CETA and for CETA to come into force

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), provinces and territories will continue to be important partners in implementing the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA. Since some areas of the agreement fall in the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, they may have to make consequential changes to their policy and regulatory frameworks, as required. Officials are working closely with all provinces and territories to bring this historic agreement into force, so that Canadians in all regions of the country can reap its vast benefits at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to (b), last October Canada, announced that it had reached an agreement in principle on a historic free trade agreement with the European Union. The agreement was overwhelmingly supported by stakeholders representing hardworking Canadians and business people from coast to coast to coast and was unanimously supported by all provinces and territories. The Government of Canada continues to work collaboratively with provinces and territories. This approach has ensured that CETA serves the interests of all provinces and territories, as well as the broader interests of the Canadian economy.

With regard to (c), the federal government is currently working closely with all provinces and territories to bring this historic agreement into force, so that Canadians in all regions of the country can reap its vast benefits at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to (d), following the completion of negotiations on August 5, 2014, Canada and the EU are now proceeding with a thorough legal review of the text to ensure accuracy and consistency. This will be followed by translation of the text into the other 22 EU treaty languages. Following that, the process required to approve the agreement in Canada and the EU, along with the steps necessary to bring policies, regulations, and legislation into conformity with the obligations under CETA, will begin. The overall process, starting from the conclusion of the negotiations through the legal review, translation, and approvals is expected to take approximately two years. It is expected that any legislative changes the provinces and territories must undertake will be completed by the time CETA comes into force.

With regard to (e), in addition to any legislative and regulatory changes that provinces and territories must undertake, the federal government must also take legislative action to enable CETA to be brought into force. Free trade agreements include commitments to reduce tariffs and other changes, which require implementing legislation. Once the legislation receives royal assent, it becomes law.

The European Union must also undergo its own implementation process.

Question No. 763—**Hon. Hedy Fry:**

With regard to the formulation of policies concerning firearms regulation: (a) what are the details of the “bureaucratic initiatives” concerning firearms regulation which were referred to by the Prime Minister in public remarks made in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, on October 17, 2014, including (i) when was each such initiative commenced, (ii) in which departments or agencies, and which divisions, offices, or organizations within those departments or agencies, do the bureaucrats who commenced each such initiative work, (iii) what has been the total expenditure associated with each such initiative, (iv) what are the titles and file numbers of any reports, dossiers, or other documents associated with, or generated in relation to, each such initiative?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to standing up for law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters. The government was pleased to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. It was pleased to stop the bureaucratic efforts of the Ontario Chief Firearms Officer to bring in a gun registry by the back door. It was pleased to cancel the proposed gun show regulations, and continuously defer the UN firearms marking regulations. More recently, the government was pleased to introduce Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act. This bill would,

Government Orders

among other common sense and red-tape reducing measures, limit the arbitrary authority of chief firearms officers. The government will not accept any attempts to bring back the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

[*English*]

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are eight motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-2.

Motions Nos. 1 to 8 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 to 8 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP), seconded by the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting the long title.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting the preamble.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting the short title.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 7

Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the abuse of process and contempt for Parliament that is embedded in this bill. Bill C-2 does nothing less than take a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada and treat it with contempt, and in doing so treats Parliament and Canadian citizens with contempt.

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How we arrived at this issue was a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, which is now well known, relating to the Pivot Legal Society and its attempts to defend what is called the InSite harm reduction centre in Vancouver. Abundant evidence shows that this harm reduction facility is saving lives. It is important with respect to public health. The Supreme Court of Canada gave the current administration very clear guidance as to how a bill should be constructed that would not violate the charter.

I will just revisit for a moment what the Supreme Court said. Members will recall that the minister was refusing to provide an extended exemption that would allow this facility to use otherwise prohibited narcotics and drugs in order to prevent the threat of death and further illness of people who are suffering from addictions and living on the streets.

The InSite facility works, and the Supreme Court found that. It looked at the minister's refusal and stated this in its judgment:

...the Minister must exercise that discretion within the constraints imposed by the law and the Charter, aiming to strike the appropriate balance between achieving public health and public safety. In accordance with the Charter, the Minister must consider whether denying an exemption would cause deprivations of life and security of the person that are not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

The Supreme Court's ruling was clear, but it is equally clear that the current administration's response, the so-called respect for communities act, was designed to do indirectly what the Supreme Court had said the administration could not do directly. In other words, it has created a law that is designed not to meet the purposes of the law for which it was being drafted. This was supposedly a law in response to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision, which would create opportunities for harm reduction facilities such as the one in Vancouver called InSite, and in other communities as well.

There are other communities that would benefit from having a harm reduction facility like this. However, this piece of legislation is so contemptuous of due process that it offends Parliament itself. Unfortunately, this is part of a trend with bills that are being drafted and promulgated in this place, and pushed through with time allocation, primarily for public relations benefit in a future election. Surely, the government has been warned by Justice department lawyers that this bill is susceptible to the same Supreme Court challenge as the one that gave rise to the decision of the Supreme Court in the Pivot case.

How is the government doing indirectly what it cannot do directly? This bill sets out such an onerous series of requirements for any person, organization, or charity considering opening an InSite facility that it makes it a joke to imagine anyone could possibly meet all these requirements.

I will provide an example. The list of requirements exhausts the alphabet. They go (a) through (z) and then there is the addition of a (z.1), et cetera. They require that anyone who wishes to open such a facility provide in advance, per requirement (w):

the name, title and resumé, including relevant education and training, of the proposed responsible person in charge, of each of their proposed alternate responsible persons, and of each of the other proposed key staff members;

I do not know if the drafters of this legislation have ever tried to open anything, but one cannot open a community day care centre and know the names of all the staff who will be hired before one can

even get a permit or put a shovel on the ground. It simply does not work that way.

• (1530)

They also want to invite anyone who wants to open a harm reduction facility to conduct consultations that are clearly aimed at finding people who might object to such a facility, and giving them the obligation to prepare letters to tell the minister responsible if there is a reason for an exemption or whether the community would rather not deal with people on the streets who have addictions. It does not provide any proportionality about the kind of evidence it seeks. It seeks to direct fair-minded people who are concerned about public health. In the interests of public health, as found by the Supreme Court of Canada, it would force them to go out and try to seek evidence from people who will oppose these facilities' purposes and ends.

I want to speak about the following for a moment, because there are so few opportunities to explain to Canadians what is happening in this place. The legislative process has become an exercise in farce. The bills are drafted in the Prime Minister's Office. I cannot believe they come from any kind of evidence-based public policy in the various departments. They come forward with titles of legislation that are clearly designed for public relations purposes and future pamphlets for use by the Conservative Party, such as this one on the respect for communities act. This is supposed to be legislation about public health and harm reduction, but it is called "respect for communities act" and has been designed not to function as legislation to allow harm reduction.

We could name any one of a number of absurd acts. One of my favourites they titled the "safeguarding our seas and skies act". It made it sound like it might be something to do with the environment. I read it avidly. The "safeguarding the skies" part dealt with forensic investigations of airplane crashes. It really was not something we could call "safeguarding our skies". The "safeguarding the seas" part dealt with existing treaties we had already accepted for marine liability regimes in the event of disasters at sea, such as oil spills and chemical spills and so on. These examples are the daily fare of this place.

Then they go to committees. Thanks to the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert, we now know that what I inferred from watching the behaviour of Conservative members of Parliament at committee is actually how it functions. The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert has written a book called *Irresponsible Government*, in which he describes how he as a Conservative member of Parliament was given talking points and told how to vote in parliamentary committees.

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I worked in this place from 1986 to 1988 in the Mulroney administration. I was not a member of that party nor at the time was I enamoured of the moves of the Prime Minister. I have to say in retrospect that they hold up quite well. However, the parliamentary committees actually functioned in the interests of public policy at achieving consensus and the very best-possible legislation for the greatest number of Canadians. Members of Parliament from all parties were not scripted. They rolled up their sleeves and worked together, made amendments to many acts, and took their time with witnesses. I never saw a witness' credentials or good-faith effort to show up at a committee denigrated until the current administration.

This is one of those bills that cries out for this place to say enough; to say enough with time allocations, enough with ignoring the clear directions of the Supreme Court of Canada, and with putting forward legislation that is simply intended to thumb its nose at the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Supreme Court, and Parliament itself.

I have tried to bring forward these amendments to the committee responsible. As members will know, 20 different committees simultaneously passed identical motions by Conservative members of Parliament to circumscribe my opportunities to present real, substantive amendments here at report stage. It has probably doubled my workload, which I did not think was possible. On top of that, of course, it means that I run from committee to committee for the ritual slaughter of my amendments.

I know you have ruled, Mr. Speaker, that this opportunity means that I no longer have rights at report stage for substantive amendments. I have to repeat for your benefit, Mr. Speaker, that I am afraid it is not working as an opportunity for me; it is working out as a coerced additional workload that I do not welcome.

This is an opportunity for the current Parliament to do the right thing, to vote down this monstrosity of a bill, reread what the Supreme Court said, and look at the medical evidence, that harm reduction at InSite works and that we need to create a legislative framework that lets it function in the interests of our society. Do not let this bill pass.

● (1535)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her comments. I know she was at the committee. Like us, she tried to move a number of amendments but was shut down. I wonder if she would agree with me that really, our only goal has been to establish a level playing field and set out criteria, guidance, and fair rules around safe consumption sites.

The way this bill is currently written, it is so stacked that it would make it virtually impossible for any organization in Canada to successfully have an application approved. I do not know if the hon. member recalls the criteria, literally from *a* to *z*, an applicant would have to meet. Even if those criteria were somehow, amazingly, met, it would still be at the minister's discretion whether an application were approved. I wonder if the hon. member would comment on that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Vancouver East, the official opposition health critic. She is someone who has represented a very troubled community with enormous dedication and commitment.

Yes, indeed, I think I mentioned that not only are there conditions from *a* to *z*, but the government has added *z.1*. It has created many obstacles for any organization that seeks to open a harm reduction clinic. I will read more into the record. An applicant would need:

...a letter from the head of the police force that is responsible for providing policing services to the municipality in which the site would be located that outlines his or her opinion...[as regards] concerns with respect to public safety and security;

...a description by the applicant of the proposed measures...to address...[those] concerns...;

...a letter from the lead health professional...;

...a letter from the provincial minister...;

...information, if any, on crime and public nuisance in the vicinity of the site....

It is not information on the particularly vulnerable populations, those people most likely to suffer if harm reduction strategies are not available to them. Everything about this legislation is designed to prevent the facilities the Supreme Court of Canada has found are in the public interest and are charter protected. This legislation attempts to tie the shoelaces together of anyone who thinks they can walk forward and open a harm reduction site.

● (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the leader of the Green Party has put on the record this afternoon, especially on the manner in which the government presents its legislation, whether it is time allocation or the manner in which the government titles its bills.

My question is related to the need for a higher sense of co-operation. If we look at the example of the InSite centre in Vancouver, there was a great sense of co-operation among the federal government, the provincial government, the municipality, and many different stakeholders, including police services, non-profit groups, and so forth. That is what made it happen.

At the end of the day, those same stakeholders, minus the federal government, seem to understand the issue and want to explore opportunities in the future. Could the hon. member provide some comment on that sense of co-operation and how it is being lost?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely the case.

It can be scary to adopt public policy that is so vulnerable to being twisted and presented in an ugly fashion for the purpose of dividing Canadians and gaining votes. Co-operation works in the other direction: How can we work together?

At the time, the provincial minister of health in British Columbia, the hon. Terry Lake, responded to the decision not to allow InSite to go forward, before it was defeated at the Supreme Court, saying:

We're reluctant to close the door on innovation and creativity when it comes to tackling these very challenging problems. We have to think out of the box sometimes. I know that the thought of using heroin as a treatment is scary for people, but I think we have to take the emotions out of it and let science inform the discussion.

That is what the previous federal government and provinces did. That is the approach of stakeholders from non-governmental organizations and the medical community, people who work the streets and know what is needed to save lives.

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Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on the debate on Bill C-2, especially after the previous member spoke.

We saw that the amendments provided by the Green Party followed the same basic line of debate it has shown on other bills in this House. If we do not agree with the Green Party members, then we must be wrong. Those Canadians who disagree with the opposition must all be wrong.

Not to shift too far off topic, but we saw that very same approach in a recent debate about the Rouge Park, in my riding. Farmers, who had land expropriated from them by the Liberal government 40 years ago, asked for their land to be protected so that they could farm forever. That is what the people in my community wanted. That is what the farmers wanted. That was what they all asked for. What did the Green Party members want? They did not care what farmers wanted or what the people in my community wanted. They actually wanted to listen to someone else. They wanted to listen to outside influences and those environmentalists who want to throw these farmers off of their land.

That is why I find the comments of the leader of the Green Party so troubling. My word. In this bill, we are asking people to consult with the community before they put something in their community. Imagine that. What did the leader of the Green Party say? It was that consultations are just a way of finding objections. That is all they would do. They would just find objections.

Let me get this straight. We are not supposed to consult, because people might be opposed to what is being forced on them in their community. This is obviously not something we are going to do on this side of the House. I am sure she would agree, and members of the opposition would agree, that if what they are talking about is supported throughout Canada in communities across this country, including in my own small-town community of Stouffville and Markham, then really, there should not be a lot of objections.

Honestly, we have to take in the opinions of the people who actually live, work, play, and pay taxes. We have to take in the opinions of the business owners, the people who create jobs and create economic activity and opportunity. We have to put them in the line of consulting on something like this. That is why we brought forward this legislation, which, of course, respects those aspects that were brought forward by the Supreme Court.

The member said that we had to add a letter to the alphabet. It went from *a* to *z*, and then we had to add *z.l*. Yes, absolutely. It is because we want to make sure that the people who are proposing these sites and the places they are proposing to put these sites meet certain minimum standards.

The member talked about having to provide resumes of the people who would be working there. Of course we are going to want to make sure, as this legislation would, that the people who work in a proposed facility have the ability to do what they say they are going to do. If we are going to bring illicit drugs into small towns, villages, and communities across this country, then I think the people who live in those small towns have the right to know that this is what is coming to their Main Street and that these are the people who would

be working there. Do they have the ability to do what they say they can do or what they are being hired to do? Do they have criminal records?

I think it is just common sense that if we are going to bring this type of facility into small towns and communities across this country that we know the people who are sponsoring this and that the people who will be working within the facility have the ability to do what they say they are going to do in a professional manner and can protect the communities in which they apply to do this. I think most Canadians would agree with that.

The member took exception to the fact that the bill would also ask that the proponents seek comments from the local police chief. Far be it from me to suggest it, but obviously the local police chief and the local police know the community. In my town of Stouffville, in York Region, Chief Eric Jolliffe and the local superintendent of No.5 District actually know what is happening in communities.

● (1545)

When a proposal for a development is brought forward in my community, I know it is done by the town. However, I often go to the police and ask what they think about what these people have brought forward in terms of development, safety, and how police, fire, and ambulance would work.

When we talk about bringing controlled substances like heroin into a community, people might want to ask police if it is the right spot to do it. What are the things the community needs to be worried about? I do not know of any Canadians who would suggest otherwise. Actually, I do. Opposition members would, because they are afraid that there might be instances when the community does not agree, local police do not agree, the people who live in the community do not agree, and business owners who hire young people do not agree. Opposition members are afraid there might be objections. In fact, the leader of the Green Party suggested that this is the reason there should be no consultations whatsoever and that Canadians should be completely left out of the process. Clearly, that is not something we are going to do. We are going to involve Canadians in these decisions.

As part of this legislation, we must also provide information on security measures and record keeping. If a community accepts a facility like this, I think it stands to reason that it is going to want to know what security measures will be put in place so the community can be assured that it is safe for the people who live in the community and safe for the people who will use the facility. That is obviously an important part of the process of making sure that communities are involved.

As I said earlier, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands talked about criminal record checks being too onerous and that it is impossible to find out who is going to be working in a facility. I suggest that if people are going to be hired in a facility like this, it is probably a good idea to get criminal record checks to make sure that the people can work in that facility. That is a common-sense addition. I think most Canadians would agree with that, with the exception of the opposition.

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The bill would also allow the minister to put a notice of application on a proposed site. In Ontario, as in all jurisdictions across this country, when someone applies for a liquor licence, a notice goes on the window so that the community knows and can comment. It is common sense. People need to know what is going on in their communities.

Apparently the opposition does not agree that when someone is proposing a heroin injection site, there should be a notice for the community. Imagine the surprise of people in the community when all of a sudden the site opened up. People would ask why they were not told what was going on. Imagine the people who would then try to use this facility in an area where people in the community were not consulted. They would have to face the fact that people might be protesting because they were upset by the process that went on.

Obviously, keeping people informed of the process from start to end is a good idea. Letting municipal politicians, those elected municipally, know what is going on and having the opportunity to comment, I think Canadians would agree, is a good idea.

The bill would allow for inspections. Once a facility like this opened, if it was doing good work, people would want to make sure it continued to do good work. Again, that is a very common-sense addition.

The things that have been brought forward in this bill would strengthen the ability of communities across this country to participate in something like this if that is what they wanted. It would allow them to have a say. It would not push things on communities they did not want.

It has been the hallmark of this government, since we were elected in 2006, to listen to the people who pay our bills. When Canadians send almost 50¢ of every \$1 they make to politicians at all levels, and thankfully, under our government, I think tax freedom day is now 28 days earlier than it was before, all they ask for is a say in the things we are doing.

When something like this is going to be put in a community, if it actually helps, if it makes a big difference, it should be the proponents who are prepared to stand by what they are doing. They should be the ones to bring the community onside. It should not be forced on any community.

● (1550)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary very carefully and I find it so astounding. On the one hand, he says that if the issue of a safe consumption site is so supportable, then public opinion should not be a problem.

The problem is that within hours of introducing the bill in the House, the Conservative Party put out a huge propaganda machine and used it as a fundraising tool. What it was called? “Keep heroin out of our backyards”. How is that a level playing field? How is that an environment whereby we can have any confidence or faith that the government is willing to look at applications in a serious, meritorious way?

The fact is that it does not care about public opinion. In fact, the public opinion process that the government has laid out is contained

to the local community where an application would be situated. That is fair, and extensive public consultation did happen at InSite. Under the bill, the public consultation can be all across Canada and the minister can weigh that however she wants.

I take serious objection to the parliamentary secretary somehow saying that if it is supportable, that public opinion is not a problem when the Conservatives have so manipulated this process and have used it as propaganda to their own base to raise funds. How despicable is that?

I would like the parliamentary secretary to answer that.

● (1555)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, let me put on the record, because I do not want there to be any confusion, that in my riding, in my small town of Stouffville, I do not want a site like this on my main street. In Markham, I do not want a site like this on the main street. As the elected member of Parliament, I would fight something like this coming to my communities because I do not approve of it.

Having said that, the bill would offer an opportunity for communities to consult. I recognize the fact that not everybody might agree with my opinion on this. That is why the bill would allow for consultation.

It is the member opposite who has suggest that actually going to the people in communities is wrong. Somehow, if we do that, they will not agree. The bill would allow that consultation.

Let me very clear. If something like this were proposed in the communities I represent, I would certainly be standing up against it because I simply do not agree that this is the best way to address this problem.

However, I appreciate that she has a difference of opinion and the bill would allow her and other people who might disagree with me and those who agree with me the opportunity to actually have a say in the process for the first time.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the phrase “common sense” used repeatedly. It is a phrase we are not used to hearing in Ontario since it was last used in that province and it became the hallmark of not doing consultation, amalgamation being perhaps one of the most prolific examples where no consultation was ever done by a party that happened to also call itself “Conservative” and liked to bandy about that phrase.

However, the government is now talking about public consultation. It is interesting. The common sense gun bill that is front of us has not had any public consultation, yet the member and other members have spoken about how the police should be involved in the injection sites but should not be involved in deciding whether weapons are in the hands of certain individuals. I guess the notion of consultation only reaches so far when we use common sense.

Government Orders

As well, when the government talks about consultation, the omnibus bill in front of us has provisions changing the powers of courts in our country, no consultation. Where we do have consultation? If we talk to the folks who run InSite, what they talk about is the need for housing as part of a third stage of dealing with people with heroin addiction. Repeated consultations across the country have called for housing. Why has the government not listened to those public consultations, if consultation is now the order of the day and that is common sense?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I am actually glad that for once I have the ability to agree with the member opposite. Since 2003 and the election of the Liberal government in Ontario, there has been no common sense in the Province of Ontario. If there were common sense in the Province of Ontario, it would not be running a massive deficit, it would not be increasing taxes on its taxpayers and it would not have to make disastrous decisions that will cost all Canadians. We would not be in the situation we are in Ontario, where it now receives equalization. It is only because of the efforts of this government that we actually have a housing strategy that takes people off the street.

The Minister of State for Social Development has outlined a number of initiatives that we have done to make a difference on housing.

The other consistent thing is that every time we bring something forward, those members vote against it.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel so disgusted by the parliamentary secretary's completely misleading comments in the House in regard to Bill C-2. We would not be opposing the bill if it actually lived up to the decision that was made by the Supreme Court of Canada. We would welcome the bill if it lived up to that decision, but Bill C-2, now at report stage, is an absolute travesty.

As I will point out in my remarks, this is so far away from what the Supreme Court of Canada said on safe consumption sites and the right, under the charter, for people to have access to those medical services that were provided in the safe injection sites. It is really quite shocking that the Conservatives have gone to such lengths in Bill C-2 to stack the deck and make it virtually impossible for any applicant, in good faith, who does all the work required to get an application in, to ever be approved by a minister as it is laid out in this bill.

I wish I was not speaking today at report stage on this bill, but I am afraid we have to because it has come back from the committee. It really bothers me that we have moved so far away from an evidence-based public policy and that this political mantra from the Conservative Party has now taken over.

As I pointed out, when the Conservatives first introduced this bill, within hours they set up a website called “No heroin in our backyards” to raise money. It is the politics of fear. It is the politics of division. It is the politics of exploiting people's concerns instead of dealing with something in a rational way and looking at serious issues in various communities across Canada, not all communities, where they feel it is warranted to have a safe consumption site for injection-drug users so they can uphold good public health and stop

the spread of HIV-AIDS, stop people from dying and get people into treatment. That is what safe consumption sites do.

The Canadian Nurses Association summed it up for me, when it said:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations — especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness...A government truly committed to public health and safety would work to enhance access to prevention and treatment services — instead of building more barriers.

I would wholeheartedly agree with that.

When the bill was at committee, we were only allowed two meetings to hear witnesses on a bill that was so important. The boom was lowered. Censure was brought in and two meetings were held to hear from witnesses. We heard from maybe 13 witnesses overall.

The NDP brought forward 23 amendments to this bill. These amendments were reasonable, based on trying to ensure that the bill actually did meet the terms set out by the Supreme Court of Canada. Many of our amendments, for example, responded to concerns that had been put forward by provincial and territorial officials and were designed to ensure that during the application process, as laid out in the bill, when officials brought forward information about an application, it would be based on evidence and research and not opinions, as is laid out in the bill.

Imagine any other health facility being approved in Canada, first with such an incredible number of people who have to weigh in on the matter. I do not know of any other health facility that would require that. However, in this case, not only is there a lengthy list of officials who have to weigh in on it, they are only required to give their opinion, so it is not actually based on evidence or research.

The other thing we are very concerned about, as has been pointed out earlier in the debate, is that the so-called public process in this bill is absolutely absurd. It is proper to do public consultation. Again, the parliamentary secretary in his comments just now was entirely misleading and incorrect when he said that the opposition did not believe there should be public consultation. Of course we do, but we believe that public consultation should be done in the community where the application intends the site to be.

• (1600)

Yes, in the little town about which he spoke, of course there should be public consultation. As an MP, he can weigh in on it and say whatever he thinks, but in this bill the public consultation can be right across Canada. It can take place for 90 days. There is absolutely no suggestion in the criteria as to how the minister should weigh that so-called public consultation. If there was an application in Toronto, she could take public consultation or opinions from people who live in Calgary or northern Alberta and say that people are opposed to this, so she had better turn it down. It is an absurdity and a travesty of process.

Government Orders

I would like to put on the record some of the key witnesses who appeared before the committee.

For example, Adrienne Smith with Pivot Legal Society, the Health and Drug Policy staff lawyer, said in her testimony that she believed:

It will likely not withstand constitutional scrutiny, and it invites an expensive and pointless charter challenge.

As a representative of the Pivot Legal Society, an organization that uses the law to address the root causes of poverty and marginalization... this bill will restrict access to a proven health care service, which will result in needless human suffering for some of the most vulnerable Canadians.

What a waste. This bill has come all this way. It is now at report stage, it is going to be approved, it is going to go to the Senate, and it is likely going to then go through another expensive course of litigation. Maybe it will go back to the Supreme Court of Canada because it is so flawed. I find that a travesty.

Donald MacPherson, executive director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, said in his testimony:

We are very sorry that this legislation is not coming before the Standing Committee on Health. After all, the primary purpose of supervised consumption services is to intervene in urgent public health contexts where vulnerable citizens are at high risk of serious and sometimes deadly consequences of injection drug use. Consumption services can mitigate this risk, including improving the health and safety of the communities where they might appropriately be located.

I know that commentary from Mr. MacPherson is based on his extensive experience as the city of Vancouver's drug policy coordinator. I know it is based on his review of probably more than 70 studies worldwide now, but at least over 30 in Canada about InSite in Vancouver's downtown eastside. He is entirely correct that these consumption services are about a very urgent public health intervention to save lives and improve the health and safety of the communities in which the facilities are located. In fact, that has very much been the evidence about InSite.

A third witness who I would like to quote for the record is Dr. David McKeown, Toronto Board of Health, medical health officer. He said:

My perspective is somewhat different from that of my law enforcement colleagues, because I come at it from a public health point of view. Toronto is one of several cities in Canada looking to implement supervised injection services as part of an evidenced-based, comprehensive approach to health services for people who inject drugs.

He went on to say that the Toronto Board of Health:

—also feels that the proposed bill is not consistent with the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada... If Bill C-2 is passed...it will be a significant barrier for any community...

The New Democrats put in amendments at report stage to delete all sections of the bill. We had no other choice. We tried to bring in amendments at committee to improve the bill so it would meet the test of the Supreme Court of Canada. I hope members of the House will oppose this bill. It needs to be shut down, rewritten and it needs to uphold the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada.

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the health critic and member for Vancouver East, for her speech. Every time I hear her speak to Bill C-2, I always learn a bit more.

With this being the final stage, I would like her to talk a little more about the vocation and mission of the InSite centre specifically, as well as the way it has helped the people in the surrounding area in the neighbourhood she represents and how it has made the Vancouver East communities safer. The member also alluded to the government's response to the Supreme Court ruling.

Would she like to elaborate on those issues?

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, InSite has now been up and running for 10 years, so it does have quite a long record that can be examined. I think members would be hard pressed to find any organization in Vancouver that would not say that InSite is part of the solution. It is not part of the problem. In fact, testimony at committee from the Vancouver Police Department representative made it very clear that InSite is very well known to the Vancouver police and that they actually refer people to it.

In regard to public health and safety, when we had a recent spat of bad heroin on the streets in Vancouver, the Vancouver Police Department put out a public advisory urging injection drug users to go to InSite, where they could at least inject safely and not die of an overdose, and could go into treatment if they so chose.

InSite has been very important, and not just in terms of saving lives and improving the health of people who are at the very edges of society and sometimes very hard to reach; it has also been shown that InSite has not increased crime and is a resource that has actually become a very important response to drug policy in the Downtown Eastside.

The record is there and it is very clear, yet with the Conservative government and the bill before us, unfortunately no other premises of this nature will likely be able to be set up in Canada.

● (1610)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the consultation process is essential. It is important not only because the courts have actually asked us to provide a regulatory framework for these sorts of things, but also because, as the member has already mentioned, we are in fact looking at authorizing the use of illegal and very dangerous drugs. The member just mentioned a dose of bad heroin.

I have asked members in my own community of Cambridge whether or not they want an injection site in Cambridge. They do not, and I do not think it is a great thing to have. I have asked the NDP and the Liberals if they intend to put an injection site in Cambridge, and they have refused to answer that question, so my concern goes beyond a consumption site where folks come to get clean needles, because they bring illegal drugs into it.

Government Orders

The member is on record as supporting medicalized heroin. I want to know from the member whether the next step is to have the federal government make the heroin and supply it to the heroin addicts along with clean needles.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, what absurdity. Neither the NDP nor anybody else is saying that the member should have a safe injection site in Cambridge. What utter nonsense.

This is about a local community itself feeling that it is an appropriate situation for an injection site, and yes, it should then have to go through a process for approval. Nobody is saying there should not be public consultation, but it should be consultation within that local community. I should not be able to weigh in on an application in the member's riding. It is up to the public health officials and so on in his riding to look at the appropriateness in that riding.

There is so much information being put out here. In terms of medicalized heroin, again, people had to go to the court system to uphold their right to have what was given under the special access approval. It was given under the current government's process and then overturned by the minister. I am glad that they did go to court and got it upheld, because now at least it is helping people.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things my colleague, the member for Vancouver East, was just saying is that this particular piece of legislation far oversteps what the Supreme Court of Canada ruled.

The Supreme Court of Canada gave five very clear factors that the government must look at if it is ever to approve another safe consumption site in any particular place that applies for one. It is not imposing it on anyone. It is any place that applies for a safe consumption site. That is the first thing.

What we feel, and what many witnesses have said, is that this so oversteps that directive that it intrudes into provincial jurisdiction, into municipal jurisdiction, into the jurisdiction of the local police forces, into the work of that region's public health officer, and into whatever the public health officer is doing based on criteria set by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

What we see is that when the government is asked a question about health, it continues to say that we should not talk about it because delivery of services is a provincial jurisdiction. Then all of a sudden the government posts 26 very specific pieces on its legislation, factors that are going to intrude so much on the jurisdictions of other levels of government and on other police forces and on physicians that it is unbelievable.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the right to life, liberty, and security of the person under section 7 of the charter overshadows any decision based on the Food and Drugs Act. That was noted.

I was there. I was in fact the designated minister to look after this issue when we were in government. What we found was that when the Downtown Eastside, during the Vancouver agreement, asked for the safe consumption site to be put in place, it was put forward by the province and by the mayor of the city. The police agreed to have a bubble zone whereby people could use an illicit substance only in that particular area. Everything was taken into consideration.

Let me give some facts.

Prior to the safe injection site being put up in Vancouver, there were about 234 overdose deaths per year in the prior two years. There were 234. After the safe injection site was set up in 2010, there were 2,395 overdoses, and not a single one of them resulted in death. That is why the Supreme Court of Canada said that this safe injection site actually saves lives.

When I listen to what is said around here, I realize that this particular government seems to think that somebody who is using substances and who is going to die is probably disposable, but obviously these people are human beings. They are Canadians. Their lives are worthwhile.

As a physician, I can say that every single life is worthwhile when we look after our patients. People stand here in this House and talk about the fact that this is not wanted in their particular region, but as the member for Vancouver East has said, nobody is inflicting or imposing anything on anybody's town or village or city.

There was a situation in which 234 people were dying from overdose deaths. The rates of HIV and hepatitis C in that little place called Vancouver East were up to extraordinary levels. There were 2,100 new cases of HIV prior to the setting up of this safe injection site in Vancouver. Today there are 30. That change from 2,100 to 30 means this form of harm reduction works.

However, the idea of the 26 pieces in the legislation that the government brought forward is so intrusive that it is going to make it absolutely impossible for any city to ask for a safe injection site, for any police to okay it, for any public health officer to give the details and the data for why it is needed, and for any province that wishes one to be able to say so.

● (1615)

We brought in amendments. Between the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, there were 60 amendments brought to this particular bill, Bill C-2, but not one comma was changed. Not one. This is what happens in most parliamentary committees right now under that particular government: no one listens.

We pay extraordinary amounts of money for people to come as witnesses, and they are expert witnesses. They come to present to Parliament, but so much for consultation. We listen to what they suggest, and when the majority suggest particular amendments, the government just says no.

The government runs a parliamentary committee, which is made up of parliamentarians from all parties. It is not an arm of the government but an institution of Parliament, and therefore should be completely non-partisan in what it delivers. It should listen to experts and factor in what they say. That is what consultation is about. It is not about listening to a whole bunch of people and then telling them, "Thank you very much, but I do not think I care about what you said. I do not like it and I am not going to do it."

The government's ideology opposes harm reduction. Harm reduction is a term that has been expunged from every single piece of language the government brings about. It does not like the idea of harm reduction.

Government Orders

As a physician, I will tell the House what harm reduction means. When someone is suffering from a disease that can threaten their lives, harm reduction is an intervention that brings down the harm so that the person does not die as a result of that particular illness and is able to continue on until a cure or some other way to help them live properly is found. We have seen exactly that in the safe consumption site in Vancouver.

In Australia, Spain, and Portugal there are safe consumption sites. It is as a result of what was done in Europe that we decided to do this particular pilot project in Vancouver. “Evidence-based” is a term that is thrown around by the government. “Evidence-based” means that when one does something, one looks at the outcomes to see what the evidence shows. What is the rate of mortality? What is the rate of morbidity? What is the harm done? How is that harm alleviated? That is the meaning of “evidence-based”, and it is very clear that the safe injection site in Vancouver showed that evidence of success.

The fact that the government has put up all these barriers means there is never going to be another safe injection site in this country. The one in Vancouver has been extended for a year; I see that as a really obvious ploy to wait until this bill passes so that the government can stop the safe injection site in Vancouver from even existing.

These are people's lives. For me as a physician, it is untenable that a government would stand in the way of saving lives. It is also untenable that within an hour of the time this bill was tabled in the House by the Minister of Health, a letter went from the Conservative Party of Canada to all its members and donors that said the Conservatives had just put forward a bill that was going to stop junkies from shooting up in their neighbourhoods.

When that comes from a government, it is extraordinary. As far as I am concerned, it is absolutely disgusting that people's lives should be so meaningless to the government that it would send out such an absolutely callous letter asking for money.

All I have to say is simply this: the word “consultation” is a joke. Parliamentary committees are a joke, currently, under this government. People can come to say whatever they like; the government never listens.

When we hear people say that this bill has been brought back exactly as it went to committee, with not even a comma changed, I think that tells us the state of Parliament at the moment in this country: it is no longer a democracy.

• (1620)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to listen to a Liberal talk about consulting and listening to Canadians. The member talks about the fact that we want consultation in this bill and said that because our opinions might be different than hers we do not care about people. By that measure, the government that she was a member of, which cut \$50 billion in health care, really did not care about Canadians because it did it unilaterally. The minister of state also talked about hepatitis C. I guess the Liberals really did not care about Canadians then. This is coming from a member who won the election in her riding by 33% or 34%. Therefore, 67% of the people in her riding do not agree with her.

The reality is that this bill gives people the opportunity to have a say. The real reason that the Liberals do not approve of that is because they know that Canadians will not always agree with their position. That is the real reason they are having trouble supporting this bill.

I do not need an answer from the member; it is more of a comment that the Liberals never have and never will ever respect what Canadians have to say. That is why they were increasingly reduced, election after election, from opposition to third-party status. I am sure after the next election, Canadians will put them out into the lobby and the dust.

• (1625)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I will not fall for that kind of ridiculous answer from the parliamentary secretary. We are talking about evidence-based decision-making. Evidence does not depend on the member's opinion or his subjective attitude to things, or on the government's opinion or its subjective attitude to anything. It depends on outcomes, on what happens when we do something, and what the evidence shows as a result of it.

Evidence is clearly showing—

Mr. Paul Calandra: It is time to put out those crosses that were burning in your riding apparently. Turn around and tell the people in the gallery that their opinions do not matter.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be able to answer the question and have the member stop heckling. He had his say, and he was very personal about what he had to say.

Evidence-based decision-making is something that has nothing to do with opinions and has nothing to do with subjectivity, yet the government continues to make decisions based on subjectivity. It ignores evidence. It ignores expert advice. I could list how many times the government has done that, but I do not have the time.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think that is very rich coming from the parliamentary secretary. To my knowledge, only 40% of Canadians voted for the Conservatives. That means that 60% did not vote for them. Therefore, I do not think that he can talk about a majority there because it has nothing to do with the percentage of people who voted for someone or for a government.

We are talking about saving lives. Let us see this from a perspective of public safety. We all know how the government likes to brag about being hard on crime and how it wants to protect communities. For a community that has a problem with respect to these kinds of situations, how would having these kinds of injection sites help make to its streets safer?

Government Orders

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the important thing about any kind of public policy is evidence, which has shown, not only in Europe, but also in Australia, and in Vancouver East, that these safe injection sites save lives. We know that all of the people who have lived may not be important to the government, perhaps because they are intravenous drug users or suffer from HIV or hepatitis C. The government does not seem to care about certain people in this country. That is evident from all of the decisions it makes. The point is that the injection sites saves lives. Every HIV case costs the government \$500,000 a year per patient. Therefore, it not only saves lives; it saves money.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Labour; the hon. member for Québec, Canada Revenue Agency; the hon. member for Drummond, The Environment.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to add my perspective, as the member of Parliament from the great city of Toronto, to today's debate on Bill C-2, the respect for communities act, and to stress the importance of passing this proposed piece of legislation.

It is important to note that this bill is in essence, as its long title implies, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, or CDSA, for short, is Canada's drug control statute. The CDSA has two purposes: to protect public health and maintain public safety.

Today, I want to highlight the aspects of the bill that relate to public health, and to most especially reinforce the comments made by my Conservative colleagues on the importance of community consultations. Before I do so, I want to speak for a few moments about the threat that illicit drug use poses to the individuals using them, to the families and loved ones of those who use them, and to broader communities across Canada.

I will start by talking about the impact of illicit drugs on individual users.

Illicit drug use can pose a great risk to a person's physical health, both immediately and over the long term. Drugs like these tear families apart, foster life-threatening addictions, and destroy lives.

Obviously the greatest immediate risk is the potential for a fatal overdose. We know that illicit drug use also presents an increased risk of infectious and communicable diseases, such as HIV-AIDS and hepatitis C, which are associated with major morbidity, mortality, and health care costs.

The issues associated with illicit drug use reach far beyond the individual user, and often have very serious impacts on families and communities. Just ask any parent or loved one of a person with a drug or substance abuse problem about the devastating impact that

these addictions have had on their lives. I am sure that many members in this House today are aware of very personal stories about how illicit drugs are negatively impacting the life of a community member, or perhaps even a friend or family member.

Rest assured that our government is steadfast in its commitment to protecting the public health of Canadians. It is vital that we work first and foremost to prevent illicit drug use, especially among our young people who are particularly vulnerable.

Where addictions exist, it is imperative that measures are put in place to make treatment available, which is why our government put in place the national anti-drug strategy. This strategy is contributing to safer and healthier communities through coordinated efforts to prevent illicit drug use, to treat dependency, and to reduce the production and distribution of illicit drugs.

Our government has invested over half a billion dollars in prevention, treatment, and enforcement activities under this strategy. This represents an unprecedented level of funding for anti-drug initiatives, and this strategy continues to evolve in response to the increased pressures being felt by Canadians and their respective communities.

Most recently, prescription drug abuse was added as a priority issue to be addressed under the national anti-drug strategy. In economic action plan 2014, our government announced almost \$45 million in new funding over five years, to address prescription drug abuse.

This funding will be used for educating people on the safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription medications; enhancing prevention and treatment services in first nations communities; increasing inspections to minimize the diversion of prescription drugs from pharmacies for illegal sale; and improving surveillance data on prescription drug abuse.

Our government recognizes that prescription drug abuse is a serious public health and safety issue that is having a significant impact on communities across Canada. Addressing this issue under the framework of the national anti-drug strategy keeps Canada's focus where it needs to be: on prevention and treatment.

I also want to point out that last year alone, our government committed over \$95 million through the federal initiative to address HIV-AIDS in Canada, and the Canadian HIV vaccine initiative. This investment supports research and prevention, and facilitates access to diagnosis and treatment, particularly among vulnerable populations. It also supports Canadian researchers who are working to prevent infections, improve treatment, and ultimately find a cure for HIV and AIDS.

In Canada, this means preventing new infections and making a difference in the lives of more than 71,000 Canadians who are living with HIV and AIDS.

Government Orders

This government takes the responsibility to protect the health of Canadians very seriously. The bill we are debating in the House today, the respect for communities act, is consistent with our government's approach to addressing illicit drug use in the national anti-drug strategy. That is why passing Bill C-2 is important.

• (1630)

Bill C-2 relates to section 56 of the CDSA, which permits the Minister of Health to exempt a party from the application of the CDSA for certain activities. Bill C-2 proposes two separate exemption regimes. The first would be for licit substances, and the second would be for illicit substances, including a specific regime to undertake activities with illicit drugs at a supervised consumption site. Such an exemption would be necessary to protect the staff and clients at the site from charges of possession under the CDSA.

It is imperative that the Minister of Health give careful consideration to any application for such an exemption. It is also an important principle that the minister be provided with all of the information needed to make an informed decision, on a case-by-case basis, for each application that comes across her or his desk. The substances covered under this act can pose serious risk to the health and safety of individuals and communities if they are abused or misused. We know that the risk is amplified when the substances are accessed illegally, as may be the case at a supervised consumption site.

Such an exemption would only be granted once rigorous criteria have been addressed by the applicant, which includes the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders, such as local residents and businesses. Only then would the Minister of Health be able to verify that adequate measures are in place to protect the health and safety of staff and clients, as well as community members in the vicinity of the proposed site.

Many of the criteria included in the bill are for the protection of public health. For example, an applicant for such an exemption would have to provide scientific evidence to demonstrate the medical benefit to individual or public health associated with access to activities at a proposed supervised consumption site. The applicant would also have to provide a letter from the highest-ranking public health official in the province or territory, outlining their opinion on the proposed supervised consumption site. The applicant would also have to provide a letter from the provincial minister responsible for health, indicating how the proposed activities of the site would be integrated within the provincial health care system.

Every one of the criteria included in this legislation is meant to capture information that is relevant to the minister in exercising her or his duty to protect public health and public safety.

I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of the respect for communities act. As I mentioned earlier, illicit drugs can have far-reaching and devastating impacts on individuals and communities. The respect for communities act would further strengthen our government's ability to protect the public health and public safety of Canadians. Most importantly, Canadian families expect safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children.

This bill would give local law enforcement, municipal leaders, and local residents a voice before a permit is granted for a supervised

consumption site. Communities deserve to have a say if someone would like to build a drug consumption site where illegal drugs are used in their neighbourhood. Canadian families have a right to this input.

The minister needs to have the information that she or he needs to exercise her duties as mandated by the Supreme Court, and our government will continue to keep our streets safe.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and quite frankly I found it to be ironic. I heard him say just how much the government cares about the safety and well-being of Canadians, families and communities. He talked at length about how drug use can harm people and their families.

Meanwhile, by introducing this bill, the Conservatives are taking services away from people and endangering not only the health and safety of people with drug problems, but also that of their families and different communities.

My colleague seems to forget that requests for the construction of supervised injection sites are coming from areas of Canada that are already affected by drug use problems. No one is asking for supervised injection sites to be built near schools. The Conservatives are being asked to provide services where they are most needed.

How can my colleague opposite justify closing facilities such as InSite or making it more difficult to open them in areas such as east Vancouver? These are places where people who really need help can turn to. These are not sites where people go to use drugs, but sites where people receive services.

How can he keep saying that he is protecting Canadians' health with a bill that is so flawed and so ridiculous?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, it seems that my colleague is adding provisions to the bill that simply are not there. This bill is in response to a Supreme Court decision stipulating that the bill must explicitly set out the consultations that are to be held in communities.

These consultations include local police forces, municipalities and health agencies. That is important. This needs to be explicitly set out. Right now, it is not clear how one goes about obtaining an exemption from the Minister of Health. The Supreme Court ruled on exactly that. There must be consultations. In the words of the Supreme Court:

Nor is it an invitation for anyone who so chooses to open a facility for drug use under the banner of a "safe injection facility".

Government Orders

This is not *carte blanche*. Consultations must be held with people in the community before these sites can be opened. It makes sense to consult the community.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that my colleague spoke a lot about public health. If this is meant to look at public health, why did the bill go to the public safety committee when it was introduced by the Minister of Health and should have gone to the health committee? However, that is not the question I want to ask.

Illicit drugs impact on a person's health. The member said so. Harm reduction is very important because it tries to minimize that impact on a person's health. When we see rates of HIV drop from 2,100 to 30 and deaths go down from over 240 a year to zero, does the member not think that is a positive impact on health? The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association and the Canadian Public Health Association all believe this is an important bill.

When InSite was started, the Liberal government ensured that local people, the province, the city, the police, everyone, did their due diligence, and we accepted that. There were huge public consultations that went on for over a year before this was agreed on. Why can this bill not do exactly that? Why does it intrude as much as it does?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting the hon. member talked about consultation as some kind of intrusion. We need evidence obviously, so various stakeholders will be consulted, including local health officials and people who have actually had experience running safe consumption sites. This is the kind of evidence that a minister of health would need to make an application for an exemption. There is also the health of the local community that needs to be considered, which is the reason local police officials would be consulted in these kinds of endeavours.

It is important to get as much evidence before arriving at a decision, and that is exactly what this bill would do. The reason we say we should consult with Canadians in their municipalities and locations is so they can weigh in on very important decisions that affect not just the health of the people who are affected by this terrible affliction of drug addiction, but also the health of the community.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to talk about Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague from Vancouver East for her speech and her work on this file. The member's rigour, and especially her compassion, are a real inspiration to me, and I wanted the House to know that.

Personally, I think this bill is not only a thinly veiled attempt by the Conservative government to put an end to supervised injection services in Canada, but also a direct attack on this country's institutions and a blatant lack of respect for them too. Driven by their regressive and sanctimonious ideology, the Conservatives are utterly

incapable of relying on simple facts to make the important decisions they have to make as a government.

Like many of my constituents in the Montreal community of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, I am deeply concerned about drug addiction and its negative repercussions. As such, this bill is obviously of great interest to me.

It should be understood that I rise here today not only to argue against passing the bill in its current form, but also to set the record straight, since the Conservatives have been deliberately denying the facts and doing everything in their power to twist them.

The facts, which I am going to talk about in the House today, have been studied by numerous researchers; the Supreme Court of Canada relied on these facts to render its important 2011 decision stipulating that the supervised injection services offered by InSite in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside could legally and legitimately be offered to injection drug users.

Bill C-2 is based on the Conservatives' presumption that the services offered by organizations like InSite pose a risk to public safety. However, in its 2011 decision, which the Conservatives decided to violate by means of this bill, the Supreme Court of Canada clearly ruled that it was not simply a question of public safety. Indeed, that decision called on the government to consider exemptions to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in an effort to reconcile health and public safety considerations.

Once again, the Conservatives decided to do things their way and draft their bill by putting their ideology ahead of the principles established by the Supreme Court. They are making the process for obtaining an exemption from the law so complex that it will create a disincentive to opening new centres. By way of evidence, they decided to send the bill to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, where they brought in a series of police officers, whose work is obviously to fight drug trafficking, and representatives of groups with ties to the Conservative Party. In so doing, they deliberately disregarded the entire public health aspect of this issue. If that is not a rejection of the Supreme Court and its rulings and proof that the Conservatives are blinded by their ideology, then it can only be contempt, in my opinion.

The comments by the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness alone are enough to show that all of their decisions are based on this ideology. In fact, in response to my questions at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, he said:

Basically, opening a supervised injection site leads to an increase in criminality, an increase in police resources and an increase in social disorder. That has been proven and that is reality.

Government Orders

I did not really understand why he was talking about that, because I explained to him and to another minister who was there that some people from a low-income housing unit in my riding organize a clean-up every spring. I participate in the clean-up with my team. We clean up the area, which includes removing needles from a nearby park. A supervised injection site could help make this less of a problem. At least this helps back up what I am saying.

If the government truly wanted to make this a public safety issue, I would suggest that a supervised injection site in a neighbourhood like Hochelaga-Maisonneuve would help reduce harm.

I want to take this opportunity to invite the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Health to come take a walk in a park in Hochelaga with their children, so they can understand why some parents back home are afraid of letting their children play outside and why some groups go through the parks in the morning to ensure that there are no needles lying around.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court ordered the government to take public health into account when making decisions about services similar to those offered by InSite. Accordingly, we must recognize that the health of intravenous drug users is cause for alarm.

•(1645)

In Montreal, 68% of users have hepatitis C and 18% are living with HIV. Not only are these serious life-threatening diseases, but they also represent an enormous social cost in terms of health care alone.

According to the statistics, when specialized addiction prevention services can prevent even just one case of hepatitis C or HIV infection, they automatically make their annual budget cost effective. That says a lot. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that between 2006 and 2009, 72 injection drug users died of overdoses in Montreal.

Just like the mayor of Montreal, SPVM police officers, the public health branch and several community groups in my riding and across Montreal, and in light of scientific studies—which rely on facts to reach conclusions—I believe that supervised injection sites are a vital means of tackling the problem in the interest of both public health and harm reduction.

Contrary to what the Conservatives think—since they have such a hard time acknowledging scientifically proven facts—this is not an opinion. There are many well-documented scientific arguments that weigh in favour of supervised injection sites. Centres in Barcelona, Sydney and Vancouver, which have existed for years, are good examples. The list of benefits is impressive: harm levels have been reduced or have remained the same, the number of intoxicated people wandering the streets has dropped sharply, the number of users has stabilized and so on.

It would take a fairly regressive ideology to keep someone from seeing the fact that safe injection sites are an effective and affordable health care service. Some of those in blind opposition to this include the witnesses invited by the Conservatives to appear before the Standing Committee on Health. What a circus.

On one hand, the government refused to invite important witnesses who made it known that they were interested in appearing

before the committee and who could have explained to us the public health aspects of injection sites and the benefits they provide from a harm reduction standpoint. Those witnesses include the Canadian Association of Nurses in AIDS Care and the Canadian Bar Association, which represents 37,000 members across the country. This is what that association had to say in its submission:

However, other parts of the Preamble reflect a continued emphasis on prohibiting illicit drugs. This approach ignores overwhelming historical and current evidence that prohibition drives the drug supply underground and increases violence and deaths associated with drug activity and overdoses. Not only dangerous, this approach has proven expensive and ineffective, even after decades and endless public funds to allow it to succeed. The CBA and many others have argued for a harm reduction approach to instead be used in dealing with illegal drugs and addiction.

That is exactly the opposite of what the Conservatives are saying.

Worse still, they invited organizations espousing an unabashedly Conservative ideology to appear, such as Real Women of Canada, an organization I definitely wish to dissociate myself from even though I consider myself to be a real woman. That organization was obviously invited for the purpose of discrediting studies that recognize the benefits of InSite and supervised injection services in general.

Not only did the witness attempt to discredit the studies, but she went so far as to accuse the researchers of professional misconduct. She was lucky to be given immunity during her testimony. That immunity is obviously not intended to give witnesses a chance to say whatever they want.

What does it say about the credibility of an organization that has appeared before the Supreme Court more than once to plead that a fetus is a person and has the right to life, but is unable to see that an addict is also a person with the right to life?

In its ruling, the Supreme Court recognizes that addiction is an illness and that drug addicts are citizens who have the right, like everyone else, to life, health and security, which are constitutional rights guaranteed under section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Our role as a society is not to lecture people, but rather to show them compassion and help them in order to give them the best possible options.

•(1650)

When it comes to supervised injection services, the days of Conservative bigotry are over. It is time for our country to show compassion toward injection drug users and give them the health care they are entitled to.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, reducing harm is exactly what we do want to do. I want to make that very clear. Maybe I could just maybe explain to the member the issue that we do have.

Government Orders

We know that the Liberal Party wants to legalize marijuana. I have asked the medical association what legalization would mean in terms of prescribing marijuana. Now, the medical association actually does not know. It is going to want very reduced quantities of THC's and extreme regulations of the drug before it would ever prescribe it. That makes sense. That reduces the harm.

My concern, and I think the concern we have on this side of the House, is that while safe injection sites of course reduce harm, they are injecting an illegal drug that no one knows where it was made or how potent it is. What I am hearing members of the Liberal Party say is, "Well, that doesn't really matter because if they overdose, they're at least at a site".

My question now, based upon what some of the member's own colleagues have said, is whether the next suggestion will be that the federal government itself, on the tax dollar, make and prescribe the heroin and do the whole thing. Will the next agenda be that the federal government make and supply the illegal drugs, not just heroin because we know this is for everything? Are we now getting into supplying illegal drugs?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I never suggested anything like that.

Secondly, I will give an example. My sister was a smoker from a very young age. Every year, every day, I told her she should stop smoking, but she never quit. Then one day she suddenly decided to quit and has not smoked since.

Supervised injection sites can offer people support. I agree completely that substance abuse is a scourge that destroys lives. However, addicts can get help at supervised injection sites. Eliminating these services will not make substance abuse go away; quite the contrary. It is important to provide services to people in order to be able to help them quit when they are ready. Only then will there be no drugs in the streets and no syringes in parks.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting listening to the preamble of the previous question referencing the Liberal Party's position with respect to marijuana. The member might want to ask one of his own colleagues who went to a school and declared that he, too, favours legalization of marijuana. He might be interested in finding out what sort of response he gets from that particular member.

My question for my colleague, the New Democratic member, is about this whole sense of federal co-operation. Consultation is something that we saw take place when InSite came into being. That consultation was exceptionally thorough and included the federal government, the provincial government, the municipal government, the different stakeholders, non-profit groups, and some stakeholders, including our police, first-time responders, and so forth.

Would the member not agree that there is and was a great deal of consultation done in connection with InSite and that it would be ludicrous for any member of the House to believe that there would not be any consultation done if, in fact, there were a community that

wanted to move ahead with something similar to the InSite in Vancouver?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, of course there must be consultation; that is clear. However, if we frighten business owners by telling them that there will be more drug addicts in their area, of course they will say no during consultations. They have to be told the real facts. This has to be based on science, not on scare tactics.

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill C-2, the respect for communities act. As I do this, I reflect on the Governor General's words in the Speech from the Throne that opened the second session of the 41st Parliament of Canada, where he spoke of parliamentarians' abiding concern for the common good of our neighbours in each community. It is this abiding concern that is the driving force behind the respect for communities act. Put simply, Canadian families expect safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children.

The respect for communities act would give local law enforcement, municipal leaders, and local residents a voice before a permit is granted for a supervised injection site. A key priority of our government is the protection of public health and maintenance of public safety, and I am very proud of the many measures that we have already put in place and will continue to put in place to improve the health and well-being of all Canadians.

Today I want to highlight the government's specific actions against illicit drug use in Canada and describe how the respect for communities act is a vital component in achieving these objectives. Most importantly, I want to drive home that communities deserve to have a say if someone would like to have a drug injection site where illegal drugs are used in their neighbourhood.

The national anti-drug strategy, as many of us in the House know, guides the government's actions against illicit drugs. Through this comprehensive strategy the government continues to support and protect Canadians, their families, and their communities by implementing measures that reduce or prevent the use, production, and distribution of illicit drugs.

Since its launch in October of 2007, the federal government departments of justice, public safety, and health have been working collaboratively to achieve the three main objectives set out in the strategy, which include contributing to safer and healthier communities by reducing and contributing to the elimination of illicit drug use in Canada, reducing the supply of and demand for illicit drugs, and addressing the crime associated with illicit drugs.

Our government has since invested over half a billion dollars implementing activities under this strategy in three priority areas: prevention, treatment and enforcement. This represents an unprecedented level of funding for anti-drug initiatives and reflects our government's commitment to addressing the issue of illicit drug use in Canada.

Government Orders

In a moment I will share some of our success stories to date, but first I would like to highlight how the national anti-drug strategy continues to evolve in response to emerging trends and changing needs.

In the Speech from the Throne, our government committed to expanding the national anti-drug strategy to address the growing problem of prescription drug abuse. This commitment was reaffirmed in economic action plan 2014, which allocated almost \$45 million over five years to expand the focus of the strategy to also address prescription drug abuse in Canada.

As we move forward, we can build on the success of our past activities in prevention, treatment, and enforcement. Take for example our accomplishments to date with preventing drug use. When the strategy's prevention action plan was established in 2007, our government was responding to some disturbing trends, particularly among young Canadians. We were seeing an increased level of drug crime and increased substance abuse issues at earlier ages. Drug use among our youth was clearly identified as a real concern, and for many Canadian communities it still is. These dangerous and addictive drugs tear families apart, foster addiction, and destroy lives.

• (1700)

It has long been recognized that prevention is best achieved by the coordinated efforts of multiple players. With this in mind, the government invested over \$70 million in community based prevention initiatives under the drug strategy community initiatives fund. This contribution fund program directly supports community-based programs aimed at preventing illicit drug use. I am proud to say that under this program, the government has launched over 130 such projects across Canada. Going forward, these projects will also respond to the issue of prescription drug abuse.

Just last December, the Minister of Health announced \$11.5 million in funding over five years for a health promotion and drug prevention strategy for Canada's youth. This is a national project led by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse as part of the national anti-drug strategy. The goal of this project is to prevent drug abuse among Canadians between the age of 10 and 24, through education, national prevention standards, and the building of sustainable partnerships.

We are now a couple years further into the strategy, but even by 2012 an evaluation indicated that it was increasing awareness of illicit drug use and its consequences. It enhances supports for at-risk populations and improves community knowledge. In particular, the mass media campaign, DrugsNot4Me, and the RCMP's organized crime awareness services showed a major impact in increasing awareness about and understanding of illicit drug issues.

A second key priority has been treatment. Back in 2007, the strategy's treatment action plan under the national anti-drug strategy was established to address the lack of treatment capacity for those in need of support, and the need for innovative and relevant approaches to drug treatment. As part of that action plan, this government invested in the drug treatment funding program to support provincial and territorial governments and other key stakeholders in their treatment efforts.

The strategy has provided over \$145 million to the drug treatment fund. Evaluation findings from 2007 to 2012 show progress in a number of areas, including increasing the accessibility and availability of early intervention treatment services for at-risk youth. I am pleased to say that the scope of the drug treatment funding program has been expanded to address the issue of prescription drug abuse.

The third and final priority I want to highlight is this government's enforcement capacity. In 2007, the enforcement action plan was established to address the illicit production and distribution of marijuana and synthetic drugs, as well as the diversion of precursor chemicals. Efforts were made to target organized criminals and others who profit from the manufacturing and distribution of drugs that endanger Canadian youth and communities.

When the national anti-drug strategy was evaluated in 2012, it showed that the enforcement action plan had increased the capacity of drug enforcement and prosecutors to gather and share intelligence, to analyze evidence, and to control and monitor controlled substances. In addition, the enforcement action plan has raised awareness of illicit drugs and precursor chemical issues among enforcement officers in Canada and abroad through workshops, training, and information sessions, as well as joint law enforcement efforts.

The enforcement action plan has also contributed to increased safety in dismantling illicit drug operations. It should be noted that addressing the manufacturing and production of illicit drugs will require a long-term concerted effort, and this government will sustain its efforts on this important work.

The bill that we are debating here in the House today, the respect for communities act, is aligned with and strengthens the government's approach to addressing illicit drug use as initially set out in the national anti-drug strategy. This government is addressing the causes of drug addiction by implementing measures that seek to prevent Canadians from using dangerous and addictive drugs in the first place, and by supporting efforts that provide treatment options to those who have developed addictions. In addition to this, our government will be working to reduce the drug-related issues that organized crime seeks to perpetuate in our communities.

• (1705)

By supporting Bill C-2 we are demonstrating our abiding concern for the common good of our neighbours across Canada. I encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech.

Government Orders

I know that he was formerly a police officer and he is quite familiar with what goes on. However, in his speech he spoke only about crime reduction and drug addiction, as well as about making our communities safer. Scientifically speaking, everyone who has been involved with supervised injection sites—in Canada or elsewhere—agrees that this is exactly what those sites do. These sites help treat addiction and save lives. They decrease the number of overdose deaths and make our communities safer.

Why would my colleague have us vote in favour a bill that will prevent such sites from opening? Not only would these sites provide advice and help people recover from addiction, but they would also save lives. There is a paradox here. Drugs will not simply disappear overnight, as much as we would like that to happen.

Why does the member want to prevent the public from having access to these services? Could he explain that to me?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, InSite in Vancouver was created because there was a significant problem that had evolved in east Vancouver, and that was the use of heroin and the fact that there were a lot of overdoses.

InSite has not prevented overdoses. In fact, it has encouraged people who use the illegal drug to use it in the facility. The problem I have with that is that there is not one point or one-tenth of a gram of heroin that is purchased anywhere in the world that is legal. As a result, we are encouraging illegal drug use in a facility that will protect them from having any recourse. That is the problem.

We should not encourage people to use the drug; we should encourage them to get off of the drug. The only way to do that is to intervene through means other than a safe injection site.

• (1710)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really hard to know where to begin because of the very unfortunate approach taken by the government on this extremely important public health issue.

The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia is a former peace officer. He knows all too well that we have so many connections between crime and substance abuse in this country that it is not funny.

Here are some facts around InSite usage in Vancouver in the Downtown Eastside. We know that there were 20,000 referrals to health services in 2008-09, over 50% of which were for detox; that InSite users are 30% more likely to engage in addiction treatment than non-InSite users; and that 3 out of 10 injection drug users in Downtown Eastside are HIV positive and that there were 30 new HIV cases in the Downtown Eastside compared to 2,100 in 1996. We know, for an apparently fiscally responsible government on the other side, that every time we prevent one new case of HIV infection we save \$500,000 in health care costs and treatment.

This bill flies in the face of a Supreme Court of Canada decision. It is a bill that, unfortunately, is being torqued and spun by political handlers in the Conservative Party because they want to fundraise and frighten people. I think it is very unfortunate that in 2014 Canadians are subjected to this kind of nonsense.

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question in there.

I know this: for all of the heroin users, and for that matter any person who is addicted to drugs, there is not one who does not want to get off of that drug. They would all like to live clean and be healthy. The fact of the matter is that safe injection sites do none of that because a person still brings an illegal drug into a safe area to inject that drug, which they know is illegal.

I would rather see recovery centres and treatment centres that can encourage people to get off of the drug rather than encourage them to continue with the drug.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill we are debating today on supervised injection sites is, quite simply, a very bad bill—and there is no other way to describe it. There are three major problems with this bill. First, there is a problem with the essence of the bill. It is obviously not based on fact, experience or knowledge about such centres. It is based on a Conservative ideology and on a desire to frighten people in order to raise funds for their party.

This bill is also a good example of the Conservatives' tactics for circumventing the Supreme Court. This bill is yet another sad example of the Conservatives' lack of respect for our laws, for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and for Canadian institutions.

Let us get back to the essence of the bill. Some may think it is silly, but the NDP thinks that decisions should be based on facts and experience. Let us look at the experience we have right here in Canada.

There is InSite in Vancouver. The results obtained by this site have been studied in depth in more than 30 studies published in well-known journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, and *The British Medical Journal*, which are all peer reviewed. As a former social scientist, I know that these publications are very prestigious.

All of these studies highlight the benefits of InSite. Notably, there was a 35% drop in overdose-related deaths. As well, there are fewer needles in public areas and downtown, for one. That is one aspect of this issue that really interests me. I have participated in needle pickups in the riding of Laurier—Sainte-Marie. There are areas where needles are found just about everywhere, including places where children might pick them up and hurt themselves with them. It makes people in the area very uneasy.

With a place like InSite, there are fewer needles in the streets and fewer people shooting up in parks, public places and public bathrooms. There is also a fairly significant drop in communicable diseases.

Government Orders

Finally, these studies contradict what we are hearing from our Conservative colleagues, who are saying that these sites encourage rather than discourage people from using heroine. Those who use InSite at least once a week are nearly twice as likely to sign up for a detox program. InSite is often a stepping stone to give them access to a detox program or other medical services. Often these people have many issues. This is their entryway into the system, a way to help them deal with their problems.

The Conservatives say that there is a negative impact on the community. After having read the studies, I see a positive impact: fewer needles and fewer communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. It is fitting that we are talking about this today, since it is World AIDS Day. Those are some of the benefits.

• (1715)

We have to ask people what they think. One study showed that 80% of those who work or live near InSite support the program and think it is a good idea. Now, 80% is almost three times the percentage of people who support the Conservative government's policies. I think it would be worth listening to them. I know that this government is not in the habit of listening to people, but I think it is important. The people who have direct experience with the situation support the program.

Such sites exist elsewhere in the world, in places like Europe and Australia, and all of the studies confirm the positive impact of this approach. For example, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has shown that supervised injection sites are accepted by the community, contrary to what the members opposite would have us believe, and that they reduce high-risk behaviour and drug use in public. Those are just some of their many findings.

In short, this is good for people in general, and of course it is good for those struggling with addiction. That is why the Supreme Court slapped the Minister of Health on the wrist when, in 2008, for strictly ideological reasons, he turned down InSite's application to renew the exemption allowing it to operate.

In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the minister's decision to close InSite violated the rights of its clients under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and was "...arbitrary, undermining the very purposes of the CDSA, which include public health and safety."

We have a Minister of Health who acts contrary to public health. The Supreme Court also said:

The infringement at stake is serious; it threatens the health, indeed the lives, of the claimants and others like them. The grave consequences that might result from a lapse in the current constitutional exemption for Insite cannot be ignored.

I think it is pretty clear, but how did the Conservatives respond? Instead of saying they would heed what the Supreme Court told them, what Canadians were telling them, and what the experts were telling them and going back to the drawing board, as usual—and this is so typical—they decided to go against the Supreme Court, as well as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I might add, by introducing the bill currently before us.

Through this bill, they are creating an obstacle course of sorts. It would be practically impossible to meet all the demands and criteria and provide all the documents and details this bill requires. It is a

bureaucratic obstacle course for organizations like InSite or other similar organizations that would like to set up shop.

The worst part is that, even if any organizations managed to complete the obstacle course, the minister can always simply say no, no matter what. We are seeing this everywhere. Ministers are getting more and more discretionary powers. These decisions are being made behind closed doors, without any transparency or fairness, and for ideological reasons. Indeed, rather than face a real debate based on facts, the Conservatives prefer their little backdoor schemes. I think that is because they know that otherwise they would lose the debate.

I would like to read a few quotes, and this one is from the Canadian Nurses Association:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations, especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness....A government truly committed to public health and safety would work to enhance access to prevention and treatment services, instead of building more barriers.

• (1720)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie for doing such a fine job explaining all the benefits of our InSite program in Vancouver. She presented evidence showing that the program has saved lives, reduced the spread of disease and saved money. Giving drug addicts access to a safe site results in lower costs to society. They are given help to stay off the streets and to live healthier lives.

The government claims that this bill will allow more sites like the one in Vancouver to open and it talks about a number of commitments. However, the Conservative member who just spoke clearly said that it would be better not to have another site, rather than having a site where illegal drugs are consumed.

In the hon. member's view, which of the two is the real objective of the Conservative government when it comes to Bill C-2?

• (1725)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think it is quite clear. The objective is not to have any more of these sites.

Nonetheless, the Conservative government cannot win the argument, because experts and the public alike all argue in favour of such sites. The Conservatives have no hope of winning the argument.

That is why they are playing this little trick. Since they do not have the right to oppose these sites—because the Supreme Court said so—they want to torpedo them. This lacks transparency—not to use a stronger word.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech and for showing us that this bill does not make any sense.

I would like her to talk about her riding, which is in the heart of Montreal, as my colleague from Hochelaga did.

Government Orders

In her view, would the presence of a supervised injection site make the communities safer, including that of Laurier—Sainte-Marie?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Yes, absolutely. I just touched on it in my speech because there were so many things to cover.

In Laurier—Sainte-Marie, a very urban and very densely populated riding, community organizations work hard picking up needles that are lying all over the place. Children find them in their schoolyards. It is unbelievable.

Opening a supervised injection site would greatly reduce the number of needles lying about. That is one of my greatest concerns in Laurier—Sainte-Marie, although it may not be the most important one.

There are several other problems. In Laurier—Sainte-Marie people who shoot up in the streets are also a public safety problem. We rely on organizations that work with drug addicts, even if they are not supervised injection sites, to try to get people to willingly enter the system. Cactus Montréal is a good example.

Having these people enter the system immediately is not their objective. They try to reach out to these people and have them enter the system willingly so they can receive the appropriate care.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of Bill C-2, the respect for communities act. This is a very important piece of legislation, and one that will further strengthen Canada's drug control statute, known as the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

The legislation before us today proposes to entrench this belief in the law with regard to supervised injection sites, and is guided by a ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, in 2011. In this ruling, the court affirmed that it remains the Minister of Health's authority to exercise discretion in granting section 56 exemptions, which can allow supervised injection sites to operate. However, notably telling is that its decision was not an invitation for anyone who chooses to open a facility for drug use under the banner of a safe injection facility.

It is interesting to hear members of the opposition saying that it must be either no sites, or that every site that one might want to have can go ahead. The Supreme Court of Canada gave parameters around what might be involved, and ultimately said that it would be within the discretion of the minister, having due regard for the criteria that the court set out.

As all members in this House know, our government is committed to helping keep Canadian families and communities healthy and safe. I want to begin my remarks by telling this House about some of the ways that we are living up to this commitment.

Earlier in the year, our government announced \$100,000 in funding for a project that will train front-line community workers and criminal justice personnel in New Brunswick on effective, efficient, and timely substance abuse treatment strategies for youth involved in the criminal justice system. The funding was part of a national anti-drug strategy, which focuses on preventing illegal drug

use and providing treatment services for those with drug dependencies.

There is also some talk about the fact that we need to provide treatment services and that we need to look at preventing illicit drugs. Members have to keep that in the background when looking at this particular piece of legislation.

The national anti-drug strategy also allows this government to get tough on drug dealers and producers who threaten the health and safety of our youth and the viability of our communities.

In 2012, our government introduced the Safe Streets and Communities Act, which is making Canadian communities safer while extending greater protection to the most vulnerable members of society. As part of this act, the government implemented mandatory minimum penalties for serious drug offences carried out for organized crime purposes or that specifically targeted youth. In doing so, our government has further enhanced the ability of Canada's justice system to hold offenders accountable for their actions.

Another piece of legislation that is vital to the government's focus on safeguarding Canadians is the one we have been talking about throughout the debate here tonight on Bill C-2, which is the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, or the CDSA, for short. It controls substances that can alter mental processes and that may produce harm to health or society when diverted or misused. Again, it is in this context that this proposed legislation must be considered.

The act also includes measures to protect public health, by prohibiting activities with controlled substances unless they are authorized for specific legitimate purposes. The act also serves to maintain public safety by prohibiting the possession, trafficking, importing, exporting, and production of those substances unless otherwise authorized.

The act is a prohibitive piece of legislation. That is, it sets out all of the things that cannot be done with a controlled substance, along with identifying which substances are controlled. However, there are times when exceptions to the rules need to be made, and they are made. This is generally accomplished through the making of regulations, and it is also where section 56 of the act comes into play.

Section 56 of the act authorizes a minister of health to grant exemptions from the provisions of the act. While the act gives the minister discretion in determining whether or not to grant an exemption, any decision must strike a balance between public health and public safety. Therefore, it is not an either/or, but must be something that takes into account all of the factors, which the minister has to weigh and then make a decision.

For the most part, the exemptions granted under the act are routine. For example, an exemption may be granted for medical purposes or for scientific ones, such as university-based research or clinical trials, which goes without saying.

Government Orders

•(1730)

The bill we are debating today has no impact on these types of exemptions. The type of exemption that would be impacted by Bill C-2 is one with controlled substances that had been obtained through illicit sources or, as we might say, accessed on the street. They are illegal substances obtained on the street, and, again, that must be part of the context within which we review this legislation.

Currently there are two types of exemptions of this nature that are entrenched in the statute. The first is for law enforcement purposes, for example, to train sniffer dogs used in seizing drugs, and the second is for InSite, as ordered by the Supreme Court of Canada. Throughout the debate, we have heard reference to the Supreme Court of Canada decision concerning InSite. In that decision, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the act's prohibition on possession and trafficking of controlled substances, and affirmed the minister's right to exercise discretion in granting an exemption under the act. It is not in every case that there will be an exemption. It must be exercised as a discretion based on a number of factors.

Bill C-2 was developed further to the Supreme Court of Canada decision, and the criteria included in it codified the five factors that the minister must and should consider when assessing an application as set out by the Supreme Court of Canada. The opposition has said that we should not go into these factors. The Supreme Court said that these are the very factors that must be taken into consideration before a decision is made one way or another. Therefore, I think it is absolutely appropriate to codify those in the amended legislation that we have proposed.

In the respect for communities act, this government is putting in place a regime that would provide further clarity and transparency to the way in which an application would be made for exemptions to conduct activities with illicit substances in a supervised drug consumption site. It would also ensure that the Minister of Health is provided with the information that she needs to make an informed decision on supervised injection sites on a case-by-case basis, as mandated by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The respect for communities act outlines the criteria that the applicant must address when seeking an exemption to undertake activities with illicit substances at a supervised consumption site before the Minister of Health could consider the application. What is wrong with that? There are certain criteria that would have to be met, and the applicant must indeed attempt to meet them.

As I have mentioned, the criteria included in the bill are consistent with the factors set out by the Supreme Court of Canada. They include, among other things, scientific evidence showing that there is a medical benefit to the proposed activities, letters of opinion from key stakeholders, and a demonstration of the financial sustainability of the site. Simply put, the respect for communities act would give local law enforcement, municipal leaders, and local residents a voice before a permit is granted for a supervised injection site. That seems very reasonable to me.

It is our government's belief that communities deserve to have a say if someone would like to build a drug injection site where illegal drugs are used in his or her neighbourhood. Our government is concerned about the potential risks that supervised drug consump-

tion sites could pose for the surrounding communities and the families who live in them. That is only reasonable. For this reason, Bill C-2 would make it mandatory for applicants to solicit the opinions of surrounding communities and relevant stakeholders, including letters of opinion from law enforcement, public health, and municipal leaders.

Further, the applicant would have to consult with a broad spectrum of local community groups and provide a report on those consultations. The applicant would also have to provide an indication of what measures would be taken to address any relevant concerns that are identified in the process. Again, I would say that is very reasonable.

The minister would also be authorized to publicly post a notice of application to seek broad community input for any proposed supervised drug consumption site. A supervised drug injection site should not be created in a residential community without consultation, and that gives the community an opportunity to pose any concerns and have input. It is also an opportunity for those applying for the licence to address any potential concerns. If they have gone through those steps that have been set in advance, then the minister may issue a licence, if she chooses, based on the evidence before her.

•(1735)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question that I have asked before because I think that it is important.

The bill we are debating in the House was introduced in response to a Supreme Court decision concerning the government's intention to close a supervised injection site. However, this site has been successful for 10 years because it has improved safety in Vancouver and also saved lives. That cannot be denied. That has been the case for 10 years. There is evidence and facts attesting to its success.

Does the member believe that the bill clearly responds to the Supreme Court of Canada decision?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, of course they do. The government has said that it does and has taken great pains to ensure that those issues are addressed.

Again, I would like to quote the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, who said:

The factors considered in making the decision on an exemption must include evidence, if any, of the impact of such a facility on crime rates....

It must obviously mean that there are things that we must consider with that in mind. To that was added:

...indicating a need for such a supervised injection site...

We must then have some input and some facts to say that it should be needed here, or that it may not be needed in downtown Vancouver. That might be different somewhere else. She continued by adding:

...the regulatory structure in place to support the facility...

Is it there, or is it not? She also included the following:

...the resources available to support its maintenance, and expression of community support or opposition.

Government Orders

These are the words of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, who said that we must consider these things when we are coming to some conclusion. Therefore, it is only reasonable that the legislation would deal with each of those aspects and say here is the framework, and here is the codification of how we might do that.

I find that very reasonable.

• (1740)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened very closely to a number of the Conservative members of Parliament as they have addressed this issue, not only at this stage, but also at the second reading stage.

I have a fairly clear question for the member. Does he see any value to the InSite that we currently have in Vancouver? I am sure he would acknowledge that many different stakeholders were involved in the creation of that particular site. In fact, many would say that it was a great example of federal co-operation with the different levels of government and different stakeholder that ultimately brought it into being.

As a member, does he see any value to that particular site?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, my view is that the value of that site has little to do with the legislation before us. The legislation before us attempts to deal with what the Supreme Court of Canada said we had to take into consideration. If that site passes all of the criteria, it is entitled to be there as much as any other site.

However, in terms of co-operation with the community, the legislation talks about letters of opinion from provincial and territorial ministers responsible for health and public safety, local government, lead public health officials in the province, and the heads of the local police forces. If we are asking all of these people and they come to the conclusion that this is something we need and should have, after that consultation, and in addition to having public input, we will come to a consensus and say that in this case we should have the facility.

If that site had qualified under these circumstances, then it would. It obviously did once before with the consultation that it did. The minister would then look at giving it an exemption.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful that my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain has pointed out this section of the Supreme Court's decision. I actually took those words and put them into an amendment, which I attempted to get before the committee. That is because what is in the bill does not represent a codification of what the Supreme Court said. It represents a bastardization of what the Supreme Court said. It would put forward conditions, ideas, and notions that are obstacles to creating a site that the Supreme Court has found is in the interest of public health and safety.

The conditions from the court's decision are exactly what should have been in the bill, not *a* to *z*, and then *z* plus one, to confound the efforts to establish harm reduction. I wonder if my hon. friend can explain to me why they did *a* to *z*.1, instead of using the words of the court?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, that is a most unfortunate characterization by the hon. member. It is unfortunate, and it is incorrect.

I do not know what the member would find offensive about the fact that she would consult people who are most affected in the area. I wonder what she would find difficult about accepting the fact that we might consult those who have some knowledge and who deal with this issue.

I wonder if she would look at the fact that this would be in the context of people dealing with illicit drugs, and they would be trying to administer them with immunity from prosecution. When doing all of that, one needs to take things into consideration along the lines of this bill.

Ultimately, the test will be when the Supreme Court of Canada has a look at issues such as this. This is an attempt to address those very issues. It may not be in the precise line and form, but it deals with all of those issues in a particular form.

The member, simply put, is wrong on this one.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to speak to this important piece of legislation. I recall speaking to it at a previous stage, and sadly, I continue to be dismayed by the points raised by government members and the ongoing desire of the government to stifle what is important policy. It continues to disrespect the decision made by the Supreme Court, and more fundamentally, to actively remove some of the safeguards that would allow people, to put it as simply as possible, to stay alive.

This is an issue of life and death. Sadly, some of the rhetoric we are hearing from the government side, rhetoric that is not evidence based, does not take into account the difference safe injection sites make, whether it is here in Canada on the Vancouver east side or around the world. It is truly ideological rather than in the best interest of people living with addictions or in the best interest of people in our communities across the country.

We in the NDP have supported amendments to this bill, amendments that were not supported by the government. We oppose the main motion at report stage. The amendments proposed by the member for Vancouver East were to delete every clause of this bill.

We know that this is a thinly veiled effort to stop supervised injection sites from operating, which is in direct defiance of a Supreme Court ruling on these sites.

This legislation sets out a lengthy and arduous list of criteria that supervised injection sites would need to meet before the minister would grant them an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. These criteria would make it much harder for organizations to open safe injection sites in Canada.

Government Orders

We in the NDP believe that decisions about programs that may benefit public health must be based on facts, not ideology. In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that InSite provided lifesaving services and should remain open with a section 56 exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The court ruled that it was within InSite users' charter rights to access the service and that similar services should also be allowed to operate with an exemption.

Over 30 peer-reviewed studies, published in journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, and the *British Medical Journal*, have described the beneficial impacts of InSite.

Furthermore, studies on over 70 injection sites in Europe and Australia have shown similar benefits. InSite is one of the greatest public health achievements in our country, and we believe that it and similarly beneficial sites should be allowed to operate under proper supervision.

We want to outline that this is a deeply flawed bill based on an anti-drug ideology and false fears for public safety. This is another attempt to rally the Conservative base, as evidenced by the "Keep heroin out of our backyards" fundraising drive that started hours after Bill C-2 was introduced in Parliament. This bill, which will make it almost impossible to open safe injection sites, will actually put heroin back into our neighbourhoods.

We would also point out that Bill C-2 directly defies the 2011 Supreme Court ruling, which called on the minister to consider exemptions for safe injection sites based on a balance between public health and safety. It called on the minister to consider all the evidence on the benefits of safe injection sites, rather than setting out a lengthy list of principles by which to apply judgments.

The NDP believes that any further legislation on supervised injection sites should respect the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision, which is not the case with this bill. We believe that harm reduction programs, including safe injection sites, should be granted exemptions based on evidence of their ability to improve a community's health and to preserve human life rather than on ideology.

Along with my colleagues, many of us have pointed out that since InSite opened on Vancouver's east side, we have seen a 35% decrease in overdose deaths. Furthermore, InSite has been shown to decrease crime, communicable disease infection rates, and relapse rates for drug users.

• (1745)

It is not missed by me, and I am sure many others, that today, on International AIDS Day, we are recognizing the importance of supporting public policy and public health strategies that save lives instead of endangering them. Sadly, what we are seeing is the government use ideological arguments and fearmongering to both disrespect the Supreme Court and to come up with policies that put people at greater risk.

Throughout my years of being a member of Parliament, I have travelled and have spent a lot of time visiting in my constituency. I have met many people who suffer from addictions. Many people can trace that disease back to the trauma they have gone through, whether it be because they were residential school survivors or the

children of residential school survivors or whether it be the trauma related to intense physical or sexual abuse or the ongoing trauma that comes with living in poverty and in a state of hopelessness.

One of the recurring messages I get is how much people want and need help. We know that not all people living with addictions are in a place where they can get help, but the reality is that many people, through the support of friends and maybe family, get to that point, and maybe more than once in their lives. We need to make sure that they have somewhere to turn once they have made that decision, once they know that they can no longer keep going down the path they are going, a path that will almost certainly lead to destruction, or even death. We need to make sure that there are institutions and services where people can get help.

As I hear these compelling stories from people who need help and want help, I see too many examples in my constituency of there being nowhere to turn.

I think of the medicine lodge in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation that has struggled to secure federal funding year after year to provide healing and addiction services to indigenous people who go there to get help, not just from our area but from across the country. It has had to fight to secure funding for programming that works, for culturally appropriate programming, and for support for indigenous people across Canada.

I think of Whiskey Jack, an incredible program for young people in our constituency, located in the PCN. It is a program that works with many underage youth who are suffering addictions, some of them at risk of falling through the cracks in their communities and in our society. This service that is run by committed people in our north is there to help them. Sadly, support from the federal government has always been an ongoing issue.

We need more services. In Thompson we were very excited to hear about the new detox beds in our local centre, yet all of that money came from the provincial government rather than from any partnership with the federal government.

The reality is that the current government is not just pulling away from InSite and from supporting people with addictions; it is pulling away from people who live on the margins of our society and have so much to lose, including their own lives.

I take seriously the need for us to take on our duty as leaders, as legislators, to make decisions based on evidence, based on fact, and based on respecting humanity rather than on ideology, as we see from the current government.

• (1750)

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her presentation.

The bill would provide the Minister of Health with the information needed to make an informed decision.

Government Orders

I would like to ask the member opposite why she opposes the Minister of Health having the right information, whether it be science based, public safety based, or community based, to make an informed decision that would affect an entire community. Specifically, I would like to know more about her perspective on community consultation.

• (1755)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question. Sadly, though, as we know from the work that was done at committee, this bill is actually a veiled attempt at making it more difficult for places like InSite to operate and almost impossible for a place like InSite to open elsewhere in Canada.

Obviously we all believe that consultation is critical, but the way certain aspects of this bill are framed in this case is not actually to that point. It is about shutting down possibilities for continuing to do this important work in our country. We have heard this over and over again from experts. We have heard it from survivors of addictions. As I have pointed out, in article after article, peer-reviewed journal articles lead us to understand that the current government's rhetoric is actually not in line with best practice and where we need to be going.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government gave the exemption to Vancouver's safe consumption site, InSite, we consulted very broadly. We worked in conjunction with the provincial and municipal governments, public health authorities, business associations, and the public widely, and we managed to achieve what I would describe as a form of co-operative federalism wherein local, provincial, and federal authorities came together to create this organization.

Now we learn that in Vancouver, with all of the success that has accrued to InSite and all of the help that it has provided, that despite all the former police officers in that caucus on the other side, the Vancouver police strongly support InSite. The City of Vancouver supports it. The Province of British Columbia supports it. It goes on and on. The only voice that is in denial is the federal Conservative caucus. Even members of Conservative parties around the country at the provincial level are supportive.

Could the member help us understand what could possess the current federal regime to act so contrary to science and experience?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, it truly dumbfounding that we are at this point in discussing a bill that has been on the table for months, after all the incredible work at committee to get the point across to truly respect what we have heard from all the entities and experts and survivors that support it, as my colleague pointed out. It is dumbfounding to still be at this point, fighting a bill that is obstructionist, does not make any sense, and is purely based on ideology. It is disconcerting that the current government is not only not looking at evidence that supports the important work of harm reduction and safe injection sites, but it is also once again failing to respect the Supreme Court decision from a few years ago. It is sadly not a surprise with the current government, which has gone far out of its way to shun and disrespect the role of the Supreme Court at many junctures in our country's recent history.

The fact remains that this is an issue of life and death for too many people, and we have the opportunity to use evidence, science, and expert advice to make the right decision. Sadly, the government is

once again shunning all of that and turning to its narrow fear-based ideology to do the opposite.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege today to speak on a matter that is very important to both this government and to Canadians at large. I am talking about respect for communities and about Bill C-2, the respect for communities act.

Over the course of the debate in the House, we have heard considerable detail about the purpose of the bill and the provisions within it. My intention in speaking before the House today is to focus on a particular aspect of the legislation, the ways in which Bill C-2 reinforces the respect our government has for Canadian individuals, families and communities.

We know that illicit drug use poses serious risks to public health at an individual level and at the broader community level. These dangerous and addictive drugs tear families apart, foster addictions and destroy lives. The serious impacts these substances have on those who abuse them are not only detrimental to the user, but also cause serious concern and fear for their loved ones, their friends and families, and those who live nearby, including neighbours and other community members.

Illicit drug use also poses serious threats to public safety and order. For instance, we know that criminal activity results and prospers from the use of illicit substances. They often help organized crime get a toehold into our communities, and the profits that flow from their purchase allow these criminal organizations to proliferate. It is for this very reason that Bill C-2 requires that rigorous criteria be addressed by applicants wishing to establish new supervised drug consumption sites.

Equally important, Bill C-2 gives the people of these neighbourhoods, our senior citizens, young families and business owners, an opportunity to have their say on a matter that has the potential to dramatically impact their community. Canadian families expect safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children, and the respect for communities act would give local law enforcement, municipal leaders and local residents a voice before a permit would be granted for a supervised injection site.

Bill C-2 establishes rigorous criteria that must be addressed when seeking an exemption for a supervised consumption site, and gives the community members a voice in this process. I congratulate the Minister of Health for putting such a responsive bill before us for consideration.

I also want to point out that the genesis of Bill C-2 is found in the 2011 Supreme Court decision in a case involving a supervised injection site. In that decision, the court affirmed the exercise of ministerial discretion to give exemptions under section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, or the CDSA. The court also said that the minister must balance public health and public safety concerns when exercising that discretion.

Government Orders

The Supreme Court of Canada outlined factors the minister must consider when assessing an application seeking an exemption from the CDSA to conduct activities at supervised consumption sites. These include evidence, if any, relating to the impact of such a site on crime rates; the local conditions indicating a need for such a site; the regulatory structure in place to support it; the resources available for its maintenance; and any expressions of community support or opposition. Those factors form the foundation of the criteria that are incorporated in Bill C-2.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House the last of these factors, which states that exemption applications consider “expressions of community support or opposition”.

As we have said many times here before, our government believes that input from the community is essential. Embracing the need for consultation is one of the major ways that we are demonstrating respect for Canadian communities, hence the title of this act.

The criteria set out in the bill would allow many different voices to be heard and to inform the minister's consideration of an application. The onus would be on the applicant to address all of the criteria. Letters would be sought from various individuals, and I will speak to that.

● (1800)

A letter would be required from the provincial health minister where the site would be located. The letter would need to outline his or her opinion on the proposed activities at the site, describe how those activities would be integrated within the provincial health care system and provide information about access to available drug treatment services for people who would use the site.

In a similar vein, a letter from the local municipal government would be needed, outlining its opinion on the proposed activities at the site, including any concerns with respect to public health or safety.

A letter from the head of the police force in that community would also be required, again outlining his or her opinion on the proposed activities at the site, including any concerns with respect to public safety and security.

Letters from the lead health professional, such as the chief public health officer, and the provincial minister responsible for public safety would be required.

This input from both officials and experts would facilitate the Minister of Health's ability to assess an exemption application. Also important would be the consultations that the applicant would undertake and report.

First, consultations would be required with the professional licensing authorities for physicians and nurses in their respective province.

Second, consultations would be required with a broad range of community groups in the area. The applicant would have to provide a summary of consultations and include copies of all written submissions received.

As previously stated, this is the type of input that is necessary and valuable to the Minister of Health. It does not replace the input that

individuals may want to submit directly to the minister. That is why Bill C-2 serves to truly respect Canadian communities through a provision whereby the Minister of Health would give notice that an application had been received. If the minister posted such a notice of application, members of the public would then be invited to provide comments and views on the proposed site for a period of 90 days after posting directly for the minister's consideration.

One cannot overstate the dangers of illicit drugs, which are often purchased with the proceeds of crime and the sale of which often fuels organized crime. In cases where illicit drugs would be used at a supervised consumption site, our government believes that every measure must be taken to protect public health and public safety. That is why Bill C-2 proposes putting in place rigorous criteria that must be addressed before the Minister of Health can consider an application for a supervised consumption site where illicit drugs will be used.

This brings me to the six principles that would be embedded into the CDSA if Bill C-2 were to come into force. The minister would take these principles into account in balancing public health and public safety when deciding whether to grant an exemption for activities at a supervised consumption site. These principles are statements about what is known to be true about illicit drugs, including the fact that illicit substances may have serious health effects.

Adulterated controlled substances may pose health risks and risks of overdose are inherent to the use of certain illicit substances. Strict controls are required, given the inherent health risks that controlled substances may alter mental processes. Use of illicit substances presents a range of health effects for the individual user, from the risk of overdose to negatively impacting dental health to increasing the risk of devastating infectious diseases such as hepatitis C and HIV-AIDS. Malnutrition, life on the street and dependence on drugs like heroin contribute to poor health and a decreased resistance to disease. Drugs that are purchased on the black market have a high chance of being adulterated. There is no way to regulate their purity, their content or their potency. This amplifies the undeniable health risks posed by illicit drugs.

● (1805)

It is essential that these principles be taken into account as part of the decision-making process for any CDSA exemption for a supervised consumption site. That is why it is so important that Canadian communities be granted a say before any injection site where these dangerous and addictive drugs are to be used opens in a neighbourhood. A supervised drug injection site would not be created in a residential neighbourhood without consultation.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech as he read it. I want to come back to something that he repeated several times. He said that the government was open to co-operating.

Government Orders

If the government is so open to co-operating, then here are a couple of questions. Why, despite the bill being tabled by the Minister of Health, was it given to an enforcement department and committee, namely public safety and security? Is this not evidence that the government's view of addiction is that it is a criminal act?

Second, at committee, many witnesses came forward for three meetings. Many expressed concern that the bill would effectively shut down the current site in Vancouver and make it impossible to create future sites. Amendments were provided by the Province of British Columbia, the chief public health officer of B.C., and the City of Vancouver. All were denied. There were 60 amendments moved by opposition parties. All were denied by the government.

Finally, he talks about addiction. Many years ago, someone taught me that addiction is the antithesis of being free. When people are addicted to something they are actually addicted, so their freedom to choose is severely compromised because they are addicted. Could he help us understand why the government would not be facilitating or helping, particularly in the case, as he mentioned, of hepatitis C or HIV infections? For every HIV infection in our country, it costs half a million dollars in health care costs.

• (1810)

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about today is the consultative process. The Minister of Health has put the bill before Parliament and committee for the express purpose of determining, according to the direction she was provided by the Supreme Court of Canada, the standards by which a community should have input. This would ensure that they have the appropriate level of information they can provide to the minister as to whether or not they want that injection or consumption site in their neighbourhood. It affects businesses. It affects communities. It affects safety.

The member asked why it was put before Public Safety Canada. In my speech I spoke continuously about public health and public safety. Those are the key elements the bill is addressing. This is not about InSite. Bill C-2 is about the consultative process that would ensure there is lots of input for the minister to make an informed decision, given that level of input at a future date on application.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the hon. member. I believe that it is important to base our laws on facts and not ideology. I would like to know whether the member believes that supervised injection sites help lower the crime rate and whether they not only help improve the users' well-being, but also the well-being of the surrounding community.

[*English*]

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question, but it is a disturbing one. We are not talking about the right or wrong of InSite, or of that injection site. We are talking about a consultative process that would allow the Minister of Health to make a fully informed decision.

When the member opposite and his colleagues talk about ideology, their ideology would cause me to be concerned as to the freedom with which they would open consumption sites across the country without appropriate consultation.

I sat in committee and heard from many witnesses from a broad variety of professional backgrounds who offered tremendous insight into what is the right and wrong approach to this. Consultation is clearly the answer to give the minister the right information so that she could then proceed to make an informed decision on whether or not that facility would be opened in a community.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I stand today to talk on Bill C-2. It is not my first opportunity, as I spoke on the bill earlier when it was in second reading and I had the opportunity then to share some thoughts.

I am disappointed that the government has not seen the merit of making a considerable number of amendments to attempt to improve the legislation. For me, this feeds into the script that comes out of the Prime Minister's Office in terms of why we actually have Bill C-2 before us today in the manner in which it has been designed.

I think that Canadians should be aware, if they are not already, that there very much is a hidden agenda with the current Conservative government. We see that in the naming of many of its bills and the manner in which it brings in legislation.

As has been pointed out, when the government introduced Bill C-2, it was just a matter of hours before we saw a press release go out from the government. The government was trying to capitalize on some notion that Canadians could anticipate a bunch of sites being planted all over Canada in all regions and that this was something the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party were going to ensure would take place, but it would be okay, because the Conservatives were in government, and if they were given money, they would make sure it would not happen. It was a propaganda machine that the Conservatives put into place literally an hour or so after they actually introduced Bill C-2.

So much for arriving at what is in the best interests of Canadians through using science and information to design good, solid, sound public health and safety policy. Bill C-2 has very little to do with that, and I am being generous when I say "very little".

Let us be very clear that there is a need to make some changes because of a Supreme Court decision; however, we also need to be very clear that Bill C-2 goes well beyond what the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in terms of the factors to be considered when granting an exemption.

Section 56 of the CDSA gives the Minister of Health discretionary powers to grant exemptions from the act under one of three different categories: medical purposes, scientific purposes, or in the public interest.

Government Orders

The one site that Canada has is in Vancouver. It is known as InSite, and we have heard a lot of discussion about InSite. We need to recognize that it came into being as an experiment back in 2003. Back then, there was a great sense of co-operation. We used the term “co-operative federalism”, and I think that is an appropriate term to use in that situation, because in the lead-up to 2003 when this project came to the surface, we saw months of effort by a wide variety of stakeholders. They came to the table and said that we needed to do something. Ultimately, through consensus-building and working with the different stakeholders, this was the idea they came up with.

It was the Jean Chrétien government, working with Paul Martin and the minister of health, that came up with an idea of what and how the federal government would be able to contribute to the debate to realize something that the community itself wanted and that many other stakeholders felt there was a need for. We also had the provincial and municipal governments come to the table.

• (1815)

As I mentioned in my questions to government members, we saw other stakeholders such as police, nurses, other health care professionals and, most importantly, the community itself come to the table through non-profit groups, resident groups, and individuals who were having addiction issues themselves. All came to the conclusion that this was necessary.

I do not know to what degree the government of the day listens when it is told about some of the issues in our communities, especially in many of the larger communities. We need a government that understands that safe injection sites must be part of a broader evidence-based national drug policy that actually saves lives, reduces harm, and promotes public health. This is the type of government that I believe Canadians want. When it comes to action by the government in addressing that broad consensus, we find that Bill C-2 goes against what is in the public interest and the safety of Canadians.

I represent the wonderful riding of Winnipeg North, which has a great deal of culture and heritage. It has many positive things going for it. However, like other communities in Canada, it has some issues it needs to try to overcome. I do not see a government that is very sympathetic to that, because it is not looking for answers. It is not looking at ways to help communities.

A question I asked earlier today of a Conservative member was whether the member could tell us if he saw any value whatsoever in InSite in Vancouver. He skated about the question and did not provide an answer. If we listen to a number of members, whether it is today or previous days, in addressing this very important issue, we come to the conclusion that the government just does not care about dealing in a tangible way with many of the issues that are important to communities in our country. The InSite location in Vancouver is just one of them.

If we want to be able to deal with issues of addiction and crime in many communities, to look at the environments around some of the schools because of drug issues, needles, and so forth, and if we want to be able to deal with many of these constituency or types of issues, whether in Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, or any other community, we at least need to approach the issue with an open mind. I do not see that on the Conservative benches because the government has

ruled out any sort of science or other presentation that was made, whether by the police forces, health care providers, individuals having to deal with this addiction problem, or community activists who are trying not only to help those with addictions but also to turn communities around and make a positive difference among them.

• (1820)

I do not see a government that is sensitive to the needs of the community. I see a government that is more interested in getting re-elected and using legislation as a tool to attempt to scare Canadians into contributing to Conservative coffers. The bill is more about that than dealing with the reality of the situation. I find that unacceptable, and Canadians will recognize that in 2015.

• (1825)

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the hon. member. I would like to ask him whether or not he believes that his residents ought to have a say in whether or not a drug injection site should be put into their communities. Does he believe that his community representatives and leaders, whether the local school principal, teachers, moms and dads, or senior citizens, are the ones who ought to have a say in whether or not a drug injection site is put into their neighbourhood or at the end of their street?

For the families and many Canadians who have invested in their primary residences, that residence is perhaps the single largest investment they will ever make in their lifetime. If a drug injection site were to be put into their neighbourhood, at the end of their street or just behind their street, perhaps they ought be consulted before such a site goes in.

Does the member believe they should be consulted?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, not only do I believe that, I can also assure the member that they would be consulted.

Does she really believe that there was no consultation before the establishment of InSite? Nothing could be further from the truth. If and when it were to occur again, I can assure the member that there will be consultation taking place without this legislation.

The parliamentary secretary should reflect on that. Even her own minister would be quite content to see the facility close down, yet I do not believe that the Minister of Health has ever visited the facility in question, even though hundreds of lives have been saved directly through this one particular site. However, the minister has never even set foot in it from what I understand—

Ms. Eve Adams: I have.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, of course, she has now. I am glad that she has, as parliamentary secretary. I am glad to hear that. She should be advocating what the Liberals and New Democrats are advocating.

[*Translation*]

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

What has always struck me about the well-known InSite, which was founded 10 years ago, is how innovative it is.

Government Orders

Through creativity and imagination, we were able to create something that was completely new and innovative. The current government is not taking us forward; it is setting us back.

What does my colleague think about how innovative this centre is and how important it is to have innovative policies to address the major challenges facing Canadians and Canada?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. There has been a lot learned through InSite in Vancouver. If we were to canvas, we would find that there is no organization or any credible individuals coming forward and saying that it should be shut down, unless they are a part of the Conservative caucus here in Ottawa.

All of the evidence clearly shows that it has had a very positive and overwhelming impact. There is always room for some improvements, but at the end of the day, there has been a great deal learned from InSite. We would like to think that the government would be open to the types of things that it could learn from that so that we could continue to do what we can to address the whole issue of drug addiction and all of its repercussions.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the more I hear the Conservatives speak about this, the more I know they are hoisted on their own petard.

The parliamentary secretary got up earlier and said she had had the courage to visit InSite. I am very happy to hear that. I wonder if she took a picture and disseminated it to her constituents to explain just how positive InSite's work is. It has dramatically lowered HIV infection rates. It has dramatically lowered hepatitis C infection rates.

The Conservatives are trying to hide behind this notion of consultation, but they really are hoisted on their petard, because there were over 60 amendments moved by opposition parties. None passed. There were amendments by the Province of B.C., the chief public health officer of B.C., and the City of Vancouver. None passed. The Vancouver Police Department supports InSite. It goes on and on.

The only marginalized, completely ostracized group left that does not support moving forward on the safe injection sites is the federal Conservative caucus.

• (1830)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has hit it right on. That is the problem. Everyone outside of the House, and Liberals and the New Democrats within the House, recognize there is a great deal of value to what happens in Vancouver. We recognize that Bill C-2 is not healthy for us to pass.

We can only appeal to individuals like the parliamentary secretary who has visited the site to recognize the good that she saw, and maybe vote more independent of the Prime Minister's office.

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SURVIVORS OF THALIDOMIDE

The House resumed from November 27 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply, as amended.

Call in the members.

• (1850)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 290)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Armstrong
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Barlow	Bateman
Bélanger	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Boughen	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brosseau	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crockatt
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Dykstra	Easter
Eyking	Falk
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Foote
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Grogue
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1855)

[*Translation*]

LABOUR

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for letting me participate in this evening's adjournment proceedings.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to return to a question that I asked in the House on October 2 concerning protection for interns working in federally regulated businesses.

I have spoken with many organizations and young people in the past few years and months. Across the country, young workers are asking that the challenges they face be recognized. They cannot find paid work. They graduate but cannot support themselves because they cannot find full-time work in their field. They are carrying record debt, and their unemployment rate is double the national average.

They are also often exploited by employers who turn paid jobs into unpaid internships. Thus, young people are working for no pay. We have also seen the number of unpaid internships increase considerably in recent years. It is estimated that there are approximately 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada. That is a huge number.

In the meantime, the NDP is calling on the federal government to help these young workers find stable, paying jobs. In May 2013, the NDP member for Davenport introduced Bill C-542 to create an urban workers strategy and increase support for people with unstable jobs. My NDP colleague from Davenport called on the federal government to work with the provinces to challenge the use of unpaid internships and to protect these vulnerable unpaid interns.

Furthermore, the government would have to start collecting data now, through Statistics Canada, on the extensive use of training internships. Unfortunately, right now, there is no information on the number of unpaid internships in Canada. The figure that I mentioned—300,000—was just an estimate, and Statistics Canada does not have any information about this.

I remind members that the Conservative government made cuts to the long form census. We know that youth unemployment is a serious problem, but how can the federal government take action if we do not even have the facts and figures? It is a huge problem.

The NDP thinks that the federal government should commit to working with the provinces to create a national policy on unpaid internships.

When I asked that question in the House, the Conservative government did not give me an answer. The minister said that unpaid interns can file a complaint if ever they find that there have been issues of abuse during their internship. Unfortunately, the minister was mistaken.

Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hilmyer
Holder
Hughes
James
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lapointe
Lauzon
Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leitch
Leslie
Liu
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maguire
Marston
May
McGuinity
McLeod
Michaud
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray
Nash
Nicholson
Nunez-Melo
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Papillon
Péclet
Plamondon
Preston
Rafferty
Rankin
Raynault
Reid
Rickford
Rousseau
Sandhu
Schellenberger
Sellah
Shea
Shory
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Smith
Sorenson
Stewart
Strahl
Thibeault
Toet
Tremblay
Trottier
Turnel
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vaughan
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Yurdiga

Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Hyer
Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kellway
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Latendresse
Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leef
Lemieux
Leung
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Mai
Masse
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Norlock
O'Connor
Opitz
Pacetti
Payne
Pilon
Poilievre
Quach
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Regan
Richards
Ritz
Saganash
Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sitsabaiesan
Sopuck
St-Denis
Storseth
Sullivan
Tilson
Toone
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Valeriote
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 256

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion carried.

Adjournment Proceedings

Currently, there is no recourse for unpaid interns because they are not considered employees under the Canada Labour Code. That is a major loophole, and I am calling on my colleagues to support Bill C-636 so that we can protect unpaid interns.

Will the government finally put an end to this abuse and work with the NDP to extend rights and protections to interns?

• (1900)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles with regard to interns in federally regulated workplaces.

My hon. colleague is asserting that unpaid interns are being exploited and left unprotected, in violation of both federal and provincial labour codes.

Many internships are requirements of post-secondary educational programs which, as we know, are in the provincial and territorial jurisdiction. As such, real change can only be accomplished by working together with our provincial and territorial partners.

That is why the hon. Minister of Labour discussed ways to better protect young workers, including interns, at the meetings of the provincial, federal and territorial ministers responsible for labour. That was just this past September. This is not to say that we are unsympathetic with the goal of the member of the opposition, but the federal government cannot go it alone.

I can assure the House that the labour program is carefully examining the Canada Labour Code to ensure that individuals participating in internships in organizations under federal jurisdictions are safe and treated fairly. Our government is studying measures that could address the challenges faced by interns.

What protections exist for unpaid interns?

The Canada Labour Code states that employers must ensure that individuals are informed of and protected from health and safety hazards in the workplace. This includes interns.

While internships are not specifically addressed in the Canada Labour Code's employment standards, if an intern in a federally regulated workplace believes that he or she is entitled to benefits, he or she can file a complaint with the labour program and it will investigate. If labour officials determine that an employer-employee relationship exists, the individual's employment entitlements will be enforced and protected. This includes, among other things, hours of work, wages and vacation.

I share the member opposite's concern for the well-being of these hard-working young people. We can all agree that no one should experience harassment. Employers are responsible for providing a harassment-free environment and to take action when it occurs. Many workplaces have anti-harassment policies, grievance procedures and/or unions. Any intern who believes he or she is being harassed should seek help through appropriate mechanisms to address this. For example, the Canadian Human Rights Commission deals with complaints regarding discrimination and harassment.

We are focused on jobs and growth and the economy. We are relying on young Canadians to help fill critical skills and labour shortages in a number of sectors and regions. That is why we support a number of initiatives to help our young people learn and develop important skills to help them in their future career. This is why earlier this year the Standing Committee on Finance held a number of hearings focused on examining youth employment in Canada.

It is also why economic action plan 2014 is investing \$40 million to support up to 3,000 paid internships in high-demand fields. In addition, the youth employment strategy has re-allocated \$15 million annually to support up to 1,000 full-time paid internships for recent post-secondary graduates.

Our government will continue to support young Canadians, especially those who are preparing for and those who are currently part of the workforce.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I know that she has had to stay late tonight in order to answer my question, and I appreciate it.

She says that there is legislation that applies to interns. It is true that there are various provincial laws in this country that protect interns. However, there are no protections in place for interns who work in transportation, telecommunications and banks. We need to fill that gap and create legislation that will protect interns working in those three areas, which fall under federal jurisdiction.

The largest number of unpaid interns are working in telecommunications. A former intern, Jainna Patel, recently filed a complaint because she was doing the same work as paid employees, although she was not being paid herself.

That is why my bill, Bill C-636, is needed. It will protect interns, such as Jainna Patel, who have no recourse under federal law. What is more, unpaid internships penalize young people who do not necessarily come from well-off families and who cannot afford an unpaid internship.

Will the hon. member opposite support my bill, Bill C-636, so that we can protect unpaid interns who are working in areas under federal jurisdiction?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, youth employment issues matter to thousands of young Canadians looking to acquire experience and find a job in today's competitive job market.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government understands the importance of having opportunities for training in the workplace yet recognizes that internships can raise important concerns about labour standards and occupational health and safety protections, especially when they are unpaid. No one should feel unsafe at work, which is why the Canada Labour Code ensures that individuals are informed of and protected from workplace health and safety hazards.

An efficient labour market includes workers of different ages. We need our young people. That is why we are studying the issues faced by interns and young workers. The government will continue to stand by our hard-working young people as they work towards building meaningful careers.

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 29, I asked the Minister of National Revenue a question about the Canada Revenue Agency, which acknowledged that its letters are so complicated and badly written that, in many cases, taxpayers do not know whether to write a cheque or wait for a refund. It is a mystery.

Ultimately, this mismanagement of communications leaves Canadians confused and paying penalties. We are asking the government to sort out the situation and fix it. A Canada Revenue Agency study confirmed that millions of the messages that bureaucrats send to taxpayers every year are poorly organized and incomprehensible. There is also an unjustifiably severe lack of professionalism, and communications are just too dense for people to understand. The Canada Revenue Agency is out of touch with the people, and by letting the situation persist, it is complicating matters. All of this gobbledygook comes at a price. Confused taxpayers are flooding the agency's call centres with requests for information over the phone, and they are sending the agency thousands of letters to ask for clarification. Dealing with those complaints is costly and takes up more and more resources. The Canada Revenue Agency needs to fix the problem and the penalties. This would not happen if communications were clear and well written, as they used to be. Sometimes government benefit cheques are cut off for no reason because people do not understand the agency's unintelligible letters.

One study also suggested that the agency needs a champion, a direction, really, so that it can overcome the problems caused by bureaucratic inertia.

In 2014, at a time when we understand the importance of confidentiality, privacy and the right to adequate communication that provides clear explanations, we simply cannot accept situations like some I have seen in my riding, for instance. Someone came to tell me that when he tried to file his federal tax return online, it could not be found. He was asked a while later to send the whole return again, as though it had been lost. What happened to his data? How was it processed? Does he need to worry or wonder whether it is there, dormant or hacked? Those are legitimate questions. Of course, someone also has to pay for that.

On that point, it is important to point out that the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada has said that a new wave of work force adjustments among officials who work on tax evasion and tax havens will reduce the government's ability to recover money owed.

Considering the costs related to so much inefficiency and the many scandals that came to light over a number of months, it is absolutely crucial that the government act and respond appropriately. I am convinced that the Conservatives across the aisle understand the point I am trying to make and understand that we need to stop this lack of professionalism. Indeed, it is not very Canadian. It makes no sense. It is absolutely crucial that we take action and correct the situation, which will also help our reputation around the world. Learning things like that will make us look good.

• (1910)

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue and for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member from Quebec for her question.

I think the member said that the question was asked on October 29. I believe the minister answered very clearly and precisely on that day. However, if the hon. member did not understand the answer, I am happy to take more time and go into more detail in answering tonight.

Our government regularly seeks and receives feedback from businesses, individual taxpayers, and experts on our communications and how these can be simplified and clarified, as clarity is essential. We are taking action. As part of its commitment to continuous improvement, the CRA routinely conducts evaluations to assess the effectiveness of its programs and the performance of its services.

The most recent third-party evaluation was initiated by the agency as part of this ongoing effort, and it is a critical input to its focus on reducing red tape and supporting taxpayers in complying with their tax obligations and assessing the benefits to which they may be entitled. The recommendation from this evaluation will lead to changes and improvements for all taxpayers. In fact, the CRA has already taken action on the file.

On October 9, the minister announced that the CRA is taking advantage of red tape reduction consultations in all provinces and territories across the country to solicit feedback on correspondence sent by CRA and how communications with taxpayers can be improved. These consultations will seek the views of small businesses and tax service providers, whose feedback often reflects that of individual taxpayers. The minister has also requested that CRA further engage Canadians to solicit their opinion on how to improve its correspondence with them.

Adjournment Proceedings

Just last month, the minister also announced that the CRA is launching a new e-services initiative to improve correspondence with Canadians through the expansion and improvement of our secure online mail services for individual taxpayers. Over the next 18 months, the most common letters and notices that CRA generates, constituting more than 60 million pieces of correspondence a year, will be available online to Canadians in simplified, easier-to-understand formats. This includes the launch in February 2015 of our manage online mail service, which will be available for individual Canadians to receive their notice of assessment. The online mail service will be significantly expanded over the subsequent 12 months to include other mail to Canadians, such as benefit notices and statements. It was on October 9 that the minister started this initiative and she will continue to take action on it.

In the meantime, the member said that she had an individual case in her riding. I would certainly suggest to her, if she has not done so already, to approach the minister on that individual case and ask for some clarity on it.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I very much understood the minister's response on October 29. She said that clarity was essential and she was right. Clarity is essential, but that also means there needs to be an investment in human and financial resources. The Conservatives keep making cuts, so of course things are not going so well. It costs money to achieve a certain level of quality.

If I may say so, with the Conservatives, we have access to two official languages in Canada: English and translated English. This creates problems with regard to clarity. This creates problems in translation. We end up with information and communications that are awkward and unintelligible in French. That is a problem that should be examined more closely.

Apparently, federal public servants working at the Canada Revenue Agency were recently informed that their bilingual positions would now be designated unilingual English. How am I being answered today? It is strictly in English. That is a problem. It is a reality and if we want clarity, then we have to be prepared to pay and provide the human and financial resources that are needed. Government services cannot be reduced to bare bones or the quality of communication will be affected.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, as I said, CRA is committed to improving its communications with taxpayers and has already taken steps that address the member's concern.

It should be noted that in a typical year, the CRA sends out approximately 129 million pieces of correspondence. The approach we are taking will make sure that the highest volume streams of correspondence are improved first.

We are committed to improving communications with Canadians. As I mentioned previously, internal program evaluations, audits, and reviews are an integral part of how CRA monitors and improves the management and delivery of its programs, and we have already taken action to improve communications. This includes improved plain language in CRA's tax forms and guides, internal training and tools

for employees on the use of plain language, and, more recently, it has focused on providing simple to use online services, including online mail.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to revisit a question that I asked the hon. Minister of the Environment concerning a report issued by Germanwatch. This report indicates that, under the Conservatives, Canada has the worst record of all OECD countries when it comes to combatting climate change.

Some might say that this is not surprising in light of everything we have heard recently and all the fossil awards Canada has received at international climate change conferences. However, it is still disconcerting to again be admonished for not doing our job. There is an important explanation for that: we have not yet tackled what will become the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Canada—the oil and gas sector.

The purpose of the adjournment debate is to obtain answers that were not provided in question period. I am going to try to get those answers. I will put a few questions to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, who is here this evening. First, when will there be regulations for greenhouse gas emissions for the oil and gas sector?

Secondly, the Minister of the Environment recently made an announcement. She said that there would be a little help in that area, since it had been announced that the U.S. and China had made some firm and very important commitments to move forward on the fight against climate change. The Conservatives have long said that they would not do anything until the U.S. and China did something. That reasoning did not make any sense, but now that the U.S. and China have made these firm commitments, what did the Minister of the Environment do? She announced that another \$300 million would be spent on the fight against climate change and some international assistance. My question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment is this: what does that \$300 million mean? Is it the amount to be allocated every year, over 10 years, 50 years? We have seen some announcements regarding additional funding over the very long term. Over how many years will that \$300 million be spread?

I have one last question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment. I moved a motion at the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development asking that the opposition parties may also be represented at international climate change conferences, such as the one in Lima that began today. Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment support the motion that will finally once again give the opposition parties the right to attend climate change conferences? There is more than one vision of Canada, there are several. They should be represented in international debates.

Those are my main questions for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment. I hope to get answers to all those questions.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1920)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to addressing the challenge of climate change and has followed through on that commitment with concrete action, both domestically and internationally.

Domestically, the government is implementing a sector-by-sector regulatory approach and has started by addressing emissions in two of the largest emitting sectors of the Canadian economy. These are the electricity sector and the transportation sector. With our government's coal-fired electricity regulations, Canada became the first major coal user to ban the construction of traditional coal-fired electricity generation units. The regulations also require the phase-out of existing coal-fired units without carbon capture. For example, in the first 21 years, the regulations are expected to result in a cumulative reduction of about 214 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. That is the equivalent of removing some 2.6 million personal vehicles per year from the road over this period.

In collaboration with the U.S., our government has developed regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions from new passenger automobiles and light trucks. With these regulations, it is projected that 2025 cars and trucks will produce about 50% less greenhouse gas emissions than 2008 vehicles. Our government has also developed regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions from new on-road heavy-duty vehicles. With these regulations, it is projected that 2018 heavy-duty vehicles will emit up to 23% less greenhouse gas emissions.

Internationally, Canada is playing a constructive role in the United Nations negotiations toward a fair and effective, new post-2020 climate change agreement. We have always said that for any international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all major economies and emitters must do their part.

As my colleague said, we are very encouraged to see the United States and China, accounting for 39% of global greenhouse gas emissions, taking action, as Canada only emits less than 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We will continue to play our part by reducing emissions at home and working with our partners across the globe to establish an international agreement that includes all emitters.

Through our current chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and as a founding member and major finance contributor to an international organization on climate change and clean air, we are taking real action to address short-lived climate pollutants, such as black carbon and methane. Due to their short lifespan, reducing these types of pollutants can achieve more immediate climate benefits, particularly in the north.

Our approach is working. We have decreased emissions while growing the economy. For example, in 2012, greenhouse gas emissions were 5.1% lower than 2005 levels, while the economy grew by 10.6% during that same period. Our government will build on these actions by working in concert with the U.S., while continuing to collaborate with provinces to reduce emissions from the oil and gas sectors. This will ensure that Canadian companies

remain competitive in the context of the highly integrated North American energy market.

More than 275,000 Canadians rely on the oil sands for jobs. That is why we will continue to take an approach that balances the needs of the environment and the economy. We are going to accomplish all of this without a job-killing carbon tax, which would raise the price of everything.

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to debunk the Conservatives' two most popular myths, which my colleague repeated. I am sad that he did not answer any of my questions.

First, it is not true that the Conservatives have a good record on climate change. In fact, it is the provinces that have done all of the work—especially Quebec and Ontario, which will soon have a cap and a greenhouse gas emissions trading system, known as a carbon exchange. That is what the NDP endorses. The first myth is therefore debunked.

Second, it is not true that Canada emits only 2% of greenhouse gas emissions. No matter how you calculate it, Canada is one of the largest polluters per capita in the world. The OECD has said that we are the third-biggest polluter. There is nothing to be proud of there.

As for the oil sands, the Prime Minister said that we reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 40%. However, according to an article in *La Presse*, greenhouse gas emissions have actually increased by 500%. That is because the government calculated the total emissions instead of the intensity of the emissions. That is what should be done. We need to be honest here.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, Canada is working diligently to reach an agreement in Paris that is fair to Canada and includes all emitters and all economies.

Currently, Canada emits less than 2% of greenhouse gases globally. Canada also has one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world, with 79% of our electricity supply emitting no greenhouse gas emissions.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government has made significant investments to transition Canada to a clean energy economy and advance this country's climate change objectives. Since 2006, our government has invested over \$10 billion in green infrastructure, energy efficiency, the development of clean energy technologies, and the production of cleaner energy and fuels.

As I said, we are doing that without a \$21 billion job-killing carbon tax that would raise the price of everything.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:27 p.m.)

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