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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, December 11, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 11, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 38(6), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions.

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MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2013-2014 annual report of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

I am very proud that our government continues to support the commission's important work. I would like to acknowledge the important achievements included in this year's report.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation in the 30th Regional Assembly of the America Region of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, held in Toronto from August 4 to 8, 2014, and respecting its participation in the 32nd session of the Europe Regional Assembly of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, held in Warsaw, Poland, from September 28 to October 1, 2014.

[*English*]

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH ACT

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-646, An Act to designate the month of April as National Hispanic Heritage Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to introduce my private member's bill, an act to designate the month of October as Hispanic heritage month.

Hispanic Canadians represent a dynamic community that has made important contributions to the growth and prosperity of Canada. In fact, in 2011, almost 900,000 people declared Spanish as their native language and reported Latin American and Spanish origins. This number is growing each and every year.

By nationally proclaiming October as Hispanic heritage month, our nation would formally recognize and celebrate the rich contributions of Hispanic Canadians to the fabric of our culture and society, and provide national opportunities for Hispanic populations in Canada to share and promote their unique culture and traditions with their fellow Canadians. Above all, Hispanic heritage month would be an opportunity to remember, celebrate, and educate future generations about the outstanding achievements and contributions of all Hispanic people in Canada.

It is my hope that members will support this bill.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

EXPANDING THE OBJECT OF FEDERAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES ACT

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, FD) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-647, An Act to expand the object of the federal regional development agencies.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill has four objectives.

To begin, it would broaden the mandates of the federal regional development agencies to include not only economic development in the regions and their communities, but also sustainable development, promotion of social and cultural affairs and environmental protection.

It would also ensure that the agencies work in partnership with municipalities, SMEs, not-for-profit organizations and communities to achieve their new objectives.

In addition, it would facilitate the reallocation of funds that are currently managed by various departments working in silos in order to create a single access point, which would increase access to these funds and reduce red tape.

To conclude, Forces et Démocratie wants the agencies to ensure that development in the regions and communities responds better to actual needs.

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

* * *

[*English*]

WARNING LABELS FOR RADIO APPARATUS ACT

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-648, An Act respecting the prevention of potential health risks from radiofrequency electromagnetic radiation.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce my private member's bill to inform and caution Canadians of the potential health risks from radio frequency electromagnetic radiation, most commonly created by smart phones, portable phones, baby monitors, and wireless systems.

Smart phones provide Canadians of all ages with a broad array of valuable services; yet, most Canadians are unaware that these devices not only receive but broadcast electromagnetic radiation, which has been classified by the World Health Organization as possibly carcinogenic, and that the length of time of use near or touching the body may increase health risks.

This legislation would require manufacturers to place warnings, which are now buried in tiny booklets few users ever read, on the outside packaging of their products to empower consumers with the information they need to make informed choices, knowing all such radio apparatus may cause serious long-term health effects. The bill was prepared with the assistance of Citizens for Safe Technology, a national organization based in my riding of Oakville.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN OPTIMIST MOVEMENT AWARENESS DAY ACT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-649, An Act to establish the Canadian Optimist Movement Awareness Day.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to introduce my bill, which would designate the first Thursday in February in each and every year as Canadian Optimist Movement Awareness Day.

The optimist movement has been around for 90 years. Its members have long worked to develop the creative, cultural and sports potential of young people.

There are more than 630 optimist clubs in Canada, which have more than 16,000 members. Each club helps nearly 80 young people in every region. Each optimist club needs to recruit more volunteers. This would help young Canadians thrive, develop their potential and develop self-confidence.

Today, I want to thank my optimist sponsor in Saint-Anicet, André Picard, with whom I have worked a lot, as well as all of the other optimists I spoke with in developing this very positive bill.

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

* * *

● (1010)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions from my constituents in Parkdale—High Park.

The first petition calls on the Government of Canada to stop the devastating cuts to our postal service, Canada Post.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls for the Government of Canada to make reuniting families a central priority in Canada's immigration system.

SCIENCE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition calls on the Government of Canada to end its muzzling of scientists and to reverse the cuts to research programs in a variety of government departments and agencies.

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table petitions from people from Kapuskasing with respect to the right of small-scale family farmers to preserve, exchange, and use seeds.

The undersigned are asking the government to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize that they have a vital role to play in the struggle against hunger and poverty, and 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.

[*Translation*]

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first calls for the creation of a corporate social responsibility ombudsman for extractive companies. Since the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor, which was created in 2009, is completely ineffective in resolving conflicts and has not proposed any effective solutions, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to pass a law to create an ombudsman position.

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the government to protect navigable waters.

As a result of the changes the Conservatives have made to the Navigation Protection Act, only 62 rivers, 97 lakes and three oceans remain protected. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to exercise its responsibility and guarantee the continued right to navigation on all of Canada's lakes and rivers and to restore the environmental assessment process.

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with a number of constituents who presented me with several petitions on the issue of having Canada adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty. There are a number of signatories who, I suspect, are appealing to a good number of members of Parliament.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions with a lot of signatures.

The petitioners, citizens of Canada, acknowledge that the current impaired driving laws are too lenient. In the interest of public safety, these citizens of Canada want to see tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentences for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

The petitioners are also calling for the Criminal Code of Canada to be changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

The Deputy Speaker: I see the member for Parkdale—High Park is rising. Is this on something else or is it on petitions?

● (1015)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Petitions.

The Deputy Speaker: Since the member has already been up once, she will need the unanimous consent of the House. Do you want to seek that?

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I request the unanimous consent of the House to present further petitions.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

NATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think this is a first for my time here in Parliament. I want to thank my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to present these petitions.

I have petitions signed by members of my community in Parkdale—High Park. The first petition is calling on Parliament to designate May 5 of each year as a national day of the midwife.

DEMENTIA

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of Bill C-356, to create a national strategy for dementia.

SCIENCE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is in support of the creation of an independent science watchdog for Parliament.

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last petition is in recognition of the inherent rights of farmers to reuse, save, select, exchange, and sell seeds.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to refrain from making any changes to the Seeds Act.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this place in the last opportunity before the break to present yet another petition from members of the GTA who are very concerned about the whole issue of precarious work.

More and more workers are working jobs that are short-term, contract, or freelance, are self-employed, or work multiple part-time jobs; and some, especially young workers, are working for free. They have very little protection, no job security, no pensions, no benefits.

We need to take this issue seriously. The people who have signed this petition call on the government to enact a national urban worker strategy. It is an honour for me to present this on their behalf today.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 767 will be answered today.

[*Text*]

Question No. 767—**Ms. Laurin Liu**:

With regard to proactive enrolment for Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement benefits: (*a*) how many persons aged 65 and over who did not receive benefits without applying for them in 2012 are now receiving them automatically, broken down by (i) region, (ii) province; and (b) what percentage of those persons who had to apply to receive their benefits in 2012 now receive them automatically, broken down by (i) region, (ii) province?

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), automatic enrolment in the OAS pension, Canada pension plan/Quebec pension plan, CPP/QPP, for beneficiaries with 40 years of CPP/QPP participation, category 1, began in April 2013. The Old Age Security Act stipulates that the minister can only waive a pension application for an individual on their 65th birthday. As a result, individuals over the age of 65 are not captured by this process.

Therefore, no individuals aged 65 and over in 2012 have received benefits without having had to apply for them.

The first individuals to be automatically enrolled for the OAS pension at the age of 65 began receiving benefits in May 2014. From May 2014 to October 2014, approximately 60,750 individuals began to receive the OAS pension without having had to apply.

With regard to (b), 0% of individuals aged 65 and over in 2012 have received benefits without having had to apply for them.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 766 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 766—**Mr. Dennis Bevington**:

> With respect to the Northern Greenhouse Initiative (NGI), and to the Call for Expressions of Interest to access NGI funding that closed on September 30, 2014: (*a*) how many applications were received; (*b*) who applied; and (*c*) when will the successful applicants be announced?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

NÁÁTS'IHCH'OH NATIONAL PARK RESERVE ACT

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of the Environment) moved that Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve of Canada), be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we debate third reading of Bill S-5, I want to express my full support for the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve act.

The purpose of the bill is to formally establish and protect Nááts'ihch'oh under the Canada National Parks Act as our nation's newest national park. This would the forty-fourth national park Canada has created since it first set aside lands in the Rocky Mountains for Banff National Park.

Located in the Mackenzie Mountains of the Northwest Territories, this newest national park borders on the Yukon territory and shares part of its boundary with Nahanni National Park Reserve. At 4,895 square kilometres, it would be the fifteenth-largest national park in Canada.

I want to express my appreciation to fellow parliamentarians who have spoken in support of Bill S-5. It is clear that support for the protection of Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve under the Canadian National Park Act cuts across party lines and is a vision shared by all.

However, as we move toward the end of debate on Bill S-5, I do want to address some of the perceptions that have emerged during discussion on Bill S-5, both in this chamber and in committee.

In short, some of the commentaries suggested our government lacks the commitment to both protect Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve and to honour the undertakings we have made to the first nations and Métis of the area in the establishment agreement that we signed in March 2012.

The first issue I wish to address is the public consultation program.

A number of members have raised concern over the fact that so few of the over 1,600 participants in the consultation program indicated a preference for the boundary that closely resembles the one that was chosen.

When Parks Canada released its three boundary options for comment in 2010, it was very clear in its material that it was not a vote but a discussion. The agency clarified that it was possible that none of the three options presented would be the boundary, stating:

> The three boundary options being presented are not formal proposals and it is unlikely that the final park boundary will look exactly like any of them.

Indeed, the final boundary was not any of the options presented for public consultation. At the request of the Sahtu Dene and Métis in 2012, the government added a 20-square-kilometre extension of the national park reserve boundary into the O'Grady Lake area. The purpose of this addition is to facilitate visitor access to this new national park in a very beautiful area.

As the consultation program demonstrated, the government's proposal to create Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve generated considerable support among Canadians. Over 96% of the participants who submitted written comments expressed their support for this initiative to create a new national park, and over 61% cited as important the protection of the habitats of important wildlife species such as grizzly bears, caribou, Dall sheep, and mountain goats. Passage of Bill S-5 would be the best means for this House to positively respond to this level of support.

Consultation programs are but one element of an overall approach to deciding upon whether to create a new national park, under what conditions, and with what boundaries. In the case of Nááts'ihch'oh, the results of the 2010 public consultation program were not the only factor in deciding the boundary. Our government also had to consider the final views of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Sahtu Dene and Métis; the results of the mineral and energy resource assessment that was undertaken the by the Geological Survey of Canada; the strategic value of the minerals in the area to Canada; the needs and plans of the current mineral development companies that have interests in the Nááts'ihch'oh area; and the views of other implicated federal departments.

The result of this process is a proposal for 4,895-square-kilometre national park reserve that would protect the upper reaches of the South Nahanni River as well as habitat for woodland caribou and grizzly bears, while allowing for the development of existing mineral claims and leases and for potential future mineral development.

● (1020)

The second issue I want to address is the suggestion that Parks Canada would not be able to maintain the ecological integrity of Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve.

The Canada National Parks Act states:

> Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks.

The establishment agreement we signed with the Sahtu Dene and the Métis commits both parties to sustain the ecological integrity of the South Nahanni River watershed.

Several speakers have cast doubt on our government's commitment to ecological integrity in light of the recent report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development on Parks Canada and ecological integrity. I want to dispel this concern. Parks Canada continues to maintain professional and technical science capacity at each of Canada's national parks in order to deliver science-based programs such as ecological monitoring and restoration and the protection and recovery of species at risk. It will be no different in the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve.

In his report, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development concluded that:

> Parks Canada...is fulfilling its key responsibilities for maintaining or restoring ecological integrity in Canada's national parks. The Agency has developed a solid framework of policies, directives, and guidelines for fulfilling its key responsibilities....

The commissioner also highlighted the fact that Parks Canada is recognized as a world leader in developing guidance on ecological integrity. I would note that Parks Canada is transparent with the Canadian public on the state of our national parks' ecological health, as we are the only country in the G8 that is reporting on the state of ecological integrity in our national parks system.

Parks Canada is also recognized internationally as a leader in building respectful, trusting relationships with aboriginal peoples, which includes the active use of traditional knowledge in ecological decision-making. It would be no different in the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve.

All of this augurs well for the ecological future of Nááts'ihch'oh, as our government has the legislative mandate for ecological integrity the staff and resources, and the track record to ensure that this park would be left unimpaired for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of future Canadians.

The third issue I want to address is the ability of Parks Canada to promote tourism associated with Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve.

The agreement between Parks Canada and the Sahtu Dene and Métis confirms that a shared purpose is to "encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the Park" and to "enhance the experience of visitors to the Park". I am pleased to note that between 2009-10 and 2013-14, Parks Canada measured a 4% increase in visitation to our national parks, which is almost a half a million new visitors. Our government has seen growth in visitation to a range of sites. Gros Morne National Park, on the west coast of Newfoundland, saw a 6% growth between 2012-13 and 2013-14. There was a 21% growth in Cape Breton Highlands National Park in Nova Scotia, a 13% growth in Ontario's Bruce Peninsula National Park, and a 31% increase in visitation to Manitoba's Wapusk National Park.

At the urging of the minister responsible for Parks Canada, the agency is developing an approach to unleashing the economic potential of our northern national parks with a focus on more aggressively attracting visitors to experience northern Canada and the culture of the aboriginal people who call these lands home.

Clearly Parks Canada continues to deliver quality ecological integrity and visitor service programs, and, most importantly, it continues to deliver on its mandate to maintain and make use of the national parks so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Finally, there have been suggestions during this debate that in creating Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve, we would simply cut the ribbon on a new park and then abandon it, offering press releases but not funding its development and operation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

● (1025)

Among other things, the agreement signed by Parks Canada and the Sahtu Dene and Métis states that a shared purpose is to create employment and business opportunities for beneficiaries of the affected Sahtu communities. Since we signed that establishment agreement with the first nations in 2012, Parks Canada has moved to immediately implement the terms of the agreement. For example, the minister of the environment appointed representatives to the management committee that is to advise on the management of Nááts'ihch'oh. The management committee provides advice to the minister and the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board on various matters, including renewable resource issues, the park management plan, employment, training and economic opportunities for members, and protection measures.

Until a new office is constructed, Parks Canada has opened a temporary office in Tulita and hired four employees, including the site superintendent. One of these is a Sahtu beneficiary. Parks Canada is advertising all positions locally in the community and consulting with the Sahtu on how best to attract Sahtu beneficiaries. In hiring staff, Parks Canada is taking into account special considerations for Sahtu cultural knowledge and provides preferences to qualified Sahtu members.

After signing the establishment agreement, Parks Canada started discussions with the first nations on the supply of offices, a visitors' centre, a warehouse, and housing units. In the end, the total capital investment in the community will be $3 million.

Clearly, we have not just cut a ribbon and run. We are committed to fulfilling the terms of our agreement with the Sahtu Dene and Métis and have moved to immediately implement it. We have committed the necessary funds to establish, develop, and operate this new national park. We are taking steps to ensure that this new national park reserve will not only protect the environment but make a meaningful contribution to the social and economic well-being of the community. This legislation would protect the lands and waters of a nationally significant landscape in the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve of Canada.

In passing the bill and making it law, we are providing Parks Canada with the powers necessary to protect this national treasure for the benefit of all Canadians. It is not just here in Parliament but across our nation that people work to protect the great symbols of our nation, the great institutions of our democracy, and the natural and cultural heritage that stand as a testament to the history of our great nation. We owe them our gratitude.

In conclusion, I hope that all members will support passage of Bill S-5 and the formal establishment of Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve under the Canada National Parks Act.

● (1030)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech and for coming here and presenting the government's viewpoint on the bill, which has certainly not come from the front benches of this establishment. That is something that should always be considered when presenting such an important bill.

I want to talk a bit about Parks Canada, because having lived next to Wood Buffalo National Park for my entire life, I know very well what has happened with national parks in our country.

Under the Liberals' administration, national parks were the whipping boy for program cuts. They have continued that way through this government. In the year 2000, I remember the park superintendent at Wood Buffalo telling me that the park's budget in real dollars was less than it was 20 years before. We are dealing with very large pieces of land that do not have a lot of support in terms of financial resources to do the job that has to be done.

In the Nahanni expansion, I asked Jim Prentice, the minister at the time, to give me a letter outlining what he was going to do for this expansion. He said they were going to put $5 million into capital projects for the Simpson and Nahanni Butte region. That was seven years ago. Nothing has been spent yet. I talked to the director the other day in committee. He said they have $3 million put aside, so over seven years the $5 million has turned into $3 million, and nothing has been built.

What is the best indicator of future performance? It is past performance. How is the government going to improve on its past performance when it comes to putting infrastructure into our national parks?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that the question comes directly after we just invested $250 million in national parks.

There is a strong commitment. Even the environment commissioner's report stated very clearly that Parks Canada is in a position to make sure it upholds the ecological integrity of our national parks. We will continue to work toward that.

The Conservative government has established more national parks and added more national parks and more conserved areas in this country than any government has before. We continue to support that work going forward.

Parks Canada has clearly stated that it has the financial wherewithal to do the work it is required to do to not only maintain our parks but to enhance them and make them better places for our visitors from around the world.

Members can see from the statistics I gave in my speech that we are seeing a rise in park usage. More than half a million more people visited our national parks than in past years. That is a fantastic record, and it is something we can all be proud of as Canadians. We should stand side by side in the House and be proud of our great national parks and be willing to bring them forward as something we should all be proud of as Canadians.

● (1035)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is right. We should all be proud of our national parks.

I listened the to the member from the Conservative Party talk about how the government has done so much for national parks. I hear the New Democrats say that the Liberals do not support national parks. Here we are today, talking about the Nááts'ihch'oh national park, which was actually created by Pierre Elliott Trudeau back in 1972. It was a time when governments around the world were not moving toward national parks. We had a visionary prime minister back in 1972, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who saw the merit of this particular national park, which we have today in a much more expanded way.

The member is right that we need to value the potential role our national parks can play, not only for people but for the environment. This particular park, for example, has grizzly bears and caribou, among other things.

Would the member not agree that as we continue to evolve as a nation, we need to explore how we can add to our national parks in a positive and creative way? Today is a step. Is it perfect? Likely not, but it is a step moving forward. Would he not agree?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from across the way from Winnipeg North, my neighbouring riding. He is acknowledging that we are doing something great here, that we are moving forward, and that this is a very positive step for Canadians. I would agree with him on that.

The creation of national parks is very important. The Conservative government has created three national wildlife areas, three marine protected areas, two national parks, two national marine conservation areas, and one historic site. That is a pretty good record for the government. We have done a lot of work.

At the environment committee, we spent a lot of time working on the national conservation plan, which is being rolled out as we speak. As the member opposite indicated, that work was very much predicated on hearing from people across Canada who were telling us about the need to not only have these parks but to be involved in them, to be able to actually touch and feel things and be part of that natural area we have a natural inclination to be out and about in. That is what we heard a lot in our hearings during those meetings on the national conservation plan, and that is what we continue to bring forward here.

It is important that we continue to work on establishing these things.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, parks are a very important part of Canadians' lives. The Conservative government has an excellent record when it comes to the number of parks and protected areas it has created. It has already created three national wildlife areas, three marine protected areas, two national parks, two national marine conservation areas, and one historic site.

Why is it important to now establish the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that great question, because it is important that we have an understanding of why it is so important that the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve now be established.

The establishment of this park reserve will complete the ongoing work to significantly expand Nahanni National Park Reserve and to conserve a significant proportion of the world-class South Nahanni River watershed. We will expand the original 4,765 square kilometre boundary of Nahanni sevenfold, to the point that it will be the third-largest national park complex in Canada, at 34,895 square kilometres.

Globally, this is among the most significant national park expansions. The boundary for the expanded Nahanni and the newly established Nááts'ihch'oh includes habitat that will protect up to 600 grizzly bears, as my friend across the way alluded to earlier. That is nine times greater than the number of grizzly bears protected within Banff National Park, Canada's first national park.

● (1040)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this park will be enormous. When one includes the neighbouring Nahanni National Park Reserve, it will be approximately 35,000 square kilometres. That is more than six times the area of P.E.I. This huge park will naturally also have a very long boundary.

I would like to know from the hon. member the key achievements within the boundary of the park.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, the final boundary of the South Nahanni River watershed will protect about 70% of the South Nahanni River watershed that lies within the Sahtu settlement areas.

In combination with Nahanni National Park Reserve, 86% of the entire South Nahanni watershed will be protected. The park will protect, in and of itself, about 82 grizzly bears and the summer habitat for the Nahanni woodland caribou herd.

Visitors will now be able to paddle the South Nahanni River from the Moose Ponds to the Nahanni National Park Reserve within that boundary.

The boundary was selected to achieve key conservation gains, including protection of the upper reaches of the South Nahanni River, as well as habitat for woodland caribou and grizzly bears, while allowing for the development of existing mineral claims and leases and potential future mineral development.

Again, as I said, the boundary will protect 70% of the South Nahanni River watershed within the Sahtu settlement area.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill S-5. Of course, we support the development of national parks, and as a national party, we are very much in favour of Parks Canada.

As an MP from the Northwest Territories, my job in Parliament is to make sure that the people in the Northwest Territories get the deal they agreed to with the Conservative government. That is my job, and if I do not do that, I am not doing my job. Therefore, when the hon. member said that somehow this is linked to the flowery thought of all these national parks and that I am opposed to it, that is not the case at all. My job here is to represent the people of the Northwest Territories and the people of the Sahtu. That is what I am here for, and I know that job.

We are pleased, and we hope that the bill will pass later today and that we will all agree to get it done before Christmas, because really, this expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve is a Christmas gift to Canada. It is not necessarily simply from the government; it is from the people of the Sahtu Region. The first nations, the people who have settled their land claims, had the ability to say to the Government of Canada that they were willing to enter into a partnership and create a national park reserve in their territory on the land their ancestors lived on, which is theirs to use. They went ahead with this for the good of Canada and for the good of everyone. I think that is who we should be celebrating here today: the people of the Sahtu Region. They are the ones who are ultimately responsible for this national park.

I could say the same thing about the Dehcho Region during the first expansion of the Nahanni national park. It would not have happened without the support of the Dehcho people.

Now we have a third park in the Northwest Territories that our first nations people are looking to develop and create. That is the Thaidene Nene, which is located on the eastern edge of Great Slave Lake. It is a beautiful area, and these people are working very diligently with Parks Canada, with everyone they can, to promote and develop this sacred area, which they understand will be a world-class national park in the future.

Our people in the Northwest Territories are onside with national parks, but we want to make sure that the Conservative government is onside with what it takes to create a national park. It is not just an agreement on the land that will be put in a reserve. It is the understanding that we need to build the infrastructure. We need to make the opportunities for that national park, one of many in the Northwest Territories, to flourish and provide the people of the Sahtu Region with an opportunity to show the beauty of their region, to bring people into Canada, and to offer something that is unique and wonderful in an ever-shrinking world: wilderness that is well preserved and is part of a natural ecosystem. That is what we have with Nááts'ihch'oh park. It is a wonderful opportunity.

We are onside with this endeavour. We look forward to the bill going through third reading here today and leaving this place, with the understanding that it can go to the Governor General for final approval. That would be a very good thing to happen.

It is not that we agree with everything that has happened with the park. There are people who have said that the boundary should be larger, but that is something the government has made a decision on. That is the role of the government. It chose not to listen to the people. Therefore, the Conservatives are moving forward with this reserve, and we have to accept that. That is fine. We will deal with it. There will be other governments in the future that may make the changes required to completely control the ecosystem in that area and make sure it covers the whole watershed. Those are issues we can deal with later.

● (1045)

The national park reserve sets out an area whose final boundary will be renegotiated. There will be opportunities to deal with that. Therefore, this is not a problem and we can move ahead.

I want to switch gears and talk about the Sahtu Region. The Sahtu Region in the Northwest Territories is an amazing area. It has natural resources that have been exploited for many years by Imperial Oil at the Normal Wells oil field. When we think of it, the current government and the Liberal government before it have always refused to allow the royalties, the dollars collected from the Normal Wells oil field, to be returned to the people of the north.

The government tells us what is in the devolution agreement. It says it owns part of that oil field and that it is not going to share it. How did it get ownership of it? It traded the rights to take royalties from Imperial Oil for a one-third share of ownership. Therefore, on a deal that was struck between the Liberals and Conservatives—I do not know who struck this deal, but they made a deal—the government collects the money as ownership rather than royalties, and tells the Northwest Territories government that it is not going to get a penny out of it. This has been going on for 40 years.

When we talk about putting a little money into a national park in the Sahtu Region, that is after the government has fleeced the people of the Northwest Territories, taking all the money out of their pockets from the oil field. That is what the Conservatives did. They cannot deny it; that is the history. With the Liberals and Conservatives, it is the same old story. It is really an unfortunate aspect of the development of the Northwest Territories that this resource is not considered part of any devolution agreement and has been taken out of the equation.

What happens in the Sahtu Region? There is limited infrastructure development, there is a high cost of living, people have less than adequate community resources. That is the situation in the Sahtu Region. No wonder people are looking to a national park for an opportunity to improve their lot in life.

There was some talk in the last couple of years about fracking oil. Shell went in and other companies were fracking oil there. That is fine. At $60 a barrel now, that is over. It is finished. It is not going to happen. Nothing like that is going to happen in the Sahtu Region for a long time. We have an opportunity now to develop other resources, most of which have been identified as tourism. Local people can be involved in this and we can see some sort of economy creeping in on that basis.

It is a sad fact of northern development that these kinds of arrangements are made. Governments take and do not return. Resource development in every other region of the country is used to develop the region. Royalties are used to improve the situation so that the region can develop. In this case in the Sahtu, those monies have amounted to about $120 million to $150 million a year over many years. That might be reduced a bit now with the price of oil going down, but those are the kinds of dollars we are talking about that have been kept out of the Sahtu Region.

The government has not reinvested. It says it owns this resource, but does it put the money back into the region to make sure that it is good? Any normal public government with the right and responsibility to collect money from a region generally puts something back into the region.

I am glad that the government has agreed with the Sahtu people to create the national park, but it might explain why my concern lies more with the promises that are made about the development of the park and the investment that the government is willing to make in national parks in the Northwest Territories.

In the case of the Nahanni expansion, the dollars were actually cut back. There were some seven years in which infrastructure was not developed, and then the dollars intended for infrastructure are cut by 50%.

● (1050)

How does that work? Did you not think about inflation? Does inflation not come into developing infrastructure? Do you not—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, we are approaching the Christmas season, and a number of times during my colleague's speech he has referred to "you" as not doing something. It is important that he acknowledges the good work that you have done. We appreciate the work that you do.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that expression of support.

The member did cross the line, that very last time. Before that, generally when he was using the term "you"—and I have made this ruling in the past—it was meant as a collective "you", as in "you the administration" or "you the government", as opposed to you as an individual or a bunch of individuals. However, the last time I believe it was more personal, so I would caution the member for the Northwest Territories to be careful of that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I was talking about the Liberals and Conservatives together, and perhaps when I said "you", the Conservatives did not realize that I was lumping them in with the Liberals for their refusal to deal with the north respectfully when it comes to this particular aspect of northern development in the Normal Wells oil field. The Conservatives have stuck with the Liberal line.

Regarding the "you" that I was referring to, I apologize for any confusion I might have caused my Conservative colleagues this close to Christmas, because I know they are probably thinking about mistletoe and Christmas pudding and all the rest of that. I am really happy for them because it is a good time of year and I am sure we will all enjoy ourselves at Christmas.

However, I want to go back to tourism because with oil at $60 a barrel in this country, we are going to have to do something other than resource development. Sixty-dollar oil is not going to make this country run properly. Let us talk about tourism and what the government has done for tourism over the last years since the Conservatives have been in power.

With regard to tourism, the marketing investment made by various nations in tourism in 2011 was as follows: Ireland, $211 million, a 14% increase; Mexico, $153 million, a 4% increase; Australia, another resource-developing nation, $147 million, or a 30% increase; France, a similar increase, Canada—we should be up there—$72 million, a 10% decrease in our marketing effort by the current government. Every other country in the world has taken tourism seriously. What is wrong with the Conservatives? Do they not understand that bringing people into this country helps our balance of trade, that it creates jobs and opportunity for real people? Whether it someone working in a gift shop in Victoria or paddling a canoe for a visitor in the Sahtu Region, or whatever people are doing, they need the support of the federal government.

We need to sell Canada. We need to sell these beautiful national parks that we have created. We need to put that on the table. Yes, perhaps some national parks have seen increases in their tourism, and we could pick out a few of the smaller ones and say that is great. Yes, national parks are going to be a selling point for Canada, but we have to sell them. We have to invest in them. We have to make the marketing decisions that will improve the opportunities for tourism to increase so that we can actually benefit from them.

Perhaps we should simply invest in oil, which jumps from $147 a barrel down to $60, back up to $100, and now down to this. How is this going to work for Canada? It is not sustainable. This type of activity cannot be the main stem of our economy. We need to go back to the basics of how we make a living in this country. We cannot be living high off resource development when prices are so fragile. Some days resources are going to make a lot of money for people and those people will put more money into housing, causing the price of housing in Calgary to rise to a point where sooner or later it will fall and hurt everyone. However, what happens when interest rates go up and all those young people who have resource-development jobs paying them $180,000 a year and have bought expensive houses no longer have those jobs anymore? We are going to see the same situation that occurred in the 1980s.

Why should we be so focused on resource development? Why not invest in things that we can control? Tourism is a great opportunity.

Let us think about it over Christmas. As people are eating their plum pudding, as they are enjoying the love and affection of their family, which I am sure all of us are going to do and look forward to so much, let us think about tourism. We should think about the opportunities that exist for this country to share what we have. We should think about the beauty of the Sahtu Region and about the incredible nature of the Nahanni National Park.

● (1055)

I remember Jack Layton, Olivia Chow, and I went down the Nahanni River in the summer of 2007. We wanted to promote the expansion of the park. What an incredible area Nahanni National Park is. One of the reasons it is so incredible, and I do not think many people in this country realize, is that it is an area that was never glaciated. When we go down the canyons of the Nahanni for 200 kilometres, the rocks we see up on either side, a thousand feet into the air, are the rocks that were there a hundred million years ago. The patterns of change that have occurred over those years through erosion have created the most magnificent spectacle one could imagine.

What a treasure is Nahanni National Park. What an opportunity—

Hon. John Baird: The Prime Minister quadrupled the size of it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, then he reduced the budget.

We have seen that we have quadrupled the size of the parks and we have reduced the budget. How does that work? Why not invest in these parks? Why not think that these parks are the real opportunity for growth and tourism in this country? We cannot simply look on them as the whipping boys for cutting the budget for the government. That should not be the case.

National parks should be that sacred trust in which we put forward that opportunity to expand, to look at the wonderful wilderness we have. In a world of nine billion people, wilderness is one of the most valuable commodities there is. Going forward, we know that people will want to come and visit the parks. We know they will want to experience what we have here. Let us invest in that. Let us make that happen.

When my hon. colleague accused me of not liking national parks, that was absolutely ludicrous. I love the wilderness. I love what we are doing with the size and shape of our national parks, but we absolutely need to make sure that investment goes in, so that the people of the regions I represent will benefit. The Northwest Territories has given up more land for national parks than any other part of this country in the last 10 years. Let us see the investment go in to make that a reality for us.

Mr. Speaker, you have done an incredible job of keeping me in line. Thank you. I will stop my discourse there, because I can see I will not get much more applause from the other side, so I think this is a good time to quit.

● (1100)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of my friend from Northwest Territories. I want to refer to some of the things he said.

He should acknowledge that it is this government that has increased protected space in Canada by 40%. We quadrupled the size of Nahanni National Park, something that conservation experts and environmentalists had pushed for years. It was not the Liberal government; it was this government.

The hon. member is very correct that the Nahanni National Park is a phenomenal place, the first UNESCO world heritage site in the world. It was the first one designated. For years there was even mining allowed in these great areas. I think that is an example of where we can work together and accomplish great things.

There were new financial resources put to the park, never as much as anyone would like, but we have seen some good success. The bill before us, I think the member would acknowledge, is another step in the right direction, keeping up the momentum that has been building in recent years.

I found his speech quite entertaining, and I do not like Christmas pudding.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the words I did not hear from the minister were the words of the first nations of the Sahtu Region, the Dehcho people, the people of Lutsel K'e, who are the ones who actually make the parks happen. Without their support, this would not be here. That is why I said this is a Christmas gift from the first nations of my region. The Sahtu have said they are willing to give up their traditional land to make a reserve that they will share with the rest of the people for eternity.

I thank the government for listening. That is very good.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Northwest Territories, for his excellent speech.

Speaking of resource extraction, Stephen Kakfwi, the former premier of the Northwest Territories, had some pretty harsh words to say about the proposal. Of course, there is the expansion of the national park, but the way it was done was rather strange. Indeed, Mr. Kakfwi said he has the impression that it was done to protect the interests of mining companies. In the end, a large section of the land basically looks like a doughnut, with a hole in the middle, which is not protected although it is crucial to the protection of habitat and breeding grounds in that territory. According to Mr. Kakfwi, that part of the park will not be protected specifically in order to allow exploration.

Since my colleague knows the area very well, I would like to hear his thoughts on Mr. Kakfwi's remarks about the park's expansion.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, Stephen Kakfwi, the premier of the Northwest Territories from 2000 to 2004 was an excellent leader. He was a visionary in the Northwest Territories and has my total respect. I understand where he is coming from on this. We have talked about the issue of the size and shape of the park. Where we have to go with this is that, as this is a national park reserve, in the future the national park will be established. If there is a government with a will to include more of the area within that national park, that is something that could be accomplished and something we could look forward to. Right now what is happening is a step that is supported by the people in the Sahtu Region. They are willing to accept what the government is offering to do. They are partners in it.

I think we can support this going forward in good fashion for those reasons. Nothing is perfect in this world, but as we go along in life we can make things better.

● (1105)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's opening comments when he made reference to this being a Christmas gift of sorts. What we can take from that is, even though we have the bill that originated out of the Senate before us today, at the very least we should acknowledge the efforts of the first nations and other stakeholders who got engaged to give a better understanding of the needs of the community and the importance of the designation of having an expanded national park. This is not something that occurs overnight; it takes a great deal of effort that goes far beyond politicians sitting in the House of Commons. Therefore, it is important that we recognize their efforts and applaud them for allowing us to be where we are today with respect to being able to move forward and expand a national park.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, what the member is saying is absolutely correct, except the emphasis should be on the work that the Sahtu people did in getting a land claims agreement in place and in developing the whole idea of respect for their rights to the land. What we see coming out of that is that the plans other people have can come to fruition. It is an object lesson about getting land claims settled and putting first nations in a position of empowerment over their land. Then we can see good results coming from that.

What we are seeing in this country right now is the exact opposite of that, with all of these court cases over resource development. We see that governments and industry are not paying attention to the custodians, the owners of the land in many cases, who are the first nations people. When they do, good things happen.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Northwest Territories for his compliments, but also for his support on this very important bill. He hit it right on when he said that, in the season of gift-giving by Santa Claus, this is a great gift for us to give Canadians.

It is appropriate that the former minister of the environment, who did so much work up north to expand these parks that people even knew him as "Johnny Nahanni" when he was doing this work, was acknowledged here in the House.

In the spirit of giving and the spirit of Christmas, there is another park that we have an opportunity to give, as a gift to Canadians this holiday season. I want to talk a little about the Rouge Park. He knows that some people really respect Santa at this time of year, but then others respect Scrooge and are kind of looking towards the Grinch, and they are obstructing these wonderful gifts to the GTA.

We know the Liberal history of the Trudeau government of the 1970s and how it treated farmers. Now we see the Liberal government aligning itself with some of the most radical environmental groups, looking towards environmental integrity. We talked about environmental integrity in the Rouge and how that is not possible.

I was wondering if my NDP colleague would, in the spirit of Christmas, say that the NDP will help us support the creation of the Rouge and not align itself with the grinches on the side of the House in the Liberal Party who have been playing politics with this park for years. Let us make that a reality over Christmas for Canadians.

● (1110)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, this is a complex issue that the member is asking me to address right now, and that would be difficult in the 45 seconds I have.

My thoughts are full of mistletoe and Christmas pudding, as well. In this moment, I cannot say that I can offer that to the member. To me, it speaks volumes about the difference in values. When first nations people have the opportunity to respect the land and to preserve the land, they will pick up on it. In Ontario, in urban areas, my goodness, those values are much more difficult to put in place. That is something people in Ontario can learn from first nations in the Northwest Territories.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there does seem to be a lot of Christmas spirit around here.

In a moment of Christmas spirit, I am going to give colleagues a gift: I will speak very briefly about this bill. I appreciate the enthusiasm on the part of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I anticipate that this enthusiasm is shared by pretty well everyone in this House.

The reason is that there has been lots of debate about this bill. Pretty well everything that needs to be said has been said. There is general support on both sides of the House for this bill. It has been noted, and I will note again, that it is regrettable: the minister could have taken the entire South Nahanni watershed, as the population wanted, and turned it into an addition to this park.

For Liberals, this is a special park because it was initiated under former prime minister Trudeau many years ago. Successive governments have added to this park. I congratulate the government for its latest addition to the park.

It is ultimately kind of dragging bad news out of good news to take out what would have been the South Nahanni watershed and shrink it down to what is in the metes and bounds description that is in front of the bill. Regrettably, it only had the support of two people, of all of the 1,600 people who were canvassed.

Nevertheless, I adopt the views of a former colleague, Ethel Blondin-Andrew, that we should not let perfection be the enemy of the good. This is a bill that is worthy of giving support, and I am urging all colleagues to do so.

Again, in the spirit of Christmas, merry Christmas to all.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his brief but very interesting speech.

I think everyone in the House is very pleased to support Bill S-5. Although it is not perfect, just to have a reserve is nevertheless a good idea and we very much appreciate it.

My question is very simple. The government's plans had proposed three possible surface areas for this national park. The smallest area of land was the one selected, which is somewhat sad.

Why does my colleague think the Conservatives chose the smallest area of land?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, there are specific reasons for that, and they have been canvassed in previous debates and at the committee. I specifically asked the minister why she chose the smallest portion of all of the portions that were presented as options. Indeed, there were four options. I am going from memory so do not quote me on these numbers, but the options were the entire South Nahanni watershed, or 7,000 square kilometres, or 6,000 square kilometres, or 5,000 square kilometres. The 5,000 square kilometre option was the one that was accepted, which only had the support of two people.

Ironically, the lines, when they are drawn, just seem to skirt all of the mining sites so the government can legitimately say there will be no mining going on in the park itself. It is a nice bit of rhetoric, but somewhat facetious since it has drawn the boundary. How it would work, with respect to any effluent that comes from the mine that must go through part of the park, is another question.

Nevertheless, as I said, let not perfection be the enemy of the good. The government, in spite of itself, has done some good here.

● (1115)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his support of the bill, but there was a comment he made that just cannot go unaddressed.

He implied that it was the government that created those spaces for mining. I recall very clearly, as chair of the committee, that when those questions were asked of people from that area, they were very eager to have mining preserved in those areas. Let us face it, this committee is called the committee on environment and sustainable development. Our northern people are eager to have development to provide jobs and opportunity for them as well.

I hope my colleague would correct the record on the implication that it was the government that insisted on those parts being left out.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I was at that committee, too. I have the record here from the Library of Parliament. The Library of Parliament said that there were three options put in front of the 1,600 people. Two of the options, option A and option B, included the mine sites. The third option skirted the mine sites.

Yes, there is always eagerness for development in northern regions, but there is also a very deep-seated ethic of ecological integrity, which I think northerners probably respect as much as, if not more than, pretty well any other Canadian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Obviously, the creation and expansion of national parks is what we want. However, the conservation and protection measures for the areas that need to be protected can only be effective if the necessary resources are allocated to them.

We on this side of the House, our colleague from Northwest Territories in particular, have really emphasized the fact that the major cuts to Parks Canada have affected the north.

What does my Liberal colleague think of the repercussions of these cuts? Also, what needs to be done to ensure that this bill achieves its goals of protection and conservation?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the Environment Canada and the sub-department of Parks Canada have been the orphan child of the Conservative government. Essentially, for the eight or nine years that the government has been in place, the budget has been flatlined and there have been substantial lapses. Some are in the order of 10% in lapsed money last year.

It is not as if Parks Canada cannot use the money. Its infrastructure needs are massive. Literally within walking distance of this place, the Rideau Canal needs something like $300 million in upgrades. A lot of little announcements are made, but little on cheque writing. I guess we save the cheque writing for another occasion

I agree with the hon. member that it would be nice to see the resources accompany the announcements, and it would have been nice to have simultaneously tabled a dedicated sum of money for the preservation, enhancement and access to Nááts'ihch'oh.

● (1120)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the issue of mining. One of the challenges is that when there are mining sites, with approved investment and a lot of capital put in, and we want to create or expand a national park, taxpayers will be required to buy out the mining rights. The families in Ottawa West—Nepean, which might be seniors on fixed incomes or families with two kids, would have to reach into their pockets to buy out the mining rights.

The second thing that would happen is that all the people who work in the mine would lose their jobs. That is why it is so tremendously important, particularly in the far Arctic, to preserve the best and most important parts of our country, these natural wonders, before there is mining there, before there is any destruction and before there are any problems. That way we can avoid this problem in the future.

That is why it is so important to get bills like this passed, so there is no new mining in areas that we want to protect.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I tend to agree with the hon. member in principle, but it is ironic that the people of that area would have preferred to include the mine site in the actual South Nahanni watershed.

It appears that the government and the local folks, who would have been most affected by jobs and the costs of either opening or closing a facility, would have preferred to keep that part of the land inside the park rather than outside the park.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the question I asked before. The answer was that significant resources are needed for protection and conservation, which is what I expected to hear.

The hon. member talked about the money in the Parks Canada budget that was not spent, but there is also the fact that more than 64 positions have been eliminated so far in the north, where there are a dozen national parks. It is not just a question of the money that was not spent, it is also a question of the cuts that were made, which hinder the work not just of the officers in charge of conservation and protection, but also the work of the scientific staff in charge or maximizing and optimizing what we might learn from these parks.

I would like to hear what my Liberal colleague has to say about the importance of these positions and the scientific work that can be done in this national park.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for filling in my time on speeches, because I thought I offered a Christmas gift of a shorter discourse.

Nevertheless, it is great to preserve these pieces of land. We are all supportive of that. However, it is passingly strange that we do not provide resources to improve and enhance them, or even give access to Canadians so they can actually see these national treasures.

On the issues of science, the government's record speaks for itself. Science has been the whipping child. We would not want to have facts get in the way of ideology. The scientists, regrettably, provide inconvenient facts from time to time, which just ruins a well-crafted political narrative.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise and speak in support of Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve of Canada).

I have heard a lot of talk about Christmas today in the House, and maybe it is because everybody is anxious to get to their ridings, meet up with their constituents and attend a lot of the celebratory events held around Christmastime.

However, when I look at the bill and this new park, we have to first acknowledge the Sahtu Dene and Métis people, the area's aboriginal people, for the wonderful gift of this park. I want to thank them on behalf of all Canadians.

I want to also thank my Conservative colleagues for accepting this gift and bring forward legislation for the park.

In the lengthy hearings that were held, there was huge overall support for the park. A number of options were looked at. Option 1 would have encompassed an area of 6,450 square kilometres, and would have provided the best conservation value, while providing an open area around the existing mineral interests. Option 2 encompassed an area of 5,770 square kilometres, which would diminish the achievement of conservation goals and would allow more mineral potential to be available. Option 3, the smallest land proposal, encompassed an area of 4,840 square kilometres, and took advantage of the mineral potential within the proposed park reserve, while providing some protection to key values.

Hearings were held on all three options. What we have before us today is not the preferred option of all those who attended the hearings. Of those who participated in the hearings and indicated a preference, 92.3% preferred option 1. However, before us today is option 3. This park is a lot smaller than the option preferred by those who expressed an interest but, at the same time, baby steps are better than nothing, and this is a step in the right direction.

I am not saying anything new or controversial when I say that we live in one of the most beautiful countries on this planet. I have had the pleasure to travel from coast to coast to coast in my previous life and had the privilege of visiting some of our remotest regions. I have seen the majestic beauty and diversity of our geography. Therefore, I, like other Canadians, am very concerned that we offer some environmental protection for some of the pristine north and biologically-diverse areas. However, with the creation of a park, we would guarantee for Canadians some level of conservation and an area for them to visit.

It would not be in the Christmas spirit if I did not say that this is a positive step on the part of my colleagues across the way, because it is.

● (1125)

My next plea to my colleagues across the way is this. Now that they have put forward legislation that we New Democrats will be supporting—though they could have gotten it through the House without our support—the key thing for them to do now is to provide resources. We have a knack for passing legislation that sounds very grand and gives a sense of hope to people, but if we do not resource the legislation we pass, it remains words on paper. We have heard over the last number of years how many of our national parks are in dire straits and need funding to be maintained.

In December of 2013, which seems like a long time ago, the *Toronto Star* reported that there was an almost $3 billion backlog in deferred maintenance at Parks Canada. I want to repeat that number: $3 billion in backlogged maintenance. If we throw into that context a new park, which New Democrats are supporting, we worry that the creation of this new park could just be an empty gesture unless we are willing to maintain the parks and do what it takes to keep them going.

In its November 2013 departmental performance report, Parks Canada identified aging infrastructure, inadequate levels of funding, and maintenance as key risks for the department. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development identified a wide and persistent gap between what the government commits to and is achieving.

Creating a park is wonderful, and we should take credit for that, but at the same time, let us make sure that we also put resources into the budget to support not only this park but also other parks that are getting run down. I would say that they are more than a little run down, according to the report that was given to us by Parks Canada.

When New Democrats looked at the 2013-14 budget announcement of spending on infrastructure in parks, the picture became even bleaker. The budget announced $391 million over five years to deal with crumbling buildings, roads, and dams. This amount will not even cover the backlog. More importantly, the amount the government is actually going to spend in the short term is ridiculous. Guess how much it will spend on all our parks in 2014? It will spend just $1 million. While that is a huge sum of money, I know, for those who work for a living, the evidence shows that the government is $3 billion behind in just doing repair work. It has budgeted just $1 million for that work; then in 2015, next year, it will spend $4 million.

The New Democrats are not surprised at the broken promises from across the way. The Conservatives have broken promises on a huge number of issues, which I will get to later. The government then says that after the next election, it will spend $386 million. Why is that spending only required after the next election, when the need, as identified in November 2013, is well into the billions of dollars?

Because of that, it is very difficult for New Democrats to take the government at its word. Of course, the NDP supports the creation of national parks in Canada's north, as well as across Canada, from coast to coast to coast. I am very proud that my riding of Newton—North Delta has local parks. The region has some amazing parks as well, and citizens from coast to coast to coast really appreciate them.

● (1130)

In my younger days, I spent much time camping in our national parks, from the time my kids were little until quite recently. It was an absolute pleasure to go into those parks and enjoy our beautiful scenery and everything that our parks had to offer, like kayaking, swimming, and so on. I say “until quite recently” because, to be honest, since my election, I have not really had the time to go camping with my children or grandchildren. However, it is certainly something I do look forward to next summer.

Here is a park that the Conservatives have brought forward after seven years of consultation and negotiations with the aboriginal peoples of that region. The Conservatives can create all the parks they want. After all, they have a majority. However, without funding and careful protection of the ecological integrity of this park and all national parks, the designation is relatively meaningless in conservation terms.

When I have visited our Pacific Rim National Park in B.C. on the west coast of Vancouver Island, I saw first-hand some of the upgrading that was needed. I have had the absolute pleasure of enjoying that beautiful park since moving to B.C.

I want to keep touching on the fact that we need resources to support our parks. It is like owning a house. I am sure many of my colleagues across the way own their own homes. When we own a house, if we do not do the repairs, it starts to crumble around us. First it gets run down, and then before we know it, it is crumbling. It is the same when we create parks. If we do not maintain them and invest in their maintenance and infrastructure, our parks become compromised and also start crumbling.

I am sure that my friends across the aisle do not want that to happen either. I know they are going to bring forward a budget in January that will have significant dollars attached to it, so that we can go forward and make sure that our parks are protected.

I just cannot imagine anyone in Canada being opposed to the creation of national parks, except perhaps for some mining interests and others that want to go in and extract goods. We have to find a way to support our extractive industries while at the same time making sure that we look after our environment. We have to make sure that for our grandchildren and our great grandchildren have parks that are pristine and protected as a national heritage that they can visit.

Coming from England, I was so overwhelmed by the geography of Canada when I first came here. I had all kinds of stereotypes in my head when I came from England, which were soon destroyed. They should have been destroyed, because a lot of my stereotypes were based on what I saw on television. However, at the same time, I saw the diversity of our geography.

I first moved to Quebec. It is a beautiful province. We enjoyed our two years in Quebec and its geography and wilderness. We spent a lot of time outdoors—every time we could get away in fact—and explored it and the surrounding areas.

However, whether we are in Newfoundland, the Yukon, B.C., or Saskatchewan, Canadians are very concerned about their environment and Canada.

● (1135)

Here I will digress just for a nanosecond to say that I am also hearing from Canadians that they are very embarrassed at the actions our government has taken recently when it comes to the protection of our environment and the role it has played internationally. Quite honestly, I was so taken aback when I heard the Prime Minister say that it would be crazy to regulate the oil and gas industry, because I remember hearing many times from ministers and the Prime Minister how those regulations were coming. Then suddenly, it is all an act of craziness.

We are very concerned about the environment and, as a result, we New Democrats do want to say that this is a little step in the right direction on the part of the Conservatives. After all, creating a park is a good Christmassy thing to do. However, at the same time, I have to plead with my colleagues across the way that they look at some of the deregulation they have done, some of the environmental protections they have taken away, and that they reinstate many of those to protect our waterways, our pristine coastlines, and our lakes.

I would say that in my beautiful province of British Columbia, we are very dependent on the tourism industry, so we just cannot imagine the kind of damage that would happen if there were an oil spill along the B.C. coastline. We have seen how many years it takes to do the cleanup and how many billions of dollars it takes. Because of the pristine nature of our lakes and rivers, we are also concerned about these because we do not want them to become the victims of oil spills as well.

We want to ensure that the government members across the way, in the spirit of Christmas and as they look to other good things they want to do, really look at their government's degradation of environmental protection. My plea to them is that they not do it for themselves, but for their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren. If they do not have children or grandchildren of their own, they should do it for the sake of all the children who will follow us and live on this planet long after many of us have gone.

When talking about our environment, it is not a joke. I want to say that whether I visit an elementary school or high school, I am so delighted to get the privilege of visiting schools in my riding where the students decide the agenda. They decide what they want to ask me about. I do not walk in and say what we are going to talk about that day. I am invited in and the students ask me questions. The top two questions in every classroom I go to are related to the environment, to climate change. Our young people get it. Whether I am visiting Princess Margaret Secondary School in my riding or Tamanawis Secondary School or NDSS, the students are fully engaged.

Here we are, the day before the House recesses for Christmas, and I take this opportunity to wish my colleagues across the aisle and on this side, and Canadians from coast to coast to coast, a merry Christmas to all who celebrate Christmas, and to people who do not celebrate Christmas, happy holidays. I wish that they enjoy this time with their family. This is the time when all of us get together and sit around the fire and tell old stories. I am really looking forward to spending the Christmas break with my beautiful grandchildren and the rest of my family.

Merry Christmas to you as well, Mr. Speaker, and happy holidays.

● (1140)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to share in the good wishes and wish everyone in the House a merry Christmas.

I want to point out that the member inadvertently misled the House by misquoting the comments of the Prime Minister on the oil and gas industry. It is important to note that there was one word missing in her comment, which totally changed the meaning of what she was misquoting. The Prime Minister said that he would not regulate the oil and gas industry now “unilaterally”, meaning without action by other nations. He was primarily referring to the United States. That is a meaning quite different from what she said, and I think it is important to correct that. We have heard it in the House over the last couple of days as well.

As well, it was evident from the member's remarks that she had missed a very important recent announcement by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister just announced $2.8 billion for Parks Canada infrastructure, which is exactly what she was talking about. Would the member not agree that this is significant and, if so, does that increase the chances that the member will support our upcoming budget?

● (1145)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I always look forward to debating the budget. If there are good things in the budget, I want to support them. However, my colleagues across the way have buried the budget in an omnibus bill that contains all kinds of things that I cannot in good conscience support. They make it very difficult for me to vote, because I do not get the opportunity to vote for one part and not the other.

In 2006 the Prime Minister said in the House that there would be regulations for the gas and oil industry. We are now in December 2014. After having a majority since 2011, the government has run legislation through this House with respect to environmental degradation, atrocious immigration policies, and cuts to Veterans Affairs. I could go on, but at no time has it brought forward those regulations. That record speaks for itself.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, further to the previous question, which I am sure my colleague would want to speak to, the government keeps saying it is investing these dollars, but the fact is that budget cuts have had a huge impact and have led to a 33% staffing cut in science within Parks Canada. Out of 179 positions, 60 were eliminated.

The government even allowed funding to lapse in the 2012-13 period. I am wondering what impact these lapses in funding have. The government is good at saying it has invested this money, but it does not spend it. I think my colleague can appreciate my question.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I will say this at the outset. What I have seen since I have been in the House is a majority government that has an allergy to science and to evidence-based decision-making. It has a hard time listening to experts. The government also has a habit of making announcements with respect to what it plans to do and of then leaving billions of dollars in budgets unspent, as in the veterans department. It can make all the announcements it likes to get the photo ops, but if it does not follow through and spend the money, it is making fake promises.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the good wishes for a merry Christmas. I thank you for that. I certainly extend them back to you, as well as to my colleagues in the House.

However, there is one area of miscommunication, and it is with respect to environmental protection.

The member talked about making promises and not keeping them. Under the previous government there was a promise to cut our greenhouse gas emissions; during that period of time, those greenhouse gas emissions rose by over 30%. During the time that this government has been in power, it has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by over 5%, and this at a time when the economy grew by over 10%.

It is one thing to make promises and have photo ops, but this government has followed through with action. We have seen action on reducing pollutants in our air and water and on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, in the spirit of Christmas, I would ask my colleague to at least acknowledge the great work this government has done on increasing the level of protection for our environment, not just by having photo ops but by taking action that has improved our environment on every score.

● (1150)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, Canada has always had a wonderful reputation internationally, but recent comments made from the United Nations about our lack of action and our lack of commitment embarrass me as a Canadian. We need our government to be at the table with the international community to address climate change in a serious way.

The UN Secretary-General said recently that there is no plan B for addressing climate change because there is no planet B. This is a very serious issue. It is not about photo ops. All I have seen since I have been in this House is environmental protections being degraded to the point where it is almost a joke. When I look at the number of rivers and lakes that are no longer protected, at the kinds of systems put in place to approve projects that could damage our environment, at the kinds of liabilities Canadians are going to have to face for cleanup, I do not believe we are going in the right direction.

As a Christmas gift to the planet, I would urge my colleagues to revisit their policies on environmental protection and do the right thing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to listen to the speeches by my colleague from Newton—North Delta. She shares her experiences in the House and that is greatly appreciated.

I am not an expert and I did not sit on the committee that studied this bill, but I am very interested in everything to do with protected areas in Canada. I know that my colleague is from British Columbia, where they hope that consultations will be held on the possibility of transporting oil through some very sensitive areas on the west coast.

What does she think of the government's approach to protecting significant wildlife areas in Canada? What does she think of the Conservatives' approach to the environment and sustainable development?

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the first question she asked me was about committee work. I used to teach social studies. Part of social studies 11 was teaching about the Canadian government. Before that, I taught history and how decisions are made in the House of Commons and the processes our bills go through, and before I came into this House, I always felt a reassurance that the committee stage would work in such a way that all points of view would be heard and we would hear from a myriad of experts who knew a great deal about the topic. The opposition's job would be to put forward amendments to improve the bill so that we ended up with the best legislation ever. Then the bill would come back to this House.

However, my experience has been that the committee stage has been hijacked by the majority to put forward their agenda. Government members do not pay attention and many times do not even want to hear witnesses. Then they cut short the committee's time just so they can get their agenda through.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

The underlying impetus for this legislative tool to amend the Canada National Parks Act in order to create the Náats'ihch'oh national park reserve is indicative of the environmental citizenship emerging in Canada. The very study of the bill before us today is indicative of the emergence of a discussion that is being held across the country and advanced by the media.

If we look at the media landscape and the evolution of thinking across Canada, it is not difficult to discern that people are mobilizing. In this case, it is happening at the opposite end of the country, but it is also happening in northern Quebec, where I am from, and New Brunswick.

Social and environmental considerations are front and centre, and it is highly likely that these issues, which people really identify with, will be included in some election platforms in 2015. October 2015 is quickly approaching, and some political parties are trying to do some damage control.

My colleagues mentioned that Canada had made commitments to protect biodiversity, fauna and flora. However, despite these commitments, UN rapporteurs have come to Canada over the past few years and our international environmental rating has gradually dropped.

Recently, Canada has been criticized with regard to its greenhouse gas emissions and environmental protection in general. Scathing reports have been published by various national and international authorities.

This government is preparing itself for the 2015 election and must therefore improve its image. As a result, in the bill before us, the government is being more open or, at the very least, has softened its previously strong stand that favoured investment, industry and economic prosperity above all else.

In 2014, the problem is that the government is pitting social and environmental imperatives against economic imperatives. As I have often said in the House, public involvement and environmental considerations should not be seen as a hindrance to economic expansion; rather, they should be a prerequisite to and an integral part of economic development. There is a way to strike a balance and to put such claims into perspective.

In this case, it seems that most people who are affected by the measures set out in the bill thought that the park would be bigger. When I examined the documentation related to this bill and the bill itself, I saw that consultations were held. Meetings were held with people in a remote region and public officials compiled their concerns and objectives.

However, what I noticed that everyone was saying, at least in the comments that were brought to my attention, was that they wanted the protected area to be bigger. Local residents, community stakeholders and people on the ground all indicated that they would have liked the protected area to be bigger, even though the mere fact that we have a bill before us today to create a park and a protected area shows that the government is being more open and has made some progress. Nevertheless, stakeholders indicated that more openness would have been appreciated and would have been beneficial in this case.

The area proposed for the national park reserve has long been recommended for conservation in land use processes by the aboriginal people of the Sahtu. Such conservation would also align with the Government of Canada's commitment to conserve the greater Nahanni ecosystem and the ecological integrity of the area.

Despite these commitments, our country has a poor rating and a poor international and local reputation when it comes to protecting the environment and taking the public's concerns and wishes into account.

● (1155)

The upcoming election will be key, and there is a very good chance that these critical issues will come up during the 2015 election campaign.

Despite its commitments, the government agreed to the demands of the mining industry and excluded vital wildlife areas to allow for mining development in these areas. This information was also brought to my attention. Goodwill aside, and although the protections in this bill are non-negotiable, economic considerations and industrial lobbies had an influence here. The bill we are studying today was made to order, if I can say that, since some areas that are better for investment and natural resource extraction were excluded. Some consideration was given to protecting economic interests and the interests of industry on this land. Although there was some desire to protect resources, the government still chose to exclude certain areas that are more conducive to economic development.

With that in mind, there are some concerns with the size of the park, including the omission of vital caribou breeding grounds and lack of protection for source waters for the Nahanni River. I have been here for nearly four years, and we have seen how the government has gradually offloaded its environmental responsibilities. It has also offloaded the protections that are in place for resource conservation, biodiversity and ecology. The government has offloaded those protections to serve the goals of big industrial lobby groups.

That is also why we have been seeing a growing resistance and more citizen engagement right across the country. The public has had to make up the lost ground because the legal and government protections that should take precedence have all simply been removed from the political reality of 2015. The government is being open today because it knows that environmental, public and social considerations will be top priorities during the next election. The government is changing course, but only very slightly and a little too late. It is a fairly weak protection, but at least it shows some foresight.

To conclude, I would like to quote the words of Rocky Norwegian, president of the Tulita Renewable Resources Council who said:

> We accept what is in front of you today in the hope that in the not too distant future the boundaries will be expanded to include more land.

Even stakeholders and those directly involved are aware of mounting opposition and the emergence of these concepts and considerations that, for far too long, were dismissed outright. In 2015, with climate change the way it is right now, people know that future governments are going to have to deal with the issue. If it is an NDP government, I can assure you that the size of this proposed park will be expanded and that environmental and wildlife considerations will be the top priority. The pendulum will swing back again in 2015. It would be commendable and welcomed by everyone.

I submit this respectfully.

● (1200)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Manicouagan for his excellent speech on this topic.

I am aware of his work on the environment, and I know how important public consultations are to him. As he said in his speech, we know that three options were considered for this bill. By far the most popular option was the one that would have encompassed the greatest area. Over 90% of the stakeholders and people who were consulted were in favour of that option. However, the government chose a different option for this bill and for the park expansion, an option favoured by the minority.

The member touched on the fact that this was probably a gift to the mining industry, which has an interest in the region. This bill goes against what people repeatedly said they want.

I would like the member for Manicouagan to comment on the importance of public consultation and what he thinks motivated the government to choose an option that was much less popular than the preferred option.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The government says it consults people, takes notes and is free to take their views into account or not, but I think that seeking the people's consent will be the norm in the future.

Still, the government has shown at least some flexibility even though it has a fairly limited understanding of the concept of consultation. At least it made the effort to find out what people think.

Of course, we can hardly expect a radical change of heart from this government, and that is why economic interests and the industry's interests prevailed.

However, the winds of change are blowing. As I said, the 2015 election will be pivotal and will prove that these priorities cannot be left out of politics and public administration.

Government Orders

● (1205)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate everything this member does in the House and in the ridings. My question, however, has to do with the funds the government claims it is allocating to certain projects and certain departments.

According to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, there is a wide and persistent gap between what the government commits to do and what it is achieving. Budget cuts have had a serious impact, including the loss of 33% of Parks Canada's scientific staff: 60 out of 179 positions have been eliminated.

Not only are there fewer people working in the management and maintenance of parks, but the government often fails to spend all the funds earmarked. Everything it does is meant to pad its own pockets, so it can say it has a surplus, even if it was accumulated on the backs of those who need help the most.

Would the member like to talk about his concerns in that regard?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Despite the virtuous aspect of the bill before us, our study has shown that there is no envelope associated with it.

As I was saying, the government is not living up to its environmental obligations. Nor is it living up to its social obligations. It often blindly delegates management and public administration to NPOs or organizations that do not necessarily have the economic foundations needed to implement a program that is supposed to be collaborative and effective on the ground.

In this case, the funds were not necessarily redirected back to the resources on the ground or intended to get there. Although those funds are essential to implementing the project and having an effective impact on the ground, the money is just not there.

There will be a real reckoning in the next few years.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would really like to wish happy holidays to my colleagues in the House, the Parliament Hill staff, my constituents and my family.

I think that is very important. In a few days, we will not be here and people will be twiddling their thumbs because they will not be able to watch us on television.

Nevertheless, happy holidays and happy new year to everyone.

[*English*]

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-5, which would see the creation of the Nááts'ihch'oh national park in the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories, hence amending the Canada National Parks Act.

The NDP will be supporting this bill. However, it is important to note that we question the government's motives behind the option it selected, which would protect less of the land mass than what would have been preferred.

There were actually three options, and I will just go through them.

Option 1 included a total of 6,450 square kilometres. It was developed to best protect conservation values while providing an open area about existing mineral interests. It is important to note that 92.3% of those who spoke on this and indicated which option they wanted selected this one.

Option 1 was really for the protection of the entire South Nahanni River watershed, with activities related to mining limited or restricted to areas outside the watershed, which was 15.7%. Of importance to participants was preserving the habitat of important wildlife species, such as grizzly bears, caribou, Dall's sheep, and mountain goats, which was at 61.3%, and protecting the ecological integrity of the complete South Nahanni watershed, which was about 10%.

I am quoting from the final public consultation report by Terriplan consultants. As I indicated, the report said, "Option one was the preferred boundary for 60 participants (92.3%), due to the capacity of this option to provide the most protection of the watershed wildlife habitat while accommodating some mineral resource potential."

Option 2 had a total area of 5,770 square kilometres. It would diminish the achievement of conservation goals and would allow more mineral potential to be available.

As members can see, we are going down the line here.

Option 3 was actually the smallest proposal, with a total area of 4,840 square kilometres. It would take advantage of the mineral potential within the proposed park reserve while providing some protection to key values.

As I indicated, option 1 was preferred. Option 3 would allow for mining to occur. Again, only 65 of the 1,600 consultation participants expressed a boundary choice. However, the government proceeded with option three. As we can see, the preference was option 1.

Here are some of the concerns raised in the process. This is from a press release from CPAWS entitled "Disappointing boundary for new Nááts'ihch'oh National Park in Nahanni Headwaters". The comment in it is from Éric Hébert-Daly, the national executive director of CPAWS.

● (1210)

He stated:

> Creating a new national park in Canada is welcome news. Unfortunately, this park boundary does not reflect the extensive scientific evidence of what's needed to protect the Nahanni watershed, nor does it take into account the overwhelming public support for protecting the entire Nahanni headwaters expressed during the public consultation on the proposed park. More work is still needed to protect the Nahanni.

The article goes on to indicate concerns about the impact this would have on critical habitat for two woodland caribou herds, as well as grizzly bears, Dall sheep, and mountain goats. I mentioned that a little earlier. It further states:

> The legislation tabled yesterday would create a national park that leaves the most important habitat for these species outside the park.

The article goes on to say that it is about:

> ...the most critical wildlife habitat areas, including caribou calving and breeding grounds, and major upstream tributaries of the South Nahanni River, which flow into Nahanni National Park downstream.

These are not comments that we should take lightly. The article continues that this organization:

> ...has worked for more than four decades to protect the Nahanni starting with creation of the original Nahanni National Park Reserve in the early 1970s. In 2009, we publicly celebrated the Dehcho First Nations and Government of Canada's action to massively expand Nahanni National Park Reserve. And, for many years, we have worked to secure protection of the Nahanni headwaters.

As we can see, people have been working on protection extensively, and yet the government is not really heeding the concerns being raised before it makes its selection.

Let me take a few minutes to inform the House about some of the content included in the final consultation report of August 30, 2010, which came out of Parks Canada's consultation process.

I see I only have two minutes remaining, which is not a lot of time, so I am going to talk a bit about other concerns that were raised. My colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan talked about the report that found the number of positions with respect to Parks Canada, the dollars that are not being invested or are being removed from Parks Canada, and the impact this is going to have on this park.

Since I cannot go into detail, I will close by reiterating the fact that, while the terms and conditions of the constitutionally protected Sahtu land claim agreement have been met, including the creation of an impact benefit plan and management committee, New Democrats remain concerned about the government's commitment to the park. While increasing the land mass of the park is welcome, it should be noted that there is still an opportunity to realize the ultimate goal of expanding to protect the upper watershed of the South Nahanni River.

In case people are just tuning in, I want to wish my colleagues here, the staff on the Hill, and all of my constituents and family a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

● (1215)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member across the way, to whom I also wish a merry Christmas. Having worked in Hearst, Ontario, I know the north somewhat.

I was very interested in the claim that we are not spending sufficient funds in regard to Parks Canada. It is the season to celebrate and sometimes in the celebratory nature of the season we are in, we forget certain things that occurred in the House of Commons. I would ask if the hon. member could comment on the announcement of $250 million that would go to infrastructure in and surrounding our parks. I wonder if she recalls hearing that from the Prime Minister's own lips.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before, the government makes announcements, but at the end of the day it actually does not deliver very well on those announcements.

Budget cuts have had a huge impact and have led to a 33% staffing cut in science in Parks Canada: 60 out of 179 positions. The Commissioner of the Environment highlighted a pattern of broken promises and commitments to change course and ensure protection that have not happened. He was quite disturbed about that.

I can talk more about some of the numbers. The budget announced $391 million in 2013-14, over five years, to deal with crumbling buildings, roads, and dams. The amount will not even cover the backlog, but more importantly the amount the government is actually going to spend in the short term is ridiculous. This year, 2014, it will spend $1 million, in 2015 it will spend $4 million, and after the next election it will be $386 million.

As we can see, there are some concerns with the numbers the government announces and what is actually delivered at the end of the day.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the former premier of the Northwest Territories had some rather harsh words for the government about this park. He was clear when he said, "That is not a national park, that is a joke."

In fact, we see a gaping hole inside a national park. There is no consideration for the fact that mining is not isolated in a world of its own and the repercussions can be felt throughout the national park.

Can my colleague say a few words about the comments made by the former premier of the Northwest Territories about the government with regard to the selection and the mapping of the boundary lines for the national park?

● (1220)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is obviously aware of the comments that were made. I am too, because I had those comments in my notes. Nonetheless, 10 minutes is not enough to cover everything we want to say.

I can tell the House what we would do. An NDP government would properly fund the parks in order to achieve our conservation objectives, protect diversity and help the local communities develop the tourism and economic potential of our national parks.

Tourism is very important. Under this government, we have seen a decline in investment in tourism. It is not too late for this park. We could even expand it. There is still room for that and 2015 is not that far away.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-5, which seeks to create the Nááts'ihch'oh national park.

Before I continue, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the charming member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, my colleague from the other side of the Rivière des Prairies. I look forward to hearing her speech.

I am always extremely concerned about any issues that affect the protection of Canada's land and wildlife. In the past, I had the opportunity to study environmental geography at the University of Montreal and then work for Quebec's ministry of natural resources and wildlife in Mont-Laurier. I carried out a number of tasks, for example, work related to fishing in the experimental lakes. I also travelled the province and visited its wildlife reserves. I noticed the impact that taking care of our protected areas and ensuring that we have good protected areas had on different communities for a variety of reasons.

In this case, the Nááts'ihch'oh reserve is very pleased to see that a park is finally going to be created after seven years of negotiations. However, unfortunately, the Conservative government has chosen to support the demands of the mining industry, creating a park which excludes vital wildlife areas and still allows mining development in those areas. That is unfortunate. The government often excludes specific areas that are extremely important for biodiversity when creating protected areas, national parks and wildlife reserves. I was able to see how important such protections are for wildlife when I was working for Quebec's ministry of natural resources and wildlife. For example, logging occurs in the more northern areas of Quebec. That is part of Quebec's economy. It is extremely important. However, logging is done in consultation with employees of Quebec's ministry of natural resources and wildlife. When I worked there, we had to create a multi-resource forest inventory to ensure that logging was done in a environmentally responsible manner. It is a very complex issue. We had to verify whether the logging would affect sensitive ecosystems and whether threatened species were present in the area. It is always very difficult to put these things in perspective.

I am pleased that a national park is being created in a region where natural resource development is on the rise. That is very important. I hope that the protection of the land and the resources in the proposed park will be clearly defined.

I really want to stress my disappointment with the fact that the bill does not include vital wildlife areas and that the government is favouring the existing mines. There is support for mining to the detriment of the flora and fauna. We know that there are often many threatened species or species at risk in these areas. We must provide adequate protection for our land.

This is not my area of expertise. I read the documents outlining what is happening. I saw that consultations were held and I must congratulate the government for that. It is often criticized for not properly consulting Canadians. By all accounts, ideas presented during consultations were more or less taken into consideration, and at least different options were put forward.

Three options for the size of this national park were presented. I do not have the exact figures here, but one option was about 7,000 square kilometres, another was closer to 6,000 square kilometres and the last one was closer to 5,000 square kilometres. The smallest area was the option chosen for the park. We try to have the best protection in a country that is vast and has very sensitive areas, especially as a result of climate change. Consequently, it may have been preferable to have a larger area.

I also looked at what happened in committee when it studied the bill at third reading stage. A number of people, especially aboriginal chiefs, people from first nations communities or remote areas in this sector mentioned that they were very pleased that a national park was being created.

● (1225)

However, they were hoping for more space for their traditional activities, wildlife and plants, as well as respect for aboriginal communities. Still, I believe that everyone, both here in the House and elsewhere, including the witnesses, agrees that there should be a national park there.

To me, issues related to protecting our spaces are extremely sensitive for another reason. I represent the region of Laval, which is an island in the Montreal suburbs. Many people think it is a big suburb with big highways, but that is not all it is.

We are lucky to have some beautiful parks on the island of Laval, but they are not well known. The island lies between Rivière des Mille Îles and Rivière des Prairies. Currently, many residents are mobilizing to create a park. Their organization is called Sauvons nos trois grandes îles. There are several islands in Rivière des Mille Îles with extremely fragile ecosystems. People are taking action to make the three largest islands, Île Saint-Joseph, Île aux Vaches and Île Saint-Pierre, into ecological sanctuaries.

These islands are in the eastern part of Laval, very close to my riding. I am very lucky to represent eastern Laval because we still have a lot of green space. About 80% of the land is agricultural, and everyone can enjoy our very beautiful spaces, including forests.

There is also another very interesting park, Bois de l'Équerre, which we call Laval's lungs. This is a sensitive issue because Laval is a very diverse city with a steadily growing population. We are trying to protect our green spaces. Bois de l'Équerre is probably the largest park on the island of Laval that is protected to a degree. My hat is off to that group because I know that it is very active in protecting its spaces.

The people of Laval are very aware of the challenges of protecting land. In the past, many protected green spaces were used to build new shopping centres even though they should not have been used for anything else. Things were built where they should not have been. The people of Laval are fighting to keep their green spaces and land protected. I am proud that the people of northern Canada are fighting and, after seven years of consultations, have been given the opportunity to have a national park on their land.

I am very interested in House procedure, especially when it comes to bills. Unfortunately, the government often uses time allocation motions and limits debate in committees. However, I am pleased that debate on this issue has not been cut short and that the process was followed at committee stage. I am pleased to see that the House stands united on this question. I want to tell my colleagues opposite that I hope we can repeat this fine example of teamwork. I hope they will stop muzzling the opposition and imposing the government's approach.

I do not have a lot of time left to talk about our position and how we would address national parks as the first federal NDP government. Hopefully I will get some questions about that because it is of great interest to me.

In the meantime, the holidays are fast approaching and everyone in the House has worked extremely hard. I would like to thank all of the employees of the House of Commons, the pages who work with us every day and all of my colleagues in the House. I wish them happy holidays. I would also like to wish the people of Alfred-Pellan, whom I represent, a joyous holiday season. I hope to see them very soon over the holidays.

● (1230)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague from Alfred-Pellan.

In our discussion here, we have talked a lot about the importance of the protection of species. Although we do support this bill, a lot of work remains to be done. This government can create all the parks it wants, but without funding and without strong protections for ecological integrity, that designation is virtually meaningless.

Can my colleague talk about that a little more? How important is it to have the necessary funds to ensure proper protection and make things better?

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question. She has touched on a sensitive issue in talking about the importance of having the necessary funds to protect species. It is much more important than many people realize.

In my work with Quebec's natural resources, wildlife and parks department, I saw the benefits of protecting our lakes and rivers in the north. For instance, we need to make sure that fish can spawn properly. If we create a national park with a road that goes over several lakes and rivers, we will have to build culverts so the fish can continue to swim around.

Often this is done too quickly, and with the freeze-thaw cycle we have, things shift. If the funds are not available to go back and look at those culverts to ensure that fish can spawn, this has a tremendous impact on wildlife.

In this case, fish might not be able to reproduce and animals would then have less food. That is a simple example among many others that should put things in perspective and demonstrate the potential significant impact that we need to be aware of.

Resources are crucial for our national parks.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. One of the things she made reference to is some of the parks or national parks in her region. These are important. We have parks in Manitoba. One of our most popular parks has to be Riding Mountain National Park, which is about 3,000 square kilometres, virtually half the size of what we are talking about today with the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve. We always look to make the comparison. One has the black bear, the other has the grizzly bear. Riding Mountain National Park has been there since about the 1930s or 1940s.

The point is that we all care deeply and passionately about our national parks, and as time proceeds it is important that we continue to recognize where we can further develop our parks. However, along with the development and promotion of our parks, we also need to ensure that there are adequate resources, that there is something more than just a designation of a national park, that there is an investment in the future by having that park there in different ways. Could the member comment on that?

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his comments about the need for this government to allocate the resources required to put in place the right protections.

It is great to designate a national park. We can be proud to have great national parks across the country. However, resources must be allocated to protect the species.

We are not just talking about one species. We often focus on part of the problem in these situations. We must consider the biodiversity as a whole. These extremely complex issues require the involvement of a number of scientists. We must have the necessary resources on the ground.

Like most of my colleagues, I am very pleased to know that this national park will be created. However, the necessary resources have to be in place so as not to cause any harm or worse yet, not do anything at all.

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will echo all my colleagues who spoke today to wish happy holidays, merry Christmas, and a happy new year to all the House staff, all my colleagues who sit here with me and all the residents of the riding of La Pointe-de-l'Île. I look forward to seeing them over the holidays at various events. I wish them happy holidays as well and a very happy new year.

We have the good fortune and even privilege of living in such a large country with so much green space. I think Canada is truly a great country.

Who could be against virtue? I think that creating national parks is part of our identity. No one can really be opposed to designating a vast green space and protecting flora and fauna. Naturally, I rise in the House in support of Bill S-5, which was introduced in the Senate. I would like to be able to congratulate the government, but unfortunately I cannot, since this bill came from the Senate. The government could have introduced this bill itself in the House. It would have been known as bill C-5 and it could have demonstrated the government's unwavering determination to create Nááts'ihch'oh national park.

However, we must acknowledge that the government has made a commitment. It has made a commitment not only to the aboriginal Sahtu people, but also to the Northwest Territories, to work on preserving land, territory, fauna, flora and our waters, wherever necessary.

However, I think it is important to note that since this government came to power, we have seen a drop in funding, which affects both the number of scientific staff at Parks Canada and the infrastructure. For example, in December, the *Toronto Star* reported that there is a backlog of almost $3 billion in deferred maintenance at Parks Canada. We are talking about $3 billion. That is a lot of zeros. We are not talking about a little maintenance work here and there. We are talking about a huge backlog that will have a negative long-term impact on the protection of our national parks, on funding and on our tourism industry. You cannot snap your fingers and fix a $3 billion backlog, especially for a government that is practising fiscal restraint. With this $3 billion figure, I cannot imagine that we will see a single dollar invested in the coming years if the Conservatives remain in power.

The Parks Canada departmental performance report indicates that more than $17 million was allocated for resources conservation and $22 million was allocated for infrastructure. However, this money was not spent. My colleague spoke about announcements that were made but, unfortunately, not delivered on. In this case, the Parks Canada departmental performance report proves it. Funding that was announced for heritage resources conservation and for townsite and throughway infrastructure, for example, was allowed to lapse in 2012 and 2013. We are talking about millions of dollars.

We can applaud the government's promise to create a national park for resource conservation and infrastructure improvement.

● (1240)

We must applaud this. However, what is the government's long-term commitment to maintaining and preserving our resources? It can create as many national parks as it likes, but what will happen if the funding is not allocated? National park becomes just an honorary title. A national park is created in order to recognize the importance of the area to Canadians and also the fundamental importance to our country of the resources found in that area, the fauna and flora.

I urge the government to pass a meaningful bill that will do more than just create a park and its boundaries and to promise the people who live there that it will invest in the conservation of the natural resources. Budget cuts have had very serious consequences. For example, 33% of Parks Canada scientists have been cut, 60 out of 179 positions.

We are well aware that resource conservation goes hand in hand with science and study. Scientists are essential to preserving our flora and fauna and allowing people who live off the resources in the area in question to continue to do so. Conservation goes hand in hand with science. It is an almost indestructible symbiotic relationship. The Conservatives therefore cannot create a national park and cut scientists by 35%.

The commissioner spoke, for example, about a pattern of broken promises and commitments to change course, and that is unfortunate. The government promised to protect Canada's natural spaces. Unfortunately, that promise has not yet been kept. When I speak about promises, I am not talking about creating national parks but about really ensuring that the natural resources they contain are preserved.

Far be it from me to take away from the government the fact that it is supporting the creation of a park reserve and making it a part of Parks Canada. I simply want to extend my hand to the Conservatives and say that if they promise to protect that space, then we would like them to make some other commitments related to that promise. The national park, aboriginal peoples and local residents deserve to know that their government is going to keep its promises.

I would also like to mention that the government chose the smallest of the three options, when the option that was supported by nearly 93% of stakeholders involved the creation of a conservation area that left an open area around the mineral interests. The people who shared their views with government really took mineral interests into account, thinking that perhaps the Conservatives would respect their thoughts on the situation. Unfortunately, the Conservatives instead chose to listen to the interests of the mining industry for reasons that I cannot explain.

This shows that the government speaks out of both sides of its mouth. It promises to do everything in its power to protect our resources, our wildlife, but at the same time, it takes approaches that do not protect breeding grounds and green spaces in our great country.

● (1245)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member forLa Pointe-de-l'Île for her very interesting presentation on this subject.

I have one particular question about a comment she made. I already asked the question earlier this morning. The former premier of the Northwest Territories, Stephen Kakfwi, had some rather harsh words for these proposals. I think he knows his territory and its people quite well. These very harsh words were directed at the Conservatives' attitude on this issue.

My colleague mentioned the consultations that had been held and the fact that the chosen option was not at all the most popular one. Mr. Kakfwi said that, in the end, the Conservatives had chosen to create a doughnut-shaped park with a big hole in the middle. The hole would be a non-protected area where mining exploration could take place. It appears that environmental and economic issues must always be weighed against each other.

I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on the former Northwest Territories premier's opinion with regard to the way the government ignored the people who live there and the consultations held.

Ms. Ève Péclet: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague for his question.

I do not think I will be telling him anything new. The debate that pits the economy against the environment is completely false. Pitting the economy against the environment is not a real debate. It simply serves the interests of some people over others. I think it is time the House went beyond this argument and got into this century. Sustainable development is the development of the future.

Still, it is important to note that, according to the national director of the parks program of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the government's proposed boundary will not achieve this conservation goal because it leaves out much of the important habitat for woodland caribou, including critical calving and breeding grounds, as well as for grizzly bears and Dall's sheep. That is unfortunate because, by choosing a smaller area, the Conservatives are not respecting the natural habitat of many species in the Northwest Territories. It is very unfortunate that the government still wants to pit the economy against the environment.

● (1250)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her contribution to today's debate.

I would like her to remind us of the importance of Canada's national parks and their role in protecting our environment and our heritage, and in enabling the greatest possible number of Canadians to discover the beauty of the landscapes, flora and fauna that exist in these parks.

Does she believe it is important to protect these parks and ensure that they operate properly, with the human and material resources required to ensure that they are well maintained, sustainable over time, and useful to all Canadians?

Ms. Ève Péclet: Mr. Speaker, my answer has two parts. I mentioned the first one when I began my speech. Canada's flora and fauna are found all over Canada and are part of our identity. As Canadians, we must protect our resources, which are our most valuable assets. People come to Canada to see our green and open spaces. I have a lot of friends and family members who live in Europe, for example. When they come to Quebec, to Canada, they tell me how wonderful Canada is. The flora and fauna are part of our identity and we must protect our identity.

Moreover, protecting the environment is not only important for tourism, but also for our children and our future. Protecting the environment and our parks is a way to make sure that our children and grandchildren can continue to enjoy what we have enjoyed in the past and are enjoying today. I believe that conservation is fundamental not only for our identity as Canadians, but also for our children and grandchildren, so that they can continue to enjoy our green spaces the way we do today.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey North.

Since this is my last speech in the House in 2014, I would like to wish all of the employees of the House a happy holiday. I will not name them all, because I am afraid I would forget some. I wish the same to my colleagues, certainly, and of course to the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

It is my pleasure today to speak to the bill to amend the Canada National Parks Act. More specifically, it concerns the Nááts'ihch'oh national park reserve of Canada. Please excuse my pronunciation, since I do not speak that language fluently. The park is located in the northern one-sixth of the South Nahanni River watershed in the Northwest Territories.

Obviously, as all my colleagues who have spoken today have said, the NDP supports the creation of this national park. Of course, we are never opposed to initiatives like this, since we are concerned about the preservation of local plants and wildlife.

However, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the public wanted a bigger park, the Conservative government has chosen to give in to the demands of the mining industry by excluding areas that are essential to the survival of wildlife from the park and allowing mining in those areas. In my opinion, this is truly appalling. The Conservatives have completely failed to listen to the communities and have no regard for the needs of the people who live there. However, we are starting to become accustomed to this kind of practice on the part of the government.

The aboriginal peoples in this region have long recommended, in discussions about land use, that the area proposed for the national park reserve be preserved. That concern about preservation is also consistent with the Government of Canada's commitment to protect the ecosystem in the greater Nahanni region and preserve the ecological integrity of the area. If the government does not act to preserve these fragile ecosystems, who will? I do not know.

Consultations showed that the public overwhelmingly supported the creation of a larger park, as I said earlier, but the Conservatives basically disregarded public opinion and decided to protect the smallest of the three possible areas, failing to include some very important wildlife reserves. It goes without saying, but it seems to have to be said anyway: Canada has a particular wealth of plant life and wildlife. As we approach the year 2015, we cannot allow ourselves to endanger plant and animal species. That is what happens when we neglect such important things.

In opting for the smallest area, the Conservatives listened to the mining companies and simply turned a deaf ear to local residents, who know their region and their land and the species they share it with. It is particularly appalling that their opinion was so completely ignored. Yes, they were consulted, but they were not listened to. That is pure negligence.

We support the creation of the park, but we question the government’s motives. We are afraid that the land area of the park will not be sufficient, particularly because areas that are essential to caribou breeding and the water sources for the Nahanni River will not be protected.

I would also like to add that there is no sense in creating a national park without the funding that is needed to maintain it. On that point, the *Toronto Star* reported in December that Parks Canada had a backlog of nearly $3 billion in deferred work. That is a rather substantial sum.

● (1255)

We are talking about the environment, fragile ecosystems, plant life and wildlife. That $3 billion should have been invested appropriately. There should even be more money invested in these kinds of things.

In its November 2013 departmental performance, Parks Canada noted that aging infrastructure and inadequate funding and maintenance were a high risk for the agency. Here again, as I said earlier, this is a matter of negligence.

The Parks Canada departmental performance report also said that over $17 million allocated to heritage resource conservation and $22 million intended for townsite and throughway infrastructure was not spent in 2012-13. I consider that to be serious.

According to the Commissioner of the Environment, there is a wide and persistent gap between what the government commits to doing and what it is achieving. Is the government going to honour its commitments? Here again, we do not know. Even for the smallest area, will the commitments be honoured? We still do not know. We are in the dark.

The budget cuts have had serious consequences, including the loss of 33% of the scientific staff complement. Sixty out of 179 positions have been eliminated. Those positions were genuinely essential. We know that the government does not like scientists very much and we can see that here in these results. The figures are rather glaring.

It is disturbing to see the pattern of broken promises the commissioner notes, such as the commitments to change course and ensure protection that never materialized. Will this commitment materialize? Is there going to be any follow-up? Will this park be left by the wayside? I would very much like to know.

If we add to this the money allocated for park infrastructure in the 2013-14 budget, the picture is even bleaker. In that budget, $391 million was allocated over five years for repairing buildings, roads and dams that are falling apart. That amount is not enough to catch up, but it gets worse. The funds that the government plans to invest in the short term are completely ridiculous. In 2014, it plans to invest $1 million. I spoke earlier about a backlog of $3 billion, but here they are talking about an investment of $1 million. In 2015, they plan to invest $4 million, and after the election, $386 million. That is bizarre. I will say no more on that count. I will let people think about it all.

To conclude, yes, we support these kinds of initiatives, because we are concerned about protecting the environment. Obviously, we cannot be opposed to something positive. It is crucial, however, that local populations be consulted. The government cannot just hold consultations for fun and to be able to say they were held; the people have to be listened to. The communities' welfare and wishes should come before the welfare and wishes of big corporations, as well.

The government also has to inject the needed funds into maintaining these parks. As a final point, we must not do things in half measures when it comes to protecting the environment. Future generations will thank us.

● (1300)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her remarks.

She spoke at length about the significance of the resources to be allocated when national parks are established. There are already a dozen national parks in the North. However, because of the budget cuts and also because the funding allocated by Parliament was not spent, everything affecting the promises, possibilities and potential for parks is currently being neglected.

My particular fear is that we may be missing a good opportunity with the creation of this new park—one we support—without providing the necessary resources, not only for preservation and conservation but also for the science side. Providing additional funding and resources might help us learn more about what can be found in the park and what we can learn from it. In short, we may be missing an excellent opportunity.

I would simply like to know, in fact, whether the member believes that the Conservative policy, which consists of not spending all the funding allocated by Parliament, makes sense in a context where, of course, the government may be getting back to a balanced budget? From another perspective, however, do we not risk missing an opportunity to realize the full potential of, for example, the national parks, and in this case, the park mentioned in the bill?

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, we actually have a big problem with respect to the potential of these parks where, as my colleague was saying, we can learn a great deal about our fauna, our flora and our country.

This is an incredible treasure for Canada. We have landscapes that are literally breathtaking. It would be so sad if, because of budget cuts and a lack of funds, these resources and sites were neglected and not conserved. That would be absolutely unacceptable.

We should also stop hiding behind the need to balance the budget. A healthy environment and a protected ecosystem are beyond price. We are talking about future generations. That is particularly unacceptable.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague for her response.

In her speech, she mentioned another concern, namely the fact that a good part of what was planned for protection has not been protected, particularly because of mining interests. Obviously, environmental and the economic considerations must always be reconciled and we recognize that, except that the local people who were consulted favoured the option of a larger area.

I would like to hear the comments of the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on the importance of conducting consultations, respecting the results of those consultations and trying to reach individual agreements with communities that really need those jobs in order to survive, but are also in a position to make the comparison and strike a balance between the environment and the economy.

● (1305)

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, in this case, clearly, the public was consulted but not listened to. It is a government's duty to put the well-being of local communities and their residents ahead of industry. There is no doubt that some industries have to locate in a given area because of the jobs, and I understand that very well.

However, it is a different matter when the public is deciding on the surface area of a park. The people were very clear when they told the government that this was the area they wanted. The government chose the smallest area to benefit the mining industries. That is a big problem. The community was simply ignored and was consulted just to make things look good.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak in this House on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North on this very important bill, Bill S-5, which would amend the Canada National Parks Act to create a national park reserve for Canada. The name of the park that would be created in the Northwest Territories is Nááts'ihch'oh.

It is an honour, on days like today, to work together in the House and look to future generations. I think of the times that my son and daughter, and my whole family, would spend in our national parks.

I have had the opportunity over the years to visit both provincial and national parks, which are important for our communities. I know that people in my community enjoy the parks that are part of Surrey North. Therefore, it is an honour to support the bill before the House, which would create a national treasure.

Members speaking before me have talked about the gift that the aboriginal first nations people have given to all Canadians. I want to thank them on behalf of all Canadians, and particularly on behalf of people from Surrey North, for giving this wonderful gem to Canadians for generations to preserve.

I have thought about travelling to that part of the world. I listened to our NDP member from the Northwest Territories who always speaks highly of the areas in the Northwest Territories. I am hoping to get the opportunity, along with my children, to go and see that part of the world.

Of course, we need to preserve these parks for our future generations, as well as the habitats that are part of our wilderness and make us unique. Canada is a huge country with many parts to it. One of the things we can do is to ensure that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy this wilderness. We must preserve it not only for future generations to see but also for the animals inhabiting those areas, so that they can roam free and live in their natural habitat.

There were three options of area that were considered in the creation of the national park. Unfortunately, the Conservatives chose the option that had the smallest area, and I think there are some concerns about that from a number of people who were involved with the consultations. They had preferred the larger option for the park; however, the Conservatives chose the smaller option. Yes, it is a step in the right direction, but there was an opportunity to further enhance the park reserve. However, I am still happy that we at least chose an option that would provide a national park for generations to come.

I come from British Columbia, and I know the role tourism plays in its economy. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs created through tourism across this country. It is a way to diversify our economy, especially since we have seen commodities fluctuate in the last number of weeks, whether oil or other commodities. For example, oil has gone from $147 a barrel a few months ago down to about $61 this morning. Therefore, it is important for us to diversify our economy; and tourism is a natural for Canadians, as I know it is for British Columbia. There are many jobs attached to tourism, and creating parks like this can help to enhance the natural beauty of Canada and also diversify our economy with tourism-related industries.

● (1310)

Unfortunately, so many times I have seen, whether with a crime bill or a veterans' bill or a bill relating to first nations, the fact that we can make all the laws in the world that we want in creating things like parks, but there has to be funding available. There has to be money provided to ensure that some of the things we are doing in the House are carried through. That requires resources.

We know from reports that Parks Canada basically has a backlog of about $3 billion in maintenance work that needs to be carried out and that money is not available. That money has not been provided or allocated by the current government. If we are going to create these parks, we need to provide the funding to maintain these parks to ensure that we are doing everything we can so that these parks can function for generations to come.

Again, going back to how reserving a national park and how tourism can work hand in hand, my colleague talked earlier about the importance of tourism. He pointed out a number of other countries, such as Australia and France, that are actually making investments to increase their tourism.

However, what we have seen from the Conservative government are cuts to tourist-related programs aimed at attracting more tourism to this country, especially in British Columbia, where we have some of the finest skiing mountains in the world. They are right in our backyard. Some of them are a couple of hours away from Vancouver and some are actually minutes away from downtown Vancouver.

I understand the importance of tourism and how it plays into our economy. We can always do more to increase tourism.

Obviously, we support the creation of this park.

When we consult first nations and local people, we can achieve a lot of good. I have seen, in this particular case, the government work with the first nations, the Sahtu Dene and the Métis, in the Northwest Territories to work out an agreement to create this wonderful park. That is what we get when we consult people. When we consult people at the ground level, when we consult the very people who are going to be affected, the result is usually good.

Unfortunately, the current government, time after time, fails to consult the local people. We can see what is happening with the Rouge park in Scarborough, the urban park that is being created there. The consultations have gone sideways and many people in the community are opposing it.

Again, I want to thank the people of the Northwest Territories, the Sahtu Dene and the Métis, for giving this gift to Canadians at Christmas.

Talking about Christmastime, I know that my son is waiting for me at home. We are going to look for a video and find out how much it costs. Then we are going to appeal to Santa and, hopefully, it will be in his stocking or under the tree.

I want to take this opportunity to wish all Canadians and, in particular, my constituents in Surrey North, a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

● (1315)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's comments. He touched a bit on consultation. Yes, there has been some consultation, but at the end of the day they actually wanted the better option. It was basically a take-it-or-leave-it option they ended up with. Of course, they want to see an expansion, and that is fabulous, but it would have been much more appropriate for the bigger one, the first option. It would even have protected the calving areas within that park.

Again, I just want to go back to the consultation. We see that there is now a new national chief, National Chief Bellegarde, who said during his speech that business as usual with Canada would end. Again, that talks to the consultation piece. He went on to say, "If our lands and resources are to be developed, it will be done...on our terms and our timeline."

Maybe my colleague could speak to the importance of consultation. This was a step in the right direction. Now if they could continue down that path, things would be a lot rosier.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that question about the importance of consultation.

I know there are three options in this particular case. When we were looking at creating a park in the Northwest Territories, of course the Conservatives chose the third option, which includes less land than the first two options. A lot of the stakeholders in this particular consultation wanted the first option to be chosen.

Even with that, yes we have a park. It is not as large as what the majority of people want, but I want to pay respect again to the people of Northwest Territories, who are giving a gift to Canadians by allowing this park to be reserved. We can achieve things when we consult with individuals and first nations. It is our constitutional obligation to consult with first nations when it comes to land-use issues, minerals, commodities and their extraction.

Time after time we have seen the current government fail to consult, and the Supreme Court has instructed it a number of times to consult with first nations.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I want to refer my colleague to a quote from the report that was undertaken and instituted by Parks Canada. It states:

> A frequently expressed comment in the Sahtu region consultations was that it does not make sense to have a national park reserve if you also allow mining to exist in the watershed. Participants stated their distrust of the mining industry and environmental assessments to protect the natural environment, concerned that the impacts of mining would be harmful to the watershed downstream.

I ask my colleague, how important is it to ensure that we protect the ecosystem? Is the member in agreement that there would be an opportunity to expand that at a later date?

● (1320)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, yes the member from the Northwest Territories and aboriginal people have wanted to have a larger park, and yes, the Conservatives did create a smaller park. They actually rechecked the boundaries to ensure that some sort of mining activity could take place many years from now.

The member is absolutely right. The activities in those zones just outside the park will have an impact in the park, because animals do not know boundaries and go from one area to another. There is a breeding ground in an area where there could have been a park, yet the Conservatives carved that outside of the national reserve proposed by this bill.

I hope there is an opportunity to ensure, not only for future generations but also for some of species, a natural habitat in the parks in the Northwest Territories and other parts of Canada they can benefit from in the future.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place today to speak on behalf of the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto at third reading of this important bill. It is important in a number of different ways.

As many of my colleagues have already underlined, we will be supporting this bill. However, in my last speech of the year, it is important to reflect on what we can learn from this bill and its process, including what it says about the Conservative government.

It is true that we have had much debate on the bill and the various decisions that were made leading into third reading. What I would like to focus on, though, is the process and the fact that, once again, we see the government not listening to the very people who should be a vital part of the process. It brings me back to my own constituency in Toronto. I would like to talk a little bit more about some flaws in the process and connect it to the bill.

I just want to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

We have significant infrastructure projects right across the country. I will focus on the riding I represent. We can talk about the Line 9 project. Currently, we have a project that is running dirty diesel trains from the airport to Union Station in Toronto.

We have a variety of issues where the public has been unable to weigh in on and have an impact on the decision. For example, in my own riding, we have a nuclear processing plant that has been there for 50 years. We are supposed to have a full public engagement program, and people living right across from the plant did not even know that the program existed, because the government has said that it is not going to play the public engagement card too strongly. It sees that as an impediment to it doing the things it wants to do.

Fundamentally, what we are saying on this side of the House is that if we do not have social licence or if we have not consulted fully with first nations, projects simply cannot go forward. For example, if we want to run a large piece of infrastructure through a heavily populated community like the one I represent, and we are going to run that infrastructure using 19th century diesel technology that the WHO has ranked up there as a carcinogen similar to arsenic and mustard gas, we need to talk to the people who are going to be living right there. We need to get their buy-in, and if we do not, we have to find a way through. We have to consult. We have to listen, and listening is not something that the Conservative government likes to do. We saw this with this very park proposal.

I would also like to talk a little bit about the deficit in infrastructure improvements and how that is also part of a trend. Just in case my hon. friends across the way think that the deficit issue with regard to parks is a one-off, unfortunately it is not. We saw in December 2013 the *Toronto Star* reporting that there was an almost $3 billion backlog in deferred maintenance at Parks Canada.

The Conservative government loves to cut ribbons. It loves to announce big projects, but it is really not interested in supporting the infrastructure and improving it.

● (1325)

We have billions of dollars of infrastructure deficit in the city of Toronto. We have a public transit system that was built for 1960s population use. It is about twice the requirement now.

The government loved to pop by, especially when its buddy Rob Ford was the mayor, and cut some ribbons and popped some champagne when the Prime Minister wanted to help him out by putting some federal money into public transit. However, the problem is that we have a huge operational deficit. What cities, municipalities, and certainly the city of Toronto, need is a government that realizes that it cannot just come up with a big-time capital announcement. It has to be there for the whole project.

Therefore, it concerns us that the government does not understand the need for long-term, sustainable funding. An example is the need for public transit across the country and certainly in my city.

This bill and the process show a very disturbing trend by the government. It is trend that we will most certainly see change after the election in 2015 when we can make some significant changes with the first NDP government in the history of Canada.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that I am getting most of the questions. I am kind of dumbfounded that neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals are even engaged in this issue. That is quite problematic. At the same time, my colleague fully understands the environmental aspect of this and our pristine wilderness.

I would again like to quote from the report. This is from the report that came out of Parks Canada's own consultation process. It states:

> It was suggested by participants that protecting the water should be a higher priority than obtaining the employment and financial benefits of mining...While some participants saw a balance of economic and conservation values as beneficial... many others felt that mining should not be allowed at all in the watershed. It was suggested that the key concern in deciding on the boundary should be the conservation of wildlife and water.

I know in the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, which comprises 17 first nation communities, when it comes to water, the environment and their youth, who are their future, that is key. Could my colleague speak about the fact that these are things that we have to take very seriously when we put bills in place and that this consultation has to occur around these pieces?

● (1330)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raises a very important question. Ultimately, the question revolves around a matter of trust. The government has implemented bills that instead of strengthening environmental protection for our lakes, our rivers, our streams and our oceans have actually weakened them. It has gutted the public process regarding pipelines. Then it turns around and hectors the opposition for raising questions about which, quite frankly, Canadians across the country are incredibly concerned. Fundamentally, the government has lost the trust of Canadians when it comes to large infrastructure projects.

When it comes to protecting vital resources, and what could be more vital than our water, the government has consistently shown an aversion to public participation, and for transparency and for accountability. For those reasons, it will find it increasingly difficult to gain the social licence that is required for these big infrastructure projects.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I feel somewhat baited to pose a question. I do not know if the former questioner has been sleeping, but I can assure her that I have been asking questions. The Liberal Party gave a speech earlier today, and questions have been asked throughout the three hours of debate.

One of the questions I asked was with regard to the creation of the Nááts'ihch'oh park. It was created back in 1972, and the prime minister back then was no other than Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who established the park. This is not to say that the Liberals own the idea. We need to recognize that when a national park is developed, a lot of people come to the table, in particular first nations and other stakeholders.

I have made reference to the fact that we need to acknowledge the efforts of many who have ultimately led to what we have today: a bill. The Senate brought the bill forward, but at the end of the day, it took a great deal of effort by a lot of Canadians to ensure that Bill S-5 would be here today.

Would the member like to acknowledge the efforts of individuals outside of the House of Commons who have made this bill possible?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what the member was trying to ask. I believe he was trying to retroactively claim some kind of responsibility.

I will focus on the key issue, which is social licence, accountability and transparency. Let us focus on the fact that if the Conservatives want to run a pipeline, create a large piece of transit infrastructure, or convince Canadians, for example, that they are sincerely guarding the environment, then they need to give their heads a major shake.

There are significant concerns around the protection of our environment. This is not a rural-urban issue; this is an issue about which all Canadians are concerned. As reflected in this bill, the government still does not take these issues seriously at all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill S-5. As has already been said in the House, the NDP supports the creation of national parks and the preservation of ecosystems and habitats that are essential to the survival of plants and wildlife.

Consultations revealed that the public overwhelmingly supported creating a bigger park. Unfortunately, the government ignored public opinion and decided to protect only the smallest of the three potential areas, neglecting to include very important wildlife areas. Witnesses spoke about the park.

For example, the hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, chairperson of the Sahtu Secretariat, said the following:

> The Sahtu Dene and Métis support the establishment of the park. We maintain that any park in the settlement area must be created and managed in partnership with the Sahtu Dene and Métis and based on our cultural traditions, spiritual values, and economic aspirations.

● (1335)

[*English*]

I believe it is timely for me to talk about our proposed national park in the south Okanagan's lower Similkameen.

Ever since my election in 2006, I have been in contact with those opposed to the proposed park as well as those in favour. There is no question that the vast majority of my constituents in this area want some form of protection for this pristine area. However, there are differences as to how this can be accomplished.

After listening to both sides, I have come to the conclusion that the only way to preserve this fragile ecosystem is by means of a national park. Failing to do so will leave these areas under threat of mining and development regardless of what safeguards the provincial government of the day implements. Although a great deal of work has been done by Parks Canada to move this process forward, there has been some dissatisfaction with the process.

As a result of political pressure, the current B.C. Liberal government has withdrawn its support for a national park. In my conversation with our previous minister of the environment in 2012, I was reassured, however, that should the position of the provincial government change, the federal government would once again get involved in the process. This is encouraging news. I would like to thank the federal government for its commitment.

I would also like to quote from a letter that Ms. Doreen Olson, coordinator of the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network, received from the federal Minister of the Environment in December of 2013. It states:

> I would like to assure you that our government recognizes the important role that Canada's system of national parks plays in providing Canadians with meaningful experiences and opportunities for discovery. Since its creation over 125 years ago, Canada's system of national parks has continued to grow, and our government has put significant efforts into increasing Canada's protected areas.
>
> Our government is committed to ensuring that our national parks continue to provide Canadians and visitors the means to connect with our country's national heritage.

This gives us hope. The key now is for the government of British Columbia to re-engage in the process.

There have been a number of concerns about the proposed national park, the most serious being the lack of first nations' involvement on a government-to-government basis.

Since then, the Okanagan Nation Alliance has conducted a feasibility study and found that it is:

> —feasible to explore further discussions with Parks Canada about a future National Park Reserve, so long as Syilx Title, Rights and interests are protected and respected. The Syilx Parks Working Group advocates a collaborative and consensus based model with Parks Canada similar to those in Gwaii Haanas.

There are two other concerns: the ability of our local helicopter school to continue training in the proposed area and ranching. While both of these issues have been addressed by Parks Canada, they could and should be a vital part of any negotiations between the provincial and federal governments.

It should be noted that there is a growing overwhelming support for the national park from the Okanagan Basin Water Board, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, Regional District of Central Okanagan, Regional District of North Okanagan, Town of Osoyoos, city of Vernon, British Columbia Wine Institute, Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce, and tourism associations such as Oliver Tourism and Destination Osoyoos, as well as a number of environmental groups such as the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network.

In addition, thanks to the former mayor of Osoyoos, Stu Wells, the Union of B.C. Municipalities passed a resolution in support of the park. There is also support from the City of Greenwood. A resolution was passed, stating the following:

> The City of Greenwood fully supports the re-engagement of discussions between the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada, towards the establishment of a new National Park in the South Okanagan-Similkameen; and asks to be consulted throughout the process to ensure that we are partnering in economic development, tourism, and business development strategies and programs.

I would also like to issue a big thanks to Dan Ashton, Penticton MLA and chair of the province's all-party Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for his support. The standing committee recently completed its report and has recommended that the province work with the federal government and local stakeholders to assess the feasibility of, and support for, the establishment of a new national park.

I should add that as was pointed out in previous statements and questions, it takes a long time for this process to take place. It takes many stakeholders, and I firmly believe that the time is right for the Government of British Columbia to re-engage with the federal government to get this process moving so that we can leave a legacy for the future.

Last but not least, I would like to single out and thank Doreen Olson of the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network for her years of tireless efforts in promoting the establishment of a national park. I do not know how many meetings I have had with Doreen or how many meetings she has had with other folks, but I would just like to thank her and those in her organization for their effort.

The B.C. Minister of Environment, Mary Polak, recently visited our area to consult with residents, and I thank her for doing so. I had written the minister in November of 2013 asking the Province of B.C. to formally re-engage in negotiations with the Government of Canada and first nations. So far we have not had a positive reaction from the government of B.C.

We have a chance to do something right for future generations to come. I strongly urge the Province of B.C. to re-engage with the federal government and first nations. We have a potential win-win situation: the protection of our environment, tourism dollars for our area, a beautiful opportunity for people from all parts of the world to come and visit this pristine area, and, of course, full-time employment, which will certainly support our local economy. We cannot allow ourselves to miss this opportunity.

I strongly urge the Government of British Columbia to work with the federal government and to re-engage with the federal government, first nations, and other stakeholders to make the national park in the South Okanagan-Similkameen happen.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague for his remarks. He seems to be very much in tune with the concerns of his constituents. I believe he is also aware of the importance of parks, whether municipal, provincial or national, as is the case in this bill to establish a national park.

I would like to know what importance he attaches to parks and to the resources allocated to them. Earlier, I put the question to another of my colleagues. According to my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior, what importance do national parks have in terms of protecting our environment, our fauna, our flora, as well as our heritage and our history in Canada? Why should we provide them with the necessary resources to discharge the mandate entrusted to them?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question.

It is obviously important to protect certain places in our country for the future. I want to emphasize what I said in my speech. In my opinion, the best way of protecting them is to create a national park.

Where I live, the talk is about provincial protection led by people in the area. However, if we do that and protection is not provided at the national level, there is always the danger of mineral development and increased pressure on such and such a government—regardless of party affiliation—to allow the development of houses and other things.

When we take this approach, we are not doing it for today. We are doing it for the future of the grandchildren of my colleague from Sherbrooke and their grandchildren, who will be there to benefit from the fact that we have a network of national parks across Canada. I encourage the federal government to continue to work with the provinces and others to develop the national park network in our country.

● (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many of the previous speakers have suggested that the only factor the government should have considered in setting the boundaries was the result of public consultations.

I want to ask the hon. member if he would not agree that the views of the Northwest Territories should be considered as well. Should we not consider the investments and rights of the mining companies who employ the people? There has to be more taken into consideration than just the results of the public consultations.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, the question is a logical one.

However, I think we often tend to make decisions based on short-term gain in our country. Here we need to look at the long-term gain, the long-term potential of pristine areas. That is why I would like to submit that this park that Bill S-5 represents is smaller than the people normally would have wanted it to be because of the pressure from the mining industry.

I would like to submit that there is room for mining and room for development, but we have to look to the long term to ensure that we protect these pristine areas. Otherwise, there are not going to be any of these areas left for us in the future.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time.

Bill S-5 would create a national park in the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories. For geographical reference, the region is centred around the Mackenzie River and stretches towards the Yukon boundary with an incredibly beautiful mountain range and the magnificent wilderness of the Northwest Territories.

I had the pleasure some years ago to live in the Northwest Territories for a number of years. I can tell members that when I say the "magnificent wilderness of the Northwest Territories", indeed that is what it is.

I guess we could think of this park perhaps as a Christmas present for the Sahtu Dene of the Northwest Territories, but there is a Scrooge there too, and I would like to talk about the Scrooge.

There were three options that were set out for the park. Option 1 was a total area of 6,450 square kilometres. It was developed to best protect conservation values while providing an open area around the existing mineral interests. Option 2 was a total of 5,770 square kilometres, which diminished the achievement of conservation goals and allowed more mineral potential to be available. Option 3, which is the one that was chosen by the Conservatives, was the smallest proposal, with a total area of 4,840 square kilometres.

Not everybody was happy with that third option. I will read a quote from Alison Woodley, the national conservation director for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS. She said:

> Creating a new national park in Canada is always welcome news. But this boundary does not reflect the extensive scientific evidence of what's needed to protect the ecological integrity of the Nahanni watershed, nor does it reflect the overwhelming support that was expressed for protecting the Nahanni headwaters during the public consultations.

That is just one example.

I do not want members to get the idea that we do not support national parks. Of course we support the creation of parks, but we question the government's motives, and we have some concern with the size of the park, including the omission of vital caribou breeding grounds and the lack of protection for source waters for the Nahanni River.

Section 16 of the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the establishment of a national park in the Sahtu settlement area. Included in these terms and conditions are several clauses for review of the plans for the park after a period of not more than 10 years. I say this because whichever government replaces this particular one next year will have a responsibility to ensure that this plan is reviewed as it moves forward. In fact, these sorts of plans should be like the veterans charter, for example. They should be living documents that continually get looked at.

Another person who was not very happy with the option chosen for the park was Stephen Kakfwi, the former premier of the Northwest Territories. He is quite disappointed in the way the boundary lines were drawn. He said in an interview that the Prime Minister is protecting the mining interests more than environmental interests. I will quote directly from an interview on August 23, 2012:

> He's taken the heart right out of it. The middle of it is carved out, so that mining can happen, dead center in the middle of this proposed national park.

There is another Scrooge here, and I use "Scrooge" in particular because, quite frankly, creating national parks is an empty gesture if there is no funding to go along with it.

In December 2013, the *Toronto Star* reported that there is an almost $3 billion backlog in deferred maintenance in Parks Canada. Of course, budget cuts have had a huge impact. Budget cuts have led to a 33% staffing cut in science in Parks Canada, which means that 60 out of 179 positions have been eliminated.

● (1350)

Add the 2013-14 budget announcement of spending on infrastructure in parks, and the picture is even more bleak. This year, meaning 2014, the government will spend on national parks—remember, I just said there is a $3-billion backlog in infrastructure—$1 million.

The government can create all the parks it wants, but without funding and careful protection of the ecological integrity of this, and of all national parks, the designation is relatively meaningless when we speak in terms of conservation.

Let me finish with a quote from our member for the Northwest Territories. He was speaking on the funding for national parks, in the House of Commons. He stated:

> Across the entire north, there have been sacrifices on a number of occasions with national parks. What have we seen out of that? We saw the loss of over 64 positions throughout the three northern territories. The three northern territories carry 12 national parks in Canada. Twelve of the 44 national parks in Canada are in those three territories. The commitment of the people of the north to national parks is large.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River is very well attuned to wilderness, given the part of the country where he actually lives. He talked about the mountains and about the magnificent wilderness.

I will give another quote from the Parks Canada report, in which an elder says:

> The beauty and importance of the Nááts'ihch'oh area was highlighted by many consultation participants in the Sahtu. They stated that the area was very important to peoples of the Sahtu, Dehcho and Kaska.... One Tulita Elder described the mountain itself...as sacred to these peoples....

When we talk about wilderness, the current government talks about consultation. It says it listens but, at the end of the day it took option three, which was the lesser option, whereas everybody wanted option one.

Maybe he could elaborate on the fact that we need to take consultation into consideration when it comes to sacred ground or the issue here where the elder described the mountain itself as being sacred.

● (1355)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that strikes me about this park, and one of the things that is really lacking, is the whole issue of protecting watersheds and everything that goes into those watersheds.

Members may not know, but just south of my riding, in northern Minnesota, not very far from my riding, there are three North American watersheds that meet. There are always commercial interests that want to shift water from one watershed to another or want to divert water from one watershed to another.

While I am no scientist, I do know that moving water from one watershed to another watershed is something that should not be done.

Protecting watersheds, just like in this park, is most important

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, and his last remarks in response to a question. As an agronomist, I worked to improve the quality of water in agricultural environments. It is crucial to recognize the importance of protecting our blue gold. We have a huge resource in Canada, and people do not realize this. Also, what is important about watersheds is not just the river, but all the waterways and the whole area they flow into.

In his speech, he also emphasized the fact that the current government is not at all committed to conservation or the protection of water and the environment. I would like him to say a little more about the government's lack of commitment to environmental protection.

[*English*]

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to creating any sort of park, whether it is municipal, provincial, or national, we should not look at it in a backward fashion. In other words, we should not look at creating parks in terms of what the minimum is that we can possibly do to create one and still get some political credit for doing it. This is about politics, as well; do not get me wrong.

Rather than that kind of attitude going into the creation of these wilderness spaces, perhaps the real question should be how we can make this large enough to ensure the ecological integrity of the whole park and the whole region.

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.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this week a U.S. Senate report found that torture does not work that information obtained through torture is unreliable.

On March 31, 2009, at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I got CSIS, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, to admit that Canada uses information obtained though torture carried out by other countries. In December 2010, we learned that the Minister of Public Safety had sent a letter to the director of CSIS, authorizing him, in certain cases, to use information that may have been obtained through torture or abuse.

This government must stop this practice immediately, since it encourages other countries to use torture, and it must order CSIS to stop using this kind of information. This practice is immoral and unacceptable and it jeopardizes our national security by basing risk analysis on misinformation.

* * *

● (1400)

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Richmond Hill residents have consistently told me that infrastructure is a priority of theirs, along with jobs and economic growth. I am pleased to inform them that our Conservative government is listening and delivering.

Through the gas tax fund, we are delivering stable, reliable, and significant federal funding to help build local projects. In 2010, nearly $20 million has been allocated specifically for municipal infrastructure in Richmond Hill. People can find gas tax funded projects in every corner of Richmond Hill, from the significant upgrades at the Oak Ridges Community Centre, the Bayview Hill Community Centre, the Richvale Community Centre, and the Lois Hancey Aquatic Centre, to a new multi-use trail at Oak Ridges Corridor Park east.

From major road reconstruction, pedestrian bridge replacements, and trail construction to environmental initiatives, the gas tax fund is improving the quality of life for residents in Richmond Hill and, indeed, across our great country.

On behalf of my constituents in Richmond Hill, let me take this opportunity to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and every member of the House a happy Hanukkah, a merry Christmas, and a happy new year.

[*Translation*]

BEAUPORT—LIMOILOU ENTREPRENEURS

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to acknowledge the dynamic entrepreneurs of my riding.

Café chez Charlotte, La Patente, Rose et Pamplemousse, the Vieux-Limoilou veterinary clinic, La Réserve, Brûlerie Limoilou, Qui l'eût crû, Espace Niviti, NSI Solution, Momenteo and Le Triplex suspendu are just a few examples of new small businesses that are sustaining the economic vitality of Beauport—Limoilou.

Over the past few years, I have been in touch with most of the businesses in my riding that create good jobs and are key to the economic future of Canada. These passionate entrepreneurs have told me about their reality, which is helping me to find practical ways of promoting their growth and development.

Again, I want to thank them for the work they do, and I want to take this opportunity to invite my constituents to buy local.

* * *

[*English*]

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is a joyous time of year, when families and friends get together and celebrate the holiday season. From parades to holiday shopping, to dinners and parties, the Christmas season is filled with many exciting festivities and events.

It is also a time when we can reflect on the many blessings we have received throughout the year and look forward with hope to what lies ahead. We have so much to be thankful for, from family, to friends, to health. The list is endless. In the spirit of giving this season, let us also remember to share generously with those who are less fortunate and make this a Christmas to remember for all.

I would like to wish all members and all Canadians a safe and very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after eight long, suffering years under the Conservative government, the hard-working middle-class families of southern Ontario are excited about the prospect for change.

Next year, the voters of this region will have a clear choice. They can support a party that slashed VIA Rail service to Kitchener, London, Sarnia, and Windsor; they can choose a party that cut the budget of the Federal Economic Development Agency for this region by $80 million; they can vote for a party that has failed to approve a single project under its much-hyped but under-delivered advanced manufacturing fund; or they can choose the Liberal Party that will invest in infrastructure, that will support our hard-hit manufacturing sector, and that is focused on improving the lives of the hard-working middle-class families of southern Ontario.

After a decade of cuts and neglect, the choice is clear. The people of southern Ontario want change. They want a new Liberal government.

* * *

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 700 years before His birth, the prophet Isaiah declared that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son and that His name would be Immanuel, God with us. Five hundred years before it happened, Micah declared that He would be born in Bethlehem, while Zechariah wrote that He would arrive in Jerusalem as a king, riding on a donkey, the price of his betrayal and the wounds on his hands.

Indeed, all of history is divided by His time on earth: B.C., A.D., B.C.E., and C.E., if one will. For millennia, He has inspired the greatest works of art, music, self-sacrifice, and service to humanity.

The *Bible* is His story. It remains the most-published and influential literature of all time.

While 2,000 years have passed, His life, His mission, and His resurrection continue to impact lives around the world. He is the reason for the season.

I wish all members of the House, indeed all Canadians, as many as can receive it, His peace that passes understanding. Merry Christmas.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are approaching the end of this parliamentary session, which was marked by a record number of time allocation motions imposed by the Conservative government in order to pass its contentious bills, cut essential public services and undermine the democratic process of voting through what I would call electoral “deform”.

More than 850,000 Canadians currently rely on food banks to feed themselves. That is an aberration in a country like ours and it illustrates the failure of this government's policies.

Before we all leave to spend the holidays with our families, I would like to express the hope—perhaps an overly optimistic one—that as they celebrate Christmas and the New Year in the warmth of their homes, the Conservatives will think a little more about Canadians and about all those who are dealing with budget cuts, unemployment, the lack of affordable housing, insecurity and injustice.

Merry Christmas to all my colleagues and all the residents of Laval.

* * *

[*English*]

JACK AND MARION SEABROOK

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that colleagues join me today in remembering Jack and Marion Seabrook of Manitoulin Island. Jack and Marion were married in 1953. When they were separated in 2003 by Jack's death, they reportedly had never had a single fight. Last month, Jack and Marion were reunited.

The Seabrooks had three children and adopted three more from the aboriginal community. The kids say their mother never once lost her temper, saying summer was just too hot to get mad and winter was just too cold.

Jack created a museum of island history centred on the most impressive collection of tractors I have ever seen. Marion taught for three decades, creating Ontario's first native studies curriculum, in 1969. Jack supported her morally and financially while she and her students compiled and published a collection of stories of the island, followed by novels, a play, and a board game based on island life.

Jack and Marion built a loving family and enriched the island community. Today it is an honour to speak in their memory.

* * *

HANUKKAH

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when sundown arrives on December 16, in my home and homes across Canada, family and friends will gather together to light candles in celebration of the first night of Hanukkah.

This eight-day celebration commemorates the triumph of the Maccabees against the oppressive empire of Antiochus more than 2,000 years ago. Jerusalem was liberated and the Temple was rededicated, and only enough oil to last for one night instead lasted eight.

Born of the triumph of light over darkness, of freedom over oppression, and of tolerance over persecution, this celebration reminds us that miracles can occur, even in the darkest of moments, and that justice must always overcome tyranny. Hanukkah also reminds us that here in Canada, we are truly blessed to live in a country of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Hanukkah is a joyous time of family gatherings, gift giving, latkes, and games for the children, most notably, hotly contested dreidel contests. At this time, I wish all Canadians celebrating Hanukkah

[*Member spoke in foreign language as follows:*]

Chag Chanukah Sameach,

Ah Freilichen Chanukah.

[*English*]

* * *

TIBET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House today to mark the silver jubilee anniversary of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize for peace. I look forward to joining the Tibetan community this weekend to celebrate this special occasion.

In 1989, His Holiness was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace for his non-violent struggle for freedom in Tibet. Sadly, the situation in his home has only become worse. At least 133 Tibetans have self-immolated since 2009.

The Dalai Lama continues to advocate for a peaceful resolution to the Tibetan issue through dialogue and mutual respect, even in the face of such tragedy. I urge our government to engage China on the issue of Tibet and to urge the Chinese to re-enter the dialogue with envoys of the Dalai Lama based on his "middle way" approach.

I also want to wish all of us here who are privileged to work in Canada's Parliament happy Hanukkah, merry Christmas, and the very best of the holiday season.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Omar Ahmed Khadr pleaded guilty to heinous crimes, including the murder of American army medic Sgt. Christopher Speer.

This Conservative government has vigorously defended against any attempt to lessen his punishment for these crimes. That is why the Government of Canada is ensuring that he stays in federal prison, where he belongs. We do not agree that a youth sentence is appropriate for someone who is seen on video making the same type of improvised explosive devices that killed many of the 158 Canadian Armed Forces members who died in Afghanistan.

I am pleased with the decision of the Supreme Court to hear the government's appeal of the reckless decision to send a terrorist to juvenile detention. While the Liberal leader refused to rule out special compensation for this convicted terrorist and the NDP actively tries to force Canadian taxpayers to compensate him, we on this side believe that victims of crime, not the perpetrators, are the ones who deserve compensation.

* * *

● (1410)

WEST KOOTENAY REGIONAL AIRPORT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to see an update in the *Castlegar News* on our West Kootenay Regional Airport. A big thanks goes to city councillor Florio Vassilakakis for explaining the regional navigation performance system necessary to upgrade our airport.

Due to our narrow valley and low cloud ceiling, we experience more than our share of cancellations and delays. Over the last several years, I have been talking with representatives of NAV Canada about our airport. As of last year, Canada had not yet developed a public RNP system for airports such as ours.

I am happy to say that this has now changed. I was recently told by NAV Canada that it is trying to arrange a meeting with Air Canada and the City of Castlegar to discuss the airport RNP approach. The key is for Air Canada to equip its planes with compatible equipment, which their new Q400 aircraft already have. Should this happen, we could see a marked improvement at our airport as early as fall 2015.

This is a win-win situation. Air Canada increases its profits, and all of our residents benefit. We are counting on Air Canada to make this happen.

* * *

FIREARMS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the NDP will bring back the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry should they ever get the chance.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley piled on yesterday when he confirmed to media that the NDP will bring forward measures to track all firearms, in other words, with a registry. What is even worse is that he attempted to fearmonger by saying that the common-sense firearms licensing act would have made it easier for the terrorist who attacked Ottawa to transport a firearm. That type of irresponsible and misleading comment requires a fundamental misunderstanding of how gun laws work.

We are making our firearms laws safe and sensible for Canadians. I would hope that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley would return to his previous position on the issue, when he said that he had received clear and decisive direction from his constituents to oppose the long gun registry, a position he agreed with personally.

It is clear that only this Conservative government will stand up for law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters.

I and other northern British Columbians wonder if he will reverse his long gun registry flip-flop.

* * *

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from Little Black Bear First Nation in Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan, Perry Bellegarde has just taken on the toughest political job in Canada. He was elected convincingly yesterday as the new National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

In three decades of activism, he has served as a tribal councillor, as chief of Little Black Bear, as chief, twice, of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and as regional chief of the AFN.

He also has experience in crown corporations and in community organizations ranging from the Globe Theatre and the YMCA to the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority.

As Chief Bellegarde now works to energize the AFN, this new national leadership offers Canada an opportunity to make historic progress in building respect, trust, and the momentum, at long last, to close the gaps between first nations and all other Canadians. Let us not miss that chance.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economy is ranked among the best in the world, despite weathering a global economic crisis.

Our government has worked tirelessly to ensure that Canadian families have not been affected by needless taxes and out-of-control government expenditures. Instead, our government has significantly reduced the tax burden for Canadians. This government believes in the importance of a strong economy and refuses to weigh it down with another tax on Canadian families, unlike the NDP and Liberals, which have repeatedly called for increased taxes on Canadians, including a carbon tax, that would be detrimental to the well-being of Canadians and small businesses.

Bringing in a job-killing carbon tax is irresponsible. By resisting a carbon tax, despite opposition demands, this government is standing up for hard-working Canadians. Our Conservative government will never punish Canadians with the job-killing carbon tax called for by the opposition.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives and the Liberals who have shown once again how out of touch they are with the needs of Canadian families, the NDP has had another great parliamentary session.

We have achieved tangible results for Canadians, such as compensation for thalidomide victims and the phasing out of DOT-111 cars, which were involved in the Lac-Mégantic tragedy.

[*English*]

We launched an affordable child care plan with the goal of ensuring that parents do not pay more than $15 a day for child care. After 20 years of empty promises, it is time.

We fought to maintain home mail delivery for Canadians and called for a moratorium. We stood up for veterans, and we stood up against constant Conservative corruption. We held the government to account for the military mission to Iraq.

We will continue to hold the Conservatives to account and to build a government in waiting for 2015, because Canadians deserve better.

[*Translation*]

We cannot wait for 2015.

[*English*]

TAXATION

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is good news this Christmas. Under our Prime Minister, all families will receive more money in their pockets, right where it belongs, thanks to our family tax plan.

The Liberals would take it away. In fact, the Liberals have even said that Canadians can be convinced to accept a tax hike. I do not understand that thinking. In fact, I find it unconscionable. The Liberals would take money away from hard-working families and instead build up government bureaucracy.

Thankfully, all families in Calgary Centre with children will benefit from our recent announcements. Families will be better off with the universal child care benefit increase and expansion. In fact, families that have children under six will receive nearly $2,000 per child, per year, and families with kids from six to 17 will receive $720 per year, per child.

Only our Conservative government knows that moms and dads are the best ones to make decisions about what to do with their money, not the Liberals.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past eight years, $1.1 billion that should have been used to help veterans was funnelled back into federal coffers because of the minister's incompetence and his chronic inability to process claims properly.

Two years ago, he was told that his department had seriously underestimated the number of veterans who need help. He did absolutely nothing to address the situation. In fact, he made it worse.

When will the Prime Minister get rid of the Minister of Veterans Affairs?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered, and today there are more services, more benefits and more points of service for our veterans than ever before.

Here are the facts. The opposition voted against expanding funeral and burial funding. It voted against career transition services. It even voted against the children of deceased veterans education assistance program.

We take no lessons from a party that speaks one thing and does another.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ministerial responsibility is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. That person has caused the harm. He shut down nine veterans offices and allowed $1.1 billion to lapse when veterans needed help, and he says that it is somebody else's fault.

No, he is responsible. What is he waiting for to finally, for once in his life, do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for our veterans, and we will continue to do so in spite of the opposition voting against every one of those items.

The reality is that those members voted against disability and death compensation. They voted against the earnings loss and supplementary retirement benefits. They voted against the veterans independence program.

I hardly think we need to take any lessons from a party that says one thing and does exactly the opposite.

* * *

● (1420)

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2009—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, in 2009, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights unanimously decided that it was time to take action against impaired drivers.

Two years ago, I asked the Prime Minister about this, and he said that he was taking it seriously and that it was a priority. Two years later: nothing

[*English*]

There is nothing that governments do that is more important than saving human lives. A lot of them will be posing with people from Mothers Against Drunk Driving over the holidays.

Here is our only question for the Conservatives. Since that unanimous report in 2009, more than 5,000 Canadians have died because of drunk driving. What are they waiting for to act?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, impaired driving is still the number one criminal cause of death in our country. It is a very serious issue.

He has alluded to the fact that many of us, including myself, have met with members of MADD Canada, as well as other justice groups that are advocating for changes to the Criminal Code. We have contemplated seriously the changes that are required. We hope to have legislation forthcoming.

Oral Questions

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, former Premier Dunderdale of Newfoundland and Labrador was there to announce that there was a deal with the federal government: $280 million would flow to Newfoundland and Labrador as compensation for the European trade deal. Now we find out that the government is imposing conditions that will mean, in practical effect, that the $280 million it promised will never flow.

Why did the government make the promise to Newfoundland and Labrador and break it such a short while later?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working out the details of this minimum processing requirement fund with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The fund was created to compensate for anticipated losses from the removal of minimum processing requirements. The fund was never intended as a blank cheque that would give the industry of Newfoundland and Labrador an unfair advantage over other Atlantic provinces.

We have been very clear from the start that the MPR fund was to compensate for demonstrable losses.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years, the Prime Minister has been promising “sector by sector regulations to combat climate change”. In 2008, he not only promised a cap and trade, he promised specific regulations for oil and gas.

Now the same Prime Minister has suddenly said that his own idea of promising those very regulations would be “crazy”. It is his idea that he is now calling crazy. What does it say about the Prime Minister that he considers his own ideas to be crazy?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is crazy is a job-killing carbon tax.

What the Prime Minister said was that Canada would not take unilateral action and impose taxes and monetary penalties on the oil and gas sector. This is a North American issue that needs a North American solution. We have always said that we would work together with the United States on reducing greenhouse gas emissions for the oil and gas sector.

We are the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Westmount—Ville Marie.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the Auditor General informed us that the Conservatives were underestimating veterans' needs and that demand would probably go up.

What did the minister do? He cut 1,000 jobs, and the biggest cuts were made to front-line programs for health, financial and transition services. The minister is not only incompetent; he is also mean.

Why is the Prime Minister putting up with this? When will he show this incompetent and insensitive minister the door?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we support our veterans. The reality is that we voted for many of the benefits and services for veterans and their families.

However, let me just inventory a few of the items that the Liberal Party voted against. They are the veterans independence program, the earnings lost benefit, the supplementary retirement benefit, the financial support program, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, career transition services, the disability allowance, and many more.

Again, the hypocrisy is more than anybody can really believe.

● (1425)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it was convenient, the Prime Minister praised the new veterans charter. For example, in 2006, in speaking with veterans, he claimed to support the troops and noted, " This veterans charter is one example of our government's commitment". However, when it became clear how badly his government had mismanaged that supposed commitment, he rushed to blame the charter on a previous government.

The Prime Minister has been exposed for his mean-spirited neglect of our veterans. How can they possibly trust anything he says?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the advent of the new veterans charter, what this government has done consistently year after year, while the opposition has voted against it, is enhance the benefits, the services and the delivery of programs for veterans and their families.

We have been delivering for our veterans. We continue to do so, while the opposition opposes everything we do.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while we believe the Conservatives should have long ago invested in mental health services for those who serve, they seem incapable of announcing money for military mental health without skirting into questionable ethical grounds.

Today's announcement of a new centre of excellence includes funding of a half a million dollars from military contractor General Dynamics Corporation, which receives tens of millions of dollars in contracts from the Conservative government.

In its rush for good news announcements, does the government really not see the conflict of interest created by General Dynamics Corporation contracts with DND?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing the best care possible for our men and women in uniform. It was our government that boosted the mental health budget for the armed forces by over 20%. Members who are battling mental illness have greater access to specialized care more than ever before.

The Canadian Armed Forces has established a new national Canadian Military and Veterans Mental Health Centre of Excellence and created a Chair in Military Mental Health, working in partnership with the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. We are seeking even further opportunities to advance military-related mental health research. Our brave men and women in uniform deserve nothing less.

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[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 900 positions were eliminated at Veterans Affairs. That is more than a third of the unit that administers services and 372 positions in the health and rehabilitation unit. To mask their ideological cuts, the Conservatives claimed that this would not affect services.

That is what got us into the mess we are in right now: veterans are dying before they can get the care they need and others are committing suicide. This makes no sense.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for? When will he dismiss this completely incompetent minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work that we on this side of the House have been doing, while the opposition constantly votes against our programs and services for veterans.

We opened or announced new front-line medical facilities for veterans' mental health. We are working with family resource centres to support medically-released veterans and their families. We have shrunk the application and the paperwork to deliver more services upfront for our veterans. We have created new monthly financial benefits totalling thousands of dollars each year for seriously injured veterans.

The opposition votes against all these things.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is totally out of touch.

For two years, he has been unable to forecast the needs of his department; yet, he has done nothing to correct the situation, despite a stern warning from the Auditor General, who told him that his data did not take into account the growing needs of soldiers with post-traumatic stress.

For the past two years, the minister has been laying off all kinds of staff and closing regional offices without knowing what the future needs would be. Now, he has to backtrack and rehire some staff.

It is high time the Prime Minister gave veterans a nice gift by dismissing this irresponsible minister.

● (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of us on this side of the House are proud of the fact that we have been, and continue to, looking after the needs of our veterans and their families. We do that through the delivery of programs and services.

Let me give the House just one example where the NDP voted against a program, and that was disability and death compensation benefits for our veterans. The New Democrats voted against that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have failed veterans every step of the way, and they refuse to take responsibility.

A 2012 Auditor General's report warned that Conservative mismanagement was: creating a mess at Veterans Affairs; failing veterans on mental health issues and PTSD; and creating a state of confusion with front-line case managers.

The Conservatives' response was to cut front-line staff and close regional offices. It is inexcusable. When will they finally fire the minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for our veterans, and we will continue to do so in spite of the NDP voting against all of these things.

The reality is that the New Democrats keep voting against every program or measure that we have brought forward. They voted against disability and death compensation, earnings lost and supplementary retirement benefits and the veterans independence program.

There are no lessons to be learned on this side of the House from that party which votes against the very things we are trying to achieve for our veterans.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the 39th, 40th and again in this 41st Parliament, this party has tabled legislation, the climate change accountability act, that would commit Canada to emission reduction targets. That is a consistent determination to preserve this planet for our kids.

Contrast that with a Prime Minister who once called meeting emission targets “an important objective”, but now, having missed every target, he calls emission regulation “crazy”.

How did it happen that the Prime Minister's once important objective became crazy?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, what it crazy is a job-killing carbon tax.

Our government is the government that is reducing emissions, while supporting economic growth and job creation. We are achieving this without the crazy policies of the NDP.

In 2012, greenhouse gas emissions were 5.1% lower than the 2005 levels, while the economy grew by 10.6% during the same period.

Canada's 2020 greenhouse gas emissions are projected to be 130 megatonnes lower than they would have been under the Liberals. That is real leadership.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because the Conservatives refuse to regulate the oil and gas sector, other sectors will have to do more if we are to meet our targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The manufacturing sector, for example, which has already come a long way, will have to make up for the Conservatives' favouritism toward the oil companies.

How does the Prime Minister justify the fact that other sectors have to pay the bill for the oil and gas sector?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's record is clear. We have taken decisive action on the environment while protecting our economy. We will continue to implement the sector-by-sector regulatory approach to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that protects the environment and supports economic prosperity.

Building on these actions, we recently announced that we will be taking action to limit the growth HFCs, which are the most potent and fastest-growing greenhouse gases in the world, and we will do that without putting economic penalties on our oil and gas sector and without a job-killing carbon tax.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the sector-by-sector approach, oil and gas is the sector with the biggest GHG emissions, and there is no way for Canada to meet its obligations without regulating that sector.

The Prime Minister says he wants to align Canada's oil and gas rights with the U.S., but neither the minister nor the parliamentary secretary could say if he has proposed continent-wide regulations to the Americans. Therefore, I will ask again: what regulations has the government proposed to the United States?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the Prime Minister said Canada would not take unilateral action and impose taxes and monetary penalties on the oil and gas sector, but what the opposition has said is it would impose taxes and monetary penalties on the oil and gas sector. The opposition also said it would act unilaterally to impose a job-killing carbon tax. The opposition parties would gamble with 275,000 jobs in Canada.

Our government is not going to do that. We are going to support hard-working Canadians, and we are going to do that without the crazy taxes of the NDP.

* * *

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 procurement secretariat just released an update on this file.

As we expected, the cost for Canadians has gone up again. It is now going to cost $45.8 billion to purchase, maintain and operate the F-35s. As if that were not enough, the last plane would not be ready until 2025. Confusion reigns and Canadians want to know how their money will be spent.

Will the minister finally commit to holding an open and transparent bidding process?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, no decision has been made on replacing the CF-18 fleet. We want to make sure that our men and women in uniform have the equipment they need, which is why we are doing a life extension on the CF-18s so that they can run right through until 2025.

In our commitment to transparency, we released three reports yesterday and all of the unclassified reports, and all of the information therein will be taken into consideration when a decision is made.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rising costs and slipping timelines of the F-35s were laid out in careful detail in yesterday's independent review report. There could be $1 billion more in costs and the final purchase could be pushed back to 2025, a far cry from the $9 billion originally claimed in 2010. The report also says three other jets could equally meet Canada's needs.

Will the Conservatives be having an open competition, or are they still in favour of a sole-sourced purchase of the F-35s?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, no decision has been taken as part of our seven-point plan. We commissioned several reports, and those are being evaluated. In fact, they have been released publicly. They were tabled yesterday. The information in those will be considered when a decision is made.

Meanwhile, to make sure that our men and women in uniform have the equipment they need, we are doing life extensions so that the F-18 fleet can continue through 2025.

Quite frankly, the NDP, the no defence party, has been arguing to buy absolutely nothing to support our troops.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has had these reports in its hands for months. The Pentagon has documents showing that we have already asked for earlier purchase of the F-35 and there is an entire secretariat devoted to this, so it hardly seems likely that a decision has not already been made.

Can the minister tell us whether this proposed purchase has actually gone to cabinet?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how to make it more clear: no decision has been made.

We are going to consider all of the information that has been prepared in the various reports, which were made public yesterday, and we will evaluate the different options to make sure that our men and women in uniform get the equipment they need at a price that is responsible to taxpayers.

We will make sure that the troops have the equipment they need by doing life extension to 2025 on the CF-18s.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at least 160 Canadians who bravely served this country died by suicide over the last decade.

The current Conservative government was warned two years ago by the Auditor General that it was unprepared for dealing with veterans' mental health. It was told again this year that the wait time for mental health services was unacceptable. That any member of the Conservative government can stand up and say that they are doing a good job without any sense of shame is an insult to the memory of anyone lost because of their inaction.

The minister has allowed us to get to this point of crisis. When will he do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as recently announced, there are a number of initiatives that we have undertaken that will in fact address the mental health situation. This is something that we have been doing all along. There are initiatives under way that will enhance service delivery at the front line. There are new clinics and expanded clinics being put in place.

We have been responding and we will continue to do that for the mental health needs of our veterans and their families.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, newly elected National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Perry Bellegarde vowed yesterday to keep pushing for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Earlier this week, Canada witnessed the courage and eloquence of Rinelle Harper as she added her voice to the calls for an inquiry.

Will the Prime Minister get on the right side of history and immediately call a national public inquiry so that we can put an end to this ongoing national tragedy?

● (1440)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, we know that different victims have different views, and we respect the views of all of these victims.

What happened to Rinelle Harper was appalling and a horrific crime. Our thoughts and prayers are with her as well as with her family. Thanks to her family's brave decision to move forward and work with police, we have apprehended the attackers, which is extremely important.

Our government is very focused on making sure that victims are supported and that those who commit these crimes are apprehended and put behind bars. We have moved forward with the victims bill of rights, as well as a number of other initiatives.

This government is focused on doing the right actions, unlike the opposition.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have admitted that there has been no progress in the fight against the underground economy in the past five years. What are they proposing? A committee with no targets.

What is more, for the past two years, they have been blocking requests from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to determine how many billions of dollars are hidden in tax havens, when every other country in the G7 has already done those calculations.

Does anyone in the Conservative government care about tax evasion?

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that just a few weeks ago in Toronto I launched a ministerial advisory committee on the underground economy to highlight all of our efforts that have been extremely successful in that area and our enhanced approach to the underground economy, which I also tabled in this House. We are taking that issue very seriously.

As far as the PBO is concerned, we are working with the PBO. There is an issue as to how much we can share with him. We are working on it.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Canada decides to use information obtained through so-called enhanced interrogation techniques, it implies that the Conservatives are authorizing things such as forcing detainees to stand even though they are injured, making sexual threats regarding detainees' families and depriving detainees of sleep for more than a week.

Does the minister condemn torture? If so, will he refuse to use information obtained through torture in the future?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the issue she is referring to has to do with the American authorities, not American politicians.

That being said, let me be clear: Canada does not condone the use of torture.

However, if information that can save Canadian lives is brought to the attention of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service or our law enforcement agencies, I expect that information to be considered.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Senate report on the CIA's so-called enhanced interrogation techniques is very clear: torture is not only morally wrong, it does not work. Information obtained through torture is unreliable.

However, despite this, the Conservatives have directed Canadian security agencies to use and share information obtained through torture.

Why is the minister making Canadian agencies go along to get along with states that torture?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Canada does not condone the use of torture.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in October, when Farmers of North America expressed interest in buying the Wheat Board's assets, Conservatives said, “Well, there's no time”, but then they changed their minds and said, “Oh, we'll give you a month.”

A month to put a bid as complex as that together was hardly enough time, so guess what? The bid was rejected.

However, when private companies were allowed to bid on it, guess what? There was no timeline.

The CWB is still considering offers from private companies, so why did Conservatives impose a timeline on farmers but not on multinational corporations? Why does the current minister not want farmers to own the Canadian Wheat Board?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, absolutely none of that is true. The member for Welland should actually get better research. He could maybe talk to the Wheat Board itself, or I would be happy to give him a briefing.

The Farmers of North America imposed its own timeline, trying to find out from farmers if there was any desire to put together the several hundred million dollars it would take to be a serious contender. They never did that. They actually never did put forward a serious bid. If they had, it would have been adjudicated along with everyone else's by the CWB, working in concert with an international accounting and legal team to ascertain the best bid.

● (1445)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the idea that the folks who wanted to make the bid would impose timelines on themselves so that they could derail their own bid makes perfect sense, especially from this minister.

The Wheat Board's assets are public. They should be for sale and they should actually benefit farmers, but the board's management seems determined not to sell the assets to interested farmers. It seems it would prefer to give a sweetheart deal to a foreign multinational.

Would the minister state, for the House and for the record, if he is aware of any kind of bonus, special compensation, or incentive that would go to the executive management of the Canadian Wheat Board?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not a political process, as we said when we put that bill forward in October 2011. This is following the timeline and following the outline that was prescribed within that.

The directors at the Wheat Board have decided to expedite to bring stability to what it is offering western Canadian farmers predominately, but it has increased its footprint across Canada with the purchase of Mission Terminal and loading facilities in Quebec. Should that come to fruition in the coming months or in the couple of years that they have in that timeline, bringing that stability would be a wonderful thing,.

As to bonuses and so on, that is certainly in the purview of the Wheat Board, not mine.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Poland's defence minister, Tomasz Siemoniak, says that there has been unprecedented activity by Russia's navy and air force in the Baltic Sea region in recent days.

He also says that this is evidence of Russia's testing and probing of NATO and that this does not in any way help to build good relations and trust.

Given this spike in activity, would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence please update this House on Canada's contribution to NATO's Ukrainian assurance measures?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his great support for Ukraine.

There has indeed been increased activity in the Baltic Sea region by Russian forces, and our CF-18 pilots continue to witness it first-hand. Yesterday morning, two CF-18 Hornets based in Lithuania were scrambled to respond to non-NATO aircraft off the Baltic coast and intercepted a Russian transport aircraft and a Russian surveillance plane.

This time, however, these Russian planes had an escort: four Russian MiG-31 Foxhound fighter jets. Our CF-18s shadowed this Russian formation for approximately an hour.

Let there be no mistake: Canada continues to stand with our NATO allies in the face of Russian military aggression.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister showed up at the UPA convention empty-handed. He also created uncertainty among farmers and cheese producers by saying that if they suffer any losses as a result of the Canada-European Union trade agreement, they would be compensated. In Brussels, when the Prime Minister promised compensation, there was no “if” or “maybe”.

The uncertainty this government is creating is affecting investments. Cheese producers simply want to know exactly how the government is going to evaluate losses.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate and thank the parliamentary secretary. While at the UPA convention, he represented the government very well and defended our cheese producers and the dairy industry in general, because over here, we keep our word.

We signed an agreement and people in the dairy industry will be compensated. They were very pleased to hear that from the parliamentary secretary. We are there for our farmers, and we will continue to stand up for them.

* * *

[*English*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if that is a promise, let us see the details in writing.

I would remind Conservatives that they also promised to compensate Newfoundland and Labrador for giving up rules that protect our fish processing jobs. What happened to that promise?

Tomorrow, the premier is coming to Ottawa to meet with the Prime Minister to find out what happened. Will the Prime Minister agree to honour the terms of the commitment he made, or will this be a replay of the foot-dragging, promise-breaking, disrespect, and contempt that Conservatives showed to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with the Atlantic accord?

● (1450)

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should better inform himself on this file. The fund was created to compensate for anticipated losses from the removal of minimum processing requirements. The fund was never intended as a blank cheque that would give the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador an unfair advantage over other Atlantic provinces.

The Canada-European Union trade agreement represents an unprecedented opportunity for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it would be a shame for anything to interfere with that. We have been very clear from the start that the MPR fund was to compensate for demonstrated losses.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Lachine post office, which is in my riding, was one of the first post offices to close as a result of the Conservatives' cuts.

When the government announced that there would be no more door-to-door mail delivery, citizens' complaints ballooned. People with reduced mobility, seniors, hundreds of municipalities and all Canadians want this service.

Will the Conservatives finally listen to Canadians for once and keep door-to-door mail delivery?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that the decision with respect to home delivery is that of Canada Post, an independent arm's length crown corporation. It did so as part of its five-point plan in response to the fact that it delivered 1.2 billion fewer letters in 2013 when compared to 2006.

I remind the member that, as it does this, two-thirds of Canadians currently do not have door-to-door delivery. Canada Post, in terms of balancing its finances, has a responsibility to do so. We expect it to do so without being a burden to taxpayers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year, one hour after the Canada Post announcement, the Minister of Transport announced in a press release that she agreed with the decision. Thus, it is not true that the corporation is at arm's length.

It has been one year since the Conservatives decided to disregard the well-being of Canadians by eliminating home mail delivery. While other countries such as Germany are retooling their postal services by adding banking services, Canada and the Conservatives are attacking a service that Canadians appreciate.

One year after this tragic announcement, have the Conservatives finally heard the people's justifiable anger?

Do they understand that this has a direct impact on municipalities and people with reduced mobility?

Do they understand that Canada Post is profitable?

Will they keep home mail delivery?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this is another message brought to us by CUPW. I am sure it wrote that for the member opposite.

Let us be clear. Canada Post has posted three consecutive years of losses. That is primarily because it is delivering a significant amount less mail than it was only years ago, 1.2 billion fewer letters. It has a responsibility under law to operate in a way that is financially sustainable. It has taken action with respect to a five-point plan. We expect it to do that without being a burden to taxpayers.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Prime Minister, it is crazy to keep his Copenhagen promises and regulate the oil and gas industry at any price per barrel.

What is even more crazy is to blow off presidents Obama and Hollande and Prime Minister Cameron and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It is crazy to blow off the Lima climate change conference. It is crazy to embarrass his minister. Mind you, she does a pretty good job of it all by herself.

Why not just keep this crazy train going, and actually regulate the oil and gas industry?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, Canada would not take unilateral action and impose taxes and monetary penalties on the oil and gas sector.

Let us take a look at the Liberals' record. When they were in power, they signed on to the Kyoto accord without any plan, without any details, and we saw greenhouse gases go up 30%.

We are working with our partners in the United States so that we take a North American solution to this. We have always said we would like to work together with the United States, and we are going to do it without a job-killing carbon tax.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's failure to champion strong environmental policies is damaging our economy and killing jobs.

Its neo-Conservative ideology is hindering the ability of our exporters to get their products to market. When the Prime Minister broke his promise to regulate greenhouse gases, he once again damaged the petroleum sector.

What kind of crazy economics is that?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what would be crazy is the Liberals' plan.

As I said earlier, they would take unilateral action to impose taxes and monetary penalties on the oil and gas sector. They would act unilaterally to impose a job-killing carbon tax. They would gamble with 275,000 jobs.

We are not going to do that. We are going to support hard-working Canadians because we believe on this side that we are the only party that can be trusted to lower greenhouse gas emissions while growing the economy.

That is real leadership.

* * *

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the $687 million in cuts to public safety are having a serious impact on Canadians' safety. The Conservative government is getting ready to abolish the intensive supervision program for offenders at high risk of reoffending. We are talking about preventing sex offenders, bikers and mobsters from being released back into society without strict supervision.

The program is to come to an end on December 31, which is completely unacceptable. This is a program that has proven to be very effective.

Will the minister recognize his mistake and reconsider his decision?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would have been nice to have the NDP's support when we increased police resources by one-third in consecutive budgets. We did the same for the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. We have increased the number of Canada Border Services Agency officers by nearly 26%.

The Conservatives are eager to get a Christmas present from the NDP and have them support us when the time comes to invest in improving Canadians' safety.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the answer from the Minister of Status of Women yesterday, the reality is that the government's so-called action plan to end violence against aboriginal women ignores women living in northern communities.

Inuit women are 11 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes, 11 times. Does the minister agree that it is not just about supporting victims, and that more needs to be done to address the causes of violence in northern communities?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has been acting and doing a significant number of things to make sure we are standing up for victims and punishing criminals.

Let me list some: a victims bill of rights act, a DNA-based missing persons index, new laws to protect victims and make sure that those who are being harassed know that those who are harassing them will be put behind bars, a new bill on zero tolerance for barbaric practices, our Safe Streets and Communities Act.

Our government is acting for northern Canadians and Canadians across the country. Why are they not supporting us in doing so?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to provide regular updates to Canadians in this House on Operation Impact and the ongoing efforts of our forces to confront and degrade the military capabilities of the terrorist group ISIL.

Unlike the previous Liberal government who sent armed forces to Afghanistan without a debate or vote in Parliament, this government put forward a motion, which clearly defines the motives, parameters, and goals of Canada's contribution to fight ISIL.

As we come to the end of this parliamentary sitting, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence please, once again, update the House on Operation Impact?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt is correct. Our government has facilitated multiple technical briefings from the military for Canadians on the mission in Iraq. We have also made numerous statements in this House regarding our air strikes.

In that tradition, I can confirm that yesterday our CF-18s dropped a bomb on an ISIL vehicle checkpoint about 250 kilometres to the southwest of Mosul.

Unlike the Liberals, who did not even bother consulting Parliament when they sent our armed forces to Afghanistan, our government has been open and transparent with Canadians.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the government has done nothing with the Cohen commission report. We know it has devastated fish habitat protection and scientific research on the west coast. We also know the importance that Justice Cohen placed on the migratory paths of the Fraser River sockeye.

Is the government going to allow the expansion of aquaculture facilities in the migratory path of the sockeye, or will it wait until the crucial research being done by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is completed?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, B.C. salmon is very important to our government, as it is to all British Columbians. When my parliamentary secretary first proposed the motion calling for a judicial inquiry into the decline of the Fraser River sockeye back in 2004, it was the Liberals that teamed up with the Bloc Québécois to vote it down.

I am very happy to report that the Fraser River sockeye returns are very strong this year. The final end season run for Fraser sockeye was nearly 20 million fish. We have introduced several measures that are consistent with recommendations from Justice Cohen.

* * *

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we can relate to the news, when it talks about who we are and what is happening in our communities, that makes for an interesting newscast.

Today we heard that regional newscasts will be cut in half. In the Saguenay, Rimouski, Fredericton and Calgary, newscasts will be cut from one hour to 30 minutes. The government is slowly killing our public broadcaster, literally. We are talking about CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate here.

How can the minister stand by while the regions lose half of their regional newscasts? Why is she treating us like second-class citizens?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. The CBC is solely responsible for its day-to-day operations, including decisions with respect to programming and with respect to human resource management.

Our government respects the CBC's independence as an arm's-length crown corporation. It would be nice to hear, before Christmas, the NDP agree with us on that point.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government committed to taking actions to ensure that Canadians are not paying higher prices simply because of where they live. The unexplained and often significant price gap between Canadian and U.S. prices for the same products is a frustrating reality for Canadian consumers.

These price differences are real, and they hurt the bottom line and pockets of Canadian consumers. Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry please update the House on the action that our government has taken to tackle this very real problem?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Provencher for the great question. Our government believes that hard-working Canadians and their families should not be charged higher prices than Americans simply because of where they live. That is why we tabled the price transparency act, which would give

Canada's Commissioner of Competition the power to investigate price discrimination and expose it.

The intentional manipulation of prices on identical goods for sale in Canada and the U.S. places an unfair burden on Canadians and is simply wrong. This government will continue to and will always stand up for the interests of Canadian consumers.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Public Works and Government Services Canada is responsible for the Van Horne bridge that joins Quebec and New Brunswick.

Unfortunately, the bridge's sidewalks are snow covered and the minister forgot to negotiate snow removal. Winter is here. Yesterday, another 40 centimetres of snow fell in the Gaspé, and the communities of Listuguj, Pointe-à-la-Croix and Campbellton feel abandoned.

Will the government make sure that the sidewalks are passable?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, public works is responsible for most of the properties, and the management of those buildings is usually subcontracted. I am not familiar with the case that the member is discussing, but I would be happy to get back to him about it.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, like most actual conservatives who believe in markets, I was amused by the Minister of Industry's staged photo op in a toy store on Tuesday. I find the notion that, somehow, merchants can be shamed by the Competition Bureau into lowering their prices is, to use the Prime Minister's economic qualifier, “crazy economic policy”.

If the Minister of Industry is really interested in preventing price gouging, why does he not look at some of his government's own market distorting policies that increase consumer prices, like tariffs, fuel taxes, an oligopolistic telecom market, and even supply management?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on average, Canadians pay roughly 15% more for goods in Canada compared to goods available in the U.S. These price differences are real. They hurt the bottom line of hard-working families. We will continue to stand up for hard-working Canadian families.

Business of the House

● (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of members from the group, Fostering Open eXpression among Youth, who are the winners of the million dollar 2014 Arctic Inspiration Prize.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, December 9, the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to thank the House of Commons security personnel following the events of October 22, 2014. I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS SECURITY PERSONNEL

(House in committee of the whole to recognize House of Commons Security Personnel, Mr. Andrew Scheer in the chair)

[*And House of Commons Security Personnel being present in the chamber*:]

The Speaker: Today I would like to acknowledge, on behalf of all hon. members, the courage, professionalism, and dedication of the personnel of the protective service of the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

We are all, without question, in their debt. Under the leadership of the Sergeant-at-Arms, Kevin Vickers, and director general, Patrick McDonell, the House of Commons protective service is a reassuring presence in the Parliament buildings. Each and every day, this remarkable team demonstrates its commitment to ensuring the safety of members, employees, and visitors to the Hill.

[*English*]

On October 22, 2014, their quick response during the attack in Centre Block most certainly prevented an even more tragic conclusion to the day's events.

As hon. members will know, Constable Samearn Son, a valued member of the House of Commons protective service for 10 years, was injured while attempting to disarm the gunman, despite being unarmed himself. His selfless action, putting his own body in harm's way, was a stunning example of bravery and brought further honour and esteem to the protective service.

We also remember those constables who stood guard, protecting parliamentarians, employees, and others who waited to receive word that all was clear. They provided reassurance in the early moments following the gunfire, and remained calm in the performance of their duties as the lockdown continued throughout the day and into the evening.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

Throughout the day’s events, along with great acts of bravery, there were many acts of kindness and generosity as well.

[*English*]

A group of Swiss students visiting Canada for the first time was in the midst of a tour of Parliament when the incident began. While they were safely ushered to a secure area, the group had been split over two different tours and found themselves separated and anxious about their classmates and fellow teachers. Constables were able to account for the full group and provide assurances that everyone was safe. In the midst of everything that was going on, I can only imagine the measure of relief that this brought to the teachers and parents accompanying their group.

The response on October 22 was certainly a team effort, as much a result of rigorous training and skilled leadership as it was the product of individual bravery and basic kindness.

[*Translation*]

It is also important to acknowledge the support provided by the House administration and the many parliamentary services that worked tirelessly behind the scenes to support our front-line protective service personnel and to ensure that we could return to work, business as usual, the very next morning.

[*English*]

I believe the sentiments we all share were aptly captured by the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, when he recently stated, “We had acquaintances with some of the constables up until that day. I think (we) have formed lifelong friendships with some of them now.”

On behalf of all members, it is a sincere honour to express our gratitude here today to all the men and women of the House of Commons protective service. We know we are safer because of you and your actions will not be forgotten by anyone in the Parliament Hill community.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*And the House of Commons Security Personnel having left the chamber:*]

The Speaker: I would like to remind hon. members that there will be a reception for members in room 253-D so we can personally convey our gratitude.

* * *

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it really is profoundly moving to show our appreciation to the security guards who showed such incredible bravery on October 22.

When we come back in January, we will sit for 15 weeks, and there are just 30 weeks left before this government falls in the 2015 election.

[*English*]

There are only 15 sitting weeks, and 30 weeks in all, before the next election. I know many people are looking forward to it.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to rise to ask the Thursday question, the last one before Christmas, and to thank all of the people who work so hard and contribute to life here at the House.

Today, I would like to borrow the words of the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain to thank those who work here:

> I am pleased that we will all be able to get back to our ridings to work on behalf of our constituents, to celebrate Christmas and the holidays with our family and friends and to reflect on the work we do here on behalf of all Canadians, particularly those who are having a hard time making ends meet this holiday season.
>
> Today I would like to extend wishes for a merry Christmas and happy holidays and to offer a very big thanks to everyone in and around the House of Commons.
>
> Of course, that includes my colleagues on all sides of the House and all of our staff, who make us look good most of the time.
>
> Canadians watching at home might not realize it, but there is a huge network of talented and professional staff who work tirelessly to make this place run like clockwork.
>
> First is you, Mr. Speaker, and your staff, along with the unbelievably helpful procedural experts in the clerks' offices, the table, the journals branch, the committee directorate staff, the Library of Parliament staff and, of course, all of the incredible pages[, who do a wonderful job].
>
> There is the Sergeant-at-Arms and everyone from security, [whose courage we just recognized in the House,] as well as traffic operations, the drivers of our green buses, dispatch operators, mail room staff and messengers.

[*English*]

There are also the cafeteria staff and all the food services and catering team. There is the maintenance staff, the trades people in the parliamentary precinct, materiel management, and room allocation. There is everyone in Information Services, including telecom, ISSI, printing services, and the broadcasting team. There are the people who deal with human resources, finance, travel, and pay and benefits. There are the folks who document all our words in *Hansard*, and those who translate and interpret them from one official language to the other. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and everyone who works so hard in this place.

I wish a merry Christmas and happy holidays to all.

[*Translation*]

Merry Christmas and happy new year everyone.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his last Thursday question of 2014.

Before getting to the business of the House, I hope you will indulge me a couple of moments to thank everyone for their hard work this year. As I said yesterday at a press conference, Christmastime is an appropriate point in the year to reflect on the months which have just passed.

Let me extend my thanks to all of the members' staff for the hard work and tireless efforts they put in—around here and in our constituency offices—for the cause of democracy. Without their help, our work would simply not be possible.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, as you know well, the last few months have posed a number of unique challenges around the House of Commons, but our clerks at the table have managed their way through in a sound and confident manner, all the while being short-staffed no less. However, we are looking forward to having a full team again in 2015 once our Clerk of the House of Commons, Audrey O'Brien, takes her familiar place at the head of the table.

Of course it goes without saying that everyone else around here who makes our lives easier, our work better and maintains our peace of mind deserves our hearty thanks, as we just demonstrated to one group in particular, those who provide security services.

However, I would like to single out another group in particular. I would like to take the opportunity to thank one group that works hard, often with little in the way of thanks in this place, and that being the parliamentary pages. Being a page is an extraordinary and special experience. To be able to spend a year here at such a young time in life—though nowadays it seems some can get elected to spend a year here at such a young age—is indeed a rare and special thing. The pages have been able to enjoy a particularly interesting, fascinating and dramatic first several months here. When they return home, which for many will be the first time since they began here, to their families across the country to share stories over the holidays, I think they will have more than usual eager audiences to hear their experiences and learn about their insights. I do look forward to seeing them refreshed when we come back, as I do everyone else.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I neglected to thank you and your three fellow chair occupants, and my fellow House officers for all their work this year. I wish one and all the very best for the holidays. It is fair to say that we really do have a hard-working, productive and orderly House of Commons.

As for the formal part of this statement, we will resume debate this afternoon on Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act, at report stage and then, if we get there, Bill C-44, the protection of Canada from terrorists act, also at report stage.

Tomorrow we will complete the third reading debate on Bill C-40, the Rouge national urban park act.

As for the business of the House for the week of January 26 when we return, I will let my counterparts know through the usual channels as the return of the House nears.

Finally, I would like to conclude by wishing everyone a happy Hanukkah, a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Points of Order

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to add our thoughts and best wishes to all members and all support staff. The New Democratic House leader and the government House leader have so eloquently mentioned just how many individuals are involved in the parliamentary precinct to allow our democratic system in Canada to work. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the individual security teams that came on to the floor just moments ago, the individuals who record or translate each and every word we say, the pages, the many different support staff within our political parties, and the many others who make what we have here today effective and one of the best places to work in the world.

I conclude these thoughts by wishing each and every one who celebrates Christmas a very merry Christmas. I hope everyone enjoys the holiday season and I wish them the very best in 2015.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to join my colleagues in thanking you, the staff of the House and the security personnel, including the constables we honoured today.

On behalf of Forces et Démocratie, I want to wish all of our colleagues a merry Christmas and a happy new year. I hope we can all take this time to pause and reflect and return to our constituencies to celebrate with our loved ones.

However, it is also important to remember those less fortunate than us and those who are facing challenges in their lives. We can help the less fortunate by donating to food banks and fundraisers. I really wanted to share that, on behalf of Forces et Démocratie.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for all your hard work throughout the session, and I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

● (1525)

[*English*]

The Speaker: I would just add all my best wishes to all of the members as well. I thank in particular the House leaders from the various parties, first for agreeing to the recognition service that we had today for the House of Commons. I certainly appreciate that. I think I can speak on behalf of members of our security personnel as well, that they very much appreciated this opportunity to be in the chamber with us today.

I will also return the sentiments on behalf of my fellow chair occupants, the Assistant Deputy Speakers, who sit here throughout the day as members of Parliament do the nation's work. I know it is a great honour to sit in the chair and I appreciate the co-operation that members give us all, sometimes more than others, but we certainly do appreciate that.

On behalf of the House of Commons administration, as members amend bills and file motions, I thank the people in Journals, the various other departments in House administration that work throughout the evenings, the translators, those who ensure that when we arrive here the next day, all the *Journals* are ready, the *Hansards* are all verified, and all those types of things that make the House of Commons run seamlessly.

[*Translation*]

I too want to wish all the members a merry Christmas.

[*English*]

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. I hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday. I will see everyone back here at the end of January.

An hon. member: See the clock?

The Speaker: It might be a little premature. We could see the calendar.

An hon. member: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although I would like to wish you a very merry Christmas and happy new year, my point of order is on a much more serious note.

Although my colleagues across the way from the NDP like to wrap themselves in the cloak of moral superiority, as far as the level of debate here today, they took it to quite an all-time low in personally attacking the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I am talking specifically about the comments from the Leader of the Opposition, who said, “for the first time in your life, do something right”.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs is a multiply decorated police chief from the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force and the Ontario Provincial Police.

An hon. member: It is a matter of debate.

Mr. David Sweet: I do not think this is a debate. I think it goes along with what is inappropriate parliamentary language. If you will check the video, Mr. Speaker, you will see that is in fact the case.

The Speaker: I will go back and examine the blues. If there is something there, I will certainly come back to the House.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I heard a moment ago that there seemed to be unanimous consent to see the clock. Will you seek whether there is consent?

The Speaker: My suggestion was actually a bit beyond seeing the clock; it was seeing the calendar. I was trying to see it as tomorrow afternoon.

Perhaps if the members want to corral the government and opposition House leaders outside the chamber, we could try again, but right now I do not think there is unanimous consent, despite our best efforts.

Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, December 9, the House will now proceed to orders of the day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS

The House resumed consideration from December 10 of Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts, as reported with amendments from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not echo all my colleagues. I did so earlier this morning in the House. I wish everyone here a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak once again to Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act.

As members know, the NDP supports Bill C-32 and will vote in favour of it. I will spend the little time I have sharing what some witnesses had to say in committee. We proposed a number of amendments in committee, and it will come as no surprise that the Conservatives rejected every last one of them.

I would like to raise one point before I begin. During question period, we learned that the government was going to put an end to one of our most important public safety programs. I am speechless. I thought the safety of communities was the Conservatives' number one priority. I do not understand how it is possible that we are now hearing that they do not want to put the necessary resources into it. They are talking about cuts of nearly $650 million. Because of this, they must discontinue the most important public safety program: supervision of offenders.

This is not compatible with a Canadian victims bill of rights, because not only do victims have rights during the investigation and the trial, but also they have rights after the trial and after the perpetrator has served his sentence. Victims have rights at all steps in the legal process.

The fact that the Conservatives are ending a program that is as important as the supervision of offenders in communities seems to me to be incompatible with the very intent of a Canadian victims bill of rights. Not only do victims want their rights to be respected before, during and after the legal process, but all Canadians are entitled to feel safe in their own community. How can the government justify cutting these millions of dollars to the families of victims, to the victims themselves and to their friends when this will have a direct impact on the safety of our communities?

I just wanted to express my outrage and disappointment. I even think it is unfair to victims. This bill is a step in the right direction. I will speak to specific points later. However, how can the government claim to care about victims' rights when, after the legal process and after the accused has served his sentence, it forgets the very essence of a Canadian victims bill of rights, which encompasses the right to safety and security?

We are going to support the Canadian victims bill of rights, but I just wanted to tell the government that it cannot do this. It cannot simply give up on the safety and security of victims because the legal process is over. This flies in the face of what our legal system is about. Frankly, I cannot understand why the government would want to end this public safety program, which is one of the most important programs in Canada.

● (1530)

Then, I would like to talk about some of the amendments put forward by the NDP, the reason why the Conservatives are against them and the dichotomy between the evidence given by the victims and expert witnesses who came before us in committee and, unfortunately, the Conservatives' opinion.

For example, I will present the first of these amendments. This one in fact comes up at various points throughout the bill. I will be referring to the evidence provided by Arlène Gaudreault, president of the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes. In her testimony, she told us that the bill contains no proactive rights. It is therefore only an expression of general principles that provide guidance for the players in the justice system as we know it now. There is no right to information. In fact, one of the amendments that we put forward was that these rights should not exist only if the victims ask for them, but that there should be a certain rigour on the part of the players in the justice system as we know it and that the burden should not rest solely on the shoulders of victims, but on all the players in the system.

Ms. Gaudreault said the following:

> When it comes to the right to information, for instance, this piece of legislation contains no proactive rights. It contains only rights victims have to ask for. The Manitoba legislation lists proactive rights, rights victims can obtain upon request and rights that involve certain restrictions owing to other existing legislation and policies.

The intention is good here. I want to say that because I can just picture my Conservative colleagues gnashing their teeth and saying that makes no sense because the NDP is always on the wrong side. However, a closer look at the wording of the bill reveals that the burden is placed squarely on victims and the provinces. Basically, the Conservatives want to pass a law and then wash their hands of it. Sure, they did their homework and consulted stakeholders. Honestly, I am not sure that the government actually consulted the provinces because several provinces have said that the bill seems to hold them responsible for 90% of the work. We already know that the budget for legal aid has shrunk over the past few years and that the provinces have already run out of resources. Many judgeships are vacant.

The fact that we do not know who is in charge of enforcing this bill is another extremely important aspect of this bill. The government says that there will be a complaint mechanism if victims' rights are not respected, but it is not clear to whom they should complain. Who will review the complaint? How is that process supposed to work?

Yes, this is a step in the right direction. We are used to that kind of thing from the Conservatives. It is a shame, but all of the stakeholders are always struggling for crumbs from the government. It doles things out in dribs and drabs, like throwing crumbs to pigeons, and we have no choice but to accept what it proposes. Unfortunately, the government rejects our amendments.

There are good intentions here, but Ms. Gaudreault said that none of the agencies' obligations are clear. Those obligations have been brought up repeatedly over the years. Here is what she said:

This has been an issue for years. Our organization has participated in all the consultations, and this issue has often come up. It is important for victims to know where to turn to obtain information, participate in proceedings or obtain protection.

Victims need to know where to turn to have their rights respected and who is responsible for enforcing those rights. Unfortunately, once again, the Conservatives are presenting an empty shell. I will be quite interested to see, in a few years, how this bill will be implemented. However, without the resources needed on the ground and without any consultation with the provinces, which will have to apply 90% of the Canadian victims bill of rights, we may hit a wall.

● (1535)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to wish my colleagues, you, those watching on CPAC and all House of Commons employees a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. In a few minutes, she was able to put things into context. As she said, this bill is nothing but smoke and mirrors. It is based on good intentions, but generally speaking, the resources are not there to follow through on those intentions. I am somewhat worried about that.

Could my colleague elaborate on the lack of a comprehensive approach and funding for the charter? What does she believe should be added immediately to make this a better bill?

● (1540)

Ms. Ève Péclet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It was quite difficult for me to give a 10-minute summary of a bill that was discussed over many weeks. We heard from 20 or 30 witnesses on this bill.

The first amendments we proposed were intended to make everyone involved in the justice system aware of their responsibilities in terms of respecting victims' rights. At present, under this bill of rights, the victims themselves must argue for their rights. There is an imbalance. The burden is being placed not only on the provinces, but also on the victims. Double-talk will not work here.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and I thank her for the good work she has done on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

This bill has had quite a bit of fine-tuning. It was not easy to strike a balance that took into account all the material presented by the witnesses. For instance, the House should look at clause 21 of the bill. This clause provides that prosecutors would have to take reasonable steps to inform victims that an agreement for a guilty plea has been reached.

That was a cause of much discussion in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Some wonder if it goes too far and if it is a necessary element, especially given the testimony by the Canadian Bar Association. Can the hon. member tell us something about clause 21?

Ms. Ève Péclet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The essence of a bill is always in its application.

The victims we spoke to often raised certain problems, particularly because the bill does not mention obligations. It is like a smokescreen. It is not clear who will have to enforce the law or which organization will be responsible for receiving complaints. Will it be the crown prosecutors or some agency?

There is still a lot to be done. This bill has not established a solid framework and does not express clearly and precisely how the rights of victims are going to be respected. I cannot even talk about resources, since a crown attorney came to tell us that their offices are overflowing with files and they have no time. The problem, in addition to the glaring lack of resources in the justice system, is that the bill does not say who will be responsible for enforcing this bill of rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin my comments by stating unequivocally that in spite of the comments often lobbed against us in this place by the government side, New Democrats have always defended victims' rights. We want them to have access to the services and support they need. We have fought, and will continue to fight, each and every day to help victims across the country get the funding, support, and resources they need to overcome the physical and psychological trauma that results from often unspeakable actions perpetrated against them by the most heinous of criminals.

We need to start by looking at a little bit of the history of this bill. The Conservatives promised to enact a Canadian victims bill of rights, or CVBR, as it is often called, in 2006. Sadly, it has taken more than seven years for this promise to finally come to fruition. It was not until the 2013 throne speech that the Conservatives finally made good on their pledge to victims, when they announced that the government would introduce a victims bill of rights to restore victims to their rightful place at the heart of our justice system.

Statistics about the cost to victims from crimes perpetrated against them are startling and underscore the urgency of creating a system that puts victims' rights at the fore of the criminal justice system. For instance, a study released in 2011 by the Department of Justice Canada found that the total cost of crime is estimated to be $99.6 billion a year, 83% of which is borne by victims.

For the nearly two million criminal incidents that were reported to Canadian police services in 2012, more than 450,000 primary and secondary victims sought victims' services that year alone. Given that a large component of victims' service providers make heavy use of volunteers, clearly more resources are needed to ensure that victims can access the services they require when they require them. Here, 72% of victims' services providers made use of volunteers. Obviously, these volunteers deserve kudos and applause for their commitment to assisting victims of crime. However, it also demonstrates a dire need in our community for resources specifically dedicated to the victims of crime and their families.

Let me be clear. New Democrats support this bill and any effort to improve the circumstances of victims of crime. However, New Democrats also feel that this legislation should go further. It certainly does not meet the expectations the Conservatives have been setting since 2006. For instance, the Canadian victims bill of rights would not designate legal obligations for other stakeholders in the judicial system. It would simply provide access to a vague mechanism to file complaints with various federal departments, agencies, and organizations that have a role to play in the justice system when victims have had their rights infringed.

Complaints directed at provincial or territorial organizations, including the police, the crown, and any victims' rights organizations, would be processed directly under the appropriate province's or territory's law. The practicality of this can certainly be questioned, and no specific funds have yet been attributed to the implementation of these mechanisms for examining complaints or for helping out the provinces in this regard.

The victims bill of rights also includes preclusive clauses stipulating that the new rights be enforced within reasonable means and that they avoid interfering with the discretionary powers of the police or the crown, causing excessive delays, compromising investigations and or proceedings, and bringing procedures to a standstill. In addition to this, the Canadian victims bill of rights would not confer third-party stakeholder or observer status to those who represent victims at criminal proceedings.

In sum, while it is nice to have principles and to propose bills and charters, this bill would fail to establish a legal obligation for judicial system stakeholders to implement these rights and the resources required to do so.

● (1545)

Quite simply, the Conservatives have yet again failed to articulate a holistic approach to an issue, and have simply chosen to introduce legislation that sounds good from a public relations perspective, but will not have the full impact that victims of crime are seeking.

Teresa Edwards, of the Native Women's Association of Canada, articulated this point exactly when she appeared before the justice committee proceeding on Bill C-32:

> We have a long way to go, and I really hope this legislation is not just another piece of paper that the government can point to and say it's doing something about victimization. We really need to translate that into action.... I do want to see action. I want to see results, and I want to see measured, concrete steps of how it's actually going to impact the lives of aboriginal women victims, so that we don't have to keep coming here.

While not surprising from this government, the recommendations from victims and the associations that represent them, as well as those of specialists and professionals who testified at committee, were largely ignored by the Conservatives, who also voted down all of the NDP's sensible amendments to incorporate these views into the scope of the bill.

For instance, Sharlene Lange, the mother of a victim, testified before the justice committee that:

> Beyond the sentencing stage of the process, the victims basically fall off the face of the earth. Rights need to go beyond the criminal process for this bill to even be a bill of rights.

Further, the very well-respected former attorney general of Manitoba, Andrew Swan, voiced his concerns over the potential for the bill to be just a public relations exercise without the proper follow-through from the government, stating:

> We don't want this to be an exercise where the federal government lays down some regulations, say they've done their job and then wash their hands of it.

He says that, if the government does not create a channel to make the bill enforceable, like Manitoba's support services office, then it is an empty gesture.

In conclusion, I would reinforce that New Democrats have been consistent in our support for victims rights. Being the victim of a crime can be incredibly traumatic, and our hearts go out to Canadians who are living through these experiences.

We believe that victims should be able to access support programs and have assistance as they navigate the justice system. It is critical that the government invest in victim services, crime prevention, and other smart solutions to keep our communities safe.

Finally, unlike the Conservatives, we want changes that will make a difference, not just proposals designed to get media attention.

As I am concluding, I just want to ensure that I said I am sharing my time with someone. I want to make sure I did. With that, I now look forward to the question and answer period.

● (1550)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Sudbury will be happy to know that we are past the point where we are now dealing with 10-minute speeches, so it was not necessary for him to have done that.

Having said that, questions and comments, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech. As he correctly said, the New Democratic Party has very much been a supporter of the rights of victims, and of putting in place programs and supports and making sure their rights are recognized in a process that is often extraordinarily unfriendly and detrimental to them.

My wife was responsible for establishing the first victims services division in Nova Scotia in 1989-90. It concerns me that, while the bill talks in great principles about the need to support victims, it does not do anything in terms of ensuring that there is enforceability, that those principles are able to be enforced, and that they have a role to play in the process; nor have the Conservatives ensured that the resources are there to actually provide the support that the victims require.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, thank you for clarifying matters for me. I do appreciate that.

In relation to the question asked by my hon. colleague, that relates to what our whole debate is about and what we are talking about here. It is great to be able to bring forward a bill and say that we have something here, but if the resources are not there to ensure that we can start providing the services to the victims, and whatever it is they need, then the bill is not doing its job.

That is where our concern lies with the bill. We do not think the bill goes far enough to ensure that we can give the resources and the services that the victims need and will ask for after the crime. I think it is important for us to continue to push the government to recognize that putting something down on paper is a good first step, but making sure that there is funding in place is the actual way to ensure we can help victims.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I say for my friend from Sudbury that clearly our critic for justice, the member for Gatineau, will be working hard with the government to try to improve this bill. There have been a lot of criminal experts, like Clayton Ruby, who have spoken out in articles in the news media regarding this bill. He has said that the victims need rehabilitative programs, services, and compensation from the government and that the government has dropped all of those expensive demands in favour of "shallow symbolism".

This bill, as it sits, is kind of a hollow shell of what we actually need. Therefore, I am looking forward to the hard work that our friend from Gatineau will do to try to improve this bill. I am sure the member for Sudbury will have some ideas to offer her as well.

● (1555)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his great question and all the hard work he does in relation to human rights and many other files. The question he asked really leads to what our justice critic has been doing and continues to do in working with the government to try to make a bill better.

That is what this place is supposed to do. That is what we as elected members of Parliament are supposed to do to represent our constituents, different parties, and different ideologies. When the government presents a bill, we are supposed to try to make it the best bill possible for Canadians. That is why when bills go to committee and when we are standing here, we propose amendments, and we try to get the government to see that we can do better by listening to victims and to the many experts who have already testified at committee. However, when the experts and victims groups are telling us that they do not feel this bill goes far enough, that it is more just words on paper rather than a document that would go into effect and help victims when they need it, that is something that should be concerning.

I can relate to my prior career when there was an organization in Sudbury called victims' restorative justice. Volunteers were getting together with the victim and the person or criminal who caused the crime, to work together on trying to find some sort of restorative justice for that person. That was a great example of what we can do in finding other ways to help victims.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak at report stage of Bill C-32. I also had the pleasure and privilege of attending a hearing of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on this subject. However, that does not make me an expert on it.

As I said at second reading, during the debate in the House, we are going to support Bill C-32. However, we are afraid that the bill may create expectations that will not be met. To some extent, that is what we saw this morning, when we considered Bill S-5. The government can have the best will in the world and try to come up with a bill that lays the foundation for certain principles: a victims bill of rights, in this case. However, if the resources are not forthcoming and fail to accompany the goodwill and the principles, we are a long way from being able to achieve the goals sought by the victims. They do have the right to be supported by the system in the ordeal they are going through. It is a system over which we have at least some control in the House.

One might think that there is logic of a sort for a law and order government to introduce a bill like this one and give it some resources so that it has teeth. Unfortunately, that is not what is happening, but we have seen this in a number of other areas.

The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime made a number of recommendations, most of which were ignored. With respect to the recommendations, in fact, the Conservatives took the ones that were the least disruptive or the most neutral in terms of process in order to salve their consciences, in my view. However, other recommendations that were much more substantive were set aside.

Why have an ombudsman for victims of crime if the government is not up to accepting her recommendations and the ideas she presents, which are the result of her experience and the work she does from day to day?

When the bill was tabled in 2014, after many years and numerous press conferences announcing that it was on the way, the ombudsman was extremely critical of the bill and its content. She went so far as to say that she would recommend amendments as Bill C-32 went through the various stages of the process. That is what she did. She submitted some 30 recommendations for changes, but only 14 were accepted. Some were even amended in part. In the final analysis, the recommendations were watered down by the committee which, as we know, has a Conservative majority.

I do not intend to discuss this bill of rights only in a negative way. As I said, I will be voting in favour of the bill, just like my colleagues. The idea of a victims bill of rights is a welcome one, according to what we heard from the groups representing victims of crime. However, speaking of a bill of rights for victims, some of the witnesses came to talk about problems with the content, either because it represents more a kind of harmonization of the federal approach with the provincial approaches, or because ultimately—as the Canadian Bar Association said during the committee hearing—the wording of some sections of the bill could have harmful effects that are not being properly taken into consideration by the government at this time.

In spite of everything and in spite of all the amendments that were submitted to the committee, no changes were made, which is extremely harmful because there were some constructive amendments. The only amendment the Conservative majority on the committee accepted involved a review of the scope and effectiveness of the bill of rights after two years.

As a result, two years after the bill of rights goes into effect, we will check whether it has achieved the goals that the government has boasted about and that the victims are entitled to expect. To get the amendment passed, however, there had to be a sub-amendment by the Conservatives to change the review period to five years. In other words, we will not see whether the bill of rights is actually effective until at least five years later.

● (1600)

I do not want to say that this is smoke and mirrors, because the idea is commendable. Nonetheless, it might not meet the expectations set by the Conservative government's hyperbole at all its press conferences, where it boasts about the upcoming victims bill of rights.

The victims themselves or the victims groups mentioned it a number of times, including before the committee. The testimony of Arlène Gaudreault from the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes is quite representative of what the committee heard. I quote:

> Presenting this bill [of rights] as a quasi-constitutional tool meant to strengthen victims' rights indicates to victims that their rights will be taken into account and enforced. However, that is a misleading message. It fails to make the necessary distinctions and creates false expectations. Therefore, it is bound to lead to dissatisfaction among victims.

That is a key point because, even though the victims groups realize that this bill is flawed, they get the sense that they will have an active voice in the process as a whole, especially when it comes to criminal trials against an accused and the parole process.

In fact, they will have a stronger voice than they have as things currently stand, which is a partial explanation for our support for the bill. However, the place the government wants to give victims is not as tangible as the government would have us believe. This view was shared by many of the witnesses in committee.

I would like to come back to the fundamental question from the Canadian Bar Association. The government has introduced a number of law and order bills. I would include here the omnibus budget bills, as they contain a number of amendments to the Criminal Code and legal provisions.

The Canadian Bar Association had an opportunity to appear on a number of occasions before these committees in connection with these amendments to the Civil Code and the Criminal Code. Generally speaking, its criticisms were quite scathing and went to the heart of the bill. Because this association represents the views of the majority of lawyers from coast to coast in Canada, we should pay attention to what it says.

In this case, the bar association's opinion was that the wording of some of the clauses could be challenged under the Constitution or have undesirable effects that might possibly work against the victims. I would have expected this government, which must act responsibly, to have given consideration to these comments from the Canadian Bar Association.

The Standing Committee on Finance heard evidence from the Canadian Bar Association. I know it is quite strange to speak about this committee and this association. Nonetheless, we heard from this association on a number of occasions, because of these mammoth finance bills that the government introduces.

As in other committees, including the public safety and justice committees, the government seems to dismiss out of hand not only the credibility of the Canadian Bar Association, but also its significant and constructive contribution, as if it were an ideologically opposed enemy. It should perhaps view it as an ally that could help improve bills.

I say again that the role of the opposition is not just to oppose all the government's initiatives. We oppose some bills and we support some bills, such as this one. However, I think the fundamental role of the House of Commons and the opposition is to point out to the government the shortcomings of legislation introduced in the House.

This role has been flatly rejected by the government since it was elected with a majority in 2011. This is very sad, because the process itself and the credibility of the House are called into question when these cases, which are many, are challenged in the Federal Court or the Supreme Court.

In summary, we are going to support this bill. However, we fear that it is nothing but a facade, just an empty shell that does not fully meet victims' expectations.

● (1605)

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

He touched on a rather interesting aspect. Like all the others, he talked about how the intentions of this bill and the ability to follow through on those intentions do not quite match up. What I found especially surprising was when he spoke about the Canadian Bar Association's appearance before the finance committee. What I find worrisome about all this is that, yes, there are good intentions, but the assistance for victims stops as soon as the trials are over. Then, apparently, there is no more money.

Could my colleague talk to us a bit about what the Canadian Bar Association said when it appeared before the finance committee, so we can figure out where the problem is? Are there some serious financial issues with respect to the support that this bill would provide?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Hébert for his question.

It is important to note that the Canadian Bar Association supports the idea of a bill of rights, as do most of the stakeholders who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The Canadian Bar Association did not say much about resources, but other organizations did. The bar association spoke more about the constitutionality, or the possible lack thereof, of some aspects of the bill. This does not mean that the entire bill is invalid, but its provisions could potentially be disputed. Even if they are not unconstitutional, they could have some consequences that were not anticipated by the government and that were not anticipated by victims and the groups that represent them.

This opinion was important and should have been considered by the government, but the government did not accept any of the recommendations made by the Canadian Bar Association.

● (1610)

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, for all of the work he does for voters in his riding and for all of the work he does in Ottawa.

I would like to hear his opinion on something. Justice Canada released a report in 2011 showing that the estimated total annual cost of crime is over $99 billion, and 83% of that is borne by victims. What does he think of that? That is a lot of money.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Joliette, and I congratulate her on her work in the House and in her riding, which is in the lovely Lanaudière region.

Those numbers do not surprise me. In my former life, I spent two years working for a group involved in youth restorative justice that focused on young offenders. I saw first-hand the impact that crimes had on victims. One element of restorative justice is setting up meetings between young offenders, in this case, and the victims of their crimes to help the young offenders understand the consequences and repercussions of their actions.

I worked with young offenders, but I was still able to see the negative psychological impact that these actions, such as breaking and entering or assault, had on their lives, their families, their personalities and their own individuality. I saw that.

As for the cost of the consequences of crime, that obviously includes the cost of psychological support, which is typically borne solely by the victim. That is not the only cost, but it is the first one that comes to mind in such situations.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill before us is definitely a step in the right direction. It is a good starting point. However, it is by no means enough. We will support the bill at report stage because it is a starting point. However, it does not go far enough.

I would like to point out that the NDP has always stood up for the rights of victims. If I may, I would like to go back in time. Even in the 1800s, social democratic parties pushed for the rights of workers who were victims of violence and work accidents. The first protection plan for victims of workplace accidents was implemented in Germany, and it was the social democratic parties that worked very hard for that. That said, I will return to a more recent time.

[*English*]

In 1984, Parliament adopted and enacted the Workers Mourning Day Act. The idea was to commemorate the victims of accidents in the workplace. It was work that was done by the NDP at the time, with the collaboration of other members of the House. It was a great victory for the labour movement in this country.

A good friend of mine, Elizabeth Weir, the former leader of the New Democratic Party of New Brunswick, was able to enact very similar legislation in New Brunswick in the year 2000.

Workers' rights are at the heart of the NDP's mandate. For that reason, I certainly have a great interest in this bill, which will extend rights to victims generally.

I do worry about the bill actually bringing forward too few rights. It seems to be focused more on photo opportunities and the beginnings of a sentiment that victims should have more rights. Regrettably, the bill will actually not enact that many rights for our victims.

Ms. Lange, a victim's mother, has stated that “Beyond the sentencing stage of the process, the victims basically fall off the face of the earth” and that “Rights need to go beyond the criminal process for this bill to even be a bill of rights.”

We did not go far enough. It is just the beginning of a process. I think we need to really develop a true bill of rights and not just one that has the name “bill of rights” and is in fact simply raising awareness that victims should have rights. I think there should perhaps be a better title for this bill.

We need to concern ourselves with the fate of victims. This bill is a start but it is far from adequate. If I could be permitted to speak for a moment about one of the witnesses who testified, I will just say that Ms. Dawn Harvard, the vice-president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said it really well. I will cite her testimony at the justice committee:

> Almost half of aboriginal women in Canada live in poverty. This poverty exacerbates the situations of violence, abuse, and addictions, and often, sadly, leads to incarceration. We have heard talk of the missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada....

She went to say, very well I think, that:

> Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices, it's a denial of opportunity, and it's a violation of our human dignity.

That speaks to the victims of this country. Regrettably, this bill does not address the daily expressions of being a victim that aboriginal women especially face in this country.

This bill will give victims an opportunity to address some concerns during some of the criminal proceedings, but even then the actual rights that we are affording them are far from adequate.

● (1615)

First nations are a very good example. Who are these first nations supposed to go to in first addressing their requirement to have rights expressed? Who does a victim of violence in a remote community go to? Perhaps it is the local police, but have the local police been sensitized to the plight of aboriginal women in this country? Will the victims feel confident enough to go to their local police officers to lodge their complaints? Will the police officers know enough to say, “Yes, you have a bill of rights. You have rights, and we will be here to defend them.”?

Nothing in the bill has given any of our provincial colleagues the capacity or ability to ensure that those rights are going to be made available. Once again, the current federal government is saying things that are very nice and look good on paper, but it has not put the resources forward to ensure that those rights would actually be expressed in a daily manner.

I, for one, do not believe that people who live in remote communities in this country will even know that the bill exists. I really wish that the government had taken a bit more time and effort to ensure that all the resources were in place to make sure that victims know that they have rights. They have rights today and through this bill they should have more rights in the future, but we need people to actually know that those rights are going to be there.

In poorer communities—and where I live, there are a number of poorer communities—people do not have the understanding that they can spend their hard-earned money to go and see a lawyer who will then inform them of all their rights. Often people simply cannot afford to take that route. Unfortunately, the bill seems not to make that any easier.

The Conservatives have been talking about this bill since 2006, when they came to power. They have been promising to enact a victims bill of rights since 2006. I will congratulate the government for finally, after eight years, putting it down on paper—not just using it as a photo op, but actually trying to have some real, concrete debate on this matter. Unfortunately, I do not think they went nearly as far as they had expected.

The Canadian victims bill of rights does not designate legal obligations for other stakeholders in the judicial system. It simply provides access to a vague mechanism to file complaints with various federal departments, agencies, and organizations that have a role to play in the justice system when victims have their rights infringed. As a result, when complaints are directed at provincial or territorial organizations, including police or the crown or even a victims rights organization, they will be processed directly under the laws of the appropriate province or territory. There are no specific funds, none, that have yet been attributed for the implementation of the mechanisms that the bill would provide.

I do not understand how the government expects that things are going to happen without resources being put in place. The Conservatives do this all the time. I have seen it over and over again in the bills that I have seen since 2011 in this place. I scratch my head as to what they think the provinces are going to do with these unfunded mandates that we keep sending to them.

I would like to point out that a lot of interesting testimony was brought to the justice committee. I had the opportunity to sit in on many of those sessions. It brings a tear to one's eye to hear the plight of many victims in this country, and they all had justifiable concerns to bring to the justice committee.

I will speak very briefly on some of the issues that were brought up by the Canadian Bar Association, and I will speak specifically to clause 21 in the bill.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

Clause 21 would add a provision requiring prosecutors to take reasonable steps to notify victims of a guilty plea. In this clause, we see that the victims will have the right to be informed if the accused pleads guilty during a trial. The problem is that if there is bargaining and the accused pleads guilty during the plea bargaining or during a court appearance, must the trial be terminated? Is the trial suspended until the victims are notified that the accused will plead guilty? Normally this type of bargaining is done very quickly.

Unfortunately, the bill seems to put the brakes on a very efficient justice system. Once again, not only will the bill cost victims money because they will have to find out about this charter, which has value, but all provincial trials will be more expensive.

If anyone would like to ask a question about this during the time for questions, I would be very happy to answer.

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

Ten minutes was not enough time for him. He could have spoken for an hour and gone into even more detail. I want to thank him for that. He spoke a lot about the bill of rights and its shortcomings. He concluded his speech by talking about clause 21.

I would like to hear some more about that, since it is a very important point, especially in terms of the costs associated with it.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the interest he has shown during the debates on this bill. He asked a very relevant question.

I will talk some more about clause 21. Once again, the government is giving our provincial counterparts a mandate. They will have to implement a bill passed by the House, even though they do not know how much it will cost. The government is not giving them any additional help to implement the changes proposed in the bill.

During a trial, an accused who agrees to plead guilty often negotiates for something. It is often very worthwhile and efficient for the justice system. It happens regularly. Now, that plea bargaining process will be greatly hindered by wording that was clearly poorly chosen. The government is creating a very worthwhile right, but it is not giving any indication of how much it will cost. We need to work with our provincial partners. The government cannot simply continue to pass the burden on to the provinces without expecting them to rebel at some point.

I hope the government will try harder to work with the provinces and give them the financial means needed to carry out the mandates being forced on them. That will make our justice system efficient. This bill needs to contribute to that.

● (1625)

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, there was something else in my colleague's speech that I would like him to explain. He said that the charter was like an empty shell or a sham of a charter.

What does the member think a real victims charter should look like?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question.

This charter contains some fine words and has good intentions. We have nothing against good intentions, but we also want to see some concrete measures.

Many witnesses appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and said that the charter does not go far enough. No one said it better than the first nations representatives who appeared before the committee, which carefully examined Bill C-32.

We all know very well that victims need to feel reassured. If they reach out to the authorities to assert their rights, they have to feel comfortable and they have to know that we are going to support them and stand up for them, so they can feel safe doing so. Unfortunately, this bill does not seem to reflect what victims go through day to day. We want victims to know that if they call upon the police, they will get help. However, that is not what this bill does. It contains only ambiguous wording that appears to talk about rights, but frankly, what we are passing here is more like the hope that rights will follow.

The bill should have gone much further. I think we have failed as parliamentarians. This bill does not go far enough. It needs to be improved more, but I repeat, this is a start, and we have to start somewhere. It took the government eight years to introduce something of any interest. I congratulate it, but in eight years, I would have done a better job. I do not expect much from this government, so I have to be happy with what I get.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Jean, Veterans.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, it is a first step, and we have to start somewhere when we want to change things in this country. All political parties in this place develop visions and ideas for how to change things. The Liberals, the NDP, the Greens, and Forces et Démocratie all have their ideas about how they want to change things. We develop political policy proposals, usually in the run-up to election campaigns.

In all honesty, I looked at every political party in my youth and growing up. I studied platforms and whatnot, and a lot of times promises are made to Canadians that are not quite fleshed out. All parties do it. They promise things and do not quite flesh out all the details, but they give a vision and a promise and a hope to Canadians, and I think that was the intention of the government when it came up with this bill. It had the hope of making things better for victims. It promised to make things better for victims eight years ago, and it ran on that promise.

Canadians hope that when they support a vision or a promise, there will be follow-through on it. Most of my colleagues today have said, as I will now, that the follow-through has been inadequate. When something is promised to somebody, it has to be followed through on and delivered. It is all well and good to develop nice visions and give hope to people, but follow-through has to take place, details have to be fleshed out, and it has to be backed up with real, concrete goals and objectives and actions. As my other colleague said, New Democrats will support this bill, but we believe there needs to be a more robust policy than what is on offer. There has to be more follow-though.

Earlier in the debate, my colleague from Sudbury mentioned the concept of restorative justice. CSC has a program called the restorative opportunities program. I should explain for members of the House and Canadians who do not quite know what restorative justice is that it is a system of justice that emphasizes healing, hears victims' stories in detail, and incorporates victims into the whole process of justice. It also incorporates people who have committed crimes. The end result, hopefully, is the healing of all parties involved.

As I said, Canada has a program called the restorative opportunities program, but it is a post-sentencing program. It is not fully integrated into our justice system. There are places in the world that offer restorative justice systems that are integrated into every level of their justice systems. Norway is an example. Restorative justice is incorporated into the judicial process itself. Victims' testimonies are not necessarily counted as evidence, but this system allows victims a forum to express themselves and share their experiences as victims as a way of getting to a point of healing.

Society participates in this process, so the process ends up being more inclusive of victims and society at large. Lack of inclusiveness is a complaint about our current retributive system of justice that commonly comes forward from victims. If we look at validators of the idea of better incorporating victims into the justice system, we see that the first victims ombudsman said, “I see nothing here”—meaning this legislation—“that will make the process go speedier and part of that is because the trial process is really not about the victim. It is about the accused.” That was said by the first victims ombudsman.

The idea behind that is that the trial process focuses on the accused and leaves victims out of the process, often as passive observers, when they want to be included in the justice process.

● (1630)

In terms of involving greater society, the l'Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes validates that position. This is what it said about the CSC and this legislation.

> They must concern themselves with the fate of all victims and not just those who are already implicated in the justice system.

That points to involving greater society in the process as victims. Sure, people who have crimes committed against them are direct victims, but there are also indirect victims of crime. Those people also deserve to be heard. They have a right to be heard. People who have actually been touched by crime have validated wanting to be more included in the justice system. They are people like Sharlene Lange, the mother of a victim of crime. She said:

> Beyond the sentencing stage of the process, the victims basically fall off the face of the earth.
>
> Rights need to go beyond the criminal process for this bill to even be a bill of rights.

What she is pointing to is that unless we include victims in the process from start to finish, and they feel that they are active participants, they will feel that they do not have rights under this system.

The current model we have, the CSC restorative opportunities program, needs work and development. It needs to be better incorporated into the justice system to take victims' rights into consideration. It is a post-sentencing program. It is voluntary, which is understandable, because it is not integrated into the justice system. Victims might not want to participate in a voluntary post-sentencing program that does not have the resources to back up its goals.

The second thing I want to get to is the financial cost to victims in our society. We have seen that the cost to victims is as high as, I believe, $99 billion a year. I am not sure. Perhaps my colleagues would be able to confirm that.

Unfortunately, in our country, when we measure things like economic growth, we use GDP as an economic indicator. Over 400 U.S. economists, including Alan Greenspan, have said that the major weakness of GDP is that it cannot measure social welfare in a society. What they mean by that is that when a bad thing happens, such as a crime, and it is costly to a victim, and a victim has to spend a lot of money because of being a victim of a crime, that registers as positive economic growth. That is problematic.

I hope members and Canadians listening to this debate will start to question that. When we look at indicators of economic growth using an indicator such as GDP, it registers these negative costs to our society. It does not register social welfare. There have been alternative tools proposed, such as the genuine progress indicator.

This is a good first step. It speaks to the hopes and aspirations our party has for increasing victims' rights and including victims in the justice process, but as we have said, it does not quite go far enough. There is not enough follow-up and there is a lot of work to be done.

● (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to restorative justice. I am quite familiar with restorative justice. I was the chair of a justice committee made up of a quasi-judicial group of volunteers who met to deal with young offenders. Restorative justice is a strong and positive way of ensuring that the community receives justice, and more importantly, that victims receive justice. What we need to highlight is that restorative justice is not something that can be applied universally. It is something that is effective in certain types of crime but not in all crime. However, it is something that communities and different levels of government, because in this case, the provincial government plays a very strong role, need to promote having more of.

I wonder if the member might want to comment on how important it is that the provinces work with Ottawa to ensure that there is more restorative justice taking place, because then everyone wins: the communities, the victims, and so forth.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my colleague that there has to be greater dialogue between the federal government and the provinces. One of the current government's weaknesses is that it does not have enough collaboration with the provinces.

I would like to have spoken about restorative justice at greater length. I do not think 10 minutes would have done it justice when I had to address the bill as well.

It is true that the Canadian model is not really a universal model. That is why I pointed to places like Norway, where it is incorporated into the actual process of justice rather than being an add-on in a largely retributive system. There have been great successes toward healing in aboriginal communities with the use of the restorative justice model.

I would love to work with my hon. colleague in the future and discuss the opportunities we have as a country to look at this model of justice.

● (1640)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first proposal for victims' rights support came in 1996. There have been nine years of this government with no action to date, and it was 10 years for the previous government. It has been close to 20 years with no real, substantive action.

In the presentation of this bill, there is no real move for funding for the kind of support needed to properly implement it. Even when we get this to committee and work on it, we not only have to have a plan but we need to have budgetary measures to ensure that we can deliver on that plan. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I would love to wax eloquent on this, but I believe that the problem of the past 30 years in terms of getting actual robust, concrete, detailed policy has been the centralization of power in the Prime Minister's office. That is a problem generally. Until we deal with that issue, we will not get the policy solutions we need, simply because cabinet cannot act independently enough of the Prime Minister's office to come up with policy that makes sense, that is based on research, and that looks at best practices internationally. Until we take the power out of that office, we will continue to have politically motivated legislation that is not backed up by the proper follow-through.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak once again to the government's bill to create a Canadian victims bill of rights. This is very important matter to victims and to all Canadians.

The last time I spoke I talked about the NDP's concerns about the limitations of this bill of rights. I agree that it is important to do something about the justice system. We recognize that for many victims, having assurances that they can participate in sentencing and parole hearings and being informed of the status of the prosecution are very important steps. Still, when we speak of victims' rights, we must also ask what victims need in the context of the healing process.

In our opinion, we must truly place victims at the centre of the justice system. They must feel protected, not only physically, but also with respect to their right to be informed, to be heard and to be supported before, during and after legal proceedings.

The government's fine press conferences on this bill will not provide such security to victims. Concrete measures are required, as is co-operation with the provinces. Adequate funding must be provided for the programs and the organizations that work with victims every day. We must consider the victims' families. As I said this fall in my speech regarding the government's bill on sex offenders, families are often seriously shaken up when those close to them are involved in tragic incidents.

At that time, I had had a chance to speak to Mr. Michaud, the director of the Centre d'intervention en abus sexuels pour la famille, an organization that is doing outstanding work in my riding. He told me that family members often feel helpless and are sometimes unable to help the victim at the same time as they are dealing with this trauma themselves.

We know that the presence of a supportive network is essential in order for victims of crime to be able to move on with their lives. Thus, it is important for us to consider the resources and support we can provide to such a network.

I would also point out that women are particularly affected by crime. According to police statistics compiled by Statistics Canada, nearly 174,000 women were victims of crime in 2011 alone.

According to that study, women are three times more likely to be criminally harassed than men. In Canada, in a system where women are increasingly involved in everything and are building their careers, it is very sad to see that women face so much crime and harassment.

Aboriginal women are also affected by crime: 75% of aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have been victims of sexual assault, according to data reported by Radio-Canada. That is unacceptable. However, only one sexual assault in 10 is reported to the police.

That shows women's lack of confidence in our justice system's ability to protect them. Then there are the women who have been murdered or who have disappeared without anyone finding the perpetrators. It is all very sad. Sometimes there is no investigation and the police have trouble tackling this problem.

I will quote some of the comments Teresa Edwards from the Native Women's Association of Canada made on Bill C-32 at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights:

> We have a long way to go, and I really hope this legislation is not just another piece of paper that the government can point to and say it's doing something about victimization. We really need to translate that into action. We're always talking about taking action. I do want to see action. I want to see results, and I want to see measured, concrete steps of how it's actually going to impact the lives of aboriginal women victims, so that we don't have to keep coming here.

● (1645)

It is not a problem that is faced only by aboriginal women. According to author Josée Néron, 50% of Canadian women have experienced violence at least once in their life and only 14% of them filed a complaint. That is the problem: women do not feel confident enough to lodge a complaint. They are afraid of the result; they are afraid that their complaints will not be taken seriously, and this is a major problem in our society.

I wonder how this bill will help Canadian women regain their confidence in the Canadian justice system.

We in the NDP will be supporting this bill because we believe it is a starting point. However, it does not live up to the expectations created by the Conservatives since 2006. Since 2006, this government has been promising us a bill that will really be a step forward, as well as being proactive with regard to violence against women. This is not really reflected in this bill. In fact, we are going to support it, but as I was saying, it does not live up to the expectations of victims or reflect what has been said over the years.

Adopting principles in a charter is an important step, but it must be accompanied by concrete measures if it is to have a real impact. The NDP put forward a number of amendments in this regard, but as usual, the Conservatives rejected them and put their own partisan interests ahead of the interests of Canadians and victims, as I said before.

Even worse, the recommendations made by a number of victims' associations, experts and professionals who testified in committee were simply ignored. The government must not forget that our primary concern is to respond to the real needs of victims. It is clear that this objective has been jeopardized by the fact that the bill creates no legal obligation for stakeholders in the justice system to implement these rights.

It is just as worrisome to note that this bill omits the financial resources that will be necessary for its implementation. However, as the first ombudsman for victims of crime Steve Sullivan said, resources are the key element; I mentioned this at the beginning of my speech. Resources, training and prevention are necessary and indispensable to the success of such a bill. This must not be forgotten. We must ensure that all levels are involved in the implementation of the bill, as well as in providing the necessary resources and budgets for its implementation. If we do not devote the necessary resources to implementing the principles of the bill of rights, we run the risk that it will be nothing but an empty shell, a decorative element in the Conservative Party's advertising in the next election.

As I was saying, the NDP will be supporting the main motion, because we think that, after years of talking about it, it is time to move forward. However, the government must keep in mind that this is a starting point, not an end point. This is very important.

I would like to mention that this is the first anniversary of the death of someone who was killed last year in my riding, and we do still not know who committed the offence. This is important. I am just giving one example, but there are others. Thousands of people do not report what happened or have simply been victims; we never find out who is guilty and justice cannot be done.

As parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to ask ourselves how we can more fully meet our responsibilities towards victims of crime and their families.

● (1650)

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

In her speech, she talked about concrete measures. The NDP is determined to ensure that victims of crime get all of the support they need.

Should the government invest in services for victims and crime prevention to keep our communities safe?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I touched on that in my presentation. That is the key to success. The government can pass any bill it wants—it can pass tonnes of bills—but if it does not provide the resources to ensure proper implementation, those bills are nothing but empty shells.

That is so unfortunate because this is a subject that has been discussed from every perspective lately. We have to think of the victims of violence and crime who do not report because they do not have faith in the system. If we want to succeed, it is very important to show leadership and allocate resources to prevent crime and to implement and follow up on the bill.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is the vision of an NDP government? Can my colleague explain our vision with respect to victims' rights?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I will come back to the same point once again. We believe that when we pass a law, we must absolutely allocate resources to go along with it. We also need prevention and awareness. The NDP believes that this is the key to success.

Our approach is very focused on social issues and assistance for women. The number of women in our caucus shows that young women believe in our party and believe that we can achieve things for women. It is very important, for all women in general, that we take a leadership role.

Our party is very clear: we need to allocate the necessary resources to prevent crime. We cannot simply pass a bill that punishes offenders, nor can we allow offenders to be released once they have served their sentence to reintegrate into society without any assistance. We need to ensure that they understand what they did and we need to ensure that it will not happen again.

● (1655)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, victims incur billions of dollars in expenses. We often hear the Conservatives say that they support victims' rights. They always accuse us of supporting criminals' rights.

However, I saw a contract for cable television in Canadian prisons worth about $2 billion a year. The Conservatives are talking out of both sides of their mouths.

Could my colleague talk about the financial resources allocated to victims?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, there is not really any help or financial resources for victims.

I would like to come back to a point the hon. member made with regard to the costs associated with people in prison or detention centres who then find themselves back in society without any help to reintegrate. We need to compare that cost with what it would cost to prevent instead of penalize. That is what is important. It is crucial to have a just society where everyone feels safe, instead of having people being released from prison without any help to reintegrate, without any means or resources to find work and reintegrate into society. Moreover, these people do not really understand what they did wrong because they were not helped through the process.

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after innumerable photo ops and press conferences, the Conservatives are finally presenting us with their draft Canadian victims bill of rights. They have been talking about it for eight years now, and in all honesty, I find it somewhat disappointing that we have ended up with an incomplete bill that has no mechanism for enforcement and no operating budget.

That said, I am prepared to support the main motion at report stage, because I want to help victims of crime. I would like us to do more, particularly after eight years of delay by the Conservatives, but every step towards improving matters for victims of crime is worth taking.

Throughout the committee deliberations on Bill C-32, my NDP colleagues were guided by a simple principle: making sure that the Canadian victims bill of rights was a good fit with the Canadian justice system and met victims' expectations. I fully subscribe to this principle, because if the bill of rights does not fit anywhere and does not respond to what victims told us, it becomes purely symbolic and ultimately disconnected altogether from reality.

The bill is a valid response to some recommendations by victims, and that is worth pointing out. For example, the bill of rights expands the definition of "victim of crime" and codifies victims' rights to information, protection, participation and restitution. On the other hand, a problem arises when we see that the bill of rights places no legal obligation on the other participants in the justice system. Why raise the expectations of victims, only to disappoint them if the provisions of the bill of rights do not apply?

The most practical recourse provided for victims of crime relates to a complaint mechanism within federal departments and agencies that play role in the justice system when victims' rights have been violated. This is disappointing, to say the least. Victims have been waiting eight years for a real resolution resulting from a desire to provide greater social justice. Instead, they get a department store-style complaint office. What is more, the complaint counter at Canadian Tire is better funded than the one provided for in the bill of rights.

No funding is currently allocated for the complaint mechanism. Once again, this is disappointing, to say the least. It is not surprising that we hear such negative reactions from those who supported this initiative. One of them is Frank Addario, a lawyer who specializes in criminal law. He asserts that:

> It's cynicism masquerading as policy...We did not need a new law for government to tell itself that it should communicate with victims about criminal cases.

Mr. Addario is not wrong, if we consider the narrow scope of the other measures in the bill of rights.

Some go further and claim that the Conservatives have deceived victims of crime in order to score political points. Clayton Ruby, a criminal law expert, said:

> The [bill] is an example of a community that has sold itself to the Conservatives for a mess of porridge...They need rehabilitative programs and services, and compensation from the government, and they've dropped all those expensive demands in favour of shallow symbolism.

Steve Sullivan, the first ombudsman for victims of crime, agrees. He says that the government should have given victims of crime the right to appear in court and sue the government if their rights are not respected. Mr. Sullivan said that for now, all this really does is bring things in line with provincial laws. He sees nothing in this bill that would speed up the process, and that is in part because the legal process is far more concerned with the accused than the victim.

As an aside, some people in my family were victims of a home invasion at gunpoint. They had young children and they had to fend for themselves to get services.

● (1700)

I cannot make it any clearer. Victims are marginalized by our system. Unfortunately, this bill will not make much of a difference. That is too bad.

According to the Department of Justice, the annual cost of crime in Canada is estimated to be more than $99 billion . That is a lot of money. It is sad to learn that 83% of that amount is borne by victims of crime.

As I mentioned earlier, members of my family have had to look after themselves and we supported them in their misfortune. The reality is that it is expensive. Without money, nothing will be resolved.

The Conservatives have often invested in prisons, which is the same as investing in crime, because they have reduced prevention and victim services. That is a funny way to do things. Moreover, they have expanded the women's prison in the riding of Joliette.

They have cut key programs for some victims, such as the Indian residential schools resolution health support program. In committee, the Conservatives knowingly disregarded the recommendations of many victims and victims advocacy groups. Furthermore, as is their custom, the Conservatives rejected the NDP amendments that would better reflect the recommendations of victims and experts.

I just want to point out that the NDP was the only party that put forward substantive amendments. The only real thing we managed to get passed was an amendment requiring the government to review the effects of the bill of rights after two years. The Conservatives agreed to that review, but only after five years.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that NDP MPs have always stood up for victims' rights and we will continue to fight every day to ensure that victims' services receive better funding across the country. I will therefore support the main motion at report stage, but I think we need to do much more for victims.

I have fought for 40 years for women's rights in Joliette, and aboriginals are on my list of priorities. I would like to conclude with the words of Teresa Edwards of the Native Women's Association of Canada:

> We have a long way to go, and I really hope this legislation is not just another piece of paper that the government can point to and say it's doing something about victimization. We really need to translate that into action.

● (1705)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Joliette for her speech. She did a good job of explaining this bill's shortcomings.

Even though this is more symbolic than anything, the government has to walk the talk. Symbols are all well and good, but we need concrete measures.

Having fought for women, can the member tell us a bit more about the kind of concrete measures we need? Why should the government give people more than just hollow symbolism?

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Indeed, we need to support women, and yes, the member is right, I have always worked to improve the status of women. However, this is also about the status of men, since we live in a society.

We asked ourselves many questions. I am still a member of Quebec's Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale. A few days ago we all wore white ribbons on behalf of a local branch of AFEAS to remind people that it is always women who are the victims.

Women always seem to be the victims because of a tradition that involves women being told to keep quiet unless they know what they are talking about. Women are still being repressed somewhat, even in today's society

When I saw that so many women had been elected to the NDP during the 2011 election, regardless of their age or social status, it felt like a bit of reward for all my hard work. I say “reward” but I would actually prefer for women to be able to one day defend themselves and adopt legislation that gives them the same protections as men.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the big reward for us all is my colleague, who is such a fine member. She is a reward for the entire House and for all Canadians. I find all of her speeches very relevant.

The question I have for her has to do with victims of crime and the related costs to society, which are in the billions of dollars.

Does my colleague think that the government's response to the cost is enough to meet the needs?

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I do not think so.

The costs are extremely high, and 83% of those costs are borne by victims. They need help from the government.

As I said earlier, some of my family members went through this a few decades ago. Someone broke into their home and held a gun to their heads, including the children. However, they did not get any kind of assistance afterwards. They were told to sort it out on their own and to talk to their doctor. They had to move because they worried that they would be victimized again.

The government must absolutely help victims. Yes, offenders need help, but victims do as well, and unfortunately they are left out in the cold.

● (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the chance to contribute to this debate on Bill C-32, the Canadian victims bill of rights.

I will be focusing mostly on opportunities lost with this bill. We do know that the government promised a victims bill of rights almost a decade ago, at least from 2006 until now. In the end, we end up with a bill that is quite formalistic in that it focuses extensively on the justice system, the criminal legal proceedings side of things.

It is not as if the provisions are worthless; the access of victims to a greater role in some aspects of the criminal justice process is indeed welcome. However, beyond that, looking at what crime really involves and what it does to victims seems to have been lost in the shuffle, and victims include family members, neighbours, and the people who are close to people who suffer because of a serious crime.

It seems as if the government has chosen to go a very legalistic route and not tackle victims' rights as effective rights, as non-illusory rights, as rights that are held by real people who suffer in the real world.

It is not as if there were not several victims who came in as witnesses, as well as associations representing them, to speak to these issues during the committee process and also during some of the consultations the government engaged in for a very short period. However, they seem to have been ignored, by and large.

I have a personal experience with ignoring such information. In tandem with Rev. Sky Starr of the Out of Bounds organization in Toronto, Joan Howard, an activist from my riding who lost her son to gun violence a decade ago, and Prof. Bailey from Ryerson, we organized a seminar here on the Hill intended to inform interested MPs and staff members on the question of grief and trauma when it comes to the victims of crime, especially violent crime and maybe most especially gun violence.

It was an extremely good seminar, and I was delighted to know that a representative from the parliamentary secretary to the justice minister did come and seemed to be highly engaged, and did understand what he was hearing about the need for support for grassroots, on-the-ground organizations that are actually delivering the services to many victims' family members, in cities like Toronto and in my riding of Toronto—Danforth.

However, nothing that came out of the insights from that seminar held here on the Hill appear to have penetrated this bill. That seems to be the experience that is a generalized one for those looking for a more holistic, wide-ranging understanding of what it is to assist victims of serious crime.

I have just one other example. There is a mechanism, but nobody knows quite how it is going to work, in the bill of rights. It is a rather general mechanism to file complaints with various federal departments and agencies if victims feel they are not getting the service they are owed, given the rights that are found in various pieces of legislation.

The victims bill of rights recognizes that it should be possible to bring the same kind of complaints in provincial jurisdiction, but no specific funds have been attributed to making such a complaint mechanism or series of mechanisms effective. We can tell right from the beginning that, without allocating such funds through budgeting, it is almost a gesture without meaning. These things do not work on their own.

It also reflects something the government tends to want to do a lot, which is to download costs onto the provinces wherever possible. When I was on the justice committee working on a bill dealing with surcharges that perpetrators would have to pay to victims as part of their sentence, I learned that the government members on the committee had two primary philosophies with respect to how victim support services would be paid for. One was through the perpetrators themselves, most of whom do not have deep pockets, to put it mildly. The other was through the provinces.

● (1715)

The idea that there is an extended responsibility of the federal government, through its criminal law jurisdiction, to fund through the spending power support programs across the country and the provinces, or at minimum work co-operatively with the provinces to get away from the patchwork quilt of services that now exist for supporting victims, for example for ongoing trauma, grief and other kinds of consequences of crime, seems to be well outside, almost alien to, the philosophy of the government.

All this is to say that we are disappointed. I at least am very disappointed that nothing resembling a contribution through the victims bill of rights, with a parallel commitment through the budgetary process to real support and real processes that are effectively funded, is found in this bill.

I would like to quote from l'Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, which has a very interesting insight on exactly this point. It says, “Strengthening victims' rights in criminal proceedings is of course necessary”. We are not second-guessing that either. It goes on to say, “But, it is important not to obscure their social rights, so the rights that allow them to access assistance, compensation and programs, to help them deal with the various repercussions of the crime. Governments have a responsibility to recognize victims' rights, but also to help them exercise those rights. They must concern themselves with the fate of all victims, and not just those who are already implicated in the justice system”.

Obviously, there is always a preventative component to this kind of philosophy, but there is also the question of responsibility for those who are sideswiped by crime: family members, neighbours, somebody who may just happen to be witnessing.

If there is any group of people who should understand how quickly and viscerally violence can impact on our lives, it would be MPs who were exposed to what happened on October 22. In the real world, we were not actually all that much at threat, it turns out. However, the fact of not knowing, the stress of not knowing and the trauma that was produced among some here in this building on that day and among family members not knowing what would happen should be something that we can all use productively to extrapolate to what it is to actually be a family member, friend, loved one, neighbour or witness to a violent crime in the other real world outside of the House.

I would like to end by paying tribute to, and remembering, people who, on this issue of how to think about victims and real support for victims, have been my mentors.

I think of Joan Howard who lost her son, Kempton Howard, 10 years ago. To this day she is still struggling with that loss, but she also learned that one of the pathways she could go down was to help other people with the grief that they suffered when they also lost a loved one, particularly a child, to gun violence. I salute Joan Howard for helping me learn more about the particular harm that gun violence can do.

Reverend Sky Starr has been recognized as a pioneer for social activism by CBC, one of the top 50 in a list that CBC produced, as a pioneer in grief counselling. She runs an organization called "Out of Bounds". I was there just the other night for an annual event recognizing and offering support to mothers in particular who have lost children in the city of Toronto to gun violence. With her leadership, the very notion that grief counselling has to be put front and centre in the kinds of psychological counselling services needed for victims has been advanced.

I also think of Rod Cohen who runs Blake-Boultbee Youth Outreach Services, a counselling service in Toronto—Danforth. The work he has done with at-risk family and youth in situations that often involve trauma, at minimum high degrees of stress, because of proximity to crime as one factor is notable.

I end by noting that we lost recently in Toronto—Danforth, Nahom Berhane, an outstanding young member in Toronto of the Eritrean Canadian community. While seeking to assist somebody else, he was shot down on the Danforth, one more reflection of how guns, short guns let us say, in the city of Toronto remain a plague.

● (1720)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Toronto—Danforth for his comments. Bringing this back to the families and the victims who are impacted by crime brings home to all Canadians the importance of getting this type of legislation right.

Families that have gone through losing a family member in particular have been deeply hurt and victimized. Some of those families get through and deal with that grief and then become advocates to try to make the system better for future victims. I do not know if there is any effort made by citizens in this country that is more admirable in that they have had to deal with their personal loss while advocating for better public policy.

My question is very specific and is about what the bill lacks, because I think this is a missed opportunity in some ways. It is not as if we will revisit this type of legislation every year. It has been eight years since the promise from the Conservatives to bring forward this legislation. We finally have it now, so getting it right seems important.

My question is about resources, because we have heard from victims groups before that to properly incorporate victims into the justice system, there needs to be the ability to fund the types of services they will need: the counselling, the access to legal advocacy, and the ability to be in the court system properly.

My friend is a learned scholar and knows the legal system well. A piece of legislation like this, for all its good intentions, without any financial support in it, is worrisome to me in terms of what experience those families will have in the future as they try to approach the justice system and redress some of the faults within our criminal justice system as they exist right now.

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent series of comments from my colleague.

I think it is true that even on their own terms in the bill, all of the access points, some of them just reminding us of stuff that already exists in the legal system for victims in criminal law proceedings, will end up creating more frustration than anything else if there are not effective resources to assist victims and victims families in participating in the system in the way that supposedly is envisaged by the bill.

Absent provincial governments coming along and picking up the slack, which is often what this government seems to want to happen in other areas, and saying that they will restructure our legal aid system, despite the fact that they are in a financial crunch, in order to pick up on the victims bill of rights, there is nothing the federal government has done to assist with the level of resource provision that is necessary.

I would also note that the organizations I referred to earlier, Out of Bounds and the Blake Boultbee Youth Outreach Counselling Services, are exactly the kind of organizations that year by year are scrambling to find resources and are using grant money, and very minimally, money from government, to do amazing value-added counselling for the victims of crime. Somehow or other in our system, those kinds of organizations largely fall through the cracks, but nothing in this victims bill of rights seeks to even recognize that, let alone address it.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague pointed out wonderful facts and evidence and the fact that these groups are not sufficiently funded. They have unstable funding from year to year, and they cannot really plan for the long-term goals they have.

I think this legislation is just evidence of when facts and evidence get in the way of politics. It has been eight years. The Conservatives want to present themselves as protecting the victims, but it upends their black and white picture of the world. They all of a sudden find that this will be costly. This will cost taxpayers money. It conflicts with their idea that the market can regulate all social ills, except that in this particular instance, a market-based solution is inapplicable.

Could my hon. colleague describe how sometimes Langevin Block comes up with these politically motivated pieces of legislation with nothing to back them up?

● (1725)

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, an extended colleague I have worked with, or have been associated with, a leading criminal defence lawyer from Toronto, Frank Addario, says it well. I am sorry to put it as harshly as he did, but he is correct. He says, "It's cynicism masquerading as policy."

I basically think that unless this victims bill of rights is used as a platform for future law-making that takes serious account of everything we have been discussing so far here today, it will end up being mostly symbolic and, possibly, a major contribution to the further frustration and alienation of victims, and not a source of assistance for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate and go to the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, I will let him know that there are only about three and a half minutes remaining in the time provided for government orders, but he can at least get started. He will have the remaining time, of course, when the House gets back to debate on the question.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three and a half minutes, for some of us who are a bit more verbose, is just getting warmed up. Just saying hello where I come from in the northwest takes well more than three and a half minutes. However, in this particular case I can at least put a couple of important points on the table.

First, I would like to say from listening to the debate this afternoon that it has mostly been New Democrats who have been carrying the debate on Bill C-32, an act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain acts.

I am so impressed by my colleagues on this side. They have vast experience, both from the legal profession, as in the case of my friend from Toronto—Danforth, and many from their personal experiences as New Democrat MPs, having taken the time to sit with the families of those who have been hurt to understand that victims' rights is about the stories of people who have been impacted by an injustice, and that when we are describing the policies of the day they are not in cold black and white as prescribed in legal notes put forward in bills such as this one.

To summarize, New Democrats will be supporting the bill because it is a small step forward. As was mentioned earlier, it is a failed opportunity because it over-promises and under-delivers, as is so often the case when we look at Conservative legislation. If only the title of the bill matched the reality of what is contained within the bill, then we would be a great deal more satisfied, simply because a bill of rights is such an important phraseology for a place like a parliament, implying that the piece of legislation would contain within it rights that people can then hold up and defend their interests in a court of law and when dealing with the judicial system at large.

The challenge we see here is on two fronts. It is a challenge legislatively speaking, in that this bill is desperately lacking in ability to affect laws and compel certain judicial processes to deal with victims; and it is also a challenge on the money side, in terms of the ability to spend sufficient funds to allow victims to have services they will require to get through the system. As we know, we have an excellent justice system, an excellent judiciary, but sometimes it is not completely accessible due to people's insufficient means. Lower-income families will need support, and we do not find it acceptable for the Conservatives to simply pass the buck down to the provinces and then try to take credit.

The last thing I will say is that I have sat at the kitchen tables of families who have suffered enormous loss, the loss of a son or a daughter, from a crime. To try to find some level of understanding and compassion for what they have gone through is difficult, and I am not sure I will ever be able to do that.

What I can appreciate and honour is that those families remain so dedicated to the memory of their loved one, be it a family member, a son, a daughter, a husband, or a wife, and continue to try to make the system better, even in the midst of their grief.

It would be understandable if they chose not to re-engage with the system whatsoever, but they choose, instead, to come to us, as members of Parliament. The least we can do is to honour the memory of those they have lost by bringing in legislation that would actually make the world a better place for victims.

While we are supporting the bill, we do believe the government completely shortchanged those interests of honouring and respecting those values and views.

● (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley will have six and a half minutes remaining in the time for his remarks when the House resumes debate on the question.

It now being 5:30 p.m., the House will proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

REDUCING THE EFFECTS OF URBAN HEAT ISLANDS ACT

The House resumed from September 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-579, An Act to reduce the effects of urban heat islands on the health of Canadians, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege and a pleasure to rise to address issues that come before the House. This is an interesting issue, I must say. I do not have very much background knowledge on it, but I have been able to look at it to try to get a better understanding. Bill C-579, known as the urban heat islands act, is something the Liberals support. We feel it would be good for it to move forward. Ultimately, as I say, we support it.

Perhaps I could illustrate what it really means by using a graph. If we were to look at a graph comparing hot air in city centres versus rural communities or suburban areas, we would find that where there are heavy concentrations of people or industry—huge industrial parks, for instance—the air temperature versus the surface temperature varies depending on where one is situated. People living in rural communities where there is very little or marginal development, such as on farms or in marshy areas or among the literally thousands of lakes, would find that the air temperature is not much different from the surface temperature.

However, in higher-density communities the gap starts to widen. In Canada, for example, if we were to compare a rural setting, where the air and surface temperatures are close together, to downtown Toronto on a summer day, we would find that it is considerably hotter on the surface than it is 1,000 feet up in the air. In other words, when we talk about urban heat islands, what we are really referring to is the difference between the surface temperature and the air temperature.

What can we do as a government to try to minimize the negative impacts of heat islands? There are negative impacts that we should be aware of, such as lower water quality, higher air pollution, increased heat stress that is very real, and improved conditions for the spreading of airborne diseases.

We have seen some extreme examples of this in the past in some of the cities. Again, if I look at Toronto, which is not alone, we have an extended number of days during the summertime when it will get quite hot. When we look at that heat around the downtown areas, highly industrialized areas, or very high density communities, we will find that it is significantly hotter. Those heat records, such as we experienced a few years ago, have a fairly profound impact on the living conditions of people. We have seen that in a number of examples that have occurred over the years.

One of the things that encourages me, personally, is that we have a generation of young people in our schools today or recently graduated, who place the environment as a very high priority. I remember, a couple of years back, walking into Sisler High School and a number of students took me to what was, in essence, the centre of the high school where they had opened up an outside patio door and were taking away bricks, which they were replacing with vegetation. That is one of the ways we can combat the heat island effect, if I can put it that way.

If we take a look at what we have in our urban centres, we see certain things that draw in the heat. Things we can do to marginalize that, or lessen the effect of it, are very strong positives.

As I said, walking through Sisler High School a few years ago, it was great to see students who were very aware of the positive impact. They had virtually dead ground that was in the centre of the school compound, if I can put it that way, with buildings all around it, and they had the wisdom and the vision through the support of some of the teaching staff to make a change. That change does have a very strong message.

Like all MPs, I am afforded the opportunity to fly considerably. When I fly into my home city of Winnipeg, I cannot help but notice the new subdivisions versus the areas that are more established. In the areas that are more established, the first thing I notice is the trees. There are a lot more trees in some of the older, more established communities. If we compare those types of communities to areas where there are no trees, or very little vegetation, we will find that there is an impact on the difference between the surface and air temperatures.

In the last decade or so, through city planners, we have often found that there are minimum standards right down to the footage of green space that has to be incorporated into the development of suburbs. That is a positive thing. Ponds are put in place. Mandated tree planting is something else that has a positive impact on the amount of separation between the air and ground temperatures.

● (1735)

If we look at some of the ideas that are out there and are prepared to act on them, we will in fact be able to make a difference.

There have been international conferences dealing with this particular issue. In some countries, the impact on communities is more profound. We need to recognize that Canada does have a role to play, not only locally but also internationally by playing a stronger leadership role and taking certain action. We could be more proactive.

What is also being suggested, and I would really encourage, is that we think outside of the national government. We do need to incorporate that into our thinking and planning and in coming up with a strategy. Hopefully, with the passing of the bill, there would be more of a strategy or plan and some sense of accountability that would come back to the House and demonstrate the degree to which we have moved forward as a nation.

Having said that, it is critically important that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance work with our partners at the provincial level and those ministries that are having an impact. Hopefully, we would be able to come together and develop some ideas to improve the conditions for generations after us, which ultimately will have to live in the environments we are creating.

I have found it amazing the degree to which some of our municipalities have grown over the last 20 years, whether Vancouver, Calgary, my own city, or other cities out east. We are still relatively young as a country. We have some highly intelligent individuals who can play a strong role in future urban planning.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to support the bill introduced by my colleague from Honoré-Mercier. This bill would mandate the Minister of Health to establish a national strategy to reduce the negative effects of heat islands.

In short, people noticed that the temperature difference from one neighbourhood to another can be as high as 12°C because of heat islands. This can increase smog and make air quality worse. For example, there is increased demand for air conditioning and for water, whether we are talking about potable water or water for swimming pools and water parks.

My colleague conducted public consultations in her riding and discovered that constituents in her neighbourhood were very concerned. I know that she is in an area on the Island of Montreal in which there are a number of heat islands. Since she is a good member of Parliament who listens to her constituents, she decided to come back to Ottawa and introduce a bill on this topic. I am very pleased to participate in this debate because I am very concerned about this issue. I really want to see this bill move through all stages in the House of Commons.

It is currently part of Health Canada's mandate to monitor heat islands and safeguard Canadians against the effects of heat waves. However, there is no national strategy for all of that. The bill is calling for collaboration between the federal, municipal, and provincial governments in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency. There is no knowledge transfer. People are ill-informed and no one really knows who should be sharing information with the public. I think that this bill is a very good idea.

Many industrialized countries with heat islands have developed a national strategy in recent decades, including the United States, France, Portugal, Holland, Spain, Germany, England, Japan, and Sweden. I think it would be good for us to follow suit.

During my speech, I will talk about the impact heat islands can have on health, what can be done, some solutions and the benefits of those solutions. We are talking about the health of Canadians, and a government must show great concern for the health of the people in its policies. That is very important.

The Public Health Agency of Canada said that on hot days mortality can rise by 20% in areas with heat islands. Heat islands can result in discomfort, weakness, loss of consciousness, cramps, fainting spells, heat stroke, and breathing difficulties.

To relay my own story, I suffer from asthma. It did not start when I was young, but when I was 25. I started having respiratory problems when I moved to Montreal. I had never experienced that before. At first, I did not know what it was. I underwent some testing and I was told I had asthma. The surprising thing is that I have trouble breathing when I am in Montreal. When there is a heat wave, it is even worse. Nonetheless, in summer, when it is hot and I am camping or somewhere at a cottage, I do not have those same breathing problems. It is therefore one of the effects of the heat islands. This affects pretty much every big city in Canada. More and more major structures are being built, including seniors' residences, big condo towers, and shopping centres, which all require paved parking lots. This is conducive to creating heat islands.

In fact, the Lachine industrial park is one of the biggest heat islands in Montreal. According to data from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, Lachine's industrial sector is one of the hottest areas on the Island of Montreal. I will quote from a report:

> The tree canopy coverage in the industrial sector is 4%, which is slightly above average. However, the industrial area is so large that it diminishes the effect of the tree canopy in the borough. Accordingly, the City of Montreal's department of large parks and green spaces recommends that the tree canopy coverage be increased to 15%.

In my riding, with the airport, this industrial park, and the highway, heat islands are all around us.

● (1745)

Another report said that the temperature in a paved schoolyard could go as high as 52 degrees Celsius. I know that schools are usually closed in summer, but the playgrounds in schoolyards are being used then. When I was young, I would go to my elementary school's yard. I think that 52 degrees is very high, and even if you are well hydrated, it is still very high. The people most likely to be affected by heat islands are children, seniors, pregnant women, people with existing illnesses, and athletes. If they are in a place where there are a lot of heat islands, it could be very bad for them.

I found one striking statistic: between 1979 and 2003 about 8,000 deaths in Canada were caused by heat islands and heat waves. That is a lot.

As I said earlier, right now in Canada some provinces and municipalities have programs, but there is nothing to create a synergy among all provinces and municipalities in order to make progress, share ideas, and improve the health of Canadians.

For example, Montreal now has maps to measure heat islands, and these are available to the public. In Montreal and Toronto there are municipal efforts and awareness programs. In some cities there are planning regulations encouraging white roofs and trees in parking lots, but it all happens piecemeal because the government is not taking the lead. That is what my colleague is trying to do with this bill.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the FCM, has a fund that supports efforts to reduce the effects of climate change. Some provinces also have large, well-targeted funds. However, we want a national strategy to put it all together and move forward.

Solutions have been proposed. We should increase vegetation and green our cities. On that point, I would like to congratulate a group in my riding, GRAME de Lachine, a group that does applied research in macroecology. It is doing fantastic work on heat islands. It has conducted research through a provincial program, the climate change action plan. Once again, this is a good program from Quebec. Could it be exported to other provinces? Yes, we must talk about it.

This group has planted more than 200 trees. It has used high-albedo materials to completely revitalize the playground at one of the primary schools in my riding, Martin Bélanger School in Ville Saint-Pierre. The playground is extraordinary. There are not a lot of games or a lot of structures in the playground. The company planted trees and drew designs on the asphalt. This has reduced the heat and the result is really pretty.

The building where I have my office is called Regroupement de Lachine. It has been completely renovated. It is a former grocery store that has been transformed into an eco-building. It is a community centre with geothermal energy. It has one of the largest accessible green roofs on the island of Montreal. GRAME also distributed 350 large trees in 2014. I attended one of their distribution days. These are the kinds of projects that can really reduce urban heat islands.

In terms of cost-effectiveness for the government, a number of studies prove what we are saying. One study conducted in 2013 by Bélanger Michaud at the Université de Sherbrooke shows that the return on investment is 5.8 times higher than the cost of the trees that could be planted in parking lots or along roads. A study conducted at Ryerson University showed that green roofs have two positive effects. Energy costs are lower and energy consumption is reduced. Berkeley University conducted a study in 2001, which showed that a national strategy makes it possible to save 3% to 5% in energy. A study by the World Bank describes the direct impact on emergency systems, on health and on beds available in hospitals. In fact, the dog days of summer are precisely when we have heat islands, and that is when a number of people go to the hospital because they feel ill. Once again, this represents a reduction in costs.

It is time to stop dealing with problems once they have occurred. This bill will prevent problems from occurring in the first place. It will make it possible to save money in health care and it will enable people to feel better.

● (1750)

I would once again like to congratulate my colleague for tabling this bill. I think it is a winner for everyone. I am going to vote in favour of this bill. I hope that everyone will vote for it, because it is important for our country.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-579, an act to reduce the effects of urban heat islands on the health of Canadians. I would like to congratulate my colleague for Honoré-Mercier for bringing this bill before us.

As the urban affairs critic for our NDP caucus and also the sponsor of Bill C-619, the climate change accountability act, I am very excited to have a discussion in this place about the impacts of climate change on cities, on the health of Canadians living in urban Canada and about the great opportunities that present themselves to us for mitigating climate change and improving the health of Canadians by focusing attention on Canada's cities.

The discussion is particularly timely as countries gather in Lima, Peru at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change with the goal of putting in place, by next year in Paris, the agreement necessary to avoid dangerous levels of global warming. To succeed, that agreement needs to include the world's largest emitters.

While the Conservative government likes to point to the fact that Canada is responsible for only 2% of global emissions, that places us within the top 10 greenhouse gas emitters globally. Looking globally, there appears to be positive momentum in that direction. Specifically, the recent agreement between the world's largest emitters, China and the U.S., holds out promise that we have turned a corner on this issue.

Only five years ago, in Copenhagen, these two countries pointed fingers at each other, accusing each other of sinking global efforts at mitigation. However, with this agreement, things will change. China has agreed to slow and then halt greenhouse gas emission growth by 2030. The U.S. has agreed to reduce emissions by nearly 30% by the same date.

Therefore, things will change, but it is also worth noting that this agreement stands as a clear sign that things have already changed. The simplistic contradistinction between economic growth and emission reductions no longer stands. There are new energy economies that these countries are engaged in and can profit from.

Last week's report from Clean Energy Canada tells us that things have changed in Canada, too, and will continue to change. In that same five-year period since Copenhagen, Canada, in the absence of federal support I would note, has seen its capacity to produce electricity from renewable energy sources increase sufficiently to power 2.7 million Canadian homes, and the clean energy industry in Canada is still in its infancy.

Also relevant to today's discussion is the impact of the health effects of climate change. As reported recently in the *The Guardian* newspaper, in China:

> Air quality is so far below World Health Organisation standards that a blue sky appears only after it rains, or when the government closes steel mills around Beijing and bans drivers from highways for major summits...

Of particular relevance to the bill before us, it is heartening to see that that U.S.-China agreement acknowledges the role of cities as final-energy users and, consequently, as significant greenhouse gas emitters. The Climate-Smart/Low-Carbon Cities initiative that forms part of that agreement recognizes the great potential of cities as sites of climate change mitigation.

Now, of course, the times do not look particularly propitious for us in Canada in light of the revelation this week that the Conservative government, contrary to its commitment, has no intention of regulating emissions in the oil and gas industry.

However, it is the nature of government that it changes. Governments come and they go, but a government that breaks its commitment on such a significant, indeed, existential issue, one hopes will go quickly, and a government that calls regulating what it had once committed to regulate “crazy”, one hopes will fall harder and faster than most.

Now, as per the bill, we are talking specifically about urban heat islands. The call in the bill is for the Minister of Health to establish a national strategy to reduce the negative effects of heat islands.

● (1755)

Urban heat islands are understood to be urban environments in which the average air temperature is markedly greater as compared to the average or, in particular, that of the surrounding rural environment. The effect is well known and has been well studied, precisely because of the serious impacts of urban heat islands on human health. Annual average temperatures tend to be 3.5° to 4.5° higher in cities than in surrounding rural areas. According to the OECD, this difference—and note that it is in average annual temperature—is expected to increase by 1° per decade to a difference of about 10° in large cities. In other words, the heat island effect is significant presently and anticipated to get significantly worse over time.

It has been estimated, for example, that maximum average temperatures in my city of Toronto will rise by 7° by mid-century. That means that the extreme climate events, such as heat waves, which we are experiencing as a result of generalized global warming, will also become worse in urban areas as a result of the heat island effect, or more properly the conditions that give rise to the heat island effect. Those conditions relate, in the main, to the type of infrastructure we find in urban environments and the particular materials it is made of, as well as the colour of those materials. Surface materials such as concrete and asphalt, including asphalt roofing shingles, are particularly problematic. This kind of infrastructure tends to absorb large amounts of solar radiation and release it in the form of heat, thus creating heat islands. The increasing daytime temperature, in turn, tends to trigger a vicious circle as it interferes with natural nighttime cooling processes, but it also triggers artificial cooling efforts, such as air conditioning, that add to the heat island effect.

There are well-documented health implications of extreme heat and heat islands. It is fair to say that, around the world, the effects of urban heat islands on human health are being documented by health and environmental agencies. The health outcomes vary from simply heat fatigue to death.

According to studies conducted by the American Ernest O. Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, every 1°C increase in warm weather temperature increases the pollution caused by smog by some 5%. Smog generally forms above urban areas and heat islands, and adds to water pollution and air pollution. Smog is one of the main causes of the increase in the number of cases of asthma, throat irritation, and even premature death.

It is worth noting that not all are affected equally by heat island effects. Some people are more vulnerable to health impacts than others. Seniors and youth are particularly vulnerable, but so also are the poor, the disabled, shut-ins, the homeless, and those unable to afford or without access to air-conditioned shelter. There is clearly and notably a social equity issue. This is a matter of climate justice and not just a generalized matter of human health.

Let me end with what I think is some good news. About 80% of Canadians live in urban Canada. Urban Canada is responsible for a commensurate percentage of final energy use and consequently a commensurate percentage of greenhouse gas emissions. Not the current government, obviously, but people around the world who are concerned about the future of this planet, people committed to halting global warming so as to avoid dangerous levels, are alive to the issue of urban heat islands and their health impacts and dangers. They are also alive to the great climate change mitigation potential of cities. That is why this bill and its focus on urban Canada and urban Canadians, and the need to deal with these issues, holds out such great promise for us and should receive the support of all in this House.

I again thank my colleague for bringing it forward.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 24, I had the honour of introducing my bill on urban heat islands.

Before drafting the bill, we consulted scientific experts, government departments and municipal, provincial and federal representatives. This is what the Federation of Canadian Municipalities told us:

> Our national programs unit focuses on developing and promoting best municipal practices in Canada. We do not currently have a program area specifically for heat islands. This issue is not well known or highly publicized outside Quebec.

Even so, in her speech on September 26, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health had this to say:

> Since 2008, Health Canada has worked with federal, provincial, and municipal partners to enhance the resiliency of communities and individual Canadians to the health impacts of extreme heat.

The parliamentary secretary's statement conflicts with the answer I got from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Where does the truth lie?

Everyone agrees that there are many, many compelling initiatives in the municipalities and committees, and everyone also agrees that the Conservative government's lack of support is appalling. Everyone deplores how little support they are getting. Above all, they are criticizing the absence of a real national strategy, which would create a real space for dialogue regarding best practices, and not just through a website.

What is more, the parliamentary secretary said the goal is to help communities and Canadians “adapt” to the effect of extreme heat on their health. Did I understand the word “adapt” correctly? The government wants Canadians to adapt to the harmful effects that heat islands are having on their health.

We already thought the Conservative government's inaction was deplorable. Now we learn that the government has simply abandoned Canadians altogether

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health was so proud to announce that a key component of the government's initiative was the development of heat alert and response systems. That is an excellent example of a confession of failure on the part of this government, which, instead of addressing the causes of heat islands, proposes that we simply adapt to them and, at best, predict when an asthma sufferer should stay indoors.

Once again, it is not enough to help communities adjust to the effects of heat islands on health. Instead we must tackle the phenomenon and act before the situation is critical because Canadians' health could already be at risk.

What is most serious is the parliamentary secretary's statement that the Conservative government, which refuses to adopt a real strategy, is nevertheless spending billions of dollars. She even said that, since 2007, the government has spent more than $2 billion on 1,400 green infrastructure projects across Canada. Did I hear correctly? The government has no strategy, but is spending billions of dollars. The government definitely does not want a framework for action and support, but it is nevertheless funding more than 1,400 projects.

In the same breath, the government is criticizing the NDP's approach of openly working with communities and having clear objectives and measurable results. The government is telling us that a coherent approach will cost too much. It claims that it does not have a strategy, but that is obviously false. It does have one, but it refuses to reveal it. It lists the good things it does, but is incapable of explaining the consequences.

All this bill asks of the government is that it support communities and stop backing away from its responsibilities with respect to Canadians' health, as it is currently doing.

If the government wants to talk about savings, bring it on. Not only is the government throwing billions of dollars out the window, but it also refuses to take any responsibility for the real impact of this spending. Furthermore, it is disregarding the positive economic benefits of combatting heat islands.

If the government truly listened to the experts, it would have heard Mr. Hashem, a university professor who has dedicated much of his scientific research to this topic. He estimates that we could save at least $100 million a year in health care costs alone by reducing the effects of heat islands. This represents about 4,000 new jobs. This is not a trivial number for the Canadian economy.

The government claims that my bill would create jurisdictional overlaps with provinces. Then the government admitted that a national strategy would make the government accountable for activities over which it has no control. Clearly the government is afraid of being responsible for anything.

A New Democrat government would not be afraid of setting objectives with its partners and assuming its responsibilities to meet those objectives. We will tackle the heat islands problem, and together we will change Canada.

● (1805)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, January 28, 2015, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 28, 2014, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs about an announcement he had made in Halifax regarding a $200 million mental health care program for veterans.

I would like to remind the House that this announcement was made because of pressure from the NDP. The parliamentary secretary, at the time, gave his usual response:

> ...there were only four operational stress injury clinics when our government took office. We have already put in place 13 operational stress injury clinics across the country.

The government says that it has increased services, but the numbers say the exact opposite. I will share a few examples. Last spring, I asked the minister a question about homelessness and, in particular, the fact that in Montreal there are no fewer than 50 veterans who are homeless.

Why was it difficult to help homeless veterans? It is because the Department of Veterans Affairs does not have the resources to do it. The week of November 20 we learned that the department had failed to spend more than $1 billion since 2006. On December 3, 2014, we learned from the Treasury Board's 2013-14 departmental performance report that the number of full-time equivalent employees had fallen from 4,039 in 2008-09 to 3,050 in 2013-14, which is even lower than the forecast 3,115.

Just this morning, December 12, 2014, we learned that a group of veterans known as The Canadian Veterans Advocacy were condemning the Conservative government for balancing its budget on the backs of veterans by closing at least nine Veterans Affairs Canada offices.

I will not add my voice to the chorus asking for the resignation of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Although we can criticize him because he is overseeing the cuts to services, the person actually responsible for the current situation is the Prime Minister and the disconnect between his combative ideology and his obligation to deal with the effects of war on the soldiers who return home.

If we want to condemn the government and its inability to address these effects, we must have the courage to explain what causes them. Irresponsible military action is the cause of our veterans' health needs, especially the mental health needs that the government can no longer handle.

In 2006, the Prime Minister said, "You won't recognize Canada when I'm through with it."

● (1810)

Indeed, sometimes I feel like I hardly recognize the Canada I moved to 13 years ago. It is this Prime Minister who is always trying to lead Canada away from the group of countries that work for international peace and co-operation, and towards the group of countries that are looking for provocation, confrontation and war.

There is another mind-boggling aspect of this debate. Not only are the Conservatives indifferent towards our veterans, but they also have such contempt for the public servants who work on the front lines providing services, who, according to the Prime Minister, are merely bureaucrats and pencil pushers. It is really insulting.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for giving me an opportunity to expand on the question, because it will allow me to correct a great deal of misinformation in the public domain about this particular issue.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs announced these extraordinary improvements to mental health support for active serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Canadian veterans, and their families. He said it was an investment that would significantly improve mental health support for veterans and still-serving members, including their family members.

The member opposite has fallen for the misinformation propagated by members of his own party, and partisan critics of the government have lost sight of what truly is good news. The measures announced by the minister will allow for earlier intervention for veterans living with mental health conditions. This means more support and assistance and a better chance of achieving successful outcomes.

The network of operational stress injury clinics is expanding. By fall 2015, a new clinic will open in Halifax, Nova Scotia; a regional clinic will be set up in Montreal; while the existing clinic in the greater Toronto area will also be expanded. We will also expand services in six other locations throughout the country. Over the six-year period, more than 1,200 veterans in the Halifax area could receive specialized care closer to home, allowing better access to specialized assessment, diagnosis, and treatment services. Additionally, the regional clinics could help 1,300 veterans.

Fifteen new peer support coordinators are being hired to enhance the operational stress injury clinic and social support program. The peer support program is in high demand. By employing 15 new peers, another 2,200 veterans and their families could be helped by trained peer support coordinators who have already experienced the same challenges. These coordinators listen, support, and encourage veterans to access needed treatment.

Access to seven military family resource centres will be expanded on a pilot project basis to include medically releasing Canadian Armed Forces personnel and their families. Traditionally, the services and programs offered through these centres have been available only to still-serving members of the military. This change alone will allow up to 1,200 medically releasing veterans and their families to take part in this pilot project. This is a tremendous resource, giving them access to a wide range of services to help address their needs as they transition to civilian life.

A veteran-specific mental health first aid training course will help increase awareness of the various kinds of mental health conditions. This means that a veteran or his or her family member may be able to respond or intervene earlier if someone he or she cares about is in crisis. This training course could benefit up to 3,000 veterans and their families. Imagine what that would mean to someone who may go from day to day in fear of a mental health crisis.

These are valuable programs and service improvements.

I encourage that member to stop with the partisan games and help us to eliminate the misinformation that continues to cause confusion in the veterans community.

● (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, this warmongering Conservative government has led Canada into some irresponsible military action, and now it refuses to accept the consequences of its decisions with respect to the Canadian soldiers that it sent to war.

It refuses to pay for treatment for the mental health problems that its dangerous ideology created. Whether we are talking about the war in Afghanistan, the air strikes in Iraq or the police officers we are sending to Ukraine, Canada is slowly becoming an aggressive country on the international scene.

The only hope I have is that, in 2015, Canadians will replace this aggressive Conservative government with the first social democratic government in Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, that is extremely wishful thinking. I do not necessarily know if Canadians would agree with that assessment by the member opposite.

However, let me respond by saying that our government's cutting-edge mental health strategy offers more points of service for veterans and their families, more timely access to important and lifesaving support, and will go a long way toward helping to reduce the barriers that veterans face in getting the help they so urgently need.

It completely mystifies me as to how anyone could possibly criticize what are clearly steps in the right direction by this government toward giving Canada's veterans and their families the tools they need to successfully transition to civilian life. This government remains committed to responding to the needs of veterans, not only today but also in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:17 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, December 11, 2014

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Government Response to Petitions
Mr. Lukiwski 10457

Mental Health Commission of Canada
Ms. Adams 10457

Interparliamentary Delegations
Mr. Trottier 10457

Hispanic Heritage Month Act
Mr. Adler 10457
Bill C-646. Introduction and first reading 10457
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 10457

Expanding the Object of Federal Regional Development Agencies Act
Mr. Larose 10457
Bill C-647. Introduction and first reading 10457
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 10458

Warning Labels for Radio Apparatus Act
Mr. Young (Oakville) 10458
Bill C-648. Introduction and first reading 10458
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 10458

Canadian Optimist Movement Awareness Day Act
Ms. Quach 10458
Bill C-649. Introduction and first reading 10458
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed.) 10458

Petitions
Canada Post
Ms. Nash 10458
Immigration
Ms. Nash 10458
Science
Ms. Nash 10458
Agriculture
Mrs. Hughes 10458
Mining Industry
Ms. Quach 10458
Navigable Waters Protection
Ms. Quach 10459
Agriculture
Mr. Lamoureux 10459
Impaired Driving
Mr. Shipley 10459
Ms. Nash 10459
National Day of the Midwife
Ms. Nash 10459
Dementia
Ms. Nash 10459
Science
Ms. Nash 10459
Agriculture
Ms. Nash 10459
Employment
Mr. Cash 10459

Questions on the Order Paper
Mr. Lukiwski 10459

Questions Passed as Orders for Returns
Mr. Lukiwski 10460

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Náát's'ihch'oh National Park Reserve Act
Mr. Baird (for the Minister of the Environment) 10460
Bill S-5. Third reading 10460
Mr. Toet 10460
Mr. Bevington 10462
Mr. Lamoureux 10462
Mr. Young (Oakville) 10463
Mr. Opitz 10463
Mr. Bevington 10463
Mr. Baird 10466
Mr. Caron 10466
Mr. Lamoureux 10466
Mr. Carrie 10467
Mr. McKay 10467
Ms. Doré Lefebvre 10467
Mr. Albrecht 10468
Mr. Caron 10468
Mr. Baird 10468
Ms. Sims 10469
Mr. Young (Oakville) 10471
Mrs. Hughes 10471
Mr. Albrecht 10471
Ms. Doré Lefebvre 10472
Mr. Genest-Jourdain 10472
Mr. Caron 10473
Mrs. Hughes 10474
Mrs. Hughes 10474
Mr. Norlock 10475
Ms. Péclet 10475
Ms. Doré Lefebvre 10475
Mrs. Hughes 10477
Mr. Lamoureux 10477
Ms. Péclet 10477
Mr. Caron 10478
Mr. Dusseault 10479
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot) 10479
Mr. Caron 10480
Mr. Sandhu 10481
Mrs. Hughes 10482
Mr. Cash 10482

Mrs. Hughes 10483
Mr. Lamoureux 10483
Mr. Atamanenko 10483
Mr. Dusseault 10485
Mr. Weston (Saint John) 10485
Mr. Rafferty 10485
Mrs. Hughes 10486
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) 10486
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed) 10487

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Canadian Security Intelligence Service
Mrs. Mourani 10487

Infrastructure
Mr. Menegakis 10487

Beauport—Limoilou Entrepreneurs
Mr. Côté 10487

Christmas Greetings
Mr. MacKenzie 10487

Liberal Party of Canada
Mr. Chan 10487

Christmas Greetings
Mr. Lunney 10488

Christmas Greetings
Mr. Nunez-Melo 10488

Jack and Marion Seabrook
Mr. Reid 10488

Hanukkah
Mr. Adler 10488

Tibet
Ms. Nash 10489

Justice
Ms. James 10489

West Kootenay Regional Airport
Mr. Atamanenko 10489

Firearms
Mr. Zimmer 10489

Assembly of First Nations
Mr. Goodale 10489

Taxation
Mr. Clarke 10490

New Democratic Party of Canada
Mr. Julian 10490

Taxation
Ms. Crockatt 10490

ORAL QUESTIONS

Veterans Affairs
Mr. Mulcair 10490
Mr. Fantino 10490
Mr. Mulcair 10491
Mr. Fantino 10491

Justice
Mr. Mulcair 10491
Mr. MacKay 10491

Intergovernmental Affairs
Mr. Mulcair 10491
Mr. Moore (Fundy Royal) 10491

The Environment
Mr. Mulcair 10491
Mr. Carrie 10491

Veterans Affairs
Mr. Garneau 10491
Mr. Fantino 10492
Ms. Murray 10492
Mr. Fantino 10492

Government Contracts
Mr. Valeriote 10492
Mr. Bezan 10492

Veterans Affairs
Ms. Papillon 10492
Mr. Fantino 10492
Mr. Chicoine 10492
Mr. Fantino 10493
Ms. Sims 10493
Mr. Fantino 10493

The Environment
Mr. Kellway 10493
Mr. Carrie 10493
Ms. Leslie 10493
Mr. Carrie 10493
Ms. Leslie 10493
Mr. Carrie 10494

Works and Government Services
Ms. Michaud 10494
Ms. Finley 10494
Mr. Harris (St. John's East) 10494
Ms. Finley 10494
Mr. Harris (St. John's East) 10494
Ms. Finley 10494

Veterans Affairs
Mr. Valeriote 10494
Mr. Fantino 10494

Aboriginal Affairs
Ms. Bennett 10495
Ms. Leitch 10495

Taxation
Mr. Dubourg 10495
Ms. Findlay 10495

Public Safety
Ms. Péclet 10495
Mr. Blaney 10495
Mr. Garrison 10495
Mr. Blaney 10495

Agriculture and Agri-Food
Mr. Allen (Welland) 10495
Mr. Ritz 10496
Mr. Allen (Welland) 10496
Mr. Ritz 10496

National Defence
Mr. Opitz 10496
Mr. Bezan 10496

Agriculture and Agri-Food
Ms. Brosseau 10496
Mr. Bernier 10496

Fisheries and Oceans
Mr. Cleary 10496
Mr. Moore (Fundy Royal) 10497

Canada Post
Ms. Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine) 10497
Mr. Watson 10497
Mr. Boulerice 10497
Mr. Watson 10497

The Environment
Mr. McKay 10497
Mr. Carrie 10497
Mr. Regan 10497
Mr. Carrie 10497

Public Safety
Ms. Doré Lefebvre 10498
Mr. Blaney 10498

Aboriginal Affairs
Mrs. Hughes 10498
Ms. Leitch 10498

National Defence
Mr. Trost 10498
Mr. Bezan 10498

Fisheries and Oceans
Mr. MacAulay 10498
Mrs. Shea 10499

CBC/Radio-Canada
Mr. Caron 10499
Mr. Dykstra 10499

Consumer Protection
Mr. Falk 10499
Mr. Lake 10499

Public Works and Government Services
Mr. Toone 10499
Ms. Finley 10499

Consumer Protection
Mr. Rathgeber 10499
Mr. Lake 10499

Presence in Gallery
The Speaker 10500

House of Commons Security Personnel
(House in committee of the whole to recognize House of Commons Security Personnel, Mr. Andrew Scheer in the chair) 10500
The Speaker 10500

Business of the House
Mr. Julian 10500
Mr. Van Loan 10501
Mr. Lamoureux 10502
Mr. Fortin 10502

Points of Order
Oral Questions
Mr. Sweet 10502

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Victims Bill of Rights
Bill C-32. Report stage 10503
Ms. Péclet 10503
Mr. Blanchette 10504
Mr. Toone 10504
Mr. Thibeault 10504
Mr. Chisholm 10505
Mr. Marston 10506
Mr. Caron 10506
Mr. Blanchette 10507
Ms. Raynault 10508
Mr. Toone 10508
Mr. Blanchette 10509
Mr. Nicholls 10510
Mr. Lamoureux 10511
Mr. Marston 10511
Ms. Turmel 10511
Ms. Raynault 10512
Mr. Nicholls 10513
Ms. Raynault 10513
Mr. Blanchette 10514
Mr. Nicholls 10514
Mr. Scott 10515
Mr. Cullen 10516
Mr. Nicholls 10516
Mr. Cullen 10517

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Reducing the Effects of Urban Heat Islands Act
Bill C-579. Second reading 10518
Mr. Lamoureux 10518
Ms. Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine) 10518
Mr. Kellway 10520
Ms. Ayala 10521
Division on motion deferred 10522

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Veterans
Mr. Brahmi 10522
Mr. Gill 10523

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