



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 063 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 27, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 27, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of various reports.

[*English*]

They include the Maa-nulth First Nations final agreement implementation report, 2011-2012; the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 annual reports of the Yukon land claims and self-government agreements; the Westbank First Nation self-government agreement and annual report on implementation, 2010-2011; and the 2011-2012 Tsawwassen First Nation annual implementation report.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 12 petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, in relation to its study of the Canada–European Union comprehensive economic and trade agreement, recognized as CETA, and the effects of it on the Canadian agriculture sector.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-581, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (physician-assisted death).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to present what will be a historic piece of legislation. This legislation would amend the Criminal Code to allow physicians to assist individuals at the end of life. It is a bill that would empower individuals, competent adults, to make the best decisions for themselves while at the same time protecting society's most vulnerable individuals.

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

* * *

CANADIAN COMMISSION ON PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DEATH

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-582, An Act to establish the Canadian Commission on Physician-Assisted Death.

He said: Mr. Speaker, given the profound impact the bill just introduced would have, amending the Criminal Code to allow for physician-assisted death, it is felt that an act to establish the Canadian commission on physician-assisted death would allow for the collection of data such as vital statistics including sex, education, and types of illnesses that would fall under the previous bill. It would also create a commission that could provide suggestions and recommendations to the government or to colleges of physicians and surgeons as time goes on.

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

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to consider the matter of accusations of the official opposition's improper use of House of Commons resources for partisan purposes and that the Leader of the Opposition be ordered to appear as a witness at a televised meeting of the committee to be held no later than May 16, 2014.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Routine Proceedings***USE OF HOUSE OF COMMONS RESOURCES**

Hon. Khristinn Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 56.1, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to consider the matter of accusations of the Official Opposition's improper use of House of Commons resources for partisan purposes; and

That the Leader of the Opposition be ordered to appear as a witness at a televised meeting of the committee to be held no later than May 16, 2014.

● (1010)

The Speaker: Will those members who object to the motion please rise in their places?

And fewer than 25 members having risen:

The Speaker: Fewer than 25 members having risen, the motion is adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition in which the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to recognize animals as sentient beings that can feel pain, to move animal cruelty crimes from the property section of the Criminal Code, and to strengthen the language of federal animal cruelty law in order to close loopholes that allow abusers to escape penalty.

DEMENTIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of residents from the Waterloo region. The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Health and the House of Commons to pass Bill C-356, an act respecting a national strategy for dementia.

HEALTH

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition from many people in Winnipeg North who are concerned about health care in Canada. They are calling upon the government to ensure that the Canada Health Act improves accountability on health care services that are deemed delivered. They are obviously very much concerned about the health care accord and how important it is that the federal government renegotiate and have a new health care pact for the next decade.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions from Canadians who recognize the inherent rights of farmers to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds. They are calling upon Parliament to enshrine in legislation the inalienable rights of farmers and Canadians to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of Canadian citizens from Sault Ste. Marie, Richards Landing, Echo Bay, Bruce

Mines, Searchmont, Thessalon, and Wawa to present a petition. They are concerned that the train is about to leave their community and are asking the government to reinstate the federal funding that allowed for the operations of the Algoma Central Railway. They indicate how difficult this will be on their communities and homes, particularly on businesses, and especially the tourism business.

Before the train leaves the station, they would like the government to act on assisting with the funding for at least another year. They would greatly appreciate the support of the Conservative government as opposed to seeing job loss in the riding in northern Ontario.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House today to present dozens of petitions concerning the cuts to VIA Rail, which my hon. colleague just mentioned. My constituents in Drummond are also affected by the cuts. The Drummondville station was automated last year, just a few months ago. People have been very concerned since that happened. Service has deteriorated, and services for seniors and those with reduced mobility are less readily available.

Consequently, the signatories are calling on the government to reverse the VIA Rail cuts that were announced in the 2013-14 estimates, and they are asking VIA Rail to cancel the measures announced in July 2013 regarding reduction in services at the Drummondville station.

[English]

CANADA POST

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from several hundred residents of Chapel Arm in my riding who are very upset about the closure and reduced hours of the postal office.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada and Canada Post to maintain, expand, and improve postal services and cease any proposal to reduce hours and diminish services to the residents of Chapel Arm in Newfoundland and Labrador.

● (1015)

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions that acknowledge the current impaired driving laws are too lenient, in the interest of public safety.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are calling for tougher laws and implementation of new mandatory minimum sentences for impaired driving causing death. They are also calling for the Criminal Code of Canada to be changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

HEALTH

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition from the UBC School of Nursing students, UBC being in the riding of Vancouver Quadra.

The students wish to bring to the attention of the House their deep concern about the expiry of the 2004 health accord in March 2014. They note that Ottawa has already cut funding to the Health Council of Canada, which is funded solely at the federal level and oversees the promises outlined in the health accord to ensure they are upheld.

The nurses from UBC call on the House of Commons to reconsider the dismantling of the Health Council of Canada and to agree to a 2014 health accord, thus renewing government's commitment to a sustainable and universal health care system.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is about fair electoral representation and is signed by constituents of Vancouver Quadra.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to immediately undertake public consultations across Canada to amend the Canada Elections Act to ensure that voters can cast equal and effective votes, be represented fairly in Parliament, be governed by a fairly elected Parliament, and live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

The petitioners are members of my constituency who are concerned about the winner take all voting system we currently have in Canada.

CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition with respect to Bill C-24 and the fact that it does unfairly treat current Canadian permanent residents who came to Canada as temporary foreign workers or international students.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to consider amending the Canadian Citizenship Act to recognize non-permanent residency time to be counted toward the citizenship residency requirement.

* * *

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. 302 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 302—**Mr. Ryan Cleary:**

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard: (a) have there been any reports written on the oil leak of the *Manolis L.* since it sunk in 1985; (b) how much has the government spent on cleaning up the oil spill

since 1985; and (c) has there been any study done on developing a long-term solution for the oil spill?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), since the *Manolis L.* sank in 1985, it is the understanding of the Coast Guard that there have been two reports written regarding the sinking and potential oil leak: first, the "Investigation Report into the Circumstances Attending the Grounding, Abandonment and Sinking of the Liberian Vessel 'Manolis L.' in Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland on January 17, 1985", undated, Transport Canada, marine casualty investigations; and second, the "Report of Proceedings—'Manolis L.'" of June 26, 1985, by the Canadian Coast Guard.

There may have been reports written by owners, agents, insurers, or other interests that the Coast Guard is not aware of nor has access to. To the best of the Coast Guard's knowledge, these are the only two reports.

With regard to (b), the public service does not normally keep such financial records dating this far back, and as such the Coast Guard does not have financial records for monitoring and assessment work done around the time the vessel sank in 1985. Since March 2013, the Coast Guard has expended \$600,000 in incremental costs associated with monitoring and pollution mitigation measures. The Coast Guard does not have the financial records of other government departments who have engaged in any monitoring activities since March 2013.

With regard to (c), the focus to date has been to contain the oil and prevent further leakages into the marine environment. The current approach, using neoprene seals and a cofferdam, is working well. There have been no studies of other potential long-term solutions.

* * *

[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 a revised response to Question No. 192, originally tabled on March 24, 2014, could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Privilege

[Text]

Question No. 192—**Mr. Sean Casey:**

With regard to outside legal counsel, legal advice, or any other form of legal assistance provided to government by non-government lawyers, and broken down by year since 2006: (a) what is the amount spent by department; (b) what program activities across government account for the top twenty expenditures used for non-government legal services; (c) what are the names of law firms used; (d) what is the breakdown of expenditure wherein the government was the defendant, by department and by cause of action; and (e) what is the breakdown of expenditure where the government was the plaintiff, by department and by cause of action?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

RESPONSE TO QUESTION NO. 176

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of several questions of privilege, and I will take them in the order in which I received the notices.

The hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege under the provisions of Standing Order 48, alleging obstruction by the Minister of State for Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, ACOA, as per the notice that I provided to you. I will be asking you to make a prima facie case, finding that a breach of privilege has occurred concerning a response to an order paper question which was tabled in the House. Specifically, the minister has changed the process and now intentionally interfered to obstruct from releasing information pertinent to my riding, therefore impeding my ability to perform my duties.

Some other questions of privilege raised in the House concerning order paper questions have been deemed to be a question of the accuracy of the answer to the question.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that you are not able to determine the accuracy of the answers to order paper questions, and I would not raise a question of privilege to do so. I understand that these historical cases did not constitute a prima facie case breach of privilege.

However, the breach of privilege that I am rising on today does not question the accuracy of the answer provided by the minister of ACOA, as I did not receive an answer that provided the requested information. Unfortunately, I have to rise with a question of willingness by the minister to provide important information from his department.

All members know that, as outlined in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, a question may be placed on the order paper by a member to seek answers from a department pertaining to public affairs. The context of my question was to see what projects ACOA had approved in the riding of Avalon.

It is important that I briefly present the facts that led to this breach of privilege, as it is important to understand that this is not a question of accuracy; it is a question of why the minister was willing to provide answers to the questions in the past but now refuses to provide answers to the same questions. Again, this is not a question of accuracy, but concerns the willingness of the minister to cooperate and provide an answer.

I have placed a past order paper question concerning projects funded in part or in full for my riding through ACOA. On each occasion, the minister has provided a detailed list of all approved projects within the riding. The information provided had detailed lists, including project descriptions, locations, applicants, approval dates, and funding levels. The information was provided as such.

This brings me to the question of privilege concerning a response to the most recent order paper question, No. 176, where I asked for a list of projects that ACOA has funded in my riding during a more recent time period. Unfortunately, the answer did not provide the information that was previously provided, by simply stating, "ACOA does not track projects by riding".

This is a definite change in the direction of the department, and I feel it is wrong that the minister has provided this answer to the House. In the past I have obtained the requested information from the department, and now the minister has become secretive and refuses to provide information.

It is relevant to understand that order paper questions have always been accepted parliamentary privilege in order for all members of the House to receive answers to important questions on public affairs. The minister for ACOA has unfortunately obstructed this long-standing privilege to receive such answers, and my work as a parliamentarian has been infringed upon.

The question I asked, in 2010, was answered and the information was provided. Unfortunately, we now have a minister that has intentionally interfered with my ability to obtain the same information for a later period. It is wrong and we need to ensure that parliamentary rights are protected. I ask you to review these facts and ensure we are not heading down a path whereby ministers get to decide when they will provide answers to these important questions.

I would conclude and quote Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, page 239:

Untruthful, equivocating, prevaricating, insulting, and trifling actions have been held in the U.K. to be contemptuous, as has the refusal to answer to questions.

Mr. Speaker, if you do find a prima facie case of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

● (1020)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acquaint myself further with the facts and have a further response to you.

However, I do want to point out that although the member protests greatly that there was no response, in fact there was a response to his question. He is unhappy that the response is not in the detail, and does not provide the information, that he would like.

I would point out that chapter 11, page 522, of the big green book, reads as follows:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions. Nonetheless, on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege...regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be a *prima facie* breach of privilege. The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate nor to "assess the likelihood of an Hon. Member knowing whether the facts contained in the document are correct".

Again, he did receive a response. His problem is that the response is not as detailed as he might have received on another occasion or that the information is not what he would have liked to have received. However, that is really a debate over the adequacy of the response, not the fact of whether or not there was a response.

We will respond after we have a few more details, as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that you have ruled on this issue in the past. Responses are often lacking in quality. However, you are not necessarily able to rule on the quality of the government's responses.

We will likely have more to add later. I simply wanted to reserve the right to revisit the issue.

• (1025)

[English]

The Speaker: I look forward to further submissions on this question.

The hon. member for Charlottetown has also advised me of a question of privilege, and I will hear him now.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 48, to allege that the Attorney General of Canada and justice minister misled the House yesterday during question period. We cannot accept a situation where the chief legal officer, the Attorney General of Canada, would rise in this place and, in response to a direct question put to the minister, mislead the House by making statements that are demonstrably untrue.

These are the facts. In January of this year, I submitted, pursuant to the Standing Orders, a written question that read as follows:

With regard to Section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: (a) what is the current policy of the government, particularly the Department of Justice, about the use or invocation of Section 33; and (b) since 2006, how many times has the government directed, suggested, contemplated or requested an analysis, examination or consideration from departmental officials within the Department of Justice, the Privy Council Office, or any government department, about the possible use of Section 33?

The written response, signed by the Attorney General himself, stated:

(a) The Department of Justice has no policy on the use or invocation of section 33 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* commonly referred to as the

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"notwithstanding clause". To date, Parliament has never made a legislative declaration pursuant to section 33, although certain provincial legislatures have done so.

That was the full response. There was no response to the (b) part of the question.

That was the response that the Attorney General provided to the House of Commons on Monday, March 24, 2014, just three days ago.

Yesterday, Wednesday, March 26, there was a question and answer exchange between the Attorney General and I during question period. I posed the following question:

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has refused to answer my written question about whether he or any of his political staff have ordered Justice officials to review the use of the notwithstanding clause to overrule Supreme Court decisions.

The courts have slapped down the Conservative legislation on sentencing, fine surcharges, prostitution, their unconstitutional judicial appointment—and lest we forget, this minister fought veterans in court and lost.

Will the minister tell the House, when did he or his staff first order departmental officials to assess the use of the notwithstanding clause?

This is the relevant portion of his response. It states:

Mr. Speaker, I have no idea why [this] member is insisting on the government examining the use of the notwithstanding clause, unless it is based on the fact that it was his government, his party, that [were the] only [ones] who ever used it. Maybe the member has a propensity for the use of the notwithstanding clause.

The answer went on to describe the situation with regard to veterans, which is not particularly pertinent to the point that I seek to make.

The House relies on members and ministers of the Crown to speak the truth. Arguably, this burden rests in a heavier way upon the Attorney General of Canada, the chief legal officer for the country and an officer of the court. It cannot be tolerated by this House to have the Attorney General state, without equivocation, on Monday, "To date, Parliament has never made a legislative declaration pursuant to section 33..." and then, for what must be assumed to be partisan purposes, directly contradict himself, by stating the following, two days later, in response to a question about the notwithstanding clause:

...I have no idea why [this] member is insisting on the government examining the use of the notwithstanding clause, unless it is based on the fact that it was his government, his party, that [were the] only [ones] who ever used it. Maybe the member has a propensity for the use of the notwithstanding clause.

We have before the House two statements made by the same minister that are directly in conflict with each other. It cannot be said that this was an error because one statement had been made some time ago, thus attributing it to poor memory. I sincerely hope that this is not a situation where the minister does not know the facts regarding the history of the use of the notwithstanding clause.

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●(1030)

Two directly contradictory statements were made in the House within a period of 48 hours, and this is not inconsequential. To make matters worse, the Attorney General of Canada rose some time later on an attempted point of order in order to clarify his conflicting statement. He apparently sought to clarify his statement in response to a previous point of order from the hon. member for Mount Royal, who, I should note, clearly and factually indicated that a Liberal government had never invoked the notwithstanding clause nor had there been any evidentiary basis to suggest that there was a threat to do so.

Here is what the Attorney General of Canada stated as he attempted to clarify his remarks:

For clarity, I wish to ensure that my answer did not imply that the Liberal government of the day “invoked”, which is the word that the member used, the notwithstanding clause, but threatened to use it.

The Attorney General, in attempting to clarify his remarks, further misled the House. He effectively doubled down by suggesting that his answer to me during question period did not imply something that we know from the record, he had stated clearly, as a point of fact.

Again, the record will show that the Attorney General of Canada told the House one thing on Monday, something entirely different on Wednesday in response to a question during question period, and then further misled by suggesting that he did not say what he said.

This is no minor matter, and this is not the first time that this House has been confronted with conflicting statements from a minister of the Crown.

Members will recall former Conservative minister of international cooperation Bev Oda, who repeatedly told the House of Commons that she knew nothing about the matter of who had inserted the now infamous “not” in a cabinet document that was meant to approve funding for KAIROS. The infamous “not” had the effect of killing funding for KAIROS. That minister then repeatedly told the House that she had no knowledge as to who inserted the “not”, only to disclose sometime later, when confronted with evidence pointing to the fact, that she not only had knowledge of the infamous “not”, but she in fact had ordered its insertion.

On a question of privilege raised by my colleague the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, Speaker Milliken determined that indeed there was a prima facie case to suggest that the then-minister of international cooperation had misled the House.

More recently, we had the situation of the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, who stood accused of knowingly misleading the House with a statement in relation to the so-called fair elections act. In that instance, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville told this House that he had witnessed voter fraud during the 2011 election. The member made that false claim as a way to provide some credibility to the so-called fair elections act. He retracted that statement after a significant period of time had elapsed, and only when his claim was proven to be false.

In your ruling, Mr. Speaker, you quoted a previous decision rendered on May 7, 2012, in which you outlined the test to be

applied that would give rise to a prima facie point to a member’s misleading the House. You said:

One, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

On point number one, to prove that the statement is misleading in the case before you, Mr. Speaker, one need only examine the legislative record. The legislative record is very clear. The answer that the minister gave to the written question on Monday is accurate. No Liberal government, no Conservative government, no Government of Canada has ever invoked the notwithstanding clause. That can be discerned from the legislative record.

Point two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect. Well, he certainly knew on Monday when he signed the document that was tabled in the House that indicated the correct state of affairs.

Point three, in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

●(1035)

There are only two explanations for his intentions. Number one, he did not know, or number two, he did know but attempted to mislead. I find it difficult to imagine that a parliamentarian of his experience, someone who sits in the cabinet, did not know the true state of affairs. There is only one possible explanation left.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking you to review the record and to review the statements made by the Attorney General. I submit that the statements made by the Attorney General contain all the elements that you outlined in your previous ruling. I believe that upon review, you will find it is a clear case that the Attorney General deliberately attempted to mislead the House by way of his statement or, in this case, a series of statements to the House, that he knew or ought to have known were either false or an attempt to mislead.

We expect people to speak the truth, not to play loose with statements purporting to be statements of fact. Indeed, to deliberately mislead the House is a clear contempt of Parliament and must be addressed. This is particularly problematic in that these misleading statements were made by the Attorney General of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, if you find that there is a prima facie breach of privilege in this case, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly rebut the presumption that the hon. member for Charlottetown is presenting to the House, that I have deliberately misled the House in any way.

In fact, as he himself in his presentation has reminded the House, I rose at the first opportunity to clarify what was said, as is clearly reflected in *Hansard*, that “...I wish to ensure that my answer did not imply that the Liberal government of the day...” used the word ‘invoked’, repeating the words that were put on the record by the member for Mount Royal who rose on the initial point of order yesterday and was ruled out of order by the Speaker.

My answer goes on to say with respect to “invoked”, “...which is the word that the member used, the notwithstanding clause, but threatened to use it. Members may recall that former prime minister Paul Martin, and certainly the member for Mount Royal—”. At that time I was interrupted by the Speaker, not yourself, another Speaker in the chair, and reminded that I was not, in his view, permitted to continue with my response. I then again tried to complete my statement on the record and was prevented from doing so by the chair.

What I was referring to obviously in that clarification was the use of the notwithstanding clause at that time, the threatened use, the political use, which was clearly the case in 2004. I am quoting now from a CBC report that says, Prime Minister Paul Martin says he would use the Constitution's notwithstanding clause if the Supreme Court rules that churches must perform gay marriages.” It was in that context.

He went on to say when asked by a reporter whether he would use the notwithstanding clause, “Oh, yes I would”.

That was the reference that I sought to clarify when I rose in this Chamber yesterday. That clause is in the Constitution by virtue of the Liberal government of the day. The member's question to the department was answered as he mentioned. He referenced the fact that he had sought information from the Department of Justice with respect to section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: “...what is the current policy of the government, particularly the Department of Justice, about the use or invocation of Section 33...?”

The answer that he received is quite clear: “The Department of Justice has no policy on the use or invocation of section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms commonly referred to as the “notwithstanding clause...”.

The member then opines and complains that there was no answer to the second part of his question, which goes on, “...how many times has the government directed, suggested, complained, contemplated or requested an analysis, examination or consideration...”. If there is no policy, why would the government or the Department of Justice then respond to the second part about how many times it was used or contemplated to be used?

The member for Charlottetown cannot have it both ways. He cannot ask how many times the government has contemplated using it. He has been told that there is no policy in this regard. Now he is suggesting that there was an incomplete answer given to him by the department.

The clarification that I sought yesterday and the clarification today is the political use, the threatened use, of the notwithstanding clause by the Liberal government of the day. It was not the current government. It was not this minister. It was the government of the party of which the member opposite is a member.

I would suggest that my clarification was provided in earnest yesterday. It was in response to the attempted question of privilege raised by the member's colleague, the member for Mount Royal. I rose at the earliest possible opportunity to provide clarification. There was no deliberate use. I specifically said that I did not use the word “invoked”, and that is the key word that the member for Mount

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Royal tried to attribute to me in his attempted point of order yesterday.

I hope that provides the necessary explanation for you, Mr. Speaker, to make the proper ruling, which is to find against the member for Charlottetown.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we find this government's lack of transparency very problematic, and we have repeatedly said as much. This issue is of interest to us as well, so we will come back to it later. We reserve the right to speak to it.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to come back to the specific answer given in question period yesterday and this further attempt at clarification.

The minister yesterday stated as a fact, and he used that word “fact”, that it was, he said, “his government”, meaning a Liberal government, that was the only party that ever used it. He stated that as a fact. This is not an implication. With the greatest of respect, this is an attempt to obfuscate or confuse. He stated as a fact something that he has, even in his response today, indicated that he knows not to be true.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for raising this matter. As the Minister of Justice pointed out, this was deemed to be a dispute as to the facts yesterday by the chair occupant. After listening to the debate over the definition of the word “use” or how it would be applied, it seems to me that this is a dispute as to the facts and one member's interpretation of the word over another, not something that would rise to the threshold of a question of privilege. Therefore, I am going to make that determination at this point, after listening to and examining the transcripts of yesterday.

The Chair also has notice from the member for Winnipeg North on a question of privilege.

STATEMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR EDMONTON CENTRE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise this morning because I am concerned about the statements made by the member for Edmonton Centre on March 24, earlier this week.

That day we were debating Bill C-23, the fair elections act, which is the government's term, when the member for Edmonton Centre, I believe, deliberately intended to mislead the House. I do not say that lightly, because that is a form of contempt of the House.

I would like to refer to a ruling you recently made, Mr. Speaker, dealing with another statement, made by the member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

I will first go to what the member for Mississauga—Streetsville stated and then to your comments, Mr. Speaker, as to why it is important that we be very careful in what we say.

I am going to refer to your ruling from just the other day, if I may, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that on February 6, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville stated:

Privilege

I have actually witnessed other people picking up the voter cards, going to campaign office of whatever candidate they support and handing out these voter cards to other individuals, who then walk into voting stations with friends who vouch for them with no ID.

Mr. Speaker, you articulated a ruling that many of us in the chamber actually supported, because we believe that you were right in your assessment. This is, in essence, what you stated, Mr. Speaker:

This incident highlights the...importance of accuracy and truthfulness in our deliberations. All members bear a responsibility, individually and collectively, to select the words they use very carefully and to be ever mindful of the serious consequences that can result when this responsibility is forgotten. In calling on the Chair to arrive at the finding of *prima facie* in this case, the hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition cited my ruling of May 7, 2012, where at page 7650 of the Debates, I reminded the House that, before finding that a member had deliberately misled the House, three conditions had to be met:

Then you stated those three conditions, Mr. Speaker:

...one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

I really want to emphasize what we were debating at the time. It was, once again, much like your ruling, on Bill C-23. It is an extremely important piece of legislation, and as you know, Mr. Speaker, it is exceptionally controversial. We have had emotional debates on both sides of the House. However, it is expected that when members participate in a debate, they are not going to try, in any way, to intentionally or deliberately mislead. This is what I believe has happened here.

Let me quote what the member for Edmonton Centre actually stated. Please keep in mind that the debate on that day was all about vouching. The government's position on vouching is that we should not allow vouching. That is what the Conservatives were trying to espouse throughout that day.

Here is what the member stated, and this can be found on page 3778, March 24:

In the 2006 election, I was called personally and offered hundreds of voter cards that had been left in apartment buildings and so on. Like an idiot, I said, "No, we don't do that sort of thing". I should have said, "Yes, come on down", and had the police waiting.

• (1045)

It is obvious that the member for Edmonton Centre instantly recognized that something was wrong with that phone call. In hindsight, he felt that it was illegal, because he believed that the police should have been contacted on the matter. To the best of my knowledge, I do not believe that the police were contacted. I hope that the member will address that issue.

More importantly, since this statement, we have found out that the voter cards we are debating today were not being used back in 2006. This comes from Elections Canada. The reason the member was focused on the voter cards was that he was trying to discredit the idea of Canadians being able to be vouched for. That is of critical importance.

On page 65 of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, "parliamentary privilege" is defined as:

...the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively [...] and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions...

I was here on Monday when I heard the member make the statement. There is no doubt in my mind that in making that statement, his intent was to try to give the House the impression that illegal activities were taking place and that vouching was wrong.

If we review some of the statements put forward by the member at the time, they were contradicted by media reports by, for example, the CBC, *The Hill Times*, and others. They seem to contradict what the member for Edmonton Centre was trying to lead members of the House to believe on March 25. I would suggest that such a review would be appropriate.

I look forward to the member for Edmonton Centre's contribution on this issue. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you find that there are grounds that this is a *prima facie* contempt of Parliament, at which point I would be prepared to move a motion to have the matter referred to the appropriate committee for further study.

• (1050)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with obvious interest. My hon. friend gives me far too much credit for Machiavellian intrigue. It had nothing to do with trying to mislead anybody. I was simply stating a fact.

I do not recall him being in my office that day during the campaign in 2006 nor having him listening in on phone calls. He can choose to believe that the phone call happened or not. That is up to him. It does not constitute a case of trying to mislead anyone about anything. It was simply stating a fact.

With respect to the voter identification cards, they did indeed exist in 2006. They were used, but they were not authorized to be used as a primary or sole form of identification. They were certainly there. What Elections Canada allows, whether it is voter ID cards, vouching, or whatever, and whether they are not allowed to be used or whether vouching is only supposed to be one for one, does not mean that people are not trying to get around those regulations. Human nature being what it is, people will always try to get around a system, and they will always try to do that for an advantage.

It was in the heat of an election, as the member well knows. I got the phone call. Yes, in retrospect I should have invited him down. I should have had the police investigating, and so on. In the heat of an election, quite frankly, there is not the time to deal with that kind of nonsense. We just put it aside and moved on to the election.

There was no attempt to mislead. I was simply stating a fact. I got a phone call. That was the request. Voter cards did exist in that election, but they were not to be used as primary ID. I was not misleading anyone about anything.

I appreciate the member thinking that I am smart enough to be that Machiavellian, but it is simply nonsense.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to elaborate a little further, because what we essentially have here, raised under the point of order, is actually a debate as to the issue that is in the legislation.

Government Orders

There are some very important facts, though, that have been omitted from the submission. The first fact that was omitted from the submission, and the wording was used very carefully, was that cards like this were not used by Elections Canada for identification at the time, the implication being that there were no such cards. However, there were voter information cards sent out by Elections Canada to electors at that time. They did receive them. Hence the phone call that the hon. member received.

Having been Minister for Democratic Reform in the period after 2006, I can say that the reason Elections Canada can say with certainty that they were not authorized for use as identification is that we had not yet passed into law the requirement for people to show identification when they voted, so of course they were not used for a provision that did not yet exist in the law.

The fact that they were not used for that purpose is a red herring. It is entirely irrelevant. Everybody knows what the practice was in those days. There was no requirement to show identification. What most people did was walk in, take the card they had received at their home, present it, and say that they were there to vote. There was no inquiry into whether that was who they were or not. Elections officials simply accepted the card, and people voted on that basis.

That is why the action to which the hon. member for Edmonton Centre was referring was one whereby somebody was saying that they knew a way that they could probably achieve fraud. The reason they knew this was that anybody who lived in an apartment and who threw away their card was unlikely to bother showing up to vote, so there was a good chance someone else could show up in their name, present their card, and vote.

When we look at all those facts, it is quite clear that nothing the hon. member for Edmonton Centre said was incorrect or misleading in any way. In fact, if someone is misleading right now, it is the individual who is trying to raise the question of privilege. He is the one who is misleading the House, because he is implying there were voter identification provisions that did not exist in the law at the time and he is implying that Elections Canada did not send out such cards, which at that time they did.

I would say that this is an open-and-shut case. There is no question of privilege here to be presented. This is a very different matter from what was raised earlier in the House.

• (1055)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the point being raised by the member for Winnipeg North.

While there may be some merit to it, on behalf of the official opposition I would like to indicate that we reserve the opportunity to comment at a later point in time. We just have not had the opportunity to consider the merits in detail.

The Speaker: I do understand the hon. member's desire to weigh in on this matter, but allow me to save him the trouble.

After listening to the statements by the member for Winnipeg North and the response from the member for Edmonton Centre, there certainly is not anything before the Chair as to any kind of evidence that the member knowingly said anything that he knew at the time not to be true.

This seems to be a dispute as to what may or may not have happened in the 2006 election, but there is certainly nothing that would indicate to the Chair that the member has knowingly misled the House. Members are free to have this kind of debate when the bill is back in the House and at committee. I do not think it should be brought to the floor as debate continued under the guise of a question of privilege, because there is not anything that I have heard that would raise it to that level.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, as reported with amendments from the committee.

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

Hon. Khristinn Kellie Leitch (for the Minister of Natural Resources) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Hon. Khristinn Kellie Leitch (for the Minister of Natural Resources) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to add my voice to support this worthy legislation.

[English]

If there is one thing our government has been crystal clear about when it comes to energy development, it is that public health and safety and environmental protection are paramount. This is the very essence of reasonable resource development.

There is no question we are determined to create high-quality jobs, economic growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians, and the energy sector has certainly delivered that to Atlantic Canadians in recent years.

Government Orders

Since the oil and gas industry began operating offshore in Newfoundland and Labrador in the late 1960s, the region's economy has been transformed. In 2010, the industry generated wages, salaries, and benefits worth \$291 million in the province of Newfoundland alone. Not only does the sector clearly make a major contribution to the livelihoods of workers, but it also improves the standard of living of all residents in the region, and there is also no debate that we recognize that it would be irresponsible to promote development without the assurance that the health and safety of our citizens and the protection of our environment will be fully addressed. That is precisely what Bill C-5 is designated to do. It would better safeguard Atlantic offshore oil and gas workers.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers reports that over 5,000 individuals are currently employed in the oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. Almost 1,000 more work in Nova Scotia's petroleum sector, and the potential is great for even more jobs and economic growth in the near future. Recent offshore oil and gas discoveries are bringing a new wave of activity into the Atlantic provinces.

There is all the more reason, then, for Bill C-5. Workers in the industry need to be protected, given the dangerous conditions associated frequently with their jobs.

Under the Canada Labour Code, workers are protected from hazards in the workplace. This protection includes the fundamental right to refuse dangerous work. As was underscored by the tragic March 2009 crash of Cougar flight 491 ferrying oil workers to offshore rigs and by the catastrophic sinking of the *Ocean Ranger* oil rig in 1982, worker safety must be job number one.

I can assure the House that our government is committed to ensuring the health and safety of Canadian workers and the protection of the environment. That is why we are introducing this new regime for Atlantic offshore workplaces.

[Translation]

Before outlining these improvements in detail, let me first explain where the federal government fits in this picture.

• (1100)

[English]

The Government of Canada shares responsibility for the management of the offshore with the Governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. These responsibilities are laid out in bilateral accords with each province, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act.

Canada's Atlantic offshore oil and gas industry is regulated by the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board, as well as the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. These boards ensure that operators and drilling contractors comply with the requirements of their respective implementation acts and exercise due diligence to prevent spills in Canada's offshore.

The Atlantic accords have been in place since the 1980s and are no longer sufficient to reflect contemporary requirements. They require modernization. The labour program, along with representatives from Natural Resources Canada, provincial energy and labour

departments, and the provinces' offshore petroleum boards have identified and agreed to key areas for improvement.

First, the legislation places authority for occupational health and safety within the accord acts. If adopted, this legislation would establish an occupational health and safety framework within the Atlantic accord acts.

[Translation]

The new regime would apply to worker safety on-site at offshore rigs, as well as to workers in transit to or from offshore platforms.

[English]

The new regime would apply both to worker safety on site at an offshore rig as well as to workers in transit to or from an offshore platform. It would be jointly overseen by the Minister of Natural Resources and provincial occupational health and safety ministers for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

[Translation]

It would be enforced by their individual offshore petroleum boards.

[English]

The boards would be responsible for verifying that companies have adequate plans in place to protect their employees and to avoid dangers. This includes everything from ensuring the safe handling of hazardous materials to proper procedures related to the operation of equipment and managing facilities. Using audits and inspections, we would confirm that all applicable health and safety requirements were met and demand correction if deficiencies were found. As well, the boards would be granted increased authority, such as enforcement powers for occupational health and safety officers.

[Translation]

These include the powers of inspection and investigation, warrant provisions and creative sentencing measures in case of dangerous situations.

• (1105)

[English]

Under Bill C-5, the Minister of Labour would provide ongoing federal labour expertise, such as the development of regulations, the issuance of directives to the boards, and recommendations on the appointments of special officers.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Special officers would be appointed to avoid a serious, imminent risk to the health and safety of offshore workers.

[English]

Such a scenario would proceed following joint approval and appointment by the pertinent provincial ministers and the Minister of Natural Resources, following a recommendation by the Minister of Labour.

Along with the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of Labour would also co-appoint six members of a 13-member advisory council to be made up of employers, employees, and the two levels of government. The council would provide a forum for the exchange of ideas about occupational health and safety issues to ensure the effectiveness of this legislation.

Bill C-5 also introduces consequential amendments to part II of the Canada Labour Code. In the event of an accident, the bill would extend the time limit to launch a prosecution from one year to two years, consistent with the occupational health and safety legislation in many provinces. The Minister of Labour would also have the right to disclose information to the public regarding occupational health and safety.

The amendments would also give the Minister of Labour the authority to share information with federal and provincial government departments as well as with international organizations if the minister deems it to be in the interests of occupational health and safety or in the public interest overall. This would make it easier to share information during a coroner's inquest or a provincial prosecution. I want to be clear, however, that personal information would continue to be protected.

I should point out several minor amendments to the legislation since it has been debated at second reading.

Most amendments are technical in nature, such as putting the word "Canada" in the title of the regulations and renumbering the subtexts of the act that were incorrectly numbered.

Some were needed to harmonize federal and provincial legislation. For instance, we had to replace the provincial "Occupational Health and Safety Act" in Nova Scotia with the correct new name of its Labour Board Act, as this province has amended its legislation recently. Federal and provincial legislation obviously must mirror each other.

Several amendments were required as a result of Bill C-4, the second budget implementation act, and changes to part II of the Canada Labour Code.

The changes proposed under the Canada Labour Code would make coordinating amendments. "Minister of Labour" would now replace the terms "health and safety officer" or "regional health and safety officer" to reflect the minister's authority to delegate powers, duties, and functions previously conferred to health and safety officers. Let me be clear that through the delegation process, decisions will continue to be made by health and safety officers with the necessary expertise.

Coordination is required around the protections within the code regarding the minister giving testimony in civil proceedings, and these amendments now refer to "civil and administrative proceedings", which include arbitration hearings.

The improvements I have outlined respond to input received in extensive consultations in 2010 and 2011. The provinces and industry and employee groups have all expressed strong support for the changes we have proposed. They have done so because they recognize that these changes would ensure that Canada's offshore industries will operate safely and to the highest environmental standards.

Bill C-5 would create a modern occupational health and safety regime that is relevant and responsive to today's offshore oil and gas reality, and, most importantly, it would provide robust protection for Canada's oil and gas workers, ensuring their safety and health in the workplace.

Thousands of Atlantic Canadian workers are looking to us to ensure their well-being and continued prosperity. Therefore, I urge all parties to support the bill and make these amendments the law of the land.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are supporting the legislation, but there is one serious problem with it that I wish to raise.

The minister mentioned the Cougar helicopter crash. Of course, following that, there was an inquiry by former Justice Wells as the lead commissioner. He made what he called his most important recommendation, number 29, that there ought to be an independent offshore safety regulator. The minister mentioned that the accords were bilateral agreements. The Newfoundland government firmly and strongly supported that recommendation, yet the government failed to agree. Not only did it fail to agree to that, it also failed to agree to an NDP amendment proposed at committee to have a 5-year review of that provision to see how the act is operating and reconsider that request. Why did the government refuse to do that?

• (1110)

Hon. Khristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as has been mentioned before, our government will continue to work with the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador with respect to the safety of these offshore areas.

Commissioner Wells was actually very clear at the natural resources committee in December, when he said that he was pleased with our offshore health and safety legislation. He was also very clear that good would come from the government's adoption of his recommendations. I encourage the members opposite to please read through the transcripts and be informed about what specifically was said at committee.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that in my riding of London North Centre, jobs and safety are very important to my constituents. Just recently, I was happy to attend a joint announcement by GDLS and the Minister of International Trade of one of the largest contracts in the history of Canada, one that will result in the employment of over 3,000 people.

Government Orders

In the minister's speech, she mentioned that we need better safeguards, that workers need protection and that their safety is number one. Here, could the minister explain how important the offshore oil and gas industry is to Canada and what would be the most effective change in Bill C-5.

Hon. Kristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for London North Centre for really focusing on jobs. This is a huge component of what we are trying to achieve here. Whether it be the almost 5,000 individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador, or the over 1,000 individuals in Nova Scotia, this will have a direct impact on them by ensuring that we are growing the oil and gas economy in Atlantic Canada and reaching out not only directly to those employees, but also via the spinoff benefits to the individuals who are beneficiaries of this.

Specifically with respect to these accords, the health and safety of all Canadian workers is paramount. If individuals cannot attend work knowing they are in a safe environment, where they can work safely throughout the entire day, and from where they can return to their families in the evenings, quite frankly with their lives and all of their fingers and toes intact, it makes it very challenging for them to be productive at work. The direction of these accords is first to make sure that those workers on oil and gas rigs in Atlantic Canada know they are safe and that they can have a productive day and, second, that the industry overall is safe so that we can continue to grow it and create more jobs in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the minister's speech she referred to the *Ocean Ranger* disaster. Following that particular disaster, Chief Justice Hickman headed a royal commission on the *Ocean Ranger*. There are still some outstanding recommendations from Chief Justice Hickman's report of almost 20 years ago.

When putting the bill together, did the government look at any of the recommendations of Chief Justice Alex Hickman's royal commission on the *Ocean Ranger* disaster?

Hon. Kristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the specific report, I would have to ask my officials, since I do not have a note on that. However, extensive consultations have taken place since 2003, which were updated in 2010 and 2011. Employers, employees, and governments have all been consulted and are very supportive of what is going forward. We will continue to update the regulations associated with this to make sure that we are meeting the standards of the day.

I appreciate the member's comments and I would be quite happy to get back to him with a specific answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the minister would refuse to answer a very simple question. I will try to ask it in the simplest way possible.

Why was recommendation 29 from the Wells report not included in Bill C-5? It is a simple question. Can she answer it?

[English]

Hon. Kristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, I think I answered this question, which was that Mr. Wells

was very clear at the Natural Resources committee in December that he was pleased with the offshore health and safety legislation that currently exists.

• (1115)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for carefully outlining the aspect of Bill C-5 dealing primarily with the occupational health and safety issue. She also responded earlier to a question regarding the number of workers who benefit from oil and gas production on offshore rigs.

I think that Canadians probably often think of the oil sands as the place from where all the oil is coming. I wonder if the minister would tell us what percentage of oil from offshore oil and gas development Canadians rely on.

I think it is important to realize not only the impact of oil on jobs and opportunities for Canadians, but also the energy needs of Canadians. It is important, first of all, that we have good, safe regulations to protect our workers. It is also important that we have access to good quality oil products.

Hon. Kristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, having grown up in a part of the country that is known for being the focal point of oil refining and development, northern Alberta and Fort McMurray, I am delighted to know that many of the individuals helping to grow Canada's economy are Atlantic Canadians.

The offshore contributes significantly to our nation's production, including 35% of Canada's total light crude production and close to 10% of Canada's total crude production 2010. These are substantial numbers that are driving the economies of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as contributing to Nova Scotia's economy.

The statistics are very clear. These activities represented 30% of Newfoundland and Labrador's GDP in 2010 and roughly 3% of Nova Scotia's GDP in the same timeframe. It directly employs over 5,100 Canadians.

The oil and gas sector in Atlantic Canada is growing. It is great for Canadians, it is great for Atlantic Canadians, and it is great for individuals to know they are contributing so substantially to the Canadian economy and making sure there are jobs at home supporting thousands of Atlantic Canadians.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have raised the issue of an independent regulator a number of times. As my colleague for St. John's East said, it was an important recommendation in Commissioner Wells' report. We have supported the bill because it is an improvement over the current situation. Nonetheless, this is something that needs to be addressed.

At committee, the NDP moved an amendment to ask for a ministerial review of the effectiveness of these changes within five years. The commissioner had indicated that while the bill was an improvement, it might not answer everything and that there might be a need to address in the future and to make revisions at a later point in time. Also, having an independent regulator is something that other nations doing similar work have done. Therefore, why would the minister not be willing to support an amendment that would allow the minister to do a review within five years?

Government Orders

Let us remember that we are trying to ensure the safety of the men and women who work in this industry and to fully protect us from environmental disasters.

Hon. Khristinn Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, I think the committee testimony was quite clear.

The regulatory process has begun and we will be continuing the development of regulations following the passage of the bill. Provisions within the proposed amendments require that the regulations be completed within the next five years, and we are continuing to receive input.

However, whether it be the government or others, we are always open to constructive input that provides opportunities to improve the health and safety of Canadians. If opposition members or other Canadians have recommendations that we should be considering, I encourage them to send them to me.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak at third reading on Bill C-5, an important piece of legislation for the Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia offshore petroleum industries, which are extremely important not only to Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, but also to Canada, as pointed out by previous speakers.

As was said, the industry produces 35% of Canadian light crude production, is a significant contributor to our oil industry, and has made a significant difference to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are proud of the very strong industry that we have and the contribution it makes to our workforce and our industry, to our universities, our education system, as well as to the lives of people who are able to earn a very good living from its development.

It has been a positive experience, but we also know that work on the offshore is inherently dangerous. We have had very sad reminders of that in the past. The *Ocean Ranger* disaster in February 1982 was mentioned, where 84 offshore workers were drowned in a serious disaster, where a rig engaged in exploration of the offshore in Newfoundland sank and, of course, most recently, the Cougar Helicopter crash in 2009 with the loss of 17 lives. There was another helicopter crash in the late 1980s. So we do know that we have an industry with a lot of opportunity for injury as well as loss of life, as we have sadly seen.

That is what the bill is about. The bill would put in place a safety regime in legislation, believe it or not, for the first time in the offshore. What we have had up until now is a set of draft regulations. It is almost hard to believe that the entire offshore in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia was operated under a set of draft regulations, under some theory that if we had the draft regulations it would force the employers, the industry players, and the companies to follow them as if they were guidelines.

However, there were no enforcement mechanisms. The only enforcement mechanisms were to put a stop work order on the rig. But that was an all or nothing situation. One could not actually go and inspect and find someone who had violated a provision and use those rules to make an improvement, to issue a fine, and use the same regulatory process used in health and safety to ensure compliance with the rules.

I have some experience with offshore workers. In my life as a lawyer, I represented Newfoundland and Labrador offshore oil workers in their efforts to obtain union representation and recognition. They in fact became the first offshore oil workers in North America to achieve collective bargaining. Of course, important aspects of collective bargaining include wages and working conditions, but there was also an extreme level of interest in the process of safety committees, how safety was being managed by these companies and employers, and on the part of employees and their elected organizations in participating fully in this process.

We have seen as well a very significant delay in the implementation of significant recommendations that came, for example, from the *Ocean Ranger* disaster. One of them was that an emergency helicopter should be stationed in the area closest to the offshore and be available on up to 45 minutes' notice. That was not implemented. That recommendation was made in 1985 and it did not become implemented until the last year or so, after Justice Wells stated that he wanted this to happen immediately. We now have a standby helicopter at St. John's available to wheel up in 20 minutes any time another helicopter is in the area transporting workers back and forth to the oil platforms and drilling platforms. That took 20 or 30 years to be put in place.

• (1120)

The negotiations with respect to this legislation have been going on for 13 years. It is astonishing.

With the minister having said that this is a top priority and that job one is the health and safety of offshore workers, the delays that have taken place and the length of time that it has taken to get these regulations in place are shocking. That is something that the workers are quite concerned about, and have been for many years.

We still have concerns, and the workers have concerns, about the use of night flights for helicopters. Former Justice Wells, during the course of the helicopter inquiry, issued an interim recommendation that there be no more night flights. Evidence had been presented to the helicopter inquiry that it is significantly more difficult to rescue people at night and that the rate of loss of life when a helicopter ditches at night is some 65% to 70% higher than if the ditching happens in the daylight. As a result of his recommendation, the C-NLOPB stopped night flights. The companies are now seeking to return to night flights, and there is strong opposition to that from many quarters, including the workers and the workers representatives; so we still see ongoing issues and problems.

Government Orders

However, I want to reiterate that we support this legislation because it was pushed by the workers' representatives who were involved both directly in the offshore and also with the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. They participated in these negotiations in Nova Scotia. They worked to ensure that the same kinds of safety regimes that exist on land, in terms of the right of a worker to refuse unsafe work and to participate in health and safety committees, are now parallel in the offshore. That is an achievement. Therefore, it is not a surprise that people support this legislation; it is an advance over what is there today. The regulations would be in place. They would be enforceable. There would be a system for that and a more rigorous involvement of worker representatives in health and safety committees. That is a success.

Therefore, we support it. We have supported it through committee. We did want improvements. I will provide an example of the kind of evidence the committee heard from witnesses. I would like to quote from the presentation by Lana Payne, who is the Atlantic director for Unifor at the moment but was the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour for a number of years.

In her testimony before the committee, she said:

...we are pleased that we finally have this safety regime for workers of the offshore oil industry, but we do believe that a stand-alone, powerful, and independent safety and environmental authority is not only necessary but also essential in advancing safety in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore oil and gas industry.

That was her testimony before the committee on December 9 of last year. That echoes recommendation number 29 of Mr. Justice Wells, which he characterized as his most important recommendation. He did that based on his study of regimes in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Norway. Even the United States has recognized the necessity of having a separate regime so that the health and safety of offshore workers is dealt with separately in the regulation of the industry, which involves quite a lot of collaborative work back and forth. The concern is what Mr. Justice Wells called regulatory capture.

• (1125)

That is a phrase used to describe what can happen if the regulator becomes very close to the industry it is regulating and ends up not being able to be independent and provide the sole priority of looking after the health and safety of workers.

That is why this recommendation was made and that is why these countries that have mature oil and gas regimes, such as Norway and the U.K. in the North Sea, have adopted it as a result of learning that it was necessary to make sure they had, as Lana Payne has so eloquently put it, "...a stand-alone, powerful, and independent safety and environmental authority...". That is what is required. The Newfoundland government supported that recommendation. We have a truly bilateral event here. We have not been given an explanation by the minister as to why the Government of Canada has said no. Why has it said no? The government has not provided any rationale in the minister's speech today, despite two questions to the minister—or was it three?—asking why that was.

Mr. Justice Wells still supports his recommendations. The Government of Newfoundland is very adamant that it wants to see a stand-alone offshore safety body that can handle safety and health

issues, and we would add environment to that, as well, as Lana Payne has pointed out.

We do have reservations, obviously, about this. We thought that at least the government would recognize, if it was not going to adopt recommendation number 29 and put in place a stand-alone review, and accept the amendment, which is:

The Minister of Natural Resources must cause to be laid before each House of Parliament, not later than five years after this Act comes into force, a report on the operation and implementation of this Act, including whether an independent offshore area regulator is desirable.

That would require this notion of the independent safety regulator to be foremost in the mind of the government as we go forward and, in five years, report to Parliament: "What can you tell us about the operation of this act, in light of the recommendation for an independent regulator? Can you show us that it has operated well without that? Or have you been able to conclude that an offshore separate regulator is available?"

That was an important effort and we thought that, from the point of view of government operations, particularly in light of the strong recommendation that has come forward and the strong support of the Newfoundland government, the partner in this, we would see agreement on that at least. But, no, it got very short shrift at the committee from the government members without really any effort to justify why they were not accepting that.

However, that is not unusual from the current government. It is not unusual for us to go to committee with cogent arguments, with witness support, with experts and expertise, and time and again this happens in committees with the current government.

It has not always been like that. I was here with another government, a Progressive Conservative government, back in the 1980s. We had committee meetings. We offered suggestions. We made amendments. The amendments were debated. Some were accepted; some were rejected. It was a somewhat more collegial effort, shall we say, than we have in committee with the current government.

Anything the government proposes has to be perfect. It must be perfect. Of course, it is perfect until it realizes it has made some mistakes and then it brings in a bunch of amendments itself, as it did in this case. I think it brought forward 10 at the end of the day: "Oh, we've got to fix this, this, and this"; but if anybody else makes a suggestion: "Oh, no. It's perfect as it is. We don't need to change anything because, of course, we wouldn't bring anything forward if it wasn't right and proper".

That is an unfortunate attitude. I do not know whether it represents paranoia, immaturity, lack of confidence, or just sheer pigheadedness, but the current government does not seem to recognize that any good suggestions can come from any location other than its side of the House, or maybe from the PMO.

Government Orders

●(1130)

Maybe all suggestions must flow from the PMO instead of members opposite who are listening to what is said in committee, accepting that the arguments make sense, and agreeing that the legislation may need to be amended slightly to make it better.

That is the theory of debate and amendment. Amendments are made to improve legislation, not to change it so that it would do something different from what was intended. If an amendment goes against the original intention of the legislation, it is ruled out of order. The only amendments acceptable in parliamentary procedure are ones that are within the scope of the bill and are offered by way of improvement to better achieve the purposes of the bill.

The purpose of this legislation is to have an offshore health and safety regime that reflects the needs of the people in the industry and the industry itself. Its purpose is to have a robust safety regime that ensures the safety of all workers and that ensures that the operation can be done properly, as the minister mentioned, both on site and also in transit back and forth to the oil platforms and rigs.

It has been pointed out that three rigs are presently in operation and another one is in the works, which should be operating by 2017. The Hebron-Ben Nevis field is farther out, some 400 kilometres offshore, which is a very grave distance. Helicopters fly out there in all sorts of sea conditions—obviously not in too inclement weather—that make it difficult to ditch an aircraft, if that becomes necessary. In this case, the helicopter that is being used is the only helicopter of its class that does not have a 30-minute run dry capability, which is when the main gearbox loses oil. It is required that a helicopter be able to operate for 30 minutes with a total loss of oil in the main gearbox. That requirement is for significant safety reasons. It is a requirement for military helicopters, some of which will run dry for an hour or more, but the minimum standard is 30 minutes.

When Sikorsky designed this helicopter, it received an exemption on the basis that this would never happen, or that the chances of it ever happening were remote, one in ten million hours. In the first 100,000 flying hours of helicopters of this type it happened twice, in Australia in the summer of 2008 and in the offshore of Newfoundland in March of 2009. In Australia, the helicopter was fortunately over land and the pilots could land it quickly to avoid a disaster. The second time it tragically happened in the offshore of Newfoundland. Unfortunately the documentation for this aircraft suggested that it did have 30-minute run dry capability. The helicopter pilots were heading for land, expecting to have 30 minutes to get there, but they had less than 12 minutes. The helicopter seized up and crash-landed into the ocean, causing the loss of 17 of the 18 people onboard. Miraculously, one person survived that crash.

As has been said, this is a significant step forward. We would have an enforceable health and safety regime in the offshore. Workers would have the right to refuse unsafe work and participate on health and safety committees. Hopefully, we will have a good regime that will work. Unfortunately, we do not have the independent safety regulator that was recommended by Commissioner Wells and supported by the government and people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the offshore workers themselves. Unfortunately, the government will not commit to reviewing that in five years. However, we do support the legislation.

●(1135)

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. John's East for his intervention and acknowledge that he has been around this file on the offshore for some time. I am going to lean on him for his knowledge and expertise in this matter to follow up on a question that I tried to ask the minister regarding the *Ocean Ranger* and Chief Justice Alex Hickman's commission.

The report had 136 recommendations to improve the offshore oil industry. The government has only implemented 90 of those 136. That leaves 46 recommendations unfulfilled from that particular inquiry. My question is whether any of the 46 recommendations have made their way into this legislation to improve the offshore off of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

We talked about the other inquiry, and there were two recommendations left out, but I am curious about the *Ocean Ranger* inquiry. Have any of the 46 recommendations that have been left undone made their way into this legislation at all?

●(1140)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I have been involved for a long time. In fact, I participated in the *Ocean Ranger* inquiry when it was launched in 1982, as a new young lawyer in St. John's, in Newfoundland and Labrador. A great deal of effort and anxiety went into coming up with these recommendations.

Unfortunately, as the member pointed out, the recommendation of having a rescue helicopter available was, shockingly, not implemented until after the Cougar helicopter crashed, more than 25 years after the recommendations were made.

I do not have a compendium of all of the recommendations. Clearly, the *Ocean Ranger* recommendation is now in place. It was not thanks to this legislation, but it was thanks to the recommendation of former Justice Wells that we have the helicopter for search and rescue purposes. There are outstanding recommendations, as the hon. member has pointed out, and they should be attended to. An evacuation system is a recommendation that has been worked on over the years. I do not think that we have the right system yet. There are still other recommendations that need to be looked at.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously we are biased in favour of this bill and we will support it because we always get behind worker health and safety measures. It is sad that, as usual, nothing changes until someone dies. I am not saying that is always the case, but it is often the case.

Government Orders

I have a question for my hon. colleague about the bill before us. Big changes have been made and we are moving in the right direction, but now we are up against one of this government's ideological impediments, which is that private industry should self-regulate. We have seen this in other sectors, such as rail transportation. Is that why Justice Wells' recommendation to create an independent worker safety authority—which was probably the most important recommendation—is not in this bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, and particularly for his observation about how the Conservative government has been working with respect to recommendations of a health and safety nature.

Safety does cost money. We have seen the resistance by industry to advances that cost money. They obviously do not want to spend money where they do not have to. It does require a government that is vigorous in insisting that the things that need to happen do happen, for the sake of offshore worker safety. We see some of that here, but we do not see it going far enough.

The night flights offshore are a good example. Why do we need night flights? We need them so we can operate the same number of helicopters for a greater period of time. The alternative is to have more helicopters. If we had an extra helicopter, we would not have to fly at night. However, extra helicopters cost money. There has to be a crew.

There is a trade-off being urged between worker safety and cost. We would clearly prefer to come down on the side of worker safety. If night flights are more dangerous, we should be able to insist that there are more helicopters in place. If helicopters that have a run-dry capability of 30 minutes are available, then they should be used, not the ones that do not have the capability. They may cost more money and there may be a cost in replacing them, but the value of the lives and safety of workers has to take precedence over that. We do not see that kind of attitude coming from the Conservative government.

• (1145)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the intervention by my friend from St. John's East.

You spoke, I thought very eloquently about your work in committee and the fact that there was no statutory—

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind the member for Victoria to direct his comments to the Chair, not to other members.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, through you, the member for St. John's East made a very eloquent statement about the nature of the work at committee on this matter and the fact that the government rejected the notion of a five-year review. Having worked on committees in which that five-year process has been required, such as under the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, and having seen a Progressive Conservative government release a unanimous committee report with recommendations, I saw first-hand the utility of such a statutory review.

My question is twofold. Given that this bill requires agreement with the two provinces at issue, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, would the Conservatives find such a statutory review acceptable after a five-year period? I would like to also know why

the government would reject the notion of a five-year review in these circumstances.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention and compliments from my learned friend and colleague for my speech, but I think he knows that I cannot answer why the Conservatives would reject it, other than to speculate.

There appears to be an unfortunate lack of collegiality at committee. Politicians obviously posture, especially in the House of Commons, but in committees one would expect to have a greater level of collegiality. In some committees there is that collegiality. I am looking at the prominent member of the fisheries committee, which has had collegiality as an operating principle over many years. However, when it comes to dealing with legislation, we do not see the collegiality that should exist to improve and make things happen.

That was a reasonable—though I would not call it a compromise. New Democrats were not going to get what we wanted. However, the committee should have been able to put that on the radar of the current government, or the next government. It may not be the current government. We are hoping it will not be the Conservative government, but it might be. Whatever government is in place, it would be on the radar of that government that this should be looked at. The bureaucracy and those involved would then look forward to this happening in five-years' time and be able to prepare to deal with that.

It is very unfortunate. That is all I can say. I do not know why that is, except stubbornness. Whatever is in the legislation that Conservatives put there is all that they want to do.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on Bill C-5. This is the second day this week that the House has debated legislation that impacts activities in the offshore sector, which, to those of us in Atlantic Canada, like my colleague the member for St. John's East, who just spoke, and the member for Avalon, who asked him a question, is very important. It is very important to our economy and to the people who work in the offshore sector who benefit from that. It is very important that they are safe in the work they do and in travelling to and from the offshore platforms.

The offshore sector can be a dangerous place. I know there are many measures taken to make it as safe as possible, but it is tough work. It can be dangerous work, and we have seen unfortunate proof of that over the years. In fact, there are brave men and women working out there every day performing very challenging work.

[*Translation*]

Making sure that these people are safe in their workplaces and that they return home to their families must be a priority for all of us. Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction.

However, I hope the government will actually listen to experts on Bill C-22, which we debated on Tuesday, because it did not listen to experts with respect to Bill C-5, which we are discussing today.

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• (1150)

[English]

When the House was debating second reading of Bill C-5, the member for Burnaby—Douglas asked if I thought the legislation went far enough in addressing the concerns of the Wells royal commission.

I did not, and I do not. One concern I have with Bill C-5 is that it did not adopt recommendation 29 of the Wells commission report, which flowed from a terrible helicopter crash off Newfoundland. That was already discussed a bit this morning.

My hope was that when the bill went to committee there would be consideration given to an amendment to adopt recommendation 29, which called for a separate organization to look at the question of workers' health and safety, an organization solely dedicated to that absolutely vital task.

Commissioner Wells testified at the committee last fall that he "felt that an independent safety authority was the best choice.". Commissioner Wells went on to add that he did not think everyone would agree with the recommendation. That is reasonable. He included a fallback position, which was to create a separate safety division within the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. Of course, this legislation would also apply to the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board.

While the fallback position was adopted, in my view it falls short of what is needed. It is yet another missed opportunity by this neo-Conservative government. Unfortunately, Bill C-5 was reported back to the House of Commons with only a few technical amendments which correct inaccurate wording in a number of clauses.

It was also very unfortunate, in my view, that the Conservatives on the committee would not support efforts to provide greater clarity on the word "danger" in the act. That word is particularly important, and the meaning of it is particularly important in this kind of legislation.

Under this legislation, certain terms such as "danger" are not defined in this bill. They remain to be defined by federal regulation on the recommendation of the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Labour, and with the approval of provincial ministers.

In committee, I introduced a proposed amendment calling for consultations with the provinces and key stakeholders on the definition of "dangerous work", something that we have heard is important. I felt it would coincide with the testimony we heard in committee about the importance of consulting on this question of the word "danger". That is critical for all parts of the offshore oil and gas industry, and the men and women who work in our offshore.

While this legislation does push the yardsticks and while it is a move in the right direction, it could have been better. It could have been strengthened. It should have been amended. As legislators, that is our job. It is our job not only to examine these carefully, to look for ways to improve them, but also to hear the evidence, hear the experts, and reflect on that expert evidence and testimony and make the appropriate changes. We are not simply here to do whatever the kids in short pants in the Prime Minister's Office tell us or order the Conservatives to do.

We are often asked to strike a careful balance between economic success in the oil and gas sector, the rights of employees and, of course, environmental concerns. Bill C-5 is one of the many tools to achieve this balance, and I believe the Canadian Parliament, including members in the House of Commons, ought to strive to set an example to the rest of the world by clearly indicating that we value human capital at least as much as the wealth we derive from our natural resources. That is why the Liberal Party has supported this bill.

Bill C-5 will effectively solve the issue of jurisdiction surrounding occupational health and safety in Canada's offshore oil and gas industry. It was not clear until now—which became very clear after the terrible helicopter accident off Newfoundland when it was unclear which level of government had responsibility and jurisdiction. This will solve that issue and that is important. That is an important step forward, which has taken over 10 years to realize.

The legislation would also create a streamlined process for rectifying health and safety issues and to assign responsibility. That is important because we do not want to have any doubt about jurisdiction if there is an accident in the offshore. An issue of the utmost importance is our capacity to respond to an accident or spill in the offshore. However, that is a debate for another day, and I hope we will have opportunities to do that.

This legislation is focused on the right to a safe workplace. It is an important right and a right that all Canadians must enjoy. Many of us as Canadians, and certainly those of us as members of Parliament, have a very safe work environment and are very fortunate in the kind of work we do. For the most part, it is indoor work and a lot of it is desk work or standing up work, but it sure is not in conditions some workers across this country face, by any means.

If we think of working outside on a cold day like this, or of the folks in Atlantic Canada—and I look across to my colleagues from New Brunswick and consider our families back home and other families in Atlantic Canada, digging out from a terrible storm and still experiencing terrible wind, some of them without power, and consider the folks from the power companies and snowplow drivers and others out there who are working to get things back to normal—we should feel pretty fortunate to be working in a place like this with the kind of jobs that we have.

Though a safe workplace is not the reality for all Canadians, governments have worked with stakeholder groups in the past to improve conditions faced by Canadians in their places of employment.

Government Orders

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

That, obviously, is incredibly important work. Bill C-5 is an example of these efforts—in this case, the joint efforts of the provincial and federal levels working together, which does not happen often enough. Indeed, this government is not known for working with provincial governments. However, it is our collective responsibility, whether as a legislative body, employers or employees, or society as a whole, to ensure that the right to a safe work environment is respected.

[*English*]

It is absolutely vital. The conditions for employees on offshore drilling projects should be comparable to those on land-based projects. There is no question that a drilling rig, whether offshore or onshore, can be a very dangerous environment.

I think employees and their families can be confident that what is proposed in Bill C-5, as far as it goes, would improve the health and safety regimes of our offshore oil and gas projects. However, members of my party believe we still need to ensure that the separation of health and safety concerns from those of production and economic viability occur. Justice Wells made that very clear in much more eloquent language than I.

We recognize that these two issues are very different things, but one trumps the other, and health and safety comes first. We need to make sure that, when necessary, those health and safety concerns are paramount, as they ought to be.

Bill C-5 should guarantee that the proposed chief safety officer has powerful methods of inquiry to hold operators to account. A regime of self-regulation, in our view, would be insufficient. I have already said that we do not think the chief safety officer approach is necessarily ideal. There are other things that Commissioner Wells recommended, but since that is what we are going with, let us try to make it as strong as possible.

The chief safety officer must not be influenced in decision-making by concerns of economic viability or by political pressure, which should be obvious. This individual must be a champion of a healthy and safe environment for all employees who work in our offshore oil and gas industry, or in any of those kinds of projects.

Bill C-5 has survived changes in governing parties at both the federal and provincial levels. It has received clear provincial support, and legislatures in both Nova Scotia and in Newfoundland and Labrador have given the bill's mirror legislation assent, in short order. By supporting Bill C-5, we have the opportunity to improve upon legislation that has already met some of the concerns of the provinces.

If we take into account all the elements of employee health and safety, the original offshore accords, and Bill C-5 itself in those bills, this could provide the model for future negotiations between the federal government and other provinces, like Quebec for example, that are looking to develop their oil and gas sectors.

Let me conclude by noting that while Bill C-5 is a step forward, we should recognize that more work needs to be done. Hopefully, we will not have to wait another decade for that to occur.

It is not new to Canadians that our country places great economic importance on the development of natural resources. Forest products, natural gas, hydro electricity, and oil and gas are cornerstones of our export market and contribute immensely to the creation of jobs, which, of course, we believe is very important. We want Canadians to have a good quality of life that comes with jobs and opportunity. However, let us make sure that those resources are developed in a responsible and sustainable way. Let us recognize that occupational health and safety must be paramount.

• (1200)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. member for his comments on this very important piece of legislation.

I would like to reinforce the points that the member has made, in that both provinces have already given royal assent to their respective bills to enact these changes. They have been waiting patiently for Bill C-5 to pass through our Parliament for the new regime to come into force.

I want to confirm what I thought I heard the member say, that he and his colleagues will definitely allow for this legislation to finally come into force so that workers will not have to spend another day without these safety measures that Bill C-5 would bring.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for her question. However, as she heard from my speech, I do have some concerns about amendments that were not adopted by the committee and were not supported by her party.

As I said, we think this legislation is important because it is a step in the right direction. It moves the ball forward, even if it is not as good as we would like. Therefore, we are supporting the bill. We do not have any intention to slow it down.

I should point out, of course, that the Conservative government certainly has the means to move legislation faster than it has moved this legislation. Not a week has gone by, that I can recall, in which we have not seen at least one motion of time allocation or closure by the Conservative government. I do not know if it has used it 7,000 times, but I know it is well over 50, even by last fall. The Conservatives have used these measures far more than any other government in the history of this country. For them to talk about bills not moving fast enough is a little rich, but I appreciate the question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what my hon. colleague had to say. I have a question for him.

While I am no expert in the offshore sector, it seems to me that 10 years is a bit long to take to come up with the bill that is before us today. Far be it from me to simplify the complexity of such an issue.

Since this began in 2001, when the Liberals were in power, would it not have been possible to at least establish the independent regulator, as suggested in Justice Wells' recommendation 29?

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Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

I was not involved in the natural resources file during the period in question. I know that the provincial governments and the federal government finally discussed these issues after some time. I do find it strange, and rather astounding, that it has been 10 years. There are always various things at issue between the provincial governments and the federal government, and these complexities need to be discussed. I can understand that it might take two, three or four years, but 10 years is a very long time. I do not understand. Was it because of the change in governments? I do not know.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate, as always, the comments from the member for Halifax West and the perspective he brings to issues like this. He spent some time sitting on the other side, so perhaps he can lend a bit of perspective to this particular issue.

There are two things I am concerned about. Number one, which the member talked about, is that it took 13 years for the provincial and federal governments to finally come together and bring this bill forward, which is an awful delay.

Number two, at the same time, there are steps being made and progress being made to strengthen health and safety rules as they relate to offshore development work. Would the member not agree that it is likewise a serious deficiency in our ability to protect workers on the offshore, that the current government is continuing to hack and slash away at search and rescue capabilities; and that if, God forbid, there is ever any need, we have a shortage of search and rescue capabilities?

Could the member could comment on that issue?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, first, my understanding is that governments had been in discussion for 10 years on this legislation and that we have seen the same bill brought forward a few times now. Therefore, it is surprising to me that the Conservative government did not bring it forward more expeditiously, to get it done. The Conservatives could have done that a number of times over the last eight years they have been in government. As I understand it, there were discussions going on, and I am not sure why it was not sooner than that, but that is my understanding and my recollection.

However, on the question of search and rescue, the people I know who have some knowledge of search and rescue across the country have been very concerned about the Conservatives' attitude toward this area. Whether it is in the offshore, in our North or on either of the coasts and throughout the country, we have not seen the kind of interest. We have seen cutbacks to search and rescue. We have a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are very concerned about the lack of effective search and rescue equipment in that region and throughout the country. My hon. colleague has raised a very important point.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague who attended the committee hearings a question. There has been a lot of discussion about recommendation no. 29, the

recommendation made by Chief Justice Wells in his inquiry. The government is acknowledging that it is not putting it in this bill.

At committee, was it the stance of Chief Justice Wells that recommendation no. 29 was still an important recommendation?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, Commissioner Wells certainly made it clear that he believed it was an important recommendation. He talked about the circumstances of his report. I thought he was a very impressive witness. Many of us on the committee, in view of the work he did on that commission, felt a certain deference to his opinions. Nevertheless, the government has chosen not to adopt recommendation no. 29. I think that is unfortunate. In the future we ought to seriously look at separating that function of health and safety. Obviously, the government would not reconsider it now, at third reading of the bill. However, I hope the government would at least reflect on this question and look for ways to improve it in the future.

• (1210)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to go a little further on this whole question about how long it took to get to this stage because, unfortunately, we have had a number of disasters in our region that we can point to. There seems to be a pattern of delay before we implement the kind of legislation, rules, and enforcement regulations that we need to have in place to ensure that these things do not happen.

I wonder if my colleague from Nova Scotia, the member for Halifax West, would indicate to me what steps he and his government took when they were on the opposite side to correct these problems.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I know that the other parties like to go back eight, ten years, and so forth, and talk about what the Liberal government did at that time. It is quite a while ago now, so it is interesting that they continue to do that, but it is a good sign when they try to throw barbs in our direction and challenge us on things. They are certainly paying attention and must be concerned about our party.

The fact is, if we do go back that long, I was very engaged, particularly as the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, with concerns about search and rescue and the Coast Guard. I very strongly supported measures to improve the situation for our Coast Guard. In fact, we announced funding for new Coast Guard vessels, which took quite a while for the following government to bring to fruition.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to follow some of my colleagues in the debate on Bill C-5. Having been a member of the natural resources committee for eight years, and having now left it, this was the last major piece of work I had the opportunity to work on with my colleagues from all parties. Unfortunately, I had moved prior to getting to clause-by-clause review, which would have been interesting. Nonetheless, I got a chance to listen to a lot of the testimony before committee. We had some great witnesses. We had very cordial discussion and a lot of good feedback. It was a good committee experience.

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What I am going to talk about today is the importance of the offshore. I will spend a few moments on that. Then what I would like to do is to talk about what led to Bill C-5 and why it is important. Then I would like to talk about some of the major things the bill does and some of the comments made by Justice Wells.

Certainly, as a lot of people have said in testimony earlier today, we know how important natural resources are to our country, and specifically the east coast. As my colleague, the member for Halifax West, just pointed out a minute ago, we have a lot of people working on the offshore and the potential for expansion of that resource opportunity not only helps the folks in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, but also P.E.I. and New Brunswick, whether it be by providing services or by labourers actually going there. In some cases, it is a lot better trip for some of our families to be able to go to an east coast location, as opposed to travelling west.

For that reason, we want to continue to ensure that Canada's natural resource sectors remain open to investment that is market oriented and in the long-term interests of Canadians. We will ensure that the jobs, opportunities, and economic growth created by our natural wealth are available to all Canadians. In the Atlantic offshore, this wealth is chiefly in the energy sector, particularly oil and natural gas. The strength of Canada's energy sector is well established, but as strong as Canada's energy sector is today, it offers even greater potential for the future.

Canadians living in Atlantic Canada already know what a difference a strong energy industry can make to communities' quality of life. Offshore oil and gas has literally transformed the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. For example, in 2011, the energy sector in Newfoundland and Labrador employed nearly 5,000 people and accounted for roughly one-third of provincial nominal GDP. Between 1997 and 2013, the province collected about \$7.8 billion in statutory royalties from offshore oil and gas. Now, as we begin 2014, the future is even brighter. The offshore energy sector in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia is still growing and the industry continues to invest billions of dollars in new energy projects.

Our government supports energy infrastructure projects that will create jobs and generate economic growth for Canadians, but it will do so only if these projects can be proven to be safe for Canadians and only after we have the proper reviews.

Our commitment to responsible resource development is made for environmental reasons as well as economic ones. Our plan will ensure that there is stronger protection by introducing tough new financial penalties for companies that do not comply with environmental regulations, and establishes new measures to strengthen Canada's world class pipeline and marine safety regimes. However, we have to remember that one of the major regulatory items is to protect people through a rigorous offshore safety regime. That is why we introduced Bill C-5, to ensure that offshore industries can carry out their activities safely.

I would like to read into the record some testimony from Mr. Jeff Labonté, the director general of the energy safety and security branch at the Department of Natural Resources. He said:

The work on the legislative package before Parliament got under way almost a dozen years ago. It was following an accident in Nova Scotia in which a worker in a

workplace was killed. In that particular accident, the accord acts originally separated operational safety, the operations of the technical units and things that are happening in the offshore, which was imbedded within the accord acts, and occupational health and safety as a separate area which fell under the provincial jurisdiction.

All of a sudden, we had a grey area here where it was hard to determine who was actually responsible, what would happen and who would actually regulate this going forward. That led to a 12-year process and our Bill C-5.

• (1215)

The bill is approximately 260 to 270 pages long. Members who were on the committee and actually went through the review know that roughly 200 of those pages took occupational health and safety regulations out and put them into the accord acts. It was to mirror the legislation between the provinces and the federal government. We want the offshore industries to abide by the most stringent standards. We need to identify and clarify things, and that was the reason we did that.

Interestingly enough, some of the earlier comments were about why this took so long. It started in 2002 and it was a 12-year process. A lot of us in the House, even if we have only been here a short period of time, understand that sometimes it can take a while to get federal-provincial deals negotiated. What ended up happening is that it went through a period until about 2007, when there was a realization that further work was needed on the governance aspect of the bill. It had to go back, and obviously there were a lot of iterations between the provinces and the federal government to make sure that the legislation was mirrored properly.

Those things took some time. We had some governmental issues with respect to the minority governments that happened during those times.

I believe it was under an NDP government in Nova Scotia that the legislation passed, and a PC government in Newfoundland. They are now waiting for us to do our process with Bill C-5.

The accord acts already provide the regulatory cornerstone for all oil and gas activities in the Atlantic offshore. They give the independent regulators, the two offshore boards we have been talking about this morning, the legal authority to regulate oil and gas activities on behalf of the Governments of Canada, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

They clearly establish the health and safety requirements within the accord acts. For the essential matters of occupational health and safety, and operational safety in the offshore, Bill C-5 fully clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all concerned parties, governments, regulators, employers, and workers.

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The legislation also has other practical benefits and gives new powers to the offshore inspectors to further enhance safety. For example, inspectors will now be authorized to inspect anything, take samples, and meet privately with individuals. Further, inspectors will now have the power to conduct compliance audits on the vessels used to transport workers, and if the workers themselves have any safety concerns, Bill C-5 allows them to refuse to be transported to the offshore sites.

I just want to speak to the issue of the chief safety officer's power. It has been strengthened. In my experience in construction projects before coming into this area, it was always my understanding, whenever I went to a construction site, that the chief safety officer had full ability to shut a site down. They could do that *carte blanche*. That is independence. Even if those safety officers actually reported to project managers, they really had a higher calling and a higher power.

This safety officer, referring to some of the testimony from Mr. Jeff Labonté, said:

The final area that I will cover is that of the chief safety officer. First, to ensure that safety considerations are always represented, the legislation proposes that the position of the chief safety officer can never be held by a CEO of the board. In addition, a chief safety officer would have to review and provide written recommendations related to safety on all operational authorizations. This would formalize a process that both boards have already been following and is a practice of ensuring that safety is a priority. Chief safety officers would also be granted the power to allow regulatory substitutions.

As everyone knows, when we start talking about these regulatory substitutions, technology moves very fast in the offshore environment. For example, if a new piece of equipment comes out that is going to make workers safer, a chief safety officer would have the ability to authorize its approval to substitute it for something already out there.

Those are important things to make sure that our workers are safe, which this legislation and the regulations keep up.

During his appearance at the natural resources committee in December, Justice Wells spoke about the legislation. He said:

• (1220)

Somebody has worked hard—more than one person, I suspect—on this bill. I know that it's been under consideration for a number of years. Quite honestly, I think it's a good job and I think it will help to formalize some of the concepts that people knowledgeable about the industry and the regulatory people have thought about for some time. To see it enshrined—I hope to see it enshrined—in legislation is a good thing.

A couple of things impressed me most. One is that the bill talks about and mandates the involvement of workers in the processes of safety. That was something that was important to me during the two years and three or four months that I was the inquiry commissioner.

Justice Wells was very clear in the committee that he was pleased with the offshore health and safety legislation. He was also clear that good has come of the government's adoption of his recommendations.

We also talked at length at committee with two individuals. They were Mr. Scott Tessier, who is the chair and CEO of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, and Mr. Stuart Pinks, who is the CEO of the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board. We had a significant opportunity to question those folks. In fact, one of them was actually a former chief safety officer. I

asked him about the qualifications of the chief safety officers, the kinds of things they do, and the process. He said that he was the chief safety officer for a number of years and that there is a strict selection process for chief safety officers. They are often long-tenured employees who stay with these boards for very long periods of time and build up institutional knowledge so that they are able to continue doing their jobs effectively.

Some of the other things they talked about were privacy requirements. They are not allowed to publish certain types of things when it comes to safety. With this legislation, when it comes to safety, they would be able to publish this for the public.

A lot of what was said was that it is not just for the actual workers on the site but for their families as well. We always need to be concerned about their families. They should be able to see that everything is safe. What is actually happening is important to the families, as well.

Justice Wells and the two CEOs also talked about safety forums, which have now started. They have just conducted the fifth of these safety forums. They received a tremendous amount of feedback from the workers who now, as part of this important piece of the legislation, have three major rights. They have the right to know, the right to participate in the discussions, and the right to refuse dangerous work. They are all important aspects for these workers. These safety forums allow for these types of discussions to happen and for the appropriate actions to take place. I talked previously about the safety equipment and substitutions.

There was a lot of good feedback. The Unifor representative talked about the safety regulator. I am sure that someone will ask me that question during the questions and comments.

In summary, there is no doubt that Bill C-5 would significantly enhance worker safety in the offshore by creating a much more transparent safety regime, with clear responsibilities for all involved. Our Conservative government worked with our provincial partners on this. I want to emphasize that this was a partnership, because this legislation has to be mirrored at the federal and provincial levels. It would give us a much more modern, efficient, and stringent offshore safety regime, one that is supported by strong laws and standards that are second to none.

The Conservative government is committed to freer trade and to maintaining an open marketplace that welcomes investment. It is committed to providing a regulatory regime for major projects that is fair, transparent, and predictable. It is committed to enhancing Canadian competitiveness in the economic sector.

I am encouraged and really pleased to see that members from the opposite side are going to support this bill. It represents a big and important move of the yardstick forward in terms of offshore health and safety for our workers and in terms of the well-being of their families. I appreciate their support. Hopefully, we will be able to get this passed quickly.

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• (1225)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague opposite approaches issues like this in a very conscientious manner. He spoke at some length trying to justify why it took so long for this legislation to finally hit the floor here. I do not think there is any question that needing to mesh with the provincial jurisdictions and the offshore authorities is complicated. However, that also goes to the justification for the NDP amendment that was introduced in committee.

It has taken a long time to get this legislation through. A lot of work has been done to try to make sure that it covers everything off. We have noted some weaknesses, one being with regard to the independent regulator. As is always the case, there will need to be some revisions. That is why the NDP introduced its amendment, which was to ensure that the minister would conduct a review of the bill within five years.

I would like to ask the member if he would agree that, given the complexity of this matter, we should have tried to make sure—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would ask all hon. members to co-operate with the Chair during questions and comments when a signal is given to wrap up a question or answer. It would be appreciated.

The hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. The root of the answer to that lies in the process that took place between the federal and provincial governments over a period of 12 years.

As I indicated, in 2007, the parties realized, all of a sudden, that the governance piece needed to be improved. Both levels of government had to work together to do that. Both provincial governments had actually passed their legislation. Therefore, their legislation would have had to change as well, so they would have had to go back to the drawing board. That is my understanding of the process that happened. As a result, it was important to make sure that there was no major change to the legislation that would necessitate a change to the mirror legislation in the provinces. Therein lies the answer to that question.

• (1230)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, development of offshore resources is a priority and must be done safely, and I believe that this legislation would ensure that safety. I would like the member for Tobique—Mactaquac to elaborate on that.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. Basically, it would fill a gap in a grey area in the legislation. There was operational responsibility for safety under the accords, but the occupational health and safety side was not covered at all. When the person was tragically killed, there was much difficulty at the time assigning responsibility.

By mirroring this legislation, it would adopt very stringent occupational health and safety aspects. I commented that almost 200 pages are very detailed occupational health and safety aspects that were brought into the accord acts. When one reads through them, the number of occupational health and safety committees, the powers of the boards, and the power of the safety officers are phenomenal.

They can actually stop work, and the workers can refuse dangerous work. It is tremendous. It also covers the transportation to the actual offshore platforms, which is the piece that was missing before.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's analysis of this legislation. The one thing I am concerned about is that in phase one of the inquiry report of Justice Wells, he said that he believed recommendation 29 would be the most important one in this entire report. That, of course, called for a new independent and stand-alone safety regulator being established to regulate safety in the offshore, and that was not done.

Since Justice Wells said that this was the most important recommendation, I would like to ask my hon. colleague why the Conservatives did not follow through on that recommendation.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, Justice Wells had 29 recommendations in his report, and number 29 was not an all-encompassing recommendation. In fact, recommendation 29 was broken into two sections, 29(a) and 29(b). As we heard in testimony from Justice Wells, he thought "...a separate safety authority was a good thing, but I was perceptive enough to realize that not everybody might agree, and I hold no grudge about that. Therefore I put in the second thing. Canada's offshore is Newfoundland and Nova Scotia" and is actually small compared to other areas. He thought this was a good position for us. He broke recommendation 29 into two components. Therefore, we cannot look at it as an all-encompassing recommendation and take it as a whole, because there were competing parts.

As we heard from the CEOs, 16 of the 29 recommendations have been implemented, 12 are in the process of being implemented, and 29(b) will be implemented.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we see with this agreement a progressive and comprehensive collaboration between the federal government and provincial jurisdictions. We see the results when the federal government works with other jurisdictions to solve some of the very important issues we have before us.

I would like the hon. member to comment on the importance of the federal government working with the provinces, sitting down and rolling up their sleeves, and dealing with the issues at hand, collaboratively, with the provinces.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, I know that our minister responsible for New Brunswick has forged a great relationship with the Province of New Brunswick and is working well in all aspects with respect to projects and so on. From that standpoint, I do not see that as an issue.

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We just worked very diligently on coming to a conclusion on the job grant, for example. We are signing agreements on the infrastructure agreements. Those things are coming together. This is another example of how the provinces and the federal government came together with respect to a very difficult, comprehensive, and complex piece of legislation. That is why it was important to make sure that we did not get too carried away on amendments that would send each party back to the table again to redo their legislative process.

• (1235)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand that there was consideration at committee stage of a five-year review of this legislation to see whether it could be improved in light of experience and in light of the fact that recommendation 29 of Mr. Justice Wells' report was rejected.

Why would the government not accept the need, as is found in so many other statutes in federal legislation, for a five-year review, required in the statute?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that before, but I will elaborate again. As part of this whole process, this was mirrored legislation that had to go through between the parties. The provinces had already passed theirs. This would have led to sending them back through an iterative process to change it. That is part of the process. Having gone through 12 years, then a process from 2002 to 2007, then a bunch of other changes in governance, to now, this is where we are.

I know for a fact, but I will elaborate, that the federal government and the provinces are still in discussions about the future of this, because the Atlantic offshore is actually small compared to the other jurisdictions, which have a central regulator. As Justice Wells said, when we get to the point where maybe we are on the Arctic offshore or the western offshore, there might be more discussions that would have to take place,

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue again. I had the opportunity to speak on this at second reading, at which time I indicated my support for this legislation and for the measures. I was pleased that the two levels of government, the two provincial governments and the federal government, were finally able to reach agreement. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Province of Nova Scotia passed mirror legislation, and the federal government is now following suit.

I want to focus my presentation today on where we go next. It is extremely important that we get the best piece of legislation that we can to serve the purposes laid out in the legislation. However, if we do not have the enforcement and the political will to make it happen then, frankly, we will go back to the decades when the offshore on the east coast was covered by draft regulations. We will go back to something we see far too often as it relates to private industry, in particular in the fields that are so dangerous. I speak of the whole practice of voluntary compliance. In that, governments expect the companies and individuals involved in any particular industry to be safe and careful and to not put workers at risk.

We know that public sector and private sector entities conduct risk analysis at every opportunity, before they put in any constraints on

their practices whatsoever. Before a private sector company introduces any, in this case, safety measures or the use of safety equipment, it will do a very careful analysis on what the chances are that anything is going to happen, that there are going to be problems, that there is a risk there will be a loss of limb and life and, even at that point, what the exposure of that company is to liability.

That is why it is so important for governments to take their responsibility seriously in protecting people who are not protected, whether they are citizens, customers, clients, or workers. In the case of the *Ocean Ranger*, the 84 people who lost their lives, and in the case of the Cougar helicopter, the 17 people who lost their lives, nobody represented them. Nobody went to the effort to ensure there were constraints on the private sector companies that controlled what was going to happen to them when those workers at their jobs were carrying out their responsibilities. That is why it is incumbent upon us, not only to pass legislation to prevent these kinds of things, but also to ensure that the legislation is enforced, to ensure there is the political will in place, and that there are provisions in the legislation to ensure that people or companies that contravene provisions of the legislation are held accountable.

We had a terrible tragedy in Nova Scotia, in 1992, where 26 miners lost their lives. There was a royal commission held that made a number of recommendations. It led to Bill C-45, which was passed in this House, I believe in 2004.

• (1240)

It was called the Westray bill, and it was done to assign corporate responsibility. That legislation makes all decision-makers in a company responsible for the results of bad decisions or decisions that lead to the loss of life. Yet, since 2004, 22 years after that disaster happened, there have been a couple of charges but absolutely no convictions.

That underlines my point. We need to make sure that the responsibilities are laid out in the legislation. We need enforcement. We also need to make sure that people are held accountable. Ultimately, it all comes down to political will.

This legislation would only take us part of the way. We are only beginning to move in the right direction toward ensuring that the industry has a proper health and safety regime, as well as regulations.

However, our responsibility does not end here. We need to ensure that as development continues we work harder to make sure the people working in this environment are protected, and that the environment itself is protected.

I want to refer to Lana Payne, the Atlantic director of Unifor, who testified at the natural resources committee. She said that "Canada is still far behind other industrialized oil economies such as Norway, the United Kingdom, Australia...[and] the United States" in having "powerful stand-alone authority in charge of safety and the environment...".

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The member who spoke before me seemed to suggest that we do not have a stand-alone regulator here. We do not need it. It is a small jurisdiction. It is smaller than the Arctic or the west coast or some of these other countries. The member should say that to the 82 families who lost loved ones when the *Ocean Ranger* went down. He should say that to the 17 families of the workers who lost their lives when the Cougar helicopter went down.

If development is going to be conducted off the coast of our country, then we need to ensure that proper protections are in place, as in other countries. We have not done enough. We need to do better. We in the New Democratic Party will do everything in our power to ensure that this country does a better job in this area.

It is important for the federal government to continue working with the provinces and offshore boards in this area. There is no doubt about that.

I wish the government had considered the amendment that was introduced by our members on the natural resources committee. That amendment would have seen a review by the minister after five years. We would have known whether the legislation was actually accomplishing, not only what it set out to accomplish, but whether the government was showing the political will to enforce it and to hold people accountable. That happens with other legislation. It is not new. Things change, and try as we might, we might miss provisions that we should have perhaps picked up on. A five-year review would indicate whether we had run into any difficulties. A five-year review would ensure that 10 years or 13 years out we have done our due diligence with respect to making this happen.

•(1245)

I will refer to the intervention by my friend Dr. Susan Dodd, who wrote the book *The Ocean Ranger: Remaking the Promise of Oil*. Susan lost her brother when the *Ocean Ranger* went down. I spoke at some length about Susan's work in this area at second reading, but let me say again how much I value her opinion and the exhaustive research that she engaged in to prepare her book.

Before committee, Susan rightly identified that the “failure to regulate leads not only to the loss of life and the destruction of the environment, but also to the public's losing confidence in the legitimacy of government”. Disasters, such as the *Ocean Ranger*, Westray—and I referred to the explosion of the coal mine in Pictou County, in 1992—and the *Deepwater Horizon*, are also political disasters. People appropriately asked why it was that regulations did not exist or were not strong enough. Why were there weaknesses in the system and why were they not addressed years before?

Too often, changes to health and safety come about as a reaction to an event rather than as a preventative measure. I would suggest that this needs to be changed.

When I was preparing for these remarks, I looked at the Westray example. I was a member of the legislature in 1992 when that disaster happened. Within the next day or so, I sat with families in Stellarton who were trying to understand the magnitude of the disaster and whether their loved ones might still be alive. In the initial days of that disaster, it was a rescue effort.

We had a commission of inquiry, which did not table its reports until 1998. There were 74 recommendations, and section 73 led to Bill C-45.

I talked about the need to hold decision-makers accountable. In the Westray situation, they found that there were decisions made or not made that directly led to the explosion and the loss of life. Everyone recognized that the people who had the responsibility for making decisions did not make those decisions, or they made decisions understanding that a result there could be a disaster, an explosion, which happened. Those people need to be held accountable, and that is what led to Bill C-45.

Here we are 22 years later, and we still have not been able to hold people accountable for these kinds of workplace disasters. That is why I worry very much about our sense of satisfaction when we pass a piece of legislation like this.

We have been at this for 13 years. We worked with the other jurisdictions and we got it through. When it passes through this House and finally receives royal assent, we have done our job. However, that is just the beginning. That is the point I am trying to make; it is simply just the beginning. We need to do so much more to make sure that we fulfill our responsibilities in representing the people of this country.

•(1250)

Let me make it clear. I certainly do not have all the answers on how we protect workers in the offshore industry or how we protect our environment. That is why I feel compelled, as an individual MP and a member of this House, to say we need to be ever vigilant and be always listening and always paying attention, so we can ensure that the right thing is done, that we correct our mistakes, and that we move quickly, because we are responsible to represent not only people who work in that industry but also the environment, in the event of oil spills. As my colleague from St. John's East said, there will be a third rig in operation in 2017, even farther off the coast of Newfoundland. They are exploring, again, off the coast of Nova Scotia and in the gulf. It may be inevitable that there will be further development of these resources, but we cannot proceed without ensuring that we are protecting the people who work in the industry and protecting the environment, because once those disasters happen, those lives are lost and that environment is damaged, in many cases, forever.

Let me make a couple of suggestions.

First, I call upon the current government, and any government, to support the recommendation that has gone before Transport Canada to ensure that all airplanes and helicopters that are used for search and rescue and to transport workers to and from the oil rigs must have the capability to operate for an hour after they have no oil or have run dry. That has been a recommendation—in fact, it was 30 minutes, I believe—and that recommendation has still not been put in place. Even after it was determined to be one of the problems that led to the disaster with the Cougar helicopter, that still has not been implemented. I think it is extremely important that we ensure regulation is put into place. We know this is a fairly standard requirement for helicopters that operate off the coast, to give them time to land safely.

Second, the government needs to reverse its cuts to search and rescue and ensure that our SAR teams have the equipment necessary, and in working order, to carry out their missions as quickly as possible. These are life and death situations that these people are responding to in Atlantic Canada and around our coasts. It is too often the case that search and rescue missions are hampered because our dated equipment is not functioning or the teams are unable to arrive in a timely manner.

I think it is important that I also make a plug for the environment, in this respect. As I have already said, Canada is lagging behind once again. While the government has recently introduced legislation to increase oil and gas spill liability to \$1 billion, this amount pales in comparison with the actual costs of the spill cleanup and the impact on our environment and local economies.

To wrap up, there is still a lot of work to be done to strengthen the safety of the offshore industry for our workers and for our environment. While Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction, I think it is incumbent upon the government to continue to work with the provinces, the stakeholders, and industry to prevent future disasters.

•(1255)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, both provinces have already given royal assent to their respective bills to enact these changes, as has been noted. They are waiting patiently for Bill C-5 to pass through the House of Commons and come into force.

Justice Wells appeared at the natural resources committee and said he was pleased with the legislation. He stated:

Somebody has worked hard—more than one person, I suspect—on this bill. I know that it's been under consideration for a number of years. Quite honestly, I think it's a good job and I think it will help to formalize some of the concepts that people knowledgeable about the industry and the regulatory people have thought about for some time. To see it enshrined—I hope to see it enshrined—in legislation is a good thing.

My question for the member opposite is this. Did he read the transcript of that meeting, and does he have any comments to make?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I will say that Commissioner Wells gave compelling testimony at committee. There is no doubt he worked hard to bring forward the important recommendations that led to the compilation of this piece of legislation.

He was also pushed on his recommendation 29, which called for an independent regulator, because he was suggesting that, although it does not have a single regulator in it, it is a good step forward nonetheless. He did acknowledge that the single regulator recommendation that he made, which is in existence in other oil producing nations, is extremely important and is not something that should be forgotten.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague bringing us back to the terrible tragedy of Westray. Coming from a mining community, our families were certainly very struck by that. I remember being in Stobie Mine one time, and there was a safety sign on the wall. A miner said to me, “They only ever put that after someone loses an arm or after someone dies”. All the safety recommendations come after tragedies, which is why I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the importance of maintaining a full complement for search and rescue offshore, because we cannot afford to think maybe it will

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not happen. These things do happen, and we need to have the full force of the law and the search and rescue capacity.

Justice Wells talked about the need to have an independent board set up, yet the current government seems to show no interest in that.

The Minister of Natural Resources of Newfoundland and Labrador said that, while discussions have been ongoing with the federal government on the implementation of recommendation 29, the federal government has not indicated any interest in establishing a separate safety agency.

•(1300)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. We have seen search and rescue capability reduced under the current government. Offices have been closed and cut back. Their capacity and equipment are limited. In other words, our ability to respond is a serious problem.

During Dr. Dodd's testimony at committee, she made an interesting reference. She was recounting a conversation she had with John Crosbie, former lieutenant-governor of Newfoundland and Labrador and a long-standing member of this House, wherein he said to her, “We still don't know how to get those men off those rigs”. That goes to the whole question of the safety regime, but it more importantly goes to the resources that we put into search and rescue. We are not doing a good job in that respect.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North to speak to Bill C-5, the offshore health and safety act.

This bill is a culmination of over 12 years of negotiations that started back in 2001 between the federal government and the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, as we all know, no bill is perfect. This bill is certainly not perfect, but 13 years later this bill is well past due. I am glad to see that this important step forward is being taken.

It is far past time that this legislated offshore safety regime be put into place. All workers, whether they work onshore in our communities or offshore, deserve to work in a safe environment and to have their rights protected. This bill places the overall responsibility for occupational health and safety on the operator. This means that the employer is responsible for implementation and coordination, although employees are still expected to take all reasonable measures to comply with occupational health and safety measures.

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There are basically three principles in this bill: first, the offshore occupational health and safety laws must provide workers with protections at least as good as those that exist for onshore workers; second, the protection of employees' rights; and third, support for an occupational health and safety culture that recognizes the shared responsibilities in the workplace.

These basic principles address protections that should be available to all workers. It is a shame that offshore workers have had to wait this long for these protections to be afforded to them.

It comes as no shock to me that the Conservatives waited this long to bring this legislation to the House. This is not the first time we have seen the Conservatives drag their feet and delay long overdue legislation.

However, now that we have finally reached the point where we can give these offshore workers the protection they deserve, this bill represents a very necessary improvement to the current offshore health and safety regime, by finally placing safety practices in legislation.

My NDP colleagues and I have been calling for this type of strengthened regime for several years, and we are proud to support Bill C-5 at this stage.

I mentioned earlier that this bill is not perfect, and I would like to explain my comment. The glaring deficiency in this bill is the federal government's refusal to implement recommendation 29 of the Wells inquiry. The Wells inquiry took place after the March 2009 crash of a helicopter approximately 30 nautical miles from St. John's, that left 17 dead and 1 lone survivor.

Before Justice Wells made recommendation 29, he said:

I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire Report.

This is a direct quote from the author of this inquiry who made this recommendation. He pointed out that recommendation 29 was "the most important" of all the recommendations. Here is what it said:

29. (a) It is recommended that a new, independent, and standalone Safety Regulator...

An alternative option was also recommended in this report. However, unfortunately, Bill C-5 fails to establish either of these options. It seems the government is not committed to establishing this necessary reform and closing the gap that remains.

On this side of the House, we are committed to working with the Nova Scotia government and the Newfoundland and Labrador government to further strengthen health and safety by working towards the creation of an independent stand-alone safety regulator, as recommended by the Wells inquiry.

• (1305)

As Canadians, we should strive to set an example for the rest of the world. We should be leaders on the global stage. However, time and time again, we are faced with examples showing that we are not keeping up with global best practices. This has been apparent.

I made a speech just the other day when we debated Bill C-22. Canada is not keeping pace with the international standards set for

nuclear and offshore gas liability. I will give an example, specifically how we are not even making the polluters pay for it themselves. I talked about my son and my daughter and the liability issues that are in Bill C-22.

The current liability for offshore gas, oil, or nuclear disasters is about \$75 million, which we would now increase to \$1 billion. We have seen the nuclear disaster in Japan and the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Recently, we had the 25th anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill on the west coast, where I am from. We know for a fact that \$250 billion is the rough estimate now of the cost of the disaster in Japan. The cost is in the tens of billions of dollars in the Gulf of Mexico, and it is the same for the *Valdez* disaster in the Pacific Ocean off B.C.

My point is that we are increasing the liability for these disasters to \$1 billion for the corporations, the people who are producing the gas and oil, and the private industries that are operating our nuclear plants and so on. I will use an analogy from my own home shortly. The sum of \$1 billion is not enough to clean up the mess that has caused hundreds of billions of dollars in damage. In other words, corporations are getting a free ride if there is a disaster, because guess who would be left holding the bag? It would be the taxpayers, Canadians, who are held liable for the rest of the cleanup.

We are not looking at other countries and the standards that are out there. We could look at other countries, such as Germany and other European countries, that have substantially higher liability for these issues.

I used the example of my kids the other day. My son is seven years old. He makes a mess and he does not want to clean it up. He cleans up a little bit of it, and he wants his sister to clean up the rest of it. His sister comes to me and says no, it is his mess and he should clean it up. My wife and I have explained to my son that it is his mess and that he needs to clean it up. He cannot pass on his mess to someone else.

That is what we are doing. We are not looking at other standards. That is what we are doing with regard to the liability issues for nuclear disasters, oil, and gas.

We need to look at other governments among our partners, including south of the border and other nations, to find ways of improving it. That is the case in this particular situation, where one of the major recommendations is to have an independent regulator, as Justice Wells pointed out. We need a new independent and stand-alone safety regulator, and we need to look at what other countries are doing for best practices. We have not done our job here. That was one of the recommendations made by the Wells inquiry. It clearly pointed out that this was the most important recommendation. Again, it was ignored by the Conservatives.

Government Orders

Countries like the U.K., Australia, Norway, and the United States have all recognized the value of an independent offshore regulator and have taken steps to put it into action. Why should the Canadian offshore gas industry and Canadian workers be treated any differently? That is my question for the Conservatives. Why should our offshore industries and workers be treated any differently from their counterparts in our partner countries around the world, whether in Europe or south of the border?

● (1310)

Instead of setting an example, with Canadians being leaders in a particular area with other countries to follow, we are lagging behind. It is time we reversed this trend.

Here is another example. We are world leaders when it comes to conducting elections. We are viewed as a model for other countries. We also learn from other countries. We use some of their best practices and they use some of ours. I am very proud as a Canadian that our election model is used worldwide to conduct fair elections. What are we doing in our country? We have had the top three electoral authorities, the elections commissioner, Elections Canada people, and Mr. Neufeld, testify at committee that the changes being brought forward by the Conservatives in the unfair elections act will not strengthen our current electoral system. In fact, they will disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Canadians. That is not an example we want to set. We want to go in the right direction. The right direction is to improve the systems that we have in place and to ensure that not only are our democratic values protected, but also our offshore workers, so that they have the same safety level as onshore workers. It is a very disturbing trend that we are witnessing from the government. We need to improve the safety of our workers, onshore and offshore.

Not only does the bill not provide an independent, stand-alone safety regulator, or an autonomous safety division within the petroleum board, but our efforts to provide for a review of the bill in five years were also voted down by the Conservatives at committee. This, yet again, demonstrates the Conservatives' lack of interest in further strengthening the bill. Allowing for a review of the bill in five years' time would have provided an opportunity to re-evaluate whether an independent safety regulator were needed. Even if the government did not put in the safety regulator in the first place, we asked at committee for a review after five years. Perhaps they would find evidence that we do need an independent safety regulator.

When we talk about evidence, it is very clear that science and facts do not really figure into the Conservative equation, whether on the environment or jobs. The government is using Kijiji facts to inflate the number of jobs created in the country. I have never actually used Kijiji, so I looked it up today. It is a website for people to trade household goods. In fact, one can actually buy a used tie on Kijiji, or used shoes, and there are other things created on the site. The fact that the government, which is allergic to research and facts, uses Kijiji of all websites to inflate the number of jobs available in the country makes ones suspicious of the other facts brought forward by the government.

I talked about the unfair elections act. The Conservatives say there have been many irregularities and that we need to strengthen our Elections Canada Act. They say "We need to make it fair, that there

have been 15,000 irregularities." When asked how many people were charged since Confederation with fraudulent use of voter identification cards and voter fraud, the answer is zero. The government cannot come up with any examples. Oh, it does have examples it makes up. I know that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville brought up some facts that he had to retract because they were false. Those are the kinds of facts and figures that Conservatives make up. It is unfortunate that they do this.

● (1315)

The real facts would be for them to concede that they are not appointing the regulator now, but that we should further evaluate the issue. That would make sense, that we would look at it five years from now and re-evaluate the situation to see if we needed a regulator. But the Conservatives turned that down. I have been here for a number of years now and we have seen thousands and thousands of recommendations made at committee to improve bills. We have heard from expert witnesses and stakeholders begging the government to make changes that would be beneficial to the stakeholders, the very people the laws would affect, and we have seen very few if any amendments adopted at committee stage.

I know that was not always the case. Usually members of Parliament were able to propose amendments to bills and improve them. That is the work of Parliament, to improve the legislation brought forward. That is my job, to bring forward the views of my constituents and the very people who are being affected by this. But, unfortunately, the Conservatives, who get their marching orders from the Prime Minister's Office, are told how they should go about this. We are seeing the same thing happen with the unfair elections act at committee. Reasonable amendments have been provided to improve the bill, but the Conservatives have again chosen to reject the amendments on a technical basis. Due diligence and good governance require the review of legislation, particularly in this case where we are dealing with complex legislation involving multiple levels of government. The behaviour here is consistent with the Conservatives' unwillingness to consider amendments that would strengthen the legislation coming to the floor of the House. It is not the first time we have seen this, and I can guarantee it will not be the last.

Finally, I want to point out how refreshing it is to see a bill that represents the collaborative efforts of the provinces and the federal government, although it has taken eight or nine years to bring it to this stage. I am happy that finally the Conservatives were able to collaborate with the provinces.

I can give a couple of examples where Conservatives have failed to collaborate. I would like to announce to the House that I am very pleased that Port Metro Vancouver is up and running. Port Metro Vancouver is one of the largest ports in Canada. It employees directly or indirectly 60,000 workers. There has been a strike going on for the last four weeks. This dispute has been simmering since 2005. The truckers had brought to the government's attention over the last eight or nine years some of the issues they were having locally. What have governments been doing? They have done nothing over the last seven years to address these issues.

Government Orders

Last week, the Prime Minister went to Vancouver and said it was not a federal problem, but a B.C. problem. The B.C. government said that it was not its problem, that it was actually the federal government's problem. So with a problem that has been simmering for eight or nine years, the federal government and the provincial government could not figure out whose problem it was and we have lost billions of dollars as a result from the strike. I would put the blame squarely on the Conservative government and its inability to collaborate with the province.

Again, this bill could be greatly strengthened. One of the things it lacks is recommendation 29, which calls for an independent regulator.

• (1320)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my friend across the way.

I have a couple of questions for him. First, has he ever heard of Vince Ready? If so, how did he get involved with the dispute at the port?

Also, it appears that the NDP is promoting Kijiji. Do any of the New Democrats have any actual interests in there, and did they use Kijiji for the renting of facilities to promote the NDP in ridings that it does not hold?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

We are always told that we have to deal with government business instead of those kinds of cheap shots. We are dealing with a serious issue here, the safety of lives, so if the man wants to do a clown act, I would prefer that he does it outside and not within the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): First, in response to the member for Timmins—James Bay, some of the language in his point of order itself probably goes beyond what is necessary.

That said, the hon. member for Surrey North took great breadth in his speech. He referred to many issues that arguably are not directly related to Bill C-5 and wandered afield. The subsequent question from the member for Langley followed up on two of the points raised by the member for Surrey North, neither one of which would seem to have much to do with the matter before the House.

I am going to go to the member for Surrey North for a very brief response. However, I would like to remind all hon. members of the matter that is before the House, which is Bill C-5. Both the questions and the answers ought to refer to it.

The hon. member for Surrey North.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I know we have quite a bit of leeway in regard to how we speak to the bill and I tried to bring different aspects to this discussion. I thank the member for asking the question in regard to Vince Ready and Port Metro Vancouver. Vince Ready is a very respected mediator in Vancouver, and I do respect him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The member for Surrey North is in an awkward position in trying to answer a question that clearly has nothing to do with the bill. Therefore, I am going to move on.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, when we are looking at issues on the offshore, we can all agree that this bill does go a long way toward improving the regulatory environment for safety. It has been a long time coming.

Does my colleague from Surrey North not agree that it would have been preferable if we had a more independent safety officer in this regime, as he indicated this in his remarks? He could perhaps expand on this point. That issue, to me, is the weakness of the bill we have in front of us.

• (1325)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, of course we have been calling for that measure. It is important to have independent regulators for health and safety hazard issues. We have actually been advocating for that. In fact, one of the key recommendations from the Wells inquiry was to establish an independent regulator to oversee health and safety. Again, we had offered an amendment to the bill that called for a review after five years.

We would think the government would look at some of the facts and figures, and that is why I brought up Kijiji earlier on. However, unfortunately, the current government does not look at facts and figures.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and commend him on his excellent speech. He provided a good overview of this bill and all the other nonsense that occurred this week in the House of Commons.

The NDP did excellent work during review in committee at report stage. The excellent NDP members on the committee took part in the discussions and listened to the witnesses. What is more, we proposed an amendment, which unfortunately was rejected by the Conservatives.

I do not understand why the Conservatives rejected this very simple amendment. It simply proposes a five-year delay before implementing the bill and determining whether or not there should be an independent, stand-alone offshore safety regulator.

Why did the Conservatives vote against this reasonable amendment? Could my hon. colleague explain this aberration to me? It seems quite reasonable to me to review this legislation every five years.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who asks lots of questions. We are seatmates, and I thank him for going on record to ask me this particular question.

I cannot speculate on why the Conservatives do not want an independent safety regulator. It makes on this side of the House for someone who is independent to be regulating the health and safety of Canadian workers.

Government Orders

That said, the member pointed out that New Democrats had moved an amendment to have this matter reviewed after five years. That would be the next logical step: to look at the facts and figures and see if the current regime was working. If it was not working, then we could take the extra step of providing an additional health and safety envelope for our workers, whether they are onshore or offshore.

With regard to the amendment, I will say on the record again that the government is allergic to facts and to some good ideas, and not only from the opposition. They are allergic to some good amendments even from the very stakeholders that many bills introduced by the government are going to affect.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great for us to acknowledge the health and safety needs of workers, in particular the offshore and onshore workers, but we should not confuse that with a very strong federal initiative. This legislation is before us because provincial jurisdictions have already acted on the issue, and now there is more of an obligation on the federal government to bring forward legislation.

I have always thought the current government has not been proactive in dealing with health and labour issues. The member may want to comment on the fact that the government is not necessarily providing leadership on this issue but is responding to provincial governments' actions to date. He may want to add some comments on that aspect.

• (1330)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct. This legislation has been enacted in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, and a lot of the work that has been done on the implementation of this act has already been done in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

He is absolutely right that the government is not proactive when it comes to workers' health and safety or even workers' rights. We saw that in the Port Metro Vancouver strike. Last week the Prime Minister was saying that this is not a federal responsibility and the province was saying it is not a provincial responsibility. Meanwhile, one of the largest ports was shut down because of the government was unable to see a simmering dispute that had been growing for eight years and was not able to figure out whose responsibility it was. There were 60,000 jobs related to this facility. For over four weeks, one of the major ports was shut down because of a lack of proactive work on the part of the current government.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak on Bill C-5 at third reading stage.

I wish to announce from the outset that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Drummond.

Of course, being from the west coast, I was not as familiar with the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, which has taken off in the last generation. I was very impressed, therefore, when the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and the member for St. John's East spoke so passionately about the impact the offshore oil and gas industry in their jurisdictions and reminded Canadians from coast to coast to coast just how important that

industry is to our national economy. About 35% of Canada's light crude oil is being generated by that industry, and it is expanding.

I had the opportunity, I confess for the first time, to be in St. John's several months ago and to see the enormous impact that industry has had in that jurisdiction, and in Nova Scotia as well, and to learn how proud the people of that jurisdiction are with respect to the contribution it has made to their economy. For that reason, it becomes even more important for us to address the issue of worker safety in that industry.

I was shocked to learn that there has been no statutory safety regime in either jurisdiction for a generation. Essentially, the industry has been operating without any kind of legislated jurisdiction or legislated regime for the protection of worker health and safety for a generation, but has been relying instead upon merely draft regulations. As my friend for St. John's East pointed out very accurately, the only thing that could be done in the event of a problem was to shut the whole thing down, which, of course, is often something regulators would be loath to do.

However, in place of that, we now have a very comprehensive bill before Parliament, finally. It is a bill that was made in collaboration with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador so as to provide a consistent regime to deal with this burgeoning industry. I think it is for that reason alone that the official opposition is in entire accord with the need to move on with the proposed legislation.

When I say move on, I would point out that it has taken over a decade to get us to this place with legislation. I understand and respect that there has been collaboration to work closely with the provinces in this regard, perhaps something that has not been done by the government to any great degree. However, I think that the proof is in the pudding, and we now have a regime to which the Province of Nova Scotia has given royal assent, as did the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in May of last year.

We are getting on with it, they are getting on with it, and the workers want us to get on with it. I see all Canadians would certainly understand the need to enact a regime as comprehensive as the one before us.

I should say that enforcement is really what is critical here. A number of important principles in the legislation have been spoken to by members opposite as well as members from the official opposition, and there are three principles that I think we would all subscribe to.

First of all, offshore occupational health and safety laws must provide workers with protections that are at least as good as those for onshore workers. There can be no doubt that is only fair and appropriate.

Second, there is the protection of the employees' right to know, to participate, and to refuse unsafe work, and in doing so to be safe from reprisal. This second principle is one that in the last two or three decades has been made a significant part of labour law in this country, and it is about time that the offshore workers of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia enjoyed the same rights.

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The third principle is the support for an occupational health and safety culture that recognizes shared responsibilities in the workplace. We can talk about laws and we can make laws, in this case with scores of pages, and then make many scores of regulations under the statute, but unless there is a culture of safety in the workplace, it really amounts to nothing.

• (1335)

As we examine a regime like this, the extent to which there is enforcement is also critical. It was Shakespeare who said, "...full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". If this law is not implemented carefully, responsibly, and with that culture of health and safety that has been referred to, it really will be nothing more than paper, and no one wants it to be that way. No one wants it to be that way, when we look back in sadness on the *Ocean Ranger* disaster or the helicopter crash in 2009 that killed 17 people. We are dealing with the importance of a robust regulatory regime. That is what we are here to discuss.

At a broader level, this legislation is a great example of co-operative federalism at its best. The notion that we can sit down with the provinces, which have their own circle of jurisdiction, the federal government, which has its jurisdiction, and the offshore boards, federal and provincial, that have been created, and work together and produce something like this is one of the things that makes Canada such a great country. Our willingness to work together makes this a great country.

It is sad that it has taken this long. It does not appear to be a priority for the Conservative government. Given the delay, it does not appear to be the priority one would have expected, but nevertheless we are here and we are pleased to debate such an important piece of legislation.

I mentioned the three principles that I think are so essential to this legislation. I should salute the work of Mr. Justice Wells, who came up with a number of recommendations after the helicopter crash, which have been saluted by people on all sides of the House today. He worked hard. It is telling and it is sad, and we have heard this before in the debate today, that the recommendation he thought the most important is not part of this legislation.

Mr. Justice Wells states the following in his report, "I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire Report". What is that recommendation? Recommendation no. 29 states that "...a new, independent, and stand-alone Safety Regulator be established to regulate safety in the C-NL offshore".

If that were not considered feasible, Mr. Justice Wells gave an alternative that the government "...create a separate and autonomous Safety Division of C-NLOPB [the board], with a separate budget, separate leadership, and an organizational structure designed to deal only with safety matters".

Mr. Justice Wells, the architect who brought this to the attention of the regulators so forcefully, said the most important thing is an independent, stand-alone regulator, and the Government of Canada sadly has refused to accept what he himself characterized as the most important recommendation in the entire report.

Obviously, we cannot be happy with this legislation entirely, notwithstanding that we finally have it, when such an important piece of the puzzle is missing, a piece of the puzzle that is found in so many of our sister jurisdictions with offshore oil and gas, the British with the North Sea, the Norwegians, Australia, and the United States now. Yet Canada does not think we need to go there.

If there is anything we understand from regulatory culture, it is the notion of regulatory capture. The need to have an independent board to do the job is something that most people, at least in other jurisdictions, seem to take for granted now. But for reasons that escape me, our government seems to think that is not adequate even though it had been sought by so many, the provinces, the workers, and the like. Sadly that is missing.

The bill could be much better but we will support it proudly because of the fact that the workers were involved. There were consultations. I just hope that going forward they will continue to be involved.

I wish there had been a way to have a five-year review, as sought at committee, because that has been done so effectively when other Conservative governments were around. The present Conservative government does not believe in that. Nevertheless, it is critical that we look at that in the future, as the bill will inevitably come forward for amendment. Maybe we could do it better. Maybe we could do what Mr. Justice Wells said we needed to do as the most important feature. Maybe we could do a better job of protecting those workers in those dangerous occupations off the shores of Atlantic Canada.

• (1340)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member opposite for his presentation today. In fact, he was doing really well until he got to the part about Justice Wells' recommendations.

I say that because we had Justice Wells before a committee on this bill. That question was asked of him in several different ways, about the fact that recommendation 29 was not included in the legislation.

He made it really clear that the protection he referred to in recommendation 29 was covered by this bill, and covered extremely well. He said, and this is a quote from the committee:

Somebody has worked hard—more than one person, I suspect—on this bill. I know that it's been under consideration for a number of years. Quite honestly, I think it's a good job and I think it will help to formalize some of the concepts that people knowledgeable about the industry and the regulatory people have thought about for some time.

That is his comment, and it was in response to a question about recommendation 29.

I would like to ask the member why he does not take Justice Wells' word for it, that in fact, the concerns he expressed in recommendation 29 have been covered in other ways?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I agree that Mr. Justice Wells did make those comments before the committee. I think I understand the context in which they were made.

Government Orders

Obviously it is critical that we get on with this. I think I said that as powerfully as I was able. I think Mr. Justice Wells recognized that, as well.

Having said that, he never drew back from the specifics of the quotes I read to the House of Commons just now. He did say that it was the most important feature of his bill. It is for that reason that the notion of not having a statutory five-year review seems even more difficult to fathom.

The Progressive Conservative government under Mr. Mulroney was of course a government that listened to committees and had unanimous reports when five-year reports came forward. To me, that is something this bill desperately needed, and yet the government, as it was not their idea, said no.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria asked earlier today in this debate about the practice of having provisions in legislation that require it to be reviewed after a period of five years.

I am familiar with that at the provincial level. I was interested to hear his point that it is also the case at the federal level. I have had the opportunity to speak about it a bit in terms of the principle, but I wonder if he could elaborate further in terms of the practice as it relates to federal legislation.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, one of the great inventions over the last few years was to use more and more statutory reviews.

I can give three examples of which I am aware. There is one in the Access to Information Act, one in the Privacy Act, and one in the Canadian Security Intelligence Act. Each one says that there shall be a review by a House committee within five or six years for that statute, to see whether the experience is in fact what was expected, given what was passed previously.

It seems sensible. It seems like such a good Canadian idea: to sit down and require Parliament to review it to see if there is anything that needs to be fixed.

Here we have a statute that is scores of pages long, with regulations that will be hundreds of pages in length. It seems ridiculous not to have the benefit of that in this legislation. I do not understand why it could not have been done. The member opposite says it was because of the provincial legislation that mirrored it, but that is not an excuse for the federal government within its jurisdiction deciding to review the legislation in a five-year period.

● (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures. This bill has a very long title, but it is a very important bill and Canadians, particularly the NDP, have been waiting for it for over 13 years. We have been calling for the implementation of more health and safety standards for workers in the offshore oil and gas industry.

Before I begin speaking about the bill, I would like to point out the excellent work that my NDP colleagues have done in committee. They helped this bill move forward so that it could be examined today. Some of the members in question include the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who did excellent work; the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue; the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who worked extremely hard not only on natural resource issues but also on environmental issues and who has a great deal of knowledge in this field; the member for Nickel Belt; the member for St. John's East, who gave an excellent speech today; and the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, who also examined this bill.

I mention this because Canadians do not really know about the work that is done in committee. I often talk to my constituents in Drummond about the importance of the remarkable work the NDP does in committee. We always hope that that work will be as objective as possible, that it will be not be partisan and that it will be for the good of all Canadians.

My constituents know that I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development since soon after I was elected in 2011. For three years, I have been trying to work with my colleagues in such a way as to provide as much benefit as possible to the people in the greater Drummond area and throughout Canada in order to improve bills and conduct studies that will improve the quality of the environment and sustainable development.

The Standing Committee on Natural Resources examined Bill C-5 to improve the health and safety of workers in the offshore oil and gas industry. It is important to understand the significance of the work that was done by my NDP colleagues. They proposed an amendment to improve the bill by including a provision that would require the department to conduct a review of the implementation of the act within five years of the legislation coming into force.

This interesting bill makes improvements, which I will talk about a little later, but it could be fine-tuned. For that reason it is important to have a review period. However, we do support the bill at this stage. Any important bill includes a review period.

For example, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act includes a review period. In fact, the review is supposed to be happening now. I do not know what the Conservatives are doing. They are asleep at the wheel and are forgetting to review certain laws. In any case, I am concerned about their reviews, when they actually do conduct them.

When they reviewed the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act they scrapped it altogether. We went from having thousands of environmental assessments to a few dozen. That has resulted in serious problems such as the approval of the Enbridge pipeline. Reversing the flow of the pipeline was done without a proper environmental assessment.

The same thing is happening with Bill C-5. This bill will not undergo a proper review because the Conservatives did not accept our amendment that the legislation be reviewed in five years.

Bill C-5 fixes long-standing problems with the legislation and also the authority to make regulations pertaining to occupational health and safety standards and their application to offshore oil and gas operations in the Atlantic.

Government Orders

• (1350)

The bill amends the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord in order to enshrine the workplace health and safety regime into the legislation. This is an important measure and the NDP will support it.

However, the bill does not respect recommendation 29 of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry. As hon. members know, there was a serious accident. Following that accident, the people of the region were very concerned. There was an inquiry led by the Hon. Robert Wells.

Bill C-5 does not include a provision to create an independent regulator. A number of my colleagues have mentioned that today. In fact, they have done excellent work. They have done a fine job of explaining the importance of the workers and showing concern for their health and safety, including the helicopter pilots and other members of the crew.

The bill does not have any provisions for creating an independent, stand-alone safety regulator or implementing separate safety divisions within petroleum company boards of directors.

It is truly disappointing because the NDP went to great lengths to ensure that the bill would be reviewed after five years. This could provide the opportunity to create an independent offshore authority. I am not sure what the Conservatives are afraid of, why they have this need to control everything and manage everything from their offices. This could be handed over to a stand-alone and independent regulator. That would help ensure better health and safety for our workers. We know that these people experience tough situations. They do dangerous work. They are very brave. These professionals do excellent work for their region and to take care of their families. However, we must ensure their health and safety.

This bill is a step in the right direction, but it does not include a provision for a five-year review, which would have allowed for the implementation of a stand-alone and independent authority. That is too bad.

Although the Conservatives refuse to implement recommendation 29 of the Wells inquiry, Bill C-5 is still a constructive and much-needed improvement to the current occupational health and safety regime for offshore areas because it enshrines practices into law. That is good news.

The NDP is very proud to support Bill C-5 because we have been calling for improvements to this regime for years. This bill has been a long time coming. For more than 13 years, we have been calling for this bill to move forward and for it to be implemented. Unfortunately, it is long overdue.

I would also like to mention that the NDP finds it very troubling that this work is not being done in collaboration with provincial governments more often. It is very important that the federal government respect provincial governments and its provincial counterparts.

Unfortunately, when it comes to health, the federal government imposes new approaches without sitting down with provincial health ministers. That is wrong. At least in this case it signed an agreement

with its provincial counterparts. That is a good thing, and something that should happen all the time.

As I can see that I do not have much time left, I will answer any questions.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it bears repeating that both provinces have already given assent to their respective bills to enact these changes, and they are very patiently waiting for Bill C-5 to pass through our Parliament and for this regime to come into force.

The member has suggested that amendments were brought forward. I wonder if he understands that by bringing forward amendments of this nature, it would have actually meant a delay in bringing this bill forward, because we would have had to go back to the provinces, and it would have left our workers, yet again, without the extra safety measures that Bill C-5 proposes.

I wonder if the member would like to speak to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, I am not an expert on this issue. I know some excellent members who are experts on the matter and who represent these regions: the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl and the member for St. John's East. They advocate for their communities and are very familiar with what is needed to improve this bill.

These members have told me that this is a good amendment and that they have a good understanding with their provincial counterparts. I think that if federal government representatives sat down a little more often with their provincial counterparts, they would understand that it is easy to sign agreements if you take the time to negotiate with them.

That is what I would tell my hon. colleague. My colleagues who sat on the committee are experts on the matter. They worked very hard and know their provincial counterparts. I am sure that we could reach an agreement very quickly.

I am pleased to support Bill C-5 because it is necessary and we have been waiting for it for more than 13 years, as I mentioned.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we recognize that offshore workers do work in very difficult situations. There is no doubt of that.

It is interesting that we had the government member from Saskatoon make reference to the fact that the federal government is now acting on this because of two provincial jurisdictions. One of the things we need to acknowledge is that, when it comes to occupational health and safety, the Conservative government has often been found lacking in terms of being proactive.

However, with regard to this legislation, as the Liberal critic has said, it is important. It is a step forward. It is something we do support. At the end of the day, we want to have good working environments for all workers, especially those in the offshore. When the provincial governments have led the way and are now asking for the federal legislation to pass, we want to do what we can and acknowledge that, yes, it has fallen short in certain areas, but it is important that we ultimately see the bill pass. It is something the workers deserve, and the provinces have been waiting patiently for it.

I wonder if the member wants to pick up on the fact that this, in fact, is being driven from a provincial agenda, as opposed to the national Conservative agenda here in Ottawa.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North, who explained the situation very clearly.

Earlier, the Conservative member mentioned that she was the one who had moved this bill along. On the contrary, the Conservatives have imposed decisions on a number of occasions, instead of sitting down to work with provincial colleagues and counterparts.

When the NDP is in power, we will make it a priority to sit down with our provincial colleagues and our first nations counterparts, so we can work together for Canadians.

A government cannot think that it knows absolutely everything, as the Conservatives unfortunately believe. On the contrary, we need to sit down with our colleagues and counterparts, such as the first nations and the provinces, to work and make progress on important issues.

As I mentioned earlier, health is a very worrisome example of the Conservatives' practice of imposing decisions instead of working with provincial colleagues.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker the trans-Pacific partnership is a comprehensive 21st century free trade agreement with the objective of resolving trade disputes and promoting regional economic growth. Both Canada and our friends in Taiwan have played active roles in the economic and trade development of the Asia Pacific region. In fact, Taiwan is Canada's fourth largest export market in Asia.

As Canada moves toward formal entrance into the trans-Pacific partnership, it becomes evident that Canada would greatly benefit should Taiwan also gain a seat at the table. Given the depth and breadth of Taiwan's trading investment relationships with the Asia Pacific economies, its inclusion would increase the agreement's international profile as well as its commercial significance.

It is in Canada's interests to gain greater access to Taiwanese markets for our exports and also to ensure that Taiwan is not

excluded from the benefits of broader regional trade liberalization, which could destroy supply chains, creating new barriers to business.

Taiwan is a free trading nation, like Canada, and both would make welcome additions to the trans-Pacific partnership.

* * *

BRANDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the recipients of the Brandon Chamber of Commerce business awards, honoured at the 131st Brandon gala dinner on March 20.

Small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy, and those in Brandon—Souris are no different. Southwestern Manitoba is known for entrepreneurial spirit; and our local small businesses have a proven record of giving back to the community.

I am honoured today to publicly congratulate the recipients of this year's awards: Doug Murray is Brandon's business person of the year; Bernie Chrisp is the recipient of the community service award; Jeff Cristall is the recipient of the lifetime business builder award; the Paw Resort & Wellness Centre is Brandon's outstanding new business; and Behlen Industries is the recipient of the business excellence award.

I also want to thank the Brandon Chamber of Commerce for putting on a successful event and thank all the small business owners across the country who work hard day in and day out.

On behalf of all members of the House, I thank all small business persons for everything they do and for being pillars in our communities.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Paul Martin Sr. building, a federal asset with heritage designation located in the heart of Windsor's downtown, has been allowed by the government to fall into an unacceptable and unsafe state of disrepair.

After deliberately misleading my community through her spokesperson and attacking me personally for raising this issue, the minister has finally come clean, admitting that, through her government's lack of stewardship, it has allowed this heritage building to deteriorate to the point where it could seriously injure or kill pedestrians.

The government's management of this asset has been publicly referred to as a "story of neglect", and others in my community now consider the Conservative government a "slum landlord".

Now the Conservatives indicate that demolition of this heritage building is a serious consideration despite the city proposing an affordable way forward that would have significantly enriched our downtown.

This is a shameful and abject dereliction of its duty, and I urge the government to go back to the drawing board and work toward a solution that preserves rather than destroys a piece of our community.

Statements by Members

The Conservatives have created their very own heritage moment. What they need to do is respect Canadian heritage.

* * *

PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a remarkable young Canadian from Kimberley, B.C., has shown how one can persevere after a life changing moment. In March 2004, Josh Dueck attempted a front flip, which ended badly, severing his spinal cord and breaking his neck. Most people would have given up, but not Josh. Faced with paralysis from the waist down, he took the challenge head-on and continued with his skiing career.

In just six short years, Josh competed at the Vancouver Paralympics, coming away with a silver medal, and most recently he won gold and silver medals in Sochi. Being named the closing ceremony flag bearer for Canada in Sochi is a testament to not only his dedication and commitment to his sport but also his lust for life and that attitude of never giving up.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

Congratulations, Josh, on behalf of all Canadians, especially those in Kimberley, B.C. You are a real inspiration.

* * *

[*English*]

PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Mark Arendz from Hartsville, P.E.I., who won silver and bronze medals in biathlon at the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi.

Mark's competitive spirit and athletic skills are an inspiration to all Canadians. I would also hope we recognize the courage, dedication, hard work, and family support that contributed to Mark's achievements.

I remember vividly the day Mark lost his left arm above the elbow in a farming accident at age seven. Courageously, he used his experience to teach others about farm safety and worked with the War Amps as a junior counsellor.

Pursuing his love for sport and competition—in fact, he and his whole family completed in biathlon events at Brookvale ski park—he achieved the Duke of Edinburgh gold award and over the past four years earned more than 16 medals, including the world championship.

On behalf of the House, we offer our sincerest congratulations to Mark Arendz, a true Canadian inspiration.

* * *

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, March 25 was the anniversary of the adoption of “An Act for the Abolition...” in England over 200 years ago, which led to the end of the Atlantic slave trade. However, as we are reminded all too often today, slavery thrives not only throughout the globe, but also right here in Canada through sex trafficking and forced labour. I want to

take this opportunity to recognize the survivors, peace officers, victim support agencies, and countless volunteers all across our nation for providing support, raising awareness in their communities, and ultimately bringing freedom to trafficked individuals.

Many of these unsung heroes dedicate their personal time and finances well beyond their professional roles. Particularly, I would like to thank all those involved in Operation Northern Spotlight, an anti-trafficking initiative involving more than 30 police services and 180 officers and support personnel across the country. We thank the police officers, NGOs, and the survivors for working relentlessly to abolish modern-day slavery in our nation.

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[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of negotiating a new agreement, the Conservatives have chosen to transfer health care costs to the provinces and to turn their backs on the health care system that is so cherished by Canadians. This will result in longer wait times and a lack of access to health care.

The NDP have a vision for a modern, public, adequately funded health care system. We want to ensure that Canadians have access to the care they need, no matter where they live. It is also important for Canadians to have access to quality health care and prescription medication without any financial barriers.

The NDP's approach is based on a collaborative federalism, where the federal government plays a role in prevention and the patient comes first, and maximizes the impact of government investments.

An NDP government will support new agreements to achieve better results, while recognizing the provinces' jurisdiction. In co-operation with the provinces and territories, the federal government must adopt measures that will allow all Canadians to have better access to high-quality health care.

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[*English*]

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise as an MP but also as a dad, so I hope Shane, Jake, and Mei Mei are listening.

My Conservative colleagues and I have been meeting on a regular basis to examine issues relating to substance abuse. Our goal is to get the best information available to make our legislators informed and capable. We are dealing with challenging issues, such as the effects of cannabis, recovering from drug abuse, prescription drug misuse, and mental health. Informed and capable legislators are the ingredients of good laws responsive to challenging problems, which continue to weaken our youth, divide our families, hurt our health, and hamper our economy.

I am grateful to constituents and other Canadians who have helped with the symposium, such as Lorinda Strang and AnnMarie McCullough from Bowen Island's Orchard Recovery Center, Kerry and Ginny Dennehy, staunch advocates for mental health, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, and the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the MP for Kootenay—Columbia, who have been avid participants in this discussion.

I commend all involved as these issues are so critical for our youth, such as our own children, and Canadians of all ages.

* * *

● (1410)

THE BUDGET

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the leader of the third party, our Conservative government knows that budgets do not balance themselves. Waiting for someone else to make the tough choices is not what leadership is about.

Constituents from across my riding of New Brunswick Southwest were pleased to hear that, after making tough, deliberate choices, next year's federal budget will produce a surplus. By holding down government spending, introducing tax relief measures, and lowering Canada's debt to historic levels, we have accomplished this monumental task.

The other parties said it could not be done. The other parties said we were making the wrong choices. Making responsible choices that benefit hard-working taxpayers and their families is what our government has done and will continue to do.

Looking ahead, we are preparing another round of tax relief measures. These new tax saving measures will benefit hard-working taxpayers, their families, and the Canadian economy.

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FIRE SAFETY AND PREVENTION

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the recent tragedy at L'Isle-Verte in Quebec brought home painfully the vulnerability to fire of seniors who reside in personal care homes across the country, and it has renewed calls for improvements to safety standards.

This week the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs has been on Parliament Hill telling us what we can do to make nursing homes and personal care homes safer. Thankfully, there is something we can do, and that is to install sprinkler systems in all personal care homes. The fire chiefs want the National Fire Code amended to

Statements by Members

make them mandatory. Some jurisdictions have already done so—Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario recently, and the City of Vancouver, for example—but a change to the National Fire Code, when it comes up for revision in 2015, would make it a national standard, which will save lives, if followed.

Please join me and the fire chiefs in urging the adoption of this important change, which would make our seniors safer and prevent future tragedies.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian seniors have played a central part in building this country. They deserve our support to help them enjoy the best quality of life possible. Our government continues to translate that support into grassroots initiatives, such as the new horizons for seniors program.

Last week, I announced funding for 11 community seniors' groups in my riding of Provencher. I had the pleasure of congratulating many of these community leaders in person. Groups from areas such as St. Adolphe, Hadashville, Ste. Agathe, Morris, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Piney, Sainte Anne, Middlebro, LaBroquerie, and Paradise Village will all be receiving funding for their projects.

Since 2006, the new horizons for seniors program has funded more than 13,000 projects in hundreds of communities across Canada. Our economic action plan 2014 proposes an additional \$5 million each and every year for the new horizons program.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the golden years of our seniors are truly golden. With programs like new horizons for seniors, we will continue to meet the needs of seniors now and into the future.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the violent crime rates in my riding are high. Despite numerous pleas to the federal government to put more police on our streets, the only thing we have got in return is more broken promises.

Seniors in Surrey, specifically Newton, feel especially vulnerable and are very concerned about their own safety.

Recently, the phone calls and visits from worried seniors have increased at my riding office. They are worried about growing instances of violence in our area: beatings in broad daylight, mail theft, and vandalism to Canada Post mailboxes. Now, the current government wants them to visit those boxes daily, alone, to collect their mail.

Statements by Members

I pledge to seniors in my riding, and to all my constituents, that I will continue to hold the Conservative government to account for its broken promises for more police and safer streets. Seniors and families in Newton—North Delta deserve better. We all do.

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PORT METRO VANCOUVER

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, an action plan to end the work stoppage at Port Metro Vancouver was agreed upon by all parties. Our government is pleased that truckers have agreed to get back to work at Port Metro Vancouver.

Our economic prosperity and competitiveness and the ability of our products to reach new markets depends upon a well-functioning supply chain. This back-to-work agreement demonstrates all parties' mutual interest in returning to work, returning the port to full operation, and getting Canada's economy back on track.

Constituents in my riding of Vancouver South can rest easy, knowing that our government understands the importance of opening the Asian markets and the Asia-Pacific gateway. This underlines that our investment of \$1.4 billion in strategic infrastructure projects like the gateway helps all Canadian businesses.

Our government will continue to work with all parties to ensure the long-term stability and reliability of the port for the sake of Canada's Asia-Pacific gateway, prosperity for Canadians, and the continued growth of our national economy.

* * *

• (1415)

KIDS AGAINST CANCER HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 21st annual Leah Dugas Memorial Kids Against Cancer Hockey Tournament, which took place at the Sydney Mines community centre.

This event was renamed in honour of Leah Dugas, who lost her battle to cancer when she was only nine years old. Leah had been involved in the hockey tournament and had served as the official princess in 2005.

This year, 12 teams took part to raise money for the Cape Breton Regional Hospital's pediatrics fund. Over \$60,000 has been raised for cancer research and programs over the last 20 years.

This event could not happen without the support of Leah's family, the many who provide the food, the Sydney Mines Forum, the Northside District Minor Hockey Association, the Sydney Mines and District Community Centre, and many contributors.

This tournament serves as a tribute to Leah's life and also helps families dealing with cancer. I would ask all members to recognize the Leah Dugas hockey tournament to fight cancer.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, our government brought in legislation to address the rail capacity

challenges currently affecting western Canada after a historic crop yield.

Our government is taking immediate action to get grain moving faster through legislation and regulations designed to increase supply chain transparency, strengthen contracts between producers and shippers, and help ensure the entire grain handling and transportation system is working at the top of its capacity.

The current challenges also affect more than just farmers. A strong supply chain system is essential so that Canadian shippers can remain competitive in domestic, continental, and offshore markets.

Alberta agriculture minister Verlyn Olson said:

We are pleased that the federal government has brought forward the Fair Rail for Grain Farmers Act, which addresses some of our concerns and will help strengthen rail transportation system performance in the immediate- and long-term.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Kijiji is great if you want to buy a used Sunfire or a Maltese pup, or even if you want to find a drummer for an Iron Maiden tribute band.

However, the Conservatives decided to use the classified ad site in drawing up their employment policy. That is just dumb. They have easy access to hundreds of experts who can give them specific figures on the country's employment situation, but they decided to rely on a website that was designed to sell used fridges.

What will they do next? Will they come up with a housing policy based on apartment-for-rent ads in the *Journal de Montréal*? Will they advertise for the next Supreme Court justice on Craigslist?

You would think that, once people found out about the Kijiji episode, the Conservatives would have acknowledged how ridiculous it was, but no, the Minister of Employment kept trying, mocked the experts and defended the use of Kijiji data. In the end, he admitted that he had no idea what the current state of the job market is.

Canadians want a competent government that will take its responsibility to manage the employment situation seriously. They do not want people who rely on data from Kijiji when they are deciding how to spend billions of dollars.

In 2015, the NDP will manage—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Oral Questions

[English]

TRUTH NATIONAL TOUR

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all remember the NDP leader's suspicions when he doubted that the pictures proving Osama bin Laden's death existed. He was very clear on that. "I don't think from what I've heard, that these pictures exist", he said during an appearance on *Power & Politics*. However, his party soldiers on with the NDP's legacy of adhering to conspiracy theories.

The member for Halifax and deputy leader of the NDP is championing the truther cause on her website, promoting a 9/11 truth national tour, with Richard Gage. He is advertised as coming to Halifax to share his wealth of knowledge on what actually happened on September 11, 2001. What is that truth that the member for Halifax is advertising? Is it that the World Trade Center towers were brought down by internal demolition; in other words, it was an inside job by the U.S. government?

This tour is shameful, and it is disrespectful to the victims of 9/11.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of State for Democratic Reform said that Harry Neufeld's report showed that "the safeguards designed to protect against voter fraud were violated".

However, today, Mr. Neufeld indicated that the minister had misinterpreted his report and had quoted from it selectively.

Why does the minister continue to claim that Mr. Neufeld found that there were cases of fraud when there is no connection between vouching and electoral fraud?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will do what I have done all along, which is to accurately, and in context, quote Mr. Neufeld's own report. On page 5, right here, it states:

Ensuring voter eligibility through the administration of these special "exception" procedures is an expected part of election officers' duties. Errors that involve a failure to properly administer these procedures are serious. The courts refer to such serious errors as "irregularities" which can result in votes being declared invalid.

Those are serious problems. When those safeguards are not followed, they increase the risk that the result can be overturned by a judge. We are solving that problem through the fair elections act.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is selectively quoting from a report to show that he is not selectively quoting from a report. I got that one. It makes sense.

Harry Neufeld testified that neither the minister nor his staff ever contacted him. He stated, "I was waiting for that call, and it never came". He also said that Conservatives are tilting the playing field in their direction.

The minister repeatedly uses Mr. Neufeld's report to support his unfair action, so why did the minister not consult the author of that report?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the best way to consult the author is by reading his report, which is what I am doing right now.

For example, on vouching, it is obviously risky to allow someone to vote without any documented ID whatsoever, so there are safeguards; one can only vouch for one person, for example. The only way we can verify whether someone vouches for more than one other voter is to keep records of who did the vouching. According to Mr. Neufeld's report, there were 45,000 instances where there was no record kept of the voter and the voucher. That removes the safeguard. That is unacceptable. The fair elections act will fix that problem.

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EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just because they keep repeating it, does not mean it is going to become true.

However, let us move on to the bizarre Conservative comments about their Kijiji economics.

The employment minister is telling economists that they should stop looking at data about the labour market and instead only listen to him. Can the minister tell us why he thinks economists, the PBO, and StatsCan all have it wrong, but that he and Kijiji have it right?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): That is delightful, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that the Canadian labour market, in all of the labour market information at an aggregate level, indicates that we are not facing a general labour shortage, as I have consistently said. However, every business organization in the country, from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, manufacturers and exporters, the restaurant association, the Information Technology Association of Canada, and the Canadian Construction Association, all say that there are very significant sectoral shortages. This is an issue that we should treat very seriously.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the incompetence of the government's economic team is astounding. It is so astounding that what is left of its competence is now for sale on Kijiji for 99¢.

After lecturing all the economists in the country, now the so-called Minister of Employment candidly admits that no one knows exactly what is happening on the labour market.

If he does not know what is happening on the labour market, then what is he basing his decisions and policies on?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my critic had understood my comments on the subject, she would know that I clearly said that there is no overall labour shortage in Canada. Data from Statistics Canada provide no proof of that. That being said, all of Canada's business organizations are saying that there is a labour shortage in certain specialized occupations and in certain regions. This is a very serious issue.

Frankly, we do not have enough information about the labour market. All partners must work harder in this regard.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, apparently, the Conservatives still do not have an answer. What will they do next, consult psychic JoJo Savard?

The Parliamentary Budget Officer believes that the government is going in the wrong direction by relying on information from Kijiji. It is simple. The government cannot use information gleaned from online classified ads to prove that there is a shortage of specialized labour.

How can the Minister of Employment and Social Development have the audacity to contradict the Parliamentary Budget Officer with regard to the supposed labour shortage when the minister himself admits that he does not know what is happening on the labour market?

• (1425)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said no such thing. I said that no one has a perfect knowledge of what is happening on the labour market.

I said that we know certain things. We know that there is no general labour shortage on the national labour market. However, it seems that there is a labour shortage in some specialized occupations in certain regions.

All of Canada's business organizations agree that that is the reality, and this issue must be taken seriously. That is why we are making unprecedented investments in labour market training in Canada.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, when the Conservatives introduced grain by rail legislation, they rejected all proposed amendments by farmers. Their new legislation to address the grain crisis has been described by the Saskatchewan government and many farmers as “deficient” and disappointing.

This time when their legislation goes to committee, will the government members commit to listening to farmers' good advice and accept amendments and improvements?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say that yesterday the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Transport, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, delivered important legislation that is decisive in the way that it challenges the rail transportation system to deliver grain to the ports. It would establish

minimum volume requirements for grain movements, strengthen contracts between producers and shippers, and it would increase inter-switching limits to create more rail competition.

This is a good piece of legislation for our Canadian farmers, and I ask the opposition to support it.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next Tuesday, the annual budget for the building Canada infrastructure fund will be cut by nearly 90%, putting a hard brake on economic growth for the middle class.

My question is not for the infrastructure minister to rehash budget talking points from seven years ago. My question is for the finance minister: Will he reverse this 90% cut to the government's core infrastructure program?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals seem to have forgotten how the budget and the estimates process works around here. Here are the facts. Over the next decade, we have over \$53 billion to invest in infrastructure. This includes the gas tax fund, at \$2 billion a year. This includes almost \$6 billion from the original building Canada fund, which we will continue to invest over the coming year. Last is the new building Canada fund, to which provinces and municipalities will submit invoices. Those expenses will be reflected in subsequent estimates.

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next Tuesday, the building Canada fund will lose nearly 90% of its funding. This will have a huge impact on economic growth in the middle class and on major projects, such as the expansion of the Henri VI highway.

My question is not for the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs, who will give us a seven-year-old answer. It is for the Minister of Finance.

Will he reverse the decision to cut 90% of the funding for the government's primary infrastructure program?

[English]

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under that \$10 billion provincial and territorial infrastructure fund, applications will be accepted starting this Monday, March 31, fulfilling our government's commitment.

Here are some of the categories that will be eligible: highways and major roads; public transit; disaster mitigation infrastructure; and innovation infrastructure, which our post-secondary sector is particularly pleased about.

These investments will improve our quality of life and enhance our economic—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, finding himself in a hole, the Minister of Employment and Social Development just keeps on digging. Yesterday, the minister said "...none of us know exactly what is going on in the labour market of today".

Conservatives used these manufactured labour market data to justify major changes to the temporary foreign worker program. When exactly did the government stop using factual evidence to set labour policies? When did it start relying on gut feelings and whatever it found on Kijiji?

• (1430)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): I am afraid to disappoint the member by saying that we never have, Mr. Speaker.

In all of my speeches and comments on the issue of labour market information, I have said the following: that our LMI system is inadequate, we need better information; that the Statistics Canada data does not support the contention of general labour shortages; that if there were general labour shortages, as some business organizations claim, then wage rates would have gone up faster than inflation since the global downturn, and they have not. However, we cannot ignore the data being supplied by many industry organizations and sector councils, which indicate very acute skills shortages in particular regions and sectors.

Those are the facts reflected by the New Democrats, who come over here asking me to bring temporary foreign workers into their ridings every single day.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear. First the minister admitted that he does not know what is going on in the labour market. Then he said that he thinks economists should spend less time actually looking at facts and more time going out for coffee and meeting people.

When will the minister cast aside his ideological blinders and accept the factually correct data from economists, experts, and the PBO?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said no such thing. I said yesterday in the interview, which the member distorts, as I have said every day in this position, that we do not have a general labour shortage in Canada. If we did, it would be reflected in higher wages, salaries, and benefits, which is not the evidence.

I have stood up in front of business groups and said that if employers want to keep complaining about a general skills shortage, then they should be reflecting that by increasing salaries, wages, benefits, and investments in training.

The president of the B.C. Federation of Labour stood up and called me an honorary member of the union fraternity for that comment.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): There they go with their big union bosses again, Mr. Speaker.

Let us get this straight. The minister spends months trying to justify regressive Conservative policies by citing labour market data, and then he says explicitly, and here is the quote: "none of us know exactly what is going on in the labour market of today".

My question is for the Minister of Finance.

On budget day, his predecessor said that Canada's job vacancy rate was rising at an alarming rate right now. Experts, economists, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and Statistics Canada have all contradicted this claim. Does the new Minister of Finance stand by the statements of the previous finance minister?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I have said is that everyone involved in the debate on the labour market should have enough humility to recognize that none of us knows exactly what is happening in the labour market.

However, we do know this, and I will continue with the quote: "...there is no general labour shortage" in Canada, but there is all of the evidence to suggest that there are some sectoral and regional skills gaps. That is the reality.

I wish the NDP would realize that it is in all of our interests to dig deep on this and realize that we need a better training and education system that helps to prepare young Canadians for the jobs of the future. That is why recently we had a successful mission to Europe with employers and unions on exactly that point.

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FINANCE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I see someone else got promoted to the finance portfolio. I welcome my friend from Calgary to the file.

It is clear the Conservative government uses made-up facts and hides reports to justify its regressive policies. A story in the press today reveals an internal report by Finance Canada on income splitting. This scheme will cost billions, and the vast majority of families, 85%, will see no benefit whatsoever.

When are the Conservatives going to release this vital report to Canadians, and has the Minister of Finance even read it?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member again for the welcome.

As the Prime Minister said, income splitting was a good policy for Canadian seniors, and it will be a good policy for families. Once the budget is balanced next year, the government is committed to greater tax relief for Canadian families.

Oral Questions

As a result of our low-tax plan, the average family is paying \$3,400 less than in previous years. Shamefully, the NDP has voted against each and every one of these measures.

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now understand a little better why the former finance minister was clearly hesitating about income splitting. We now know that the Department of Finance—his department—is in possession of a 300-page report on the fiscal impact of this measure, which it refuses to make public. We know that two independent studies have stated that the fiscal impact of this measure would be at least \$3 billion. As the saying goes, all things come in threes.

Will the Minister of Finance commit to releasing the report he has on income splitting?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said. Income splitting is a good policy for Canadian seniors and will be a good policy for Canadian families. As a result of our low-tax plan, the average Canadian family is paying nearly \$3,400 less in taxes in 2014.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question has to do with his department's report on income splitting. If it is a good measure, this report should say so. If the report says so, he should be able to release it. It is as simple as that. If they do not want to make it public, the report must contradict their claim that it is a positive measure. However, two other reports specifically state that 85% of families will not benefit from income splitting. I have a specific question for the Minister of Finance.

When will he release the department's report on income splitting?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): I will examine all of the reports submitted on this subject, but I must say that our government is focusing on what is important to Canadians: jobs and economic growth. Although the world's economy remains fragile, especially in the United States and Europe, our economic policies have helped protect Canada. More than one million net new jobs have been created since July 2009. Those are the facts. I do not know why the NDP chooses to ignore them.

* * *

[*English*]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Harry Neufeld's report is misused constantly by the democratic reform minister to justify Bill C-23's flawed measures.

Mr. Neufeld testified today that none of the remedies his report proposed have ever been mentioned by the minister, let alone included in the bill. He also said that his report is being wrongly interpreted and unfairly invoked by the minister. He said, "At no point in the report do I link vouching with fraudulent voting".

When will the minister stop distorting the Neufeld report?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Neufeld is entitled to author recommenda-

tions. He is not entitled to author the law. That is left to parliamentarians. At no time did I ever claim to agree with his recommendations. I do not agree with them. That is why they are not in the bill.

I do agree with the facts that are found in the report, which find 50,000 irregularities linked to vouching in the last election. We deal with that problem by ending the process of vouching and by making the reasonable request that people bring one of 39 forms of identification that will demonstrate their address and their identity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we had the opportunity to hear from Harry Neufeld on Bill C-23. He oversaw elections in Canada and around the world for over 33 years.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has distorted Mr. Neufeld's report to justify much of this bill. However, Mr. Neufeld confirmed unequivocally that the Minister of State for Democratic Reform has misinterpreted his report. He gave several examples of how his conclusions have been used maliciously.

How many other reports has the minister misinterpreted?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, none, obviously. According to the Neufeld report, there were over 50,000 irregularities linked to vouching. That is one of the reasons we decided to put an end to that practice, which is not viable.

However, Canadians can choose from 39 forms of identification to demonstrate their address and their identity. Showing a photograph is not necessary. There are many options, and we will require Elections Canada to inform voters about the pieces of identification needed.

• (1440)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, between Harry Neufeld's credibility and that of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, there is no comparison whatsoever.

Harry Neufeld said that Bill C-23 will compromise voter turnout for the sake of the minister's obsession with a problem that exists primarily in his overactive imagination. Mr. Neufeld said repeatedly that there is no link between the vouching system and voter fraud. To quote Mr. Neufeld, "...voters were not the problem".

Many experts oppose the minister's bill. When will he listen to them?

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, when somebody shows up to vote without any form of documented identification whatsoever, there are obvious risks. That is why there are safeguards. Those are the rules that were associated with vouching in the past. One of them is that the election official has to document who voted and who vouched for them. That prevents the voucher from repeating the vouching more than once, in violation of the rules.

Unfortunately, in 45,000 cases, according to Elections Canada's own report, there was no documentation, and that documentation is necessary. It is in the rules, and failure to provide it is a violation. That is why we are moving the way we are.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the grain crisis in western Canada is six months old. By the government's own calculation, the hit on farmers is \$8 billion. The legislation tabled yesterday mostly authorizes regulations to be made, which are still secret. There is no comprehensive monitoring, no better transparency, no logistical coordination, no railway costing review, no new capacity, no definition of service levels, no way to measure performance, and no damages to farmers when services fail.

Why was all of that left out? When will farmers actually get to see these draft regulations?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really wish the member had read the legislation that was tabled in the House yesterday, because by reading it, he would see what this legislation actually sets out to accomplish.

I mentioned before that it would increase supply chain transparency. It would strengthen contractual mechanisms between producers and shippers. It would help to ensure that the entire grain handling and transportation system is working at its peak efficiency.

The member should support the bill.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past week, we have heard from over 500 Canadians regarding infrastructure needs in their communities. Quebeckers want highway 185 to be repaired. In Toronto and southwestern Ontario, dozens of people want funding for public transit. In Winnipeg, the underground water pipes are freezing.

They all want to know why the government deliberately deferred money that is available in the building Canada fund until well after the next election.

[English]

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the application process for the provincial and territorial infrastructure component will open this Monday, March 31, fulfilling our government's commitment to be ready for this construction season.

Significant investments will continue to flow this year and over the next decade, the largest and the longest infrastructure plan in Canada's history. This government has tripled investments in infrastructure since 2006.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week the building Canada fund will be slashed by almost 90%, and the Conservatives are trying to deny it.

Oral Questions

Canadians know that it is nothing more than a shell game. It is just a little card trick designed to meet the Prime Minister's arbitrary deficit deadline of an election. That is what we get with a government that is focused on austerity and cuts, not growth and jobs.

Why is the government compromising public services, delaying investments, limiting opportunities for economic growth, and hurting middle-class families?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week it was suggested that a question such as this about shell games might be more appropriate in the Ontario legislature.

With respect to investments in public infrastructure and in public transit specifically, our government has invested over \$5 billion in public transit. Here is what Michael Roschlau has said: "Never before has a federal government invested so much in public transit. This budget provides a solid framework to ensure that this will continue".

* * *

•(1445)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clearer than ever that the government does not get the seriousness of the grain shipment crisis. We know they are \$8 billion short for farmers and more than a day late.

The Minister of Transport now actually admits that this year's crop is not going to get moved before next year's crop. There are 20-million-plus tonnes on the ground in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta, and yet the Conservatives' new bill has failed to increase the amount they are going to move. No extra grain will get moved beyond what the order in council said. They have not increased fines to make sure that farmers would actually get the money. They have wasted a huge opportunity.

Will the minister now go back and really get the legislation right this time? The Conservatives tried once before and failed miserably. Can they get it right this time?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly, this member does not understand what the legislation is setting out to do. The legislation is tasking the railroad companies to move one million metric tonnes of grain a week from the western grain farmers' fields to port. That is almost double what it was just a few weeks ago.

If the member wants to help western Canadian grain farmers, he should stand up and vote in favour of this legislation.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, millions of tonnes of grain are about to spoil.

Oral Questions

However, the minister continues to tell farmers to wait. The Conservatives cannot seem to grasp the problem. Grain farmers are losing millions of dollars, and our trade partners are starting to lose confidence.

Businesses across Quebec and throughout Canada are facing grain shortages. No grain means no bread, no croissants. What will we eat for breakfast?

Why have they not increased the amount of grain that can be shipped?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this legislation obliges the rail companies to move one million metric tonnes of grain a week. That is an ambitious but realistic target.

I would ask the member to consult with stakeholders in the west who are trying to move their grain. For example, I have a quote here from Greg Cherewyk, the chairman of Pulse Canada, who said:

...this fast-tracked approach allows us to focus our efforts to get to work and to immediately put in place the framework that encourages effective agreements that offer more balanced accountability and ultimately more predictable and reliable service.

They need to better understand farmers. They need to stand up and support this legislation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been reported that the personal information of 600,000 Canadians has been lost, and there have been 2,983 privacy breaches at the Canada Revenue Agency alone.

What are the Conservatives doing about it? Absolutely nothing.

A laptop containing medical and legal files was stolen in 2012, which is another very disturbing case. The thief is now trying to blackmail a lawyer at the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat. However, the Privacy Commissioner was just informed this week, two years after the fact.

What is the blackmailer asking for, and what are the Conservatives going to do? We want to know.

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we agree that Canadians should rightfully expect their personal information to be protected. The CRA has a close working relationship with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and acts on all of her recommendations.

I would clarify, because the member has brought it up, that 95% of the reported privacy issues are related to misdirected mail. The CRA handles nearly 150 million pieces of mail each year; therefore, these incidents represent .001%.

The member opposite knows this and should recognize that it is irresponsible to misrepresent this record.

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the facts say at all about the data being lost at the CRA.

Last year, it lost the financial information of half a million Canadians. Now we find that there are over 3,000 cases at the CRA, and they only bothered to let the Privacy Commissioner know about 1%.

That lackadaisical attitude toward the financial information of Canadians is simply not acceptable. New Democrats say that every time people's data is taken, stolen, or hacked, the Privacy Commissioner needs to be told.

Will the government support this common sense solution?

• (1450)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do work with our Privacy Commissioner. We do respect the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations.

Again, I think that clarification here is very important. When a global figure was given on privacy breaches, 95% of them had to do with misdirected mail. That is .001% of the 150 million pieces of mail that the CRA deals with each year.

This is something that should not be misrepresented, and it is irresponsible to undermine the confidence of Canadians in a system that works.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year our government announced that a tentative deal was in the works to sell Macdonald House. The sale represents an important step in our government's plan to consolidate Canada's diplomatic presence in London by revitalizing and renovating the historic Canada House in the heart of London, Trafalgar Square. This consolidation will ensure that Canadians will be better served in one centralized location.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update the House on the sale of Macdonald House?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to announce the completion of the sale of our high commission in Mayfair. We have sold it for \$565 million. This is great news for hard-working taxpayers.

I want to congratulate our high commissioner, who has worked to help revitalize Canada House in Trafalgar Square, to buy the building beside it, and to have better headquarters, better visuals, and a better place for clients to come to get support from Canada's mission there.

This is good news for the Canadian taxpayer and great news for our diplomats in London.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once, a long time ago, the Conservatives promised Canadians a patient wait times guarantee. However, what Canadians got were longer wait times. I do not usually quote it, but the Fraser Institute reported that wait times cost our economy over a billion dollars annually.

Why have the Conservatives cut \$250 million a year that was earmarked for the provinces to help reduce wait times? Why are they giving up on ensuring timely access to medical care? Do they not care any more?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a lot of think tanks that deal with the issue of public health policy also say—and I know that has been quoted from the Fraser Institute—is that more money is not going to make a difference. When it comes to the inefficiencies in our health care system, we are investing record amounts of funding to the provinces and territories. We need to work with them on innovative ideas and better models of care, but more money is not going to make a difference.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more expertise might help.

In 2014, wait times are longer than they were in 2004, the year the health accords were signed. That comes at a cost, and sick Canadians and their families are the ones paying for those longer wait times. Monday is going to be a sad day. That is when the Conservatives will officially reduce health care funding in Canada.

For the third time this week: why is the government refusing to work with the provinces to help Canadians get access to health care within a reasonable timeframe?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would give more kudos to the provinces than the member opposite does. They are working very hard on a lot of the difficulties faced and the inefficiencies in our health delivery systems in the provinces and territories.

Many of them also know they are already at close to 40% to 50% of their budgets for health care. They are looking within their systems for efficiencies. They are looking for innovation and we are working to support them on that.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I hear the Conservatives' answers, I get the same feeling that millions of Canadians get when they hear “Your call is important to us” and never get an answer.

For some time now, employment insurance wait times have been getting longer too. In 2012, Quebecers waited more than 39 days, not the 28 days they were supposed to wait, and that was just to have their application processed. That was just to get an answer, not a cheque.

Does the minister realize that his cuts to services and employment insurance benefits are hurting Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, because that is not true.

As I said yesterday, 69% of employment insurance claimants receive their benefits within 28 days. We have to do better, and we will do better. My parliamentary secretary is looking at ways to make our operations more efficient so that we can better serve Canadians.

• (1455)

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister, in response to one of my questions, said that EI claimants receive a cheque within 28 days, yet his own government has admitted that applications are not completed within the standard processing times. In fact, since 2011, almost 1.4 million Canadians have waited more than 28 days for a decision on their claim. Why is this okay with the minister? Why is it okay for Canadians to wait nearly seven weeks for a cheque?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, try as he might, he will never be able to shout as loud as the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

In point of fact, I am not satisfied with the service. We have to do better. The service standard we aim for is that 80% of EI applicants get their first cheque within 28 days. Right now we are at 69%. We need to do better. I have my parliamentary secretary leading a study with Service Canada and my department on how we can improve operational efficiency to meet that 80% benchmark.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the government explain how in an alleged period of austerity since 2006 the government has spent more than \$482 million, almost half a billion dollars, on outside lawyers? There have been lots of cuts to public servants, cuts to social programs, cuts to EI, cuts to veterans, cuts to railway safety, cuts to health care for retired workers, cuts to infrastructure, but lots of money for legal fees.

How can the government defend such outrageous expenditure while real people suffer?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that while the government at any given time is involved in some 50,000 litigation cases, about 85% of those are not initiated by us. I would also note for the hon. member that last year we were successful in nearly 75% of those cases.

Oral Questions

We have instituted several efficiencies at the Department of Justice and they are already having an effect. The number of hours of litigation decreased by 2% last year. We remain committed to defending the rights of Canadians and to ensuring that hard earned tax dollars are spent efficiently and effectively.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration refused to rule out the ridiculous idea of imposing language requirements on the spousal sponsorship program, when questioned by my colleague from Markham—Unionville. Aside from criminality or age, the state should not impose conditions on who Canadians can marry and bring to this country. This harmful policy will only serve to keep families apart.

Will the minister now clearly commit to not imposing this draconian requirement?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, we have no intention of imposing language requirements for spouses, but we will continue to study these issues and to hear from Canadians. It is irresponsible of the Liberal Party, as it does almost every day, to cite a comment at a round table and then suddenly fearmonger among Canadians about an important issue.

What we are trying to do here is to protect women in the immigration system from violence. Do the Liberals have any idea of what the issues are on that front, and will the member opposite agree that there are barbaric practices that should be called just that, which their leader still refuses to do?

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the Canadian Forces did not have any psychologists on the ground in Afghanistan. To obtain psychological assistance, the soldiers had to turn to the U.S. Army. It was therefore impossible for francophones to consult a psychologist in their mother tongue.

Soldiers on mission are under an incredible amount of stress. Receiving psychological help in one's mother tongue is essential to preventing post-traumatic stress. Can the Minister of National Defence explain why no psychological support was available in French in Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that unprecedented investments and commitments were made for our men and women in uniform in Afghanistan. We hired more health care workers, an unprecedented investment. I can assure the hon. member and all members of the House that the wellbeing of our men and women in uniform will continue to be a priority of this government.

• (1500)

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is shameful. Respecting our official languages is not an option. It is the law.

If psychological support is not available when soldiers need it, that can lead to very serious consequences. The men and women who serve their country deserve respect and services.

National Defence itself acknowledged that relying on the Americans was not a long-term solution and posed some cultural and linguistic challenges. Nevertheless, nothing was done, even though there was a desperate need for psychological support.

What does the minister intend to do to ensure that such a shameful situation never happens again?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence and those who work within the department and our armed forces are absolutely committed to making sure that the men and women who needed help in Afghanistan and within the armed forces get it as soon as possible. There have been unprecedented investments and efforts in this area and that will continue under this government.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Democratic Reform regarding the fair elections act and how it will protect taxpayers from partisan abuse of their tax dollars. This is very important to all Canadian taxpayers as there have recently been alarming reports about possible violations of the Elections Act by sitting NDP MPs.

Can the minister please explain how the fair elections act will protect taxpayers from these kinds of abuses that we have seen from the NDP?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, this is not the first time New Democrats have broken the law. They accepted \$340,000 in illegal union money, which is an offence under the Elections Act, and I think they thought they could get away with it again when they employed parliamentary resources, which may ultimately have pushed them over the spending limit in key byelections, another offence under the act.

Additionally, the fair elections act will create new and tougher financial penalties for parties that exceed their spending limit and that will, hopefully, root out some of the abuses for which the NDP has become so well known.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has a responsibility to ensure that Canada's laws are maintained. However, Blacklock's reported this morning that the Canada Border Services Agency issued a directive entitled, "Export Program Examination Priorities", stating in part that due to "the limited number of resources available for export examinations; other commodities, including outbound smuggling of narcotics,...should not be undertaken".

The minister must accept responsibility for this directive. Why is the minister not only condoning but actually authorizing the illegal movement of narcotics across the border?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to inform the member that we have indeed increased the number of border service officers so they can provide better service and make sure that our frontier is open for trade and commerce and closed for any illegal activities.

I will be happy to get back to the member on that particular point.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the homelessness partnering strategy funding will be renewed next Tuesday.

It took one year for the government to announce the new criteria. Obviously the negotiation process has been delayed and now services will be interrupted. Organizations that help the homeless are laying off their employees and cutting services to the most vulnerable.

Can the minister tell us how many organizations will be affected and what she is going to do to remedy the situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely wrong. We are very proud of our renewed homelessness partnering strategy, with a focus on housing first. In fact, Canada is leading the way when it comes to helping those who are homeless.

We are known now throughout the world for what we are doing because of the At Home/Chez Soi pilot project and, from that, the Housing First initiative. We are looking forward to working with community entities and with the communities who know best where these funds can be directed. Our government takes real action to help those who are vulnerable.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year was a record year on the prairies for the harvest, almost 50% higher than the average, which was amazing. Grain prices internationally were also very high, which meant the commodity price was high, so it should have been wonderful news for the prairie farmers. Unfortunately, we have a bottleneck with the railways. The minister

actually briefed the opposition on what the Conservatives are going to do to fix it and next time I am going to ask him to use bigger pictures and less print so that they can really get it.

I would ask the parliamentary secretary if he would stand and explain one more time to the opposition in the House exactly what we are going to do for prairie farmers.

• (1505)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Yellowhead not only for his excellent question but also for his involvement in the implementation of practical solutions.

Canadian farmers rely on the rail system to get their crops to market in a predictable and timely manner, and that is why our government is taking concrete action to get grain moving faster. Yesterday, we introduced decisive legislation to establish minimum volume requirements for the movement of grain, to strengthen contractual mechanisms between producers and shippers, and to increase interswitching limits to create more rail competition and efficiency.

I know my colleague supports this legislation. I ask opposition members to get on the side of farmers, to move this legislation through quickly.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently met with armoured car drivers who highlighted the dangerous working conditions they deal with every day.

Reductions in crews and a lack of appropriate training and support are threatening the safety of these workers and the public. We have sadly seen this in recent deaths and injuries in armoured car robberies and public shootouts in Edmonton, Toronto, and Longueuil.

So far, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has remained silent, when this is clearly his responsibility. Will the minister now agree to a national task force to investigate the deteriorating working conditions for armoured car drivers, before another tragedy takes place?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in life it is important to understand what our responsibilities are. If my colleague wants to address this issue, I invite him to consult the provinces because that is clearly their responsibility.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is a question about math and red herrings.

Business of the House

Yesterday, the minister said our greenhouse gases would be 130 megatonnes less than what they would have been under the Liberals. That number, picked out of the air, is known as the “business as usual” target.

Here is the math. The Copenhagen pledge made by this Prime Minister, no previous prime minister, was to reduce emissions 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. Environment Canada now says that by 2020, emission levels will be virtually unchanged.

Is Canada still committed to the Copenhagen target? Why does this minister seem to believe that business as usual is government under some other party?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to address climate change.

Since 2006, we have invested more than \$10 billion in green infrastructure, energy efficiency, adaptation, cleaner technology, and cleaner fuels. Thanks to our actions, carbon emissions will go down by 130 megatonnes from what they would have been under the Liberal government.

We are accomplishing this without the Liberal and NDP carbon tax, which would raise the price of everything.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Minister of National Revenue stated in the House that we were being irresponsible by misrepresenting facts. I would like to table some documents from her own department that are actually based on the question. If we are asking questions in the House based on information, it is not fair to accuse people of misrepresenting, hence lying. For that reason, I would like to table the documents—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

I have here the document by CBSA that I referred to in question period. The minister obviously seems to be unaware of that document. Could I gain unanimous consent to table it in both official languages?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Malpeque have the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, the Minister of Health misled this House by stating that the Public Health Agency had come into force under the current government. I offered her

three opportunities to correct herself and I am asking her to stand in this—

● (1510)

The Speaker: Order, please. It seems like a point of debate. I did not hear an “ask”, like the others, to table documents, so I do not think there is a point of order.

I see the hon. Minister of Health is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, for peace on this end of the House, I am acknowledging that the Public Health Agency of Canada was created in 2004. The remarks I made were just to be proud that it was the Conservative Party of Canada which brought it into being as a legal entity and passed the Public Health Agency of Canada Act.

The Speaker: These types of points would be much better raised as questions in question period, and these types of responses can be made as responses during question period, but not through points of order or the seeking of consent to table documents.

The hon. opposition House leader will have his inaugural Thursday question.

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[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take on the role of House leader of the official opposition. It is a pleasure to work with the Speaker, the Clerk, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the House leader of the third party.

We must have great respect for parliamentary traditions, and I hope that in the coming months, we will show respect for these traditions that are so important to everyone. The Canadians who elect us want Parliament to work well and to respect tradition.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, after my first few days on the job, I can see when we look at the current government that its members do not seem to have a lot of respect for parliamentary functions. Unfortunately, this week up to now we have had, for the 60th time, closure or time allocation, stopping debate. Some Conservatives are proud of that, but the reality is that last week we had the Supreme Court reject two bills from the government. So ramming this legislation through does not mean that it is better legislation. It means that it is worse legislation and, as we see from the Supreme Court, we have now had two rejections of legislation brought forward by the current government. Now, we have a budget implementation act that is on notice.

My question for the government House leader is the following: Will there be any legislative mistakes tabled next week in the budget implementation act, and have the Conservatives actually checked this bill against the Constitution, which should be governing our actions in the House of Commons?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I first want to say here what I said on Twitter last week; that is, I would like to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for the working relationship that we have enjoyed over the last couple of years. I wish him well with his new critic responsibilities.

Now let me thank the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his first Thursday question. I welcome the hon. member to his new role as the House leader of the official opposition. I have been told by my staff that he is the tenth House leader from across the aisle with whom I have had the pleasure of working.

While I am confident that his predecessor has briefed him on our government's approach toward facilitating a hard-working, productive, and orderly House of Commons, I see that he has already fallen into one of the grievous errors of his predecessor. For a whole bunch of reasons, I would encourage him to look in some detail at the House of Commons rules and procedures.

For example, he was concerned with time allocation and referred to it again as limiting debate, yet when he reviews the rules, as I know he is going to, and I know he will do that with some enthusiasm in the near term, he will notice citation 533 of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada*, sixth edition, which reminds us that:

Time allocation is a device for planning the use of time during the various stages of consideration of a bill rather than bringing the debate to an immediate conclusion.

That is what we have always tried to do here: schedule debates so that we can make decisions, have fair and adequate debate, and give members of Parliament an opportunity to decide questions. It is not to curtail debate; it is to schedule and facilitate decisions being made. I hope that the member will have regard for those rules, something that had escaped his predecessor.

However, I should say that I do look forward to working with him on our business in the future. That said—and I hope that he will not take personal offence to this—in our scheduling of these matters, we will continue to work off of the Gregorian calendar, not the Julian calendar.

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

Today, we will continue the third reading debate on Bill C-5, the Offshore Health and Safety Act. Tomorrow, we will start the second reading debate on Vanessa's law, Bill C-17, the protecting Canadians from unsafe drugs act. Monday will see the third day of second reading debate on Bill C-20, the Canada-Honduras Economic Growth and Prosperity Act.

[*English*]

That is one that I know he is a great supporter of.

Tuesday, April 1, shall be the first allotted day. It being April 1 after all, I assume that the NDP will ask us to debate one of its economic policies.

Finally, starting on Wednesday, we will debate our spring budget implementation bill to enact many of the important measures

Speaker's Ruling

contained in economic action plan 2014, our low-tax plan for Canadians, as we make further progress on balancing the budget in 2015.

I might also add that with regard to the grain situation, Bill C-30 is now before the House. There have been very positive discussions among the parties to date. I hope that they will lead further to being able to have that bill passed through at least second reading on a fairly constructive basis. I hope those discussions will yield fruit, in which case there might be some change to the schedule I have presented to the House today.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that messages have been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

ADVERTISEMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR WESTMOUNT—VILLE-MARIE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 24, 2014, by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine regarding recent advertisements issued by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising the question, as well as the hon. House leader of the official opposition and the hon. members for Beauséjour and for Westmount—Ville-Marie for their interventions on this matter.

[*Translation*]

On March 24, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine explained that, recently, advertisements were published in local newspapers by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie inviting readers to meet with him at a public discussion of their concerns. She noted that the invitation covered not only his riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie but also her riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and the riding of Montreal West. The member went on to contend that this invitation was an implicit attempt by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie to present himself as the member of Parliament for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Montreal West, and that the advertisement interfered with her work as the member of Parliament in her riding. Furthermore, she argued that she viewed the advertisement as a means to target future voters, which breaches House rules prohibiting the use of House resources for election purposes.

Government Orders

[English]

In response, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie questioned the member's claim that he had misrepresented himself to others, noting that, in fact, the newspaper in question, the *NDG Free Press*, is distributed in both ridings and he had very clearly indicated in the advertisement which riding he represents. He also held that, since that since their ridings are adjacent and therefore share common preoccupations, it was entirely acceptable to invite all citizens to discuss common priorities.

As all members know, to declare a matter to be a *prima facie* case of privilege, it is essential to demonstrate precisely how a member has been prevented from fulfilling his or her parliamentary duties.

[Translation]

O'Brien and Bosc states at page 109 that:

In order to find a *prima facie* breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.

• (1520)

[English]

A Speaker Milliken ruling from 2004 has been touted as a relevant precedent in this case. On closer examination, however, members will find that Speaker Milliken's decision in that case hinged on an issue of false misrepresentation.

[Translation]

In this case, however, I have carefully reviewed the advertisement in question and I see that the advertisement makes perfectly clear that the invitation is being issued by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. Indeed, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine herself acknowledged that the member for Westmount Ville-Marie did not actually misrepresent himself as the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

She also stated that:

Working on community relations in one's own riding and outside of it is certainly part of a political representative's job.

Members and indeed all Canadians will recognize the truth and significance of that statement, as did the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie when he stated that:

...the interests of our constituents should be our common priority.

[English]

The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine will know that it is not at all unusual for members not only to communicate with but also to visit the constituents of their colleagues. For example, just a few weeks ago, her colleague, the member for Welland, happened to visit the town of Raymore in my own constituency of Regina—Qu'Appelle, where he participated in a town hall meeting with local citizens.

This speaks to members' attempts to work within, beyond, and across riding boundaries for the greater good.

It therefore does not seem reasonable to suggest that merely placing an advertisement inviting readers—some of whom happen to live in a different constituency—to meet a member of Parliament is

infringing the rules and somehow ought to constitute a matter of privilege.

[Translation]

The Chair could not find any evidence to suggest that any misrepresentations were made, any truths distorted or any potential confusion created in the minds of voters and absent such evidence, I cannot conclude that the ability of the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has somehow been infringed upon

For these reasons, I cannot conclude that this matter constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege.

[English]

I thank the House for its attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

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

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

Hearing long titles like this one, we are often left wondering what the bill is really about. This legislation is a culmination of a number of attempts to address safety for workers in offshore situations.

Most Canadians who work on land just take the right to refuse unsafe work for granted, but we should not, because workers fought for the right to refuse unsafe work for many years. We have the labour movement to thank for its advocacy in this area.

As we have learned more about occupational health and safety, we have learned that it is a shared responsibility, that employees have to be integrally involved in developing policies and practices, and that enforcement has to be there as well. We are pleased that this legislation would address those aspects and would give offshore workers the right to refuse unsafe work.

This legislation is a result of co-operation and collaboration between partners, and by that I mean the Atlantic provinces and the labour movement. Labour movements in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia worked closely together to make sure protective regimes would be put in place for offshore workers in the oil and gas industry. It is mind-boggling that such a regime did not exist already, because a worker is a worker. If workers are covered when their feet are planted on the ground, then why would workers in offshore situations not be covered?

Government Orders

We have had a number of tragic disasters, and those disasters have made us as a society and at different levels of government look at where our legislative framework is to protect those who go to work.

Offshore workers are like workers everywhere else. They get up in the morning, some in the evening, and they go to work to make a living. There is every expectation on the part of those workers and the families they leave at home that they will return home safely. Once this legislation is enacted, our offshore workers will have the right to refuse unsafe work, and I am pleased about that.

This legislation reminds me of Bill C-525, the legislation we were debating last night. I can see direct links between the two bills. In Bill C-525 we see a not-so-secretive attack on organized labour and on workers' ability to organize.

It has taken workers in the offshore industry many years to get rights that other people already have. Having been a teacher for most of my life, I know how hard it was to get an occupational health and safety framework implemented in the school system for teachers as well.

● (1525)

I am also reminded that there is often a disdain by my colleagues across the way for working people who have chosen to be part of a collective called a union. However, I am very proud of the achievements of the union movement.

Looking back to the 19th century, we can see the reason that unions were founded. It was to provide some balance because workers' lives were in danger. Hands were being caught in machinery, and amputated. Young children were being sent into the mines and terrible accidents were occurring. People were being forced to work incredibly long hours. It was at that time, out of desperation, that workers decided that singly they could not bring about change. If they wanted to bring about meaningful change, they had to hold hands and become a collective.

That kind of advocacy for the rights of workers, for a right to a decent living, for the right to work in safe workplaces and ensure the maximum safety, are all things that the union movement is still advocating for today. It is not just for the unions themselves, but for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I know you would want each and every worker in Canada to have occupational health and safety protection and the right to refuse unsafe work. If we do not have that, we are left in a very vulnerable position.

When we look at the legislation, the overall responsibility to carry out and implement a lot of it is put in the hands of the operator. Therefore, I was pleased to hear that the government had paid some attention, as I had hoped, to recommendation 29 of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador public inquiry into offshore helicopter safety, which was conducted by the Hon. Robert Wells.

This inquiry spent a lot of time listening to experts, and as much as I know that my colleagues across the way have an allergy to data, science, informed decisions, and listening to experts, I was quite impressed by the recommendation put forward by Hon. Wells. It brought home to me that we are once again passing a piece of legislation that is a step in the right direction and will enshrine the

right to refuse unsafe work. However, at the same time, we are not writing legislation for yesterday. We should be writing legislation that is current for today, tomorrow, and the next few years.

The Hon. Robert Wells put forward what I would say are fairly reasonable options: the best case scenario and the one that would be acceptable if the best case scenario is not taken up by government.

In June 2010, the Hon. Robert Wells wrote:

I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire report.

Recommendation 29 demanded that a new independent and stand-alone safety regulator be established to regulate safety in the CNL offshore. That seems fairly clear. Then, Justice Wells, because he knows what parliamentarians can be like, wanted to give people a choice and not an ultimatum. It was not this or nothing.

● (1530)

He came up with a second option. The alternative option was that the government create a separate autonomous safety division of C-NLOPB, with a separate budget, separate leadership, and an organizational structure designed to deal only with safety matters. It was also to establish an advisory board composed of mature—that is often questionable—and experienced persons, who are fully representative of the community and unconnected with the oil industry. He also recommended ensuring that the safety division would have the mandate and ability to engage expert advisers, either on staff or as consultants, to assist it in its regulatory tasks.

The report further explains that the safety regulator should be separate and independent from all other components of offshore regulation and should stand alone, with safety being its only regulatory task. As I said, with a government that has an allergy to data, science, and informed decision-making, this legislation fails to meet either of those standards set out in that report. It is a report, by the way, that was not written overnight. It was well researched. As I said earlier, it is a shame that it was not included in the legislation.

We are supporting this piece of legislation because it is moving in the right direction. However, once again, I am going to make a plea to my colleagues across the way that they amend this legislation, even now, and maybe take the time so that it has some life beyond, rather than providing just the absolute minimum. I will say, though, that this is better than nothing.

We as the NDP are very committed to saying that when we form government we will continue to work with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. Even before we form government, we are committed to further strengthening worker health and safety by working towards the creation of an independent, stand-alone safety regulator. That is the right thing to do.

I have talked about the government having an allergy to data and not listening to the experts. I live in the beautiful riding of Newton—North Delta. Unfortunately for us, in my riding we have had a very high number of homicides, and some have really touched members in my community.

Government Orders

Once again, when we look at the numbers and see how under-policed we are compared to ridings that surround us, in talking about facts and science it makes sense that we need that extra policing on our streets right now. I have a growing number of constituents who are becoming very disillusioned. They are asking how much more information, facts, and experience they have to share with the decision-makers for them to realize that we have a community that needs support and additional policing.

When we are talking about offshore on the east coast, it also brings home to me that we have this beautiful geography. We are a country that spans, not from coast to coast, but from coast to coast to coast. On the west coast we are just as concerned about our safety offshore as we are about worker safety on land. We are also very concerned about our environment and the impact of offshore exploration on the environment. We have to make sure that we have rigorous environmental protections in place.

● (1535)

Being a port city, Vancouver recently experienced a work stoppage for almost a month, which had quite an impact on the community. I had businessman after businessman coming to tell me about the impact.

I also met with the truckers, who were telling me about the impact on them with the terrific wait periods that existed. Compared to 2005, when they could do 5 runs, now they can do maybe two; if they were lucky, they could do three runs. They told me how their income level had gone down but their expenses had gone way up.

Just as it has taken the federal government so long to act on this piece of legislation, in a similar way we saw the federal government being remiss in not facilitating negotiations long before the strike started. Every party realized what the issues were, and it was the government that could have facilitated a much earlier resolution. It could have negotiated a settlement to ensure we did not have the economic impacts on both the business community, the transloading companies, and the drivers and their families.

Earlier today I heard about the wheat that is backlogged. In my riding, we ran out of storage space. Now I am very concerned for the transloading companies that move lentils, chickpeas, and all legumes, as well as all the wheat. They are going to be facing some extraordinary challenges in the near future.

I do want to congratulate the parties, the truckers, the transloading companies, and the Port, for the resolution to the strike that would never have taken place if the government had played an active role at the beginning. Whether it is about health and safety issues, other working conditions, or the ability to make a decent living and feed their families, workers have found there is power in working together and being part of a collective.

We pass bills that go into law, but unless there is enforcement, they remain words on paper. My plea to my colleagues across the way is to ensure that with the moves we have made in the right direction for worker safety in the offshore industry, especially with the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord, that we at least ensure we have implementation measures in place that are not just “we are asking you to”. For implementation to happen, there has to be real

enforcement, and real enforcement has to have real consequences for those who do not ensure that the safety measures are in place.

Being a teacher, an important part of occupational health and safety is education. That is the education of workers. No occupational health and safety culture is complete without employers and workers receiving a thorough education and both of them working collaboratively. However, the power ultimately lies in the hands of the employer to ensure those conditions. All the worker has is the right to refuse unsafe work.

The enforcement and education are critical components of any successful occupational health and safety program. Having worked with a very successful one in B.C., I know that empowering the educational component can be successful.

● (1540)

I am certainly hoping that the operators who are being charged with these responsibilities will develop an educational program and also look at real enforcement.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to grain. In the Prairies, we are really sensitive these days on the issue of grain and the transportation of grain. In fact, I would have loved to have seen us debating Bill C-3 today. I know that my colleague, the Liberal Party critic for agriculture, wants to see that bill get to committee, where we can hear from farmers and other stakeholders.

The Liberal Party has long been very supportive of efforts that would ensure protective measures in occupational health and safety. We appreciate that this is something being driven more by our provinces than by Ottawa.

We recognize how important it is to have those offshore industries, which provide all sorts of economic opportunities and so much more in terms of wealth for all Canadians. There is a lot happening on the east coast. One does not have to be an eastern member of Parliament to have an appreciation for what is taking place there. I am very happy to see the prosperity.

Having said that, it is important to have labour laws and occupational health and safety measures enshrined. This is what this legislation is going to do. It has fallen short, to a certain degree, but it is a strong step forward. We give the government credit for that.

I wonder if the member might like to comment on what she believes would have given more strength to the legislation we are going to pass.

● (1545)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, as a teacher, I always rewarded good behaviour. I always believed in positive reinforcement. When we have had a bill that moved in the right direction, I have always stood in the House and said that it was good. However, if the bill does not quite hit the finish line, it is our responsibility to point that out as well.

I quoted from the panel earlier to say that an independent board was needed. Here is a quote from the former president of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, now the president of Unifor:

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In our opinion, an independent, proactive, and vigilant safety and environmental authority would begin to restore the faith of workers in the role of a regulator in protecting and acting to improve safety in the offshore oil industry.

That captures it. It is that independence that is required.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member on her speech. She is someone who is familiar with the labour movement, as the former president of B.C. Teachers Federation. I wonder if she would comment on the fact that it has taken so long to get to the point where, after 13 years of discussion, we finally have this bill, and only now do workers offshore have the same rights as anyone else to refuse unsafe work and to participate in workplace committees and have an enforceable code for safety violations.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hard-working colleague for his question. I have always admired the work he has done in the House, and I hear glorious accolades for him from his constituents as well.

From my teaching perspective, I think 13 years to get to this point is really slow. However, we got here. If we were in continuous progress, we are at the halfway mark, but we still have a long way to go.

I actually was flabbergasted that we did not have this done a long time ago. Since I have been a parliamentarian, I have seen the government with a bill it wants to railroad through the House, as it did with Bill C-525, which was a union-busting bill, so to speak. It actually managed to ram that through with only about two and half hours of witness testimony and an hour of clause by clause. It then changed the orders so as to have it debated last night so it could be pushed through.

It is really about will. I am glad to see that the Conservatives have that will today to debate this, but it is long overdue. Even if it is long overdue, I am glad that it has reached this point.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, based on the last question and answer, I have a simple question. If the member allows the debate to collapse, we could go right to a vote and make sure that this gets through. That is all we need to have happen, and we can make it law.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for a question like that for a long time.

I actually believe in parliamentary democracy. I believe in debate, where we listen to each other and sometimes actually persuade others to change their minds on something. I believe in a process where the bill goes through all its legitimate stages, with the right to amend, discuss, debate, and hear testimony, unlike my colleagues across the way, who, yesterday, sat silent while they rammed through a bill that was an attack on working people. They sat silent for the whole debate. Not even the mover of the motion had the courtesy to stand to speak to the bill. That is not parliamentary democracy; that is something else.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, based on my colleague's speech, she clearly really cares about the people around her and about workers. Her last comments really struck home.

In her speech, the member talked about certain problems and about ways this bill could have been improved. For instance, she talked about an independent safety regulator. Certain things were suggested in committee, for instance, including a mandatory review of the legislation in five years. She even said that the witnesses supported such a measure. That is also Justice Wells' position.

Does my colleague see any downside to including a mandatory review in five years?

• (1550)

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, when a bill is before us that I feel is already lacking, that does not have independence and separation, I think five years is too long. I think this bill is in need of review even before it has been acclaimed. Because I fundamentally believe that and support what was recommended by the panel in the report, five years is too long to wait to review this piece of legislation.

As I said, in 13 years we have managed to get to about a C. In order to get an A grade, we need to make sure that there is independent regulation of offshore safety. Therefore, for me, five years is far too long.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Brossard—La Prairie.

As everyone knows, the NDP is very concerned about the health and safety of Canadians at work. Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction for offshore workers. Nevertheless, it has some flaws, and that is what I would like to talk about.

The debate on amending the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures began in 1999, when an offshore worker died off the coast of Nova Scotia. Negotiations, however, did not get under way until 2001. The issue came up again in 2010 following the report by Justice Robert Wells.

On March 12, 2009, a helicopter crashed off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, killing 17 people. There was one sole survivor. After the accident, an inquiry was launched. It was carried out by Justice Wells. The judge himself stated that the most important part of the report was recommendation number 29, which recommended that:

a new, independent, and stand-alone Safety Regulator be established to regulate safety in the C-NL offshore.

This recommendation from Judge Wells illustrates the first obvious flaw in this bill, even though it has the support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This fact has been criticized by Tom Marshall, the Minister of Natural Resources for Newfoundland and Labrador. Judge Wells also proposed a three-point plan in case that recommendation was not adopted. He recommended that the government:

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Create a separate and autonomous Safety Division of C-NLOPB, with a separate budget, separate leadership, and an organizational structure designed to deal only with safety matters;

Establish...an Advisory Board composed of mature and experienced persons fully representative of the community and who are unconnected with the oil industry;

Ensure that the Safety Division would have the mandate and ability to engage, either on staff or as consultants, expert advisors to assist it in its regulatory tasks.

I remind members that at the committee stage, the NDP proposed an amendment to Bill C-5 regarding the implementation of this recommendation. The amendment would have required the minister to table a report to Parliament within five years on the enforcement and implementation of the bill and on the need for a separate and autonomous offshore safety regulatory body.

The answer seems to be that the government's top priority is resolving this issue as quickly as possible, despite the fact that negotiations have been under way since 2001. Then, they will not have to worry about it anymore, even though revising this bill could only benefit Canada's offshore workers.

Second, let us talk about relations between the federal and provincial governments. The Conservative government does not cooperate with the provincial governments enough, despite the fact that they have to have the federal government's consent to change their safety regulations for offshore workers.

An NDP federal government would have worked closely with the provincial governments in order to protect the safety of these workers. It would have addressed this issue in 2001, when the negotiations between the federal government and the governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador began.

This is nothing but another blatant case of the Conservative government failing to listen to the provinces' demands. Let us not forget that these negotiations began in 2001 and that the bill still has not been passed.

What excuse do the Conservatives have for dragging their feet on this issue, which was on the table before they even came to power? How, in almost eight years, have the Conservatives not found enough time to resolve this issue?

I could ask the same question of our Liberal colleagues, who could have considered the issue as early as 1999. We cannot waste any more time. We need to pass this bill now, once we have finished with the necessary debate.

Shell and BP are preparing to explore for oil off the coast of Nova Scotia, and I am certain that no one here wants a repeat of the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon spill. On the contrary, I think that everyone here wants to know that offshore workers will be safe and healthy.

● (1555)

Third, I firmly believe that Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction when it comes to protecting workers. This bill will give workers the right to refuse tasks that they believe are unsafe. In addition, the bill will protect workers from reprisal if they report unsafe situations. In so doing, this bill further ensures the safety of offshore workers.

However, I want to reiterate that this bill would be an even better fit if it implemented Justice Wells' recommendation number 29 or if

it would at least call for a review, in five years, of how the bill is being enforced to determine whether the creation of a new, independent and stand-alone organization to regulate safety issues in the offshore is warranted.

In closing, the NDP recognizes the merits of Bill C-5, which is a step in the right direction when it comes to better protecting workers. However, we deplore the fact that it has taken so long to get to this point. The NDP deplores the government's dismal co-operation with the Governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador and the fact that it is ignoring Justice Wells' recommendation 29 on the creation of an independent and stand-alone safety regulator for the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador offshore, which was the most important recommendation in his report.

Before becoming an MP, I took human resources management and occupational health and safety courses. These are critical issues. Safety is paramount when doing one's job and many studies show that we do a better job and we feel better if we feel safe. When we do not have that pressure, we feel happier about going to work and when we feel happy we do a better job. Therefore, it is essential.

A Conservative member asked why we were taking the time to discuss this and why we did not simply want to end debate and vote. The reason is that it is very important to have the opportunity to express our views about a bill in the House. The Conservatives often use time allocation motions to impose closure in order to quickly pass as many bills as possible.

As parliamentarians, our role in the House is to rise and debate these bills. This is a means of communicating with my constituents. I tell them about the speeches I give on various issues. Even if I am in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, which is in Montreal, Quebec, and far from where these issues are centred, these issues are of interest to Canadians across the country. This is about health and safety and it is important to take the time to discuss this issue.

We are nonetheless pleased to support this bill because it is an improvement, even though it does not go far enough.

● (1600)

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech about a danger that she clearly takes personally. It is important to talk about this issue.

Why does she think it took 12 years to introduce this bill? Since this all started 12 years ago, the Liberal government of the day is just as responsible for it as today's Conservative government.

Can my colleague tell us why it took so long, considering that it involves important worker health and safety rights?

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

I do not know if I can answer it. I cannot read the Conservatives' minds, so I do not know why they did not act sooner. Maybe it is because they want to push their agenda through.

This is the 41st Parliament. We were elected three years ago, and since the beginning, the Conservatives have passed all of the bills that were in line with their values and on their agenda. I guess they wanted to get those things done first.

Since coming to power in 2006—not all Parliaments have lasted four years—maybe they decided to deal with their priorities first. That is a shame, because worker safety is very important.

The fact that it took 12 years is disgraceful. It is important for workers to feel comfortable and safe at work. The Conservatives are not the only ones to blame for the delay, because 12 years ago, the Liberals were in power. This is a sad situation.

The NDP is the party that can do the best job of protecting workers, their health and their safety. Those other two parties have just proven that this issue was not on their agenda or one of their priorities.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, we were reviewing the transportation of dangerous goods by rail and the role of safety management systems. One witness from the steelworkers union said that Transport Canada was not doing its job and was not enforcing the rules. Rules are proposed, but Transport Canada is not enforcing them. It also gives companies permission to do all sorts of things and that is how we end up with situations like the one in Lac-Mégantic.

Does my colleague not think that having an independent body—an independent safety regulator—might help solve this type of problem?

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. She does excellent work on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

The committee's study on dangerous goods is very important. I do not really know who said it, but it is true that Transport Canada does not enforce the regulations. We have seen this, with what happened.

I think this independent organization, whose mandate would be to ensure that the rules are enforced, is essential. With the Conservatives, it is always a question of self-management. For instance, the NDP asked that companies be required to tell us when a drug shortage might occur. However, the Conservatives said that they would not require them to do so. The result was another shortage of drugs. Here again is a case where the department is being asked to self-regulate. I do not think this is a good idea, and this is why we wanted to see an independent agency set up. This is also why we wanted there to be a reassessment in five years. We would then have been able to decide whether an independent agency was necessary or not. The regulations must be enforced. I am sure that people are doing what they can—I believe in the basic goodness of people—but sometimes things are forgotten, and there can be lapses or shortcomings. This is why independent agencies exist. They exist in order to monitor the situation. Their role is to make sure that everything is all right. It would have been a good idea to include an independent agency in the bill.

We are going to vote in favour of the bill, because it is a step in the right direction. Its content is good, but it does not go far enough.

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There are half measures in the bill. There may perhaps be repercussions, but we are going to support it anyway because it includes some helpful measures for employees, even though it does not go far enough.

• (1605)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 Alfred-Pellan, Public Safety.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give my opinion on Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures. The title is a bit long, but the purpose of this bill is to correct certain long-standing deficiencies in order to protect offshore workers who work specifically in the oil and gas field. This is a matter of health and safety.

The reason why I say this matter has dragged on and that these are long-standing deficiencies is that we have known about these problems for more than 12 years. They came to light more particularly following an accident. I lament the fact that this has taken so long. Why did the governments of the time, both Liberal and Conservative, wait so long to take action to protect the health and safety of workers? That is the least we can do.

On the other hand, I do want to acknowledge that this is indeed a step in the right direction, since such recognition is deserved.

This issue is of course somewhat complex in that there had to be a lot of co-operation between the federal and provincial governments. Once again, I admit, the government has managed to speak and work with the provinces. I will come back to what could have been done better later, but I want to say that this is a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, that is not the case often enough.

As an aside, in the case of the Champlain Bridge, a matter that concerns me directly, the government clearly does not want to co-operate with the provincial government or the municipalities. It has decided that if there are no tolls, there will be no bridge. However, when we talk to the provincial government and a number of municipalities, we see that they are opposed to the government's plan. The NDP is also opposed to the government's plan to charge a toll to replace the Champlain Bridge. Now I will get back to the subject at hand. I wanted to point out that sometimes the government can work with the provinces. It has managed to do so on this bill, and I do not understand why it does not do so all the time, why it insists on working behind closed doors and not co-operating to advance matters for the public good. In this case, this is a step in the right direction.

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However, as my colleagues mentioned in committee, the NDP wanted to move amendments. One of the main points pertains to recommendation 29 of the Wells report. In fact, an inquiry was conducted following a rather tragic accident that caused a number of deaths off the coast of St. John's. The report of the investigator, Mr. Wells, contains recommendations, one of the main ones being that an independent organization be made responsible for conducting follow-up. I am going to quote the report for greater clarity: "I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire Report." Recommendation 29 calls for a new, independent and stand-alone organization to be established to regulate safety in the offshore. That recommendation is very important and was made following the inquiry. It really stated how important it was to establish such an organization.

The idea of creating a safety regulator is not a new one. We did not come up with it. We see it elsewhere. By comparison, for example, such independent, stand-alone organizations have already been established in Norway, the United Kingdom and Australia. Even the United States has a virtual equivalent called the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement.

A solution was recommended following a very important inquiry. We do not understand why the government refuses to go that route, why it is rejecting an amendment that might have been positive and practical and might have helped to improve health and safety.

•(1610)

The government often says that it will conduct studies and consider recommendations. However, it has been doing nothing for at least 20 years, even though the Transportation Safety Board says that DOT-111 tanker cars are unsafe and even dangerous. A Liberal government was in power 20 years ago. Today, we have the Conservative government and it is still doing nothing. It has no timeline to replace the old DOT-111 cars. That is what troubles me.

Bill C-5 comes in the wake of the helicopter crash in St. John's, and the Transportation Safety Board's recommendations were made in response to the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, which caused 47 deaths. The Transportation Safety Board recently released a report stating that the problem with the DOT-111 tanker cars was linked to that tragedy. Despite that fact, the government is taking no action.

There is still a parallel with this case. It has taken 12 years to act. In the case of the DOT-111 tanker cars, it has been 20 years and the government still has not done anything.

Yesterday I asked the minister when he would have a timeline, and I got no answer. In fact, I got a vague, meaningless answer. There is still no timeline even though we know it can be done in a few years. However, the government has to be willing to take action. It has to show that this is what it wants. That takes a little trust and political leadership on the government's part. That would be very much appreciated on this side of the House.

Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction. That is why we are supporting it at this stage. However, having been a member of several committees, I regret the fact that the government, which also has a majority in committee, rejects virtually all amendments

whether they are moved by the official opposition or by the third party. It does not listen to the other parties.

That is unfortunate because the current situation is very real. The official opposition did not create it. This comes from an inquiry report. Experts have studied the problem. I am not an expert, but I trust the opinion of the people who went into the field and examined the situation. Those people made a recommendation to us, saying, moreover, that it was definitely the most important one, but the government set it aside. Why? That is hard to understand on this side of the House.

We want to establish an independent, stand-alone agency because we want to improve safety regulations. That is very important. I apologize for constantly drawing a parallel with Transport Canada because this relates directly to the file I am working on, but it reveals the same attitude on the government's part. It receives recommendations, but it does nothing.

Once again, in committee today, we heard from experts who told us about the problems. Unfortunately, I can anticipate the government's attitude. It will say that it has heard some good recommendations but that it is going to shelve them and do what it wants.

With regard to the railway safety example, I find that situation unacceptable. The Transportation Safety Board made three recommendations in its report on the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, which caused 47 deaths. That report is not yet complete because the investigation is still under way. Unfortunately, the government is doing nothing to move this matter forward. That is deplorable because we are talking about saving lives, about helping people by improving health and safety. The government has turned a deaf ear despite the experts' recommendations.

•(1615)

I am going to conclude by congratulating the government for doing something quite positive after procrastinating for 12 years. There has been some co-operation with the provincial government. However, the government can and should do better.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that I have had the opportunity to ask a number of questions related to the bill. The member intrigued me when he made reference to the DOT-111 railway cars and to the fact that we are talking about 20 years.

The question that I have for him is related to an area that he says he is quite knowledgeable about. When did the NDP recognize that the DOT-111 cars were not worthy enough to be on the rail line, and how long does he believe they should continue to be allowed to be used by rail line companies?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I think it is interesting that he is asking me this question, even though the Liberal government of the day did not do anything. Now it is the opposition that is being blamed. When blame falls on the Conservative government, the Conservatives blame the Liberals, and the Liberals are now blaming us as the opposition party. This is interesting.

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I am going to answer this question, which is not entirely related to the issue before us today—but I appreciate it anyway. The Minister of Transport says that 10 years is too long. The idea of 10 years came from the United States, who said they were going to try to replace the cars in 10 years. CN told us yesterday said it was going to replace the old DOT-111 cars within four years. Irving Oil told us they would do it within a year. Today we heard in committee from a manufacturer of DOT-111 cars who thought that the number of cars that needed to be replaced was around 80,000.

Unlike the Minister of Transport, I do not have any information about the discussions the government has with all the parties involved. However, what I am asking is that the minister give us some kind of timeframe, in light of all the information and authority she has. In fact, despite having held discussions, having commissioned a report on the DOT-111 railway cars and having received TSB recommendations, we still do not have a timeframe. It is necessary to take action. The time has come to put a figure to the timeframe.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed hearing the statement by my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie. This bill has been studied in committee and an amendment was put forward by the NDP members that sit on the committee. The amendment would have required the minister to table a report in Parliament within five years on the enforcement and implementation of the act and on whether or not it was necessary to establish a stand-alone, independent offshore safety regulator.

I have been thinking about this since I studied the bill and I still cannot find an explanation. Could my colleague enlighten me on this issue ?

• (1620)

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Gatineau for her question and for all the work she has done. I have worked with her, and it is quite amazing.

Her question is accurate and relevant. I can say that we have suggested that the situation be reviewed in a few years.

My colleague from Nickel Belt sits on the committee. He explained that the members of the Conservative Party who sit on the committee were not even interested in discussing the issue. As I understand it, it is not really very interesting to them. It comes back to what I was saying in my statement: every time the opposition wants to make an amendment, the Conservative government is not interested, even though the amendment is supported by experts who say that it would be an improvement. I have seen this clearly because I have sat on a number of committees. I think this is pure partisan politics, simply because if an amendment comes from the opposition the Conservatives think it is a bad idea. This is unfortunately an old, worn-out government. I think we are going to replace it in 2015.

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to join with my NDP colleagues, since we are the only ones taking part in this debate, in supporting Bill C-5 at third reading.

First, however, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Gatineau.

We in the NDP believe that Bill C-5 is particularly important, because it is intended to correct major problems in the current legislation and in the authority for making regulations associated with occupational health and safety standards in the offshore oil and gas industry.

In concrete terms, all this means that passing Bill C-5 would enshrine safety practices in the legislation. The employer would assume primary responsibility for occupational health and safety and would be required to take part in implementing and co-ordinating the measures needed to ensure employee safety.

For their part, employees would now have the opportunity to refuse to perform an activity that they have reason to believe is not safe. This provides some critical autonomy for our workers, who are always concerned about their safety and security in the workplace. Employees would also be protected from reprisals if they report a situation they consider unsafe.

Bill C-5 is a necessary and constructive improvement in occupational employee health and safety in offshore areas, and this is why the NDP is proud to support it. Employee protection has always been, and will always be, a priority for the NDP, in every field of work.

In our view, it does not matter whether the workers are land-based or working in offshore sites. They deserve the same level of protection. The provinces have the same view. Back in the day, the NDP government of Nova Scotia put a great deal of work into this issue. Newfoundland and Labrador also worked hard and sent numerous requests to the federal government for this kind of occupational safety system to be implemented. Of course, the NDP in Newfoundland and Labrador was very active in pushing the analysis and discussion on this issue forward.

Clearly, we in the NDP are going to support all the efforts that have been made by the provinces and we are delighted to see the improvements that will be implemented when the bill is passed.

The amendments we are talking about here were requested over 10 years ago by the provinces, primarily Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, as I mentioned. It was high time that the federal government considered this issue. It is a matter that will also become more and more important for Quebec, as there is more and more discussion of oil development off our coastline, regardless of any personal views on the subject. These could also be important measures for Quebec workers, who may well be working in these areas in the future, here again, notwithstanding anyone's personal opinion about oil development per se.

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We in the NDP would also like to commend the federal government and the provinces for their willingness to work together, which made it possible to arrive at the bill that is before us today. It is a sign of openness to dialogue and co-operation that I personally find quite surprising on the part of the Conservatives, as we have grown accustomed to a great deal more inflexibility and intolerance from them. Nevertheless, I hope they have developed a taste for this new approach and that they will decide to continue along this path. Let us think positively. We can always hope that this method of working in co-operation with, rather than against, the provinces will be a model for dealing with any future issues they will have to address together with the provinces.

These days, safety is a major concern. With a great deal of effort, we got back to the issue of workforce training. Here again, however, there were disputes, because the Conservatives' approach was simply to bully the provinces, asking them to do what they were told, failing which they would no longer support them. They would not get the funding requested and would be the losers. Be that as it may, I will continue to encourage them. I will therefore ask the Conservatives to maintain this admirable receptiveness with the provinces in the future.

With respect to the bill now before us, it has to be said that it is not a cure-all, and does not resolve all the existing problems. Despite the efforts of the NDP and the repeated requests from the provinces, Bill C-5 still does not contain a provision to establish an independent offshore safety regulator.

• (1625)

This measure had originally been proposed by Justice Robert Wells in his 2010 report. He stated the following in the report: "I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire Report".

This was recommendation 29, which called for the creation of a new, independent, stand-alone agency to regulate offshore safety. This recommendation is important, because it would finally lead to the establishment of a single independent agency responsible for regulating safety.

The issue came into prominence following an accident that caused a death. It was in that context that the debate focused on the creation of such an independent agency. It is very important for us in the NDP, and unfortunately it is not included in the current bill.

In comments made a little earlier by my colleagues, both Conservative and Liberal, I heard complaints about the fact that we were still discussing this bill, that we were wasting our time and that we should pass it at once. I wonder where they were 12 years ago, when the negotiations began.

Both Liberal and Conservative members have taken this issue lightly, and done absolutely nothing. In their place, I too would wish to avoid the subject, I would not want to talk about it, and I would want it to be voted on as quickly as possible in order to forget about what was not done in the past.

I found it was unfortunate to be hearing these comments, because the experts who testified before the committee made clear the importance of having such an agency, in order to put in place the necessary measures to protect our offshore workers. Unfortunately,

we have come this far and still nothing has been done. Elected representatives in Newfoundland and Labrador, among others, have deplored the fact that the agency is not included in the bill.

An NDP government would take all the necessary action, and hold all the necessary discussions, to work with the provinces to set up such an independent agency. In our view, it is a priority. Yet it does not seem to have been a priority for the current government or for the previous Liberal governments.

In 2015, the political landscape will have changed, as we will have a New Democrat government that will at last be able to achieve the practical results so long awaited by the offshore workers. This is really important to us.

In his remarks a little earlier, my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie mentioned that the NDP had proposed an amendment in committee to try to improve the bill. The amendment called for a provision to ensure that the effectiveness of the legislation would be reviewed five years after it was passed. Therefore, it would have been possible to see whether it could be improved, possibly through the creation of an independent agency, as recommended by Justice Wells. We are not yet at that point.

I do not wish to say that the Conservatives are acting in bad faith, but I see no other reason. We are therefore going to insist on this. Because of the bad faith of the government in place, the amendment was defeated. The result therefore is a law that is somewhat lacking, but nevertheless represents a definite improvement for the workers.

With a view to additional protections for those working offshore, the NDP can support the bill. As I was saying, it is unfortunate that we were not successful in resolving all the problems that had nevertheless been made very quite clear by the provinces and by numerous experts. Some years ago, one of those problems was directly demonstrated by the death of a worker, yet we are still engaged in the same debate. However, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has stated that the current federal government clearly did not have the desire to establish such an agency.

In spite of everything, being able to incorporate better measures in the legislation for occupational health and safety is a significant step in the right direction. Given the expanding development of offshore oil and gas, this step should have been taken a long time ago. We are nevertheless getting the desired results. That is good. The NDP is very proud to support this bill.

• (1630)

I also wish to reiterate my pride in the work done by New Democrat MLAs in Newfoundland and Labrador and the then NDP government of Nova Scotia. They worked very hard to achieve this outcome. They can be proud of the work they did.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I realized something listening to this debate, and I wonder if my colleague would agree with me. I have the impression that the most important thing for this government is to get this bill passed as soon as possible and never talk about it, in case people realize that Justice Wells' main recommendation was not included.

Those who go and work on oil platforms in the future risk not coming home if the helicopter gearbox is out of oil. When the Conservatives do not want to do something, they drag their feet, they take their time, they do only half a job and they do it at the last minute. That is my impression. What does my colleague think?

Ms. Éleine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Laurentides—Labelle for this relevant question.

Perhaps the Conservatives do hope to pass this bill quickly and quietly, before Canadians really notice. However, thanks to the hard work of all my NDP colleagues, that will not happen. People know what is going on, and provincial elected representatives have also criticized the fact that that recommendation was not included in the bill. This is a problem.

The NDP members took the time to rise in the House to discuss this issue and shed some light on the problem, unlike the Conservative and Liberal members, who preferred to stay out of the debate altogether. We were able to shed some light on this problem.

Rest assured that in 2015, an NDP government will tackle the issue while working with the provinces, which is what should have been done all along.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier for her speech.

I wonder if she would care to comment on the fact that the minister responsible for this bill, the Minister of Labour, was asked three times this morning why the government refused to accept an amendment to review this provision for an independent safety board in five years' time, as was proposed by the NDP, and we did not get an answer. There was no explanation given as to why that review would not be permitted and put into the legislation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éleine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, frankly, I find it disappointing to hear such a thing. The minister should be able to answer that question.

He should have a good reason for rejecting an opposition amendment. If the Conservatives cannot justify their decision, there is a problem with it. This falls under the minister's discretionary power. This is not a decision that was taken in the best interests of our workers. I would like to ask the minister the question and get an answer, but I am not holding out hope. However, it is important to understand the reason behind this decision. If there are any problems, we need to debate them in Parliament to try to convince members from the other parties. However, the other parties do not want to truly look at this issue. We need to convince them to review the legislation and try to improve it. We will have to start the entire legislative process over. I find it very disappointing that the NDP's amendment was not seen for its merits and adopted, as it should have been.

•(1635)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech this afternoon. I have a general question for her that is related to what we are talking about today. What is the NDP's record when it comes to protecting

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workers? I am not just talking about offshore workers, but all workers. What is the NDP's record on protecting workers?

Ms. Éleine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his very relevant question, which will allow me to get back to a topic I touched on briefly in my speech: how important it is to the NDP to protect workers' rights. This topic has always been a priority for our party, unlike the Conservatives, who are constantly criticizing us for defending workers' rights. These rights are very important.

Without protections to guarantee workplace health and safety, workers will end up getting injured, being absent and being subject to potential abuse from employers. We have to keep all of that in mind. Unfortunately, the Conservative government seems to consistently—if not constantly—be ignoring that.

If workers want someone to stand up for them in the House of Commons, they have no choice but the NDP in 2015.

ROYAL ASSENT

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

March 27, 2014

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Stephen Wallace, Secretary to the Governor General, in his capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 27th day of March, 2014, at 4:03 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Deputy Speaker

The bills assented to as of this day include Bill C-28, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2014, and Bill C-29, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2015.

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•(1640)

[*Translation*]

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Gatineau.

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Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say once again publicly that I am impressed by your French. As the member for Gatineau, I can say that Quebeckers really appreciate it.

I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-5, just as I am pleased to do so at every opportunity. I do it as often as I can, so that I can give a voice to the people of Gatineau. They did not elect an MP so that she could just come here and sit back and rubber stamp all the government's bills. That is not right and that is not at all the promise I made at the time.

I would like to begin by congratulating my NDP colleagues who worked so hard on this bill. Considering all the interest shown by the Conservatives and the Liberals, I thought it was just a tiny, short bill, until I saw the 270 pages and I realized that this is an extremely important bill—I am hearing this everywhere I go—and above all, extremely complex.

I will never accept the moving of any time allocation motions in the House, which is why we object every time the government does it. Once or twice could probably be justified, but when we get to the 60th time, we begin to wonder whether this is part of a standard procedure to prohibit debate.

I will also not accept hearing in the House, in questions from the Conservative or other benches, that if we vote in favour of a bill it should automatically move to the next stage. Why? The mandate given to us by voters is to express opinions on bills on their behalf. As the opposition, and especially as the official opposition, we are also required to do the work that the government sometimes refuses to do because it is imposing its vision by virtue of its majority.

I often remind members that this strong Conservative majority was elected by 39% of the population, and 61% of the population would like to have their say once in a while. Sometimes, our opinions are heard by even a certain percentage of the 39%. We cannot simply rubber stamp bills.

However, it is not surprising coming from this government. Yesterday, in another context quite similar to this one, my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord asked the Minister of Justice a question regarding another time allocation. The Conservatives wanted to prevent debate and it seems they are criticizing us for wanting to express our opinion on Bill C-5. This is what the member said to the minister:

I have been working on this issue for two and a half years, and I have not yet been able to speak to Bill C-13. There are so many of us in the NDP who wish to speak to this that there is a good chance that I will not be able to as a result of this time allocation motion.

The member was asking whether the minister would be interested in what he had to say about this bill. The minister was frank and forthright in his reply. I will quote him word for word from beginning to end, unlike the Minister of State for Democratic Reform who quotes selectively so that the information provided is incomplete and makes no sense. The entire quote is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, no. I do not feel inclined to hear from the member.

That says it all. I spent the night thinking about that comment and telling myself that I, a woman and MP for Gatineau, elected by my constituents in 2011, would proudly rise to speak to Bill C-5.

This bill is of interest not only to the government and the Minister of Labour, but also to all of those elected to this House, and it is our duty to discuss it. Nothing exasperates me more than having to read rulings like Whaling, Nadon and all of the others that we have been receiving recently from various courts and that are saying that our work has not been done correctly. I would like to draw the attention of the House to the serious role that we have to play and particularly to the Whaling ruling, which was handed down last Thursday by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court was looking at the issue of parole, but it dealt only with the retroactivity aspect. Justice Wagner made an important point in paragraph 67.

● (1645)

I hope that everyone realizes what Justice Wagner said in his *obiter dictum*. It is not necessarily part of the ruling, but it is downright disturbing. In any case, it will be in writing. He said that some of the debate cast doubt on the constitutionality of the legislation.

It was a very acrimonious debate. That has taught me that the role we have in the House is important. We need to take part in debate, stand up and be heard. The Conservative government, and sometimes its friends at the back of the room on the other end, like to take the words that have been used and what has been said, add some artistic flair by omitting certain parts and make it seem as though something different was implied.

This shows how important the words we use and the work we do are. What is said here could be used in court. It could be analyzed to determine whether a bill we want to pass in the House is legal.

There is a procedure that the Speaker is supposed to enforce to ensure that the rules are followed and decorum is maintained. However, we also have a fundamental obligation to ensure that we are making an informed decision when we pass a bill, which is enforced and has an impact on Canadians.

This is the first day of debate on Bill C-5. However, I have heard in the House how terrible and shameful it is that NDP members want to rise and speak to a bill that affects the safety of people who work sometimes difficult offshore jobs. I salute these people and the work they do for Canadians.

It is not too much to ask to want to review a bill. It is part of the opposition's job to tell the people who are watching us and who are interested in Bill C-5 what happened and what was said at second reading, what happened and what was proposed in committee, and what was rejected out of hand by the Conservatives. More often than not that is what they do when we propose amendments. With the amendments rejected, the bill comes back to the House at report stage and third reading.

Wanting to support the bill is one thing, but we also want to caution the government. I do not want to be accused one day of sitting back in my seat when there was a serious amendment that the government might have benefited from hearing to ensure that it was doing the right thing.

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Nothing has been done in response to a very tragic situation that happened more than 12 years ago. This government boasts about being all about law and order and siding with victims. However, workers are victims too sometimes, whether this government likes it or not. Depending on the type of work they do, workers can end up in very dangerous situations.

Accordingly, any measure that affects their safety and deals with a tragic situation, like the one that happened off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, deserves special attention. The amendment proposed by the NDP was quite reasonable.

In statements by members, my colleague mentioned the meeting with the fire chiefs who said after the tragedy in L'Isle-Verte that sprinklers are essential in seniors' residences. I agree with them. We always wait for tragedy to strike before we do anything.

I will never let this government tell me when I have the right to stand up and when I do not. It is our duty. Shame on those who engage in rubber stamping for this government.

• (1650)

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Gatineau for giving a passionate, persuasive speech, as always. I would like to congratulate her for fiercely defending her constituents while remaining humble.

Why did the previous Liberal government and the current Conservative government not implement a clearer, more transparent governance model?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is the million-dollar question. It seems clear to me what the right approach is, although it may be a bit more complicated.

Listening to what others have to say about something takes a bit more time. People sometimes think they know the gospel truth—they head off in one direction and do not want to change course. My colleague spoke about humility and perhaps the issue here is a lack of humility. There is nothing wrong with admitting to a mistake. As long as it happened in good faith, I have no issues with the mistake. However, it bothers me when the same mistakes are made over and over again. As a general rule, there is nothing wrong with listening to other people's opinions.

Transparency is not just a word to be used by the opposition. In my opinion, it should also be part of the vocabulary of the party that becomes government, if it respects Canadians. Through co-operation and transparency, we can make good decisions that benefit Canadians. We are not here for us, we are here for the people who elected us.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. She reminded us that Bill C-5 is a definite and necessary improvement to the existing occupational health and safety system for all concerned. She also reminded us of the importance of protecting these people at work.

In addition, she mentioned the government's refusal to consider the NDP's reasonable amendment, which was to include a mandatory five-year review period.

Can she tell us more about the consequences of that refusal?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, only time will tell.

What I can say is that caution was the main theme of my speech, which was intended as a friendly warning to the Conservative members. Having been slapped in the face so many times over the past few weeks, they should take a step back and reconsider this kind of review mechanism.

Yes, passing Bill C-5 is important. It is long overdue. However, just because others were asleep at the switch does not mean we should do whatever happens to come randomly to mind. What it means is that we should be cautious.

That was the point of our amendment: to include a review mechanism. We are currently doing reviews with respect to official languages and part XVII of the Criminal Code. The MPs who passed section 530 and on of part XVII were smart because they set out a review mechanism to see how the legislation worked in real life. When it comes to worker safety especially, there can be no harm in doing a review.

The word “worker” is not a dirty word. We are all workers. Every day, people do all kinds of work, and some of them are exposed to more danger than others. It is just as important to protect these people as it is to protect every other victim in society.

• (1655)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. Although I have not been in politics for long, I grasped quite quickly that when the government wants to keep speeding things up, it may be because it does not want us to look too closely at certain things.

This matter of the Newfoundland and Nova Scotia boards to deal with offshore oil exploration and development is something I find exceedingly interesting, because there is an eerie and somewhat fantastical aspect to it. I have trouble imagining a group of workers getting into a helicopter, flying out to the middle of the Gulf or off the banks of Newfoundland in sometimes unbelievable weather conditions, to work on an oil rig in the midst of 30-metre waves. Most Canadians could not even imagine what it must be like. And yet, that is what everyday life is like for many seafaring workers.

This image of the platform is like a floating prison where people are forced to work for 12, 14 or 16 hours a day under extreme pressure, because the companies that operate these platforms are often subcontractors, and occupational safety is not a priority for them.

There is black gold fever in Canada at the moment. The goal is to develop all opportunities to extract and exploit oil as quickly as possible, with minimal concern for environmental impacts—a frequent occurrence in the past—or for the working conditions of the people who work there.

Government Orders

I am interested in these things, particularly given that these drilling platforms are not standardized. There are many different kinds. Some are floating platforms, some are modular or semi-submerged and others are jacked up on barges. Each type of drilling platform is therefore different, meaning that workers on these platforms are subjected to different working conditions. Do people know where the water hoses are when they are on a different platform, or when they are young workers first arriving on a platform?

Young workers might well wonder what type of platform it is, what the working conditions are, what kind of pressure they will face and what health risks are involved. This is dangerous work.

I now return to the bill that is meant to address a shortcoming in the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, which we have been attempting to do for 14 years. Occupational health and safety regimes have been enshrined in the act.

The NDP is extremely happy about this, except for a major drawback. Experts and indeed everyone who has analyzed the disasters or injuries suffered by workers have suggested the creation of an agency that is independent from the two boards in order to provide a perspective exclusively focused on occupational health and safety. Other countries have done this, including Norway, the United Kingdom and Australia. We, however, do not appear to be there yet.

I will not quote yet again from Robert Wells, whose report suggested the establishment of an independent agency. Instead, I examined the terms used in the act itself to determine why, when he analyzed the issue, he decided that the answer was to create an independent agency. I therefore reviewed the mandates of the boards provided for in the Atlantic Accord Act, particularly in terms of implementation.

● (1700)

My review of their mandate showed that the board is responsible for offshore management. It deals with the issuance of interests, exploration licences, significant discovery licences, drilling orders, production licences and royalties. It is also responsible for issuing operating licences and authorizations for work, and it has authority in the areas of financial responsibility, investigations and offences. It deals with income taxes, taxes on insurance premiums, tax administration agreements, jurisdiction of courts, regulations and payments. It is also responsible for determining equalization payments on oil deposit royalties. That is the board's mandate.

The bill is designed to add a mandate for the protection of worker safety. The board was established to oversee and regulate oil operations. There is no mention of anything human in its mandate. That is not part of it. The board has been failing to deal with this issue for years. On a platform, it is the union that strives to improve working conditions. Workers are in a no man's land.

It is not a good idea for the same board to be made responsible for monitoring occupational health and safety. That is why it is worth discussing. If action is taken too quickly and the board is given responsibility in this area, it will not exercise this responsibility as it should. Everyone knows that work on offshore platforms is very

dangerous. It is one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and there have been many accidents.

We all remember the major accidents. There have been many oil platform explosions over the past 20 years. They began in the 1970s. There were 123 deaths on the Alexander L. Kielland platform and 167 on the Piper Alpha platform. Here in Canada in 2009, a helicopter crash killed 17 people. In 2010, we all saw what happened in the Gulf of Mexico, when 11 workers were killed.

More recently, in 2011, there were victims in Russia. Off Africa, six people were killed. In the North Sea in August 2013, four died when a helicopter crashed in an incident like the one here in Canada.

We will support this bill, because it will cover the transportation of workers to the platforms and it is important for the workers to be covered during transportation.

There are also many injuries on the platforms. Many hazardous products are used. There are back injuries and there are burns. Medical assistance is required and people are in the middle of the ocean.

For all these reasons, it would be a good thing to create an independent body to handle safety and ensure that everyone who goes to these platforms is monitored in some way, with a view to ensuring that workers are not injured and that when they return to their families, they are still in one piece.

Working on a platform can be exciting. It pays extremely well, but the risks are enormous. I think that establishing an independent body would mean better oversight of all this.

Why was a review of the act after five years requested? Because the black gold rush is on and things are moving quickly. Projects are proliferating. There has been exploratory drilling at 200 sites in Nova Scotia and 376 sites in Newfoundland. People go to sea with not nearly enough protection.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their patience. I would be glad to answer a few questions.

● (1705)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has clearly demonstrated the importance of this bill, and yet, it took 12 years for it to be introduced.

Today the NDP members are the only ones rising to speak to it. No one else has given a speech. What message does that send to workers and to Canadians in general?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, that is what I was thinking before I started my speech.

The faster we go, the less the government wants to hear about certain aspects. In this case, it does not want to hear about how workers could be better protected. It is ignoring that aspect to make it easier for the industry to get at deposits as quickly as possible, and it is not considering the human condition in the situation.

The NDP represents the people. We care about the human condition and about what it means to participate in an economy and protect one another.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question is factually incorrect. The New Democrats are not the only ones who have been standing inside the House today talking about this bill. Nor does the NDP own any sort of moral high road dealing with labour-related issues.

I have indicated on several occasions today that the Liberal Party has put a high priority on even the passage of this bill. We understand and appreciate the operating difficulties that many offshore workers have on a daily basis. We believe that it is necessary, and it should be ongoing, to improve occupational health and safety issues; that, in fact, it is the provincial governments that are pushing forward this bill we have before us today; and that there is a huge demand from labour, concerned individuals, and different stakeholders who would ultimately want to see the legislation pass.

This is legislation that has fallen short in certain areas, but I would assure the member who posed the question that the New Democrats are not the only ones who care about labour and issues surrounding occupational health and safety, and the record will clearly demonstrate that.

My question for the member is this. In his opinion, where does this legislation actually fall short? Does he believe it should be held up, to continue to improve the legislation?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

The problem with the Liberal Party is that it was in power for a long time. This issue has been on the political agenda since 2001.

This is similar to the case of bilingual officers of Parliament. This year, the NDP managed to pass a bill requiring officers of Parliament to be bilingual. The Liberals were in power for 20 or 25 years. How did they not think it was necessary for these officers to be bilingual?

If I am not mistaken, they were still in power in 2001 when these negotiations started and they did not resolve them quickly, at least no more quickly than the Conservative government.

Workers in Canada and Quebec cannot count on any party other than the NDP to defend workers' rights.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the very great pleasure of rising to speak to Bill C-5, which does have weaknesses—some of my colleagues have already pointed out some of them—but which seems to have drawn a consensus on the part of the labour unions and the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

This is an extremely important issue. I have a union background myself, and as the official opposition labour critic, I believe that any progress that is made to help workers stay healthy and offer them protection and a safe work environment should be embraced and encouraged.

That is why in the NDP, we recognize that despite its weaknesses, Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction in an issue that should be above partisanship. I would like to point out that today is March 27. In one month and one day it will be the National Day of Mourning.

Each year on April 28, we remember those who have lost their lives at work. It is an important day, the symbol of which is the canary, once used in the mines to indicate when the oxygen supply was failing. When the canary died, it was time to get out of the mine, and quickly.

Last summer, I had an opportunity to visit the mine in Springhill, Nova Scotia, and I have to admit that there was a good reason why the first union in Canada was founded in the mines of Nova Scotia, where people wielded their picks on their knees in the dark. If they were not killed in an explosion, they died of black lung, because their lungs were full of coal dust. Things are different now. Unions have been legal in Canada since 1872, but before that, they were not. It has only been a little more than a century. We must continue to see to it that conditions for those working on offshore oil and gas projects are as safe as they can be.

On April 28, we commemorate all those who have lost their lives at work. It has to be said that there are many more deaths than commonly thought. In 1993, there were 758 recorded deaths in the workplace. In 2004, there were 928. In 2005, there were 1,097. That is 1,097 individuals, nearly 1,100 people in a single year who left for work one morning and never came home. This is intolerable and unacceptable. As legislators, we should do everything in our power to put in place regulatory frameworks so that these terrible things never happen again.

Nearly 1,100 people losing their lives in the workplace. Given that the average worker in Canada or Quebec works 230 days a year, this means five deaths every working day. Five people dead from trying to earn a living. People should never lose their lives from trying to earn a living and support a family.

Offshore workers deserve our support, and our support at this stage for Bill C-5. It is based on three major principles that the NDP shares and wishes to promote. Workplace health and safety legislation should protect workers—in this case, offshore workers—at least as well as it protects onshore workers. It is a simple question of fairness.

We understand that resources have to be more substantial. My colleague has already pointed out that it is much more difficult to help someone at sea than someone in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who is within a 10-minute drive of three hospitals. Being far away at sea is no reason for a person not to receive the necessary emergency assistance and care in such situations.

Workers' rights must be protected. This is extremely important. A workplace health and safety culture that recognizes a shared responsibility should be supported. Workers themselves obviously have a responsibility to take care. The employer has a responsibility to take every measure necessary to ensure that workers' lives and safety are not placed in jeopardy.

• (1710)

The government is responsible for putting legislation in place that will compel all parties to act responsibly so that when people leave for work in the morning, there is every chance that they will come home that evening. This is extremely important.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, this bill has taken a long time. It has been under discussion for 12 years. We are happy that it is moving forward, but it is moving at a snail's pace. The Conservative Party, and the Liberal Party before it, could have done their due diligence much sooner.

Today, the government has placed this bill before us. Better late than never, but it has been rather a long time coming. Moreover, while the government is working with two provincial governments and the unions to improve workplace health and safety for offshore oil and gas workers, it is at the same time undermining health and safety rights in its own legislation, with Bill C-4. It is changing the definition of workplace danger that employees working for organizations under federal jurisdiction can use in order to exercise their right of refusal to work.

A worker's right of refusal means being able to say that it seems to him dangerous to go where his employer is asking him to go, because he believes that he could have something fall on his head, say, or slip and fall, or step on a live wire.

In a budget implementation act, the Canada Labour Code was amended to change the definition of the word "danger", which must now be a significant and immediate threat. For example, if the employee is working with asbestos and he risks having cancer in 20 years, this is not immediate. So there may be some argument about this.

Furthermore, the threat must be significant, without any definition of what a significant threat is, or consultation with business, industry, trades or unions. This has all suddenly been presented to us like a rabbit out of a hat.

In parliamentary committee, questions were asked about what constitutes a significant threat. If I lose a finger, is this significant or not? If I lose a leg, is it significant? What piece of the body has to be lost or damaged before it is considered significant?

We asked about the studies the Conservatives relied on for changing the definition and whether there was a problem with the current definition. The answer was that 80% of cases of refusals to work for health and safety reasons were not justified. We asked to see the documents, and there were not any. Their estimates were based on internal discussions. This is what we learned in committee. That is really something.

In those discussions, apparently, they heard talk of situations where the claims were not justified or where there was some abuse of the system. They told themselves they would have to get tough.

In getting tough, they are likely to endanger the health or the lives of employees who work for an organization under federal jurisdiction, and, for us in the NDP, this is unacceptable.

We think it is a shame that, on the one hand, the government is working to improve the health and safety of some workers, which is a good thing and something we are supporting, and on the other hand, it is complicating the right to refuse work for tens of thousands of people.

Even if it were true that 80% of cases were not justified, that means that 20% of cases were indeed justified, and this is what counts. This is what is important for us. The job will perhaps have to wait an hour longer. That is not important. An inspector will come

and look into the problem. The important thing is that no one is hurt and no one dies on the job.

We in the NDP are going to support Bill C-5. However, I think that we should have brought in recommendation 29 made by Robert Wells, who said, "I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire report".

Recommendation 29 is the only recommendation that is not included in the bill.

Recommendation 29 calls for a new, independent and stand-alone organization to be established to regulate health and safety matters in the offshore areas of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. If that is not possible, Justice Wells recommended, in the alternative, that the government create a separate and autonomous safety division in that department with a separate budget, separate leadership and an organizational structure designed to deal only with health and safety matters, and that an advisory board be established, composed of mature and experienced persons who are fully representative of the community and unconnected with the oil industry.

That is very important indeed.

●(1715)

This is a bill that brings regulatory progress. For once, the government has worked in co-operation with the provinces, but once is not a habit.

However, one piece is missing, and that is a genuinely independent organization that would help us monitor the measures that are put in place and that is not connected to the industry or the government. In our minds, that is an essential recommendation, and we very much deplore the fact that it is not addressed in Bill C-5.

That will not prevent us from voting for the bill at this time, but we believe the government should make consequential amendments to it.

●(1720)

[*English*]

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reinforce the point that both provinces have already given royal assent to their respective bills to enact these changes.

The member opposite talked about delays. I am asking him to stop delaying now. The provinces have been waiting patiently for Bill C-5 to pass through our Parliament so that this new regime that would protect workers can come into force.

Will members opposite now allow this legislation to finally come into force so workers do not have to wait another day without the extra safety measures that Bill C-5 would bring to them?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Blame the NDP, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

I thank my colleague for her question. However, the Conservative government has been in power since 2006, and this is 2014. I do not believe it is really the NDP's fault that this bill has not previously been brought forward and introduced in the House.

Government Orders

If the Conservative government had been serious about this issue, it would have worked much faster to actually help workers. That unfortunately is not one of the Conservative Party's priorities, and this is not the first time this government has attacked the bargaining rights of the federal public service, for example. It also attacks labour organizations, thus attacking the middle class.

The NDP therefore has no lessons to learn from the Conservative government regarding worker health and safety.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): It is a good answer, Mr. Speaker. I will say it again, as the hon. member may not have paid attention to my previous speech. Today is day one of the debate at report stage and third reading.

I really empathize with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, as we sometimes see major changes included in totally unrelated bills. For example, Bill C-4 made fundamental changes to labour legislation and justice. I would like the member to comment on this.

Bill C-4 also included two sections amending the Supreme Court Act, presumably to clarify the intent of the law. We all know the fate they met. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Could he also comment on the change that would require the Transport minister to recommend occupational health and safety regulations? This is a 270-page bill filled with details and references to regulations, and we are well aware of the government's tendency to hide things. Could my colleague also share his thoughts on this?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Gatineau raises an excellent point.

Just because the government dragged its feet and introduced a bill way too late in the game does not mean we should not debate it with care and diligence. We must do things properly. The bill is almost 300 pages long. It is quite complex. We need to take the time to weed out its flaws and improve the bill. That is our job as parliamentarians.

I do understand, however, why our Conservative colleagues would not want to debate it; they are loath to debate anything. The Conservatives have now imposed 58 gag orders since 2011, and perhaps they are fantasizing about issuing one more. Who knows how many more gag orders we will have before the next elections.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I believe we have cleared 60.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It seems we are past 60, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we will reach 100. We, in the NDP, believe that it is useful to discuss, to analyze and to amend bills in order to improve them.

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his impassioned speech.

In his view, why is it that both the previous Liberal government and the current Conservative government have failed to focus on the right priorities, including workers, health and safety?

Both have focused on big business profits and on a wide variety of other things, including the deregulation that sadly led to the Lac-Mégantic tragedy.

● (1725)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi for his question. Indeed, the previous and current governments are like two peas in a pod. For many years now, the Conservatives have been serving the interests of the same groups, who do not happen to be families and workers. However, the NDP is here to stand up for them.

The Conservatives would rather subsidize oil companies and give tax cuts to the banks, although banks made around 34 billion dollars in profits last year. Since the population of Canada is 34 million people, this means that every single one of them—every person, every citizen, every senior citizen, every baby—gives \$1,000 a year to the Royal Bank of Canada, CIBC and Scotiabank. This is unacceptable.

An NDP government would definitely have other priorities. An NDP government would work for the people.

* * *

[English]

ENERGY SAFETY AND SECURITY ACT

BILL C-22—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-22, An Act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage of the bill.

* * *

STRENGTHENING CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT

BILL C-24—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage of the bill.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am certain that the members appreciate the notice given by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Private Members' Business

We will resume debate, but before giving the floor to the member for Sherbrooke, I wish to inform him that he has three minutes left for his comments. He will have the rest of his time when the House resumes debate on this issue.

* * *

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to rise today even though I only have three minutes. I will try to be as concise as possible and speak clearly during the time I have today.

This bill is of interest to me and must surely interest all my colleagues, even though we have not heard many members from other parties speak to this issue today.

In all my discussions, the issue of protecting workers comes up often. This is an important issue for me and, I am sure, for the people of Sherbrooke as well. The protection of workers will always be a priority.

My colleague from Rivière-du-Nord talked about the reality of offshore workers. There are many difficult aspects to this work, because the conditions are unbelievably tough. They are not the kind of conditions we have on dry land. Conditions are extremely dangerous in offshore areas, which are located hundreds of kilometres from shore.

Simply getting to an oil platform is a difficult, perilous undertaking. Then, once you are on the platform, it is even more dangerous, not only because of the activities that go on there, but also because of weather conditions.

A bill like the one we are discussing here today is therefore crucial. Overall, it is rather positive, despite a few shortcomings. My colleagues have already talked about them.

This bill is extremely important. I must say, it is the result of excellent work that was done by various provinces. They managed to find some common ground in order to come up with this bill, although it was a long time coming. Indeed, the work began in 2001, and it was not until 2014 that it finally came to fruition. The process was extremely long. I understand that discussions with the provinces are not always easy and that reaching an agreement can be tough, especially when several provinces are involved. It took 13 years to finalize such a bill. That is a little much. I am happy to see that it is such a priority for the government—a priority in the sense that we are debating it here today.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): When the House resumes debate on this motion, the hon. member for Sherbrooke will have 17 minutes for questions and comments.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PROMOTION OF LOCAL FOODS ACT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP) moved that Bill C-539, An Act to promote local foods, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to finally speak to my buy local bill. I have worked on this bill for at least two years, in partnership with stakeholders from across the country, including farmers and many other inspiring people.

One of those people was Jack Layton, our first leader, who was a great source of inspiration for me. I spent a lot of time working with the member for British Columbia Southern Interior to develop a pan-Canadian foods strategy that did not exist then, but that exists now or will soon, I hope. I have had a lot of support and advice from two members, our agriculture critics, namely the member for Berthier—Maskinongé and the member for Welland.

The NDP feels it is important to support farmers and buy local because they work the land and grow the food that helps us meet our basic need to eat every day, three times a day. This is essential; it is vital. Farmers receive very little recognition for the work they do. Their work is demanding and takes a lot of time, energy and investment. They do it with passion and they work the land with their own hands. Their work deserves day-to-day support from the federal government, as we have seen with provincial governments and municipal councils.

I became aware of the lack of support for farmers because my riding is primarily agricultural and rural. Of the 31 municipalities in my riding, 29 are rural. Like most MPs, one of the first things I did after being elected was meet local people and key people. I met many farmers. I learned about the Circuit du paysan, a self-guided tour in Quebec that gives people an opportunity to connect with business people and individuals who want to help us discover local products. The Circuit du paysan includes restaurants, hotels and farms in many Quebec ridings where people can stop in and taste local products, wines, farm-raised meats, fruits and vegetables. That was when I started becoming more and more aware of how important it is to recognize the work these people do.

Private Members' Business

I also started thinking more about buying local when I realized that I did not even know which of the products available in local markets and grocery stores were home-grown. You can find all kinds of products in Montreal at places like the Jean Talon market. I learned all kinds of things from talking to farmers. I talked to people, folks my age, kids, older people. When I asked children where they thought the meat on their plates came from, many of them said it came from the grocery store. They did not realize that all kinds of people were involved. The meat went through a whole process before getting to the grocery store and onto our plates. The same is true of fruits and vegetables.

It is both funny and sad to see that people lack so much information. I really want this bill to become law so that farmers can receive full recognition for the hard work they do.

More and more people are making an effort to look at where the food they buy at the grocery store comes from, to see whether the apples are from the Franklin orchard in my riding or from Chile. Did the apples travel 10,000 kilometres or just 30 kilometres to get to our grocery store shelves? This has an impact that goes beyond economics. It has an impact on health because there are different food safety requirements for Canadian products than for products from other countries.

• (1735)

It has an environmental impact that I will get into later. To buy locally is to buy products nearby that were cultivated and grown by local people that we know.

It seems like a simple concept to buy locally, but when you dig a little deeper you see that there are a number of obstacles that farmers have to overcome before they can have direct contact with consumers. It could be the cost of transportation. For fruits and vegetables to leave the orchards or the fields, they have to be transported by truck, train, or boat. That costs money. Labelling and packaging also cost money.

There are distribution challenges. There are a number of organizations that try to set up farmers' markets and organize drop-off sites for basket delivery in order to make it easier for people to access local products.

There is also a lack of public awareness. One of the realities in Canada is that we have a winter season. Our farmers cannot really provide food to the major supply chains throughout the year, which makes it more difficult for them to get their products into the major supermarket chains, for example. We have to think about that.

The federal government must do more to raise awareness about what fruits and vegetables grow in Canada, in which regions and in which seasons and to promote eating seasonally. People should know which fruits, vegetables and meats are available in winter even though farmers and market gardeners are not working their land during this season because of the cold. There is a great deal of information that needs to be made available to the public.

People who have contacted me via email, Facebook and social networks and those I have met at local markets have told me that they support this, that they agree with the principle and that they want to encourage farmers, but that they do not know where to start.

Grocery stores are making more efforts to develop buy local policies, but there is still work to be done. We could create sections in convenience stores, we could have more farmers' markets and more drop-off locations where farmers could sell their goods. At present, accessibility is a problem.

There are seniors who do not have a car or who have limited mobility and would like to have a grocery store or a pick-up location in their neighbourhood. This does not yet exist. We know very well that seniors are vulnerable, that their health is fragile and that they need to eat nutritious fruits and vegetables.

People often tell me that they do without this kind of food because they cannot afford it. It is not right that a 2-litre bottle of Pepsi costs less than a litre of fresh juice, that junk food is less expensive than healthy food. Why is food that is grown locally so expensive?

We need government action to help everyone to eat well and have access to this food.

Despite these obstacles, more and more Canadians are buying local and have consciously decided to support local farmers. This is not only because it is good for our health, but also because the agriculture sector accounts for 8% of Canada's GDP every year. This means that one out of every eight jobs in Canada is created in the farming sector.

This all translates into \$101 billion added to government coffers every year. Imagine how much we would have if everyone dedicated \$5 more to buying local every time they went grocery shopping. That number came from a farmer in my region, a market gardener named Denys Van Winden.

• (1740)

He told me that spending just \$5 to buy local would make a big difference. It would allow farmers to live better and not simply get by. It would also create more opportunities for consumers to buy directly from farmers. Since 2006, we know that over 8,000 family farms have shut down because of cuts in the agri-food sector. They are having a hard time finding people to take over their farms, because the business is so precarious, harsh and difficult. We need to fix this situation and the federal government needs to do its part to help farmers, whom we need so much.

This bill is the result of two series of consultations held with farmers, distributors and people who have developed food policies across Canada. I could talk about my own consultations. I do not wish to name everyone, however, among those people, both nationally and locally, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture supported this bill. The UPA, Farm to Cafeteria Canada, the Coalition pour la souveraineté alimentaire, several independent retailers, supermarkets, major food chains and many Canadians also answered the call. They are saying that this is important and that they want the federal government to get more involved.

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My bill is twofold. First, it demands that the federal government implement a pan-Canadian strategy in co-operation with the provinces. We want the federal Minister of Agriculture to sit down not only with his provincial and territorial counterparts, but also with farmers and distributors. We want all these people at the same table to discuss, among other issues, a common definition of buying local, because right now there is no such definition. All the provinces have slightly different definitions.

Then, we want them to set up a forum for discussing and sharing information on best practices. Currently, each province does certain things, but farmers are not necessarily aware of what can be done, what works and the tools that could be put at their disposal. It is important that people can sit together, face each other and have meaningful discussions.

Second, my bill asks the government to develop a local foods procurement policy in federal buildings. There are 28,000 federal institutions across Canada, namely agencies, departments, prisons and hospitals. This means that some 28,000 cafeterias could make more room for local foods produced by our farmers. This would make a huge difference and I hope we can get that far, because it would show a clear political will on the part of the federal government.

We must help producers overcome many challenges. There is also the workforce, which is currently very hard to find because the agricultural sector requires long hours of manual labour, especially for certain specific periods. Therefore, we must make a difference. If we do not buy locally, who will? We must really get involved and put our shoulders to the wheel.

In Canada, there are already over 2,300 local initiatives that the government could help promote and develop across the country. It is important that the Government of Canada do its share and that we can encourage our farmers to continue to innovate. It is not easy right now. They are so squeezed that they find it difficult to just survive. In order for farmers to continue feeding us and help reduce our environmental footprint, we must support them in their work. That is why this Canadian strategy makes so much sense.

I hope all members will support my efforts and vote in favour of this bill.

• (1745)

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the member coming forward with this bill. As a farmer and a big proponent of local produce, I think it is a very good bill.

I have some questions. I realize that the minister has to engage and talk to his provincial counterparts, which is very important, but in order for the bill to succeed, we have to be talking to all institutions, especially grocery stores. We have only two or three chain stores in the country, and almost 80% of people buy their products from them. What does the member suggest the minister or the government do to put things in place that would ensure that the grocery stores follow suit and are involved with the process to make sure her bill is successful?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his questions.

This would require the federal government to sit down with its provincial counterparts and with distributors. Most major food chains already have local buying policies, and all they are asking for is to sit down with federal and provincial elected officials to establish best practices and to ensure that local products are marketed and that people are encouraged to buy them. Farmers would jump for joy if they could sit down with these people. That is what they would like to do.

I have spoken to people from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, with people from the UPA and with people from Équiterre. I also spoke to many people in the field. They all hope that this meeting will happen, so that we can move forward and set clear guidelines and criteria. Nothing exists at the moment, so they are anxious to get going.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the member's notice that there is such a thing as an Agreement on Internal Trade. That AIT applies to all food procurement that exceeds \$25,000 and requires that the federal government not discriminate against Canadian suppliers. I wonder if she could comment on how her bill would conflict with the agreement on internal trade.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, as the member just said, there are procurement thresholds for contracts over \$25,000. I asked that question to Public Works and Government Services Canada representatives. The government has awarded a number of contracts for food products. In 2012-13, it awarded nine purchasing contracts totalling \$112,494. That is still not at the maximum. Those nine contracts are under \$25,000. I think we can increase the number of these contracts that comply with international agreements because they are under the \$25,000 threshold. I think we can continue in this way. A number of governments around the world do this, including the United States, the European Union and Nova Scotia. A number of governments already do this, so I do not see why Canada could not encourage its own farmers.

• (1750)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her excellent bill.

She mentioned several things, including the health of our fellow citizens. As she said, we are living in an era of junk food, and we can clearly see the impact of poor nutrition on the young and old. I think it is important to point that out in the House.

Private Members' Business

I have a question I would like to ask her about her bill and the provisions she has included in it. She spoke of economic benefits for the agricultural community, which seems to be dwindling. There is a shift in population to urban centres. How will the bill help maintain and even boost the economy of those regions?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for her question.

This bill is designed to encourage government institutions to sign local procurement contracts, which will help people eat better and help put more money in our farmers' pockets. That way, farmers can keep expanding, hiring young people, creating small family farms and, I hope, supplying farmers' markets that are close to home. This bill would also contribute to people's health because the local food movement provides more affordable food and seeks to deliver a greater number of healthy products through all short distribution channels.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for starting this important debate on supporting local food production.

Canada is a truly fortunate country. We have a robust agricultural sector that is able to meet the needs of local, national and international consumers. We have land and natural resources that foster a diverse agricultural sector. Our agricultural sector employs one out of every eight Canadians and plays a significant role in the health of our economy. As Canadians, we can certainly say that we are lucky.

[*English*]

With this in mind, our government recognizes the good intentions of this bill. However, in a practical light, we question whether Canadians would truly support legislation that would only add a layer of bureaucracy to the local food movement, a movement that is already succeeding in many regions across Canada. Do we really want to add red tape, regulations, and complications to our farmers' markets, community gardens, and co-ops? Do we want to compromise the livelihood of farmers who depend on international markets to sell their crops? The answer is no.

Across different levels of government in Canada there is already strong support for locally grown food. Our approach at the federal level is to focus on national efforts to increase consumer awareness and knowledge of Canadian agriculture, such as through funding initiatives like Farmers' Markets Canada, which is a national organization representing farmers' markets across the country.

While our government wholeheartedly supports the purchasing of locally grown food by citizens and residents, we recognize that provincial governments have a key role to play in defining what local foods are. We will continue to work with interested provinces, because we are committed to keeping the playing field fair by not favouring one farmer over another or one region over another. Together we want to break down the internal barriers to trade in this country.

The bottom line is that our government will ensure that farmers who market locally have the same opportunities as farmers who export to world markets. In fact, many farmers do both.

While the idea of a pan-Canadian strategy for local foods is well-meant, we must remember that trade accounts for a large portion of our farmers' sales. Canadian farmers export to 189 countries around the world. Our agriculture and food exports have been on a growth curve for a number of years. For 2013, all signs point to another record of close to \$50 billion.

However, trade is a two-way street. That is why we have to be very careful about federal policies that legislate local foods and about rules related to government procurement, as advocated in this bill. We cannot expect our trading partners to play by the rules if we are not prepared to do so as well.

Canada has made a commitment to follow the non-discriminatory rules contained in various multilateral and bilateral trade agreements. For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement requires Canada to treat suppliers of our trading partners no differently than they treat local suppliers. The problem with this bill is that the proposed measures could be inconsistent with Canada's international commitments. This would send the wrong message to our trading partners.

Our government understands the need to respect our international and interprovincial trade obligations, because we need to keep markets open for Canadian agricultural products. Our government understands that trade is important, and we understand the needs of farmers. That is why, through our cost-shared programs, under Growing Forward 2, we are empowering the provinces and territories to support locally grown foods through market development initiatives in their jurisdictions.

Our commitment to farmers and our investments in science are helping to ensure that Canada's food comes from the best farming practices right across the country. For example, in Quebec, our researchers are currently working on helping farmers meet the emerging demand for foods with probiotic benefits. In Atlantic Canada, we are developing more varieties of value-added crops, such as short-season soybeans. New varieties like these could increase farm revenues by an estimated \$100 million.

In British Columbia, field and lab studies are helping to minimize the environmental impact of nitrates in surface and groundwater. Groundbreaking research is helping to protect the environment while maintaining optimum crop production.

Work is also under way to build upon the challenges of producing food in the north. This means developing traits that can thrive in colder climates and creating new economic opportunities all the time. In Yukon, for example, our investments are helping farmers to sell their products by promoting local food production and increasing public awareness of Yukon-grown food.

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Our government has also partnered with the Province of British Columbia to deliver a pilot project that will give ranchers the opportunity to process and market their beef locally. This will bring more dollars into their businesses while boosting the local economy and respecting our international trade obligations.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Provincial and territorial governments play a direct, growing role in initiatives that support, promote and market local food products. Several provinces are implementing local food production strategies, including Ontario, which recently passed the Local Food Act, 2013.

The need for a national strategy was not a major issue during federal-provincial-territorial meetings. To be honest, a pan-Canadian strategy could be seen as federal interference in provincial or municipal affairs.

Bill C-539 would also undermine Canada's credibility on the international stage. If we do not apply the rules, our trade partners will. We need to be very careful with policies that favour local food production or that restrict government contracts, as this bill is designed to do.

According to the North American Free Trade Agreement and other international trade agreements, Canada must treat its trade partners' suppliers the same way it treats its local suppliers. We are also addressing the objectives set out in Bill C-539 by supporting local food production through our funding for growing forward 2.

In light of all these considerations and with all due respect, we cannot support Bill C-539.

• (1800)

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess I am not shocked that the Conservatives are against this bill. Well, I am shocked, because what better bill could there be for farmers and consumers in this country? I am not saying that some of the initiatives the government has for local produce are not good, but we cannot be cherry-picking certain areas. What we are looking at in this bill, if I can repeat what the hon. member over here said, is more of a Canadian strategy in working with the provinces.

What gets me is when the Conservatives say other countries might get angry with us or call it a bit of a barrier. I have some articles here out of the U.S., and here are some of the programs the United States has. One initiative is called "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food". This is right out of the United States, one of the trade partners that is going to have a big problem with our promoting local food. It states:

In 2009, USDA launched the "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative, an agency wide effort to create new economic opportunities by better connecting consumers with local producers. As part of the initiative, several funding efforts and programs were announced to assist farmers, help consumer's access nutritional foods, and support rural community development.

The Americans are going to be really mad at us on this one.

Here is another program that the USDA has in the United States. It is called the agricultural marketing service program. It states:

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service administers several grant programs supporting local food initiatives across the country. The Federal State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) provides matching funds to State agencies to assist

in exploring new market opportunities for food and agricultural products, and encourage research to improve the performance of the food marketing system. In 2009, 8 out of 23 grants awarded went to projects supporting local foods, such as funding to improve the effectiveness of Colorado MarketMaker.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mark Eyking: I know Conservative members are getting a little wound up, Mr. Speaker, but maybe you could get them to quiet down a bit. Maybe they are surprised that I am supporting an NDP private member's bill, but when a bill is good, we have to support it. I am surprised at the members over there. I know they know it is a good bill. This must have come out of the PMO. I do not know where it came from, but let us not get into that.

What does the bill ask for? It asks for improving access to high-quality and fresh products and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I do not know if the Conservatives are for that, but that is what is in it. The bill recommends a pan-Canadian local food strategy to constitute a local food program, and also wants local foods bought at institutions.

That being said, let us talk about the institutions. As a farmer, I have sold to them before, and if this bill is going to be successful, the government has to help farmers develop products with the right sized packaging, labelling, and distribution system. It would take quite a bit to pull this off and it is very important that the government work with the provinces to make this happen, especially if local products would be going into federal institutions of any sort.

Another great avenue that is taking off, not only in our country but in New Zealand and Australia, are farm markets. I have a brochure from Farmers' Markets Canada, which talks about \$3 billion of revenue. It says:

Farmers' Markets Canada is a...national organization dedicated to furthering the viability, growth and prosperity for Canadian farmers' markets....

In 2008, FMC commissioned a national study with the help of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to take the pulse of the farmers' market industry in all 10 provinces and measure its importance to Canadians and the Canadian economy.

One of the most important findings was the value consumers place on being able to buy food directly from the farmer who produced it. While 92% of shoppers rated it as important, a full 62% rated it as "extremely important".

As many know, it is hard for farmers' markets to stay open year-round, and I would like to talk a bit about the one in Cape Breton.

The one in Cape Breton is called the Cape Breton Farmers' Market. It is a non-profit co-operative that has been in operation for almost 30 years. It started as an outdoor seasonal market and now it is indoors, a market that attracts thousands of visitors weekly from all over the island.

• (1805)

I am proud to say that my dad and I were some of the first vendors 30 years ago. We sold eggs and chicken and fresh produce there. Now look at it.

While I am bringing attention to our own farmers' market, there are thousands across this country. This private member's bill would help those farmers' markets. We need to have more resources for those small farmers if they are making jams or jellies. If they are making value-added products, they are going to need some sort of help. That could stem from Bill C-539.

We talk about oil security but food security is so important. Canada is a big country. We just need to look at this year alone and how the delivery of propane was disrupted by rail and how grain shipments were disrupted.

It is important to have more local food. We do not expect to have the same food year-round locally. We like to have berries this time of year, which might come from Chile or wherever. It is important that when we have local foods, farmers have the opportunity to sell them locally and stores have the opportunity to buy them.

Twenty-eight million shoppers visit farmers' markets. The average purchase price per shopper at a vendor's stall is \$32. The average small farmer at these farm markets generates one to five jobs. The numbers are pretty big when we look at those farmers' markets.

I mentioned before that we also have to look at the grocery store business. Recently I visited a store called Bread & Circus Whole Foods Market in Boston. I picked up a bag of carrots and swiped it and the screen not only told me the price but it also told me exactly who the farmer was that grew them, the people working on the farm, and how the carrots were distributed. It was the same with cauliflower. We should be encouraging our own stores to do this. Young people like to know exactly where products are from. This provides them with an advantage, as it does the farmer and the grocery stores themselves.

Bill C-539 is only a start. We need a Canadian approach. The Conservatives get squirrely when we talk about a national strategy about anything; they do not want national strategies. This is an issue that we should be looking at in the agriculture committee.

Every member in the House must have a local farmers' market in their own community. Think of all the products that are available. Think of being in the Okanagan Valley. It is not just fresh produce I am talking about. I am also talking about wine. I am talking about the new types of wines at the farmers' market in Annapolis Valley, which are available in liquor stores now. It is more than just food that is being sold. Think of the wine industry. Think of the potential if grocery stores and liquor stores have these labelled right.

This legislation is for more than about just farmers. It could also help people who sell fish. I am from the east coast and it has delicious fish. We have to look at how far away "local" means. We

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have people visiting us in Cape Breton from right across this country, many of them members, even some Conservatives, and they do not want to leave for various reasons. Whether it is at a restaurant or a farmers' market, people want to taste the local food, whether it is produce, fish, or so on.

We have to do more than just have this legislation. We need to have resources for farmers to be able to produce the right type of products for the grocery stores.

Safety is also important. A lot of small farms cannot afford all the tools needed for biosecurity and food safety. We have to help these farmers, because they will in turn expand and produce more food.

I commend the member for her bill. I wish the Conservatives would come to their senses. When the time comes to vote, I urge them to vote for this legislation. It is important for farmers.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House in support of my colleague's bill. I sincerely congratulate her on her work, her dedication and her passion. It is very important for us to have this debate today because Canada lacks a long-term vision for agriculture and buying local.

This bill asks the federal government to implement a pan-Canadian local foods strategy following consultation with the provinces and experts and to develop a policy to encourage government institutions to purchase those foods.

The main goal is to promote local foods and support Canadian farmers. During the summer, when I meet people in the community and in farmers' markets, they tell me about their growing interest in local products. When I go grocery shopping, I look for local products because I want to support what people are doing locally.

When I consume local products, I feel like I know where that food comes from and I am supporting local farmers. I find that very satisfying. I am trying to pass that kind of thinking on to people around me and especially to my son.

Here in Canada, local food initiatives include Farm to Cafeteria, a not-for-profit agency in British Columbia that has a 10-year track record of creating and supporting local food projects in public- and private-sector institutions.

Most major grocery stores have introduced policies to buy or promote local products. In addition, more and more farmers' markets are opening, and their presence in urban areas plays a critical role in promoting local foods.

In my riding, the Yamachiche farmer's market is very popular. In the summer, I organized an event at the market that was a great success. Some 400 people attended a demonstration put on by a local chef, Chef Justine, on how to make vegetarian chili.

In my riding we also have Goûtez Lanaudière!, which brings together products from the Lanaudière region under a common label to make it easier for consumers to discover and recognize those products. It is a great idea.

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To me, buying locally is not just about supporting local farmers. It is also about reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, consuming fresh products that have not been shuffled around—from trucks to refrigerators—supporting the local economy, keeping direct and indirect jobs for Canadians, and discovering the variety of products that are grown or processed where we live.

Those are good reasons why I strongly believe that the federal government must work with the municipalities, provinces and territories to help farmers offer fresh seasonal products, and help consumers find the products they are looking for not far from their doorstep.

The provinces have taken the lead in promoting local foods. Several have developed programs in co-operation with the industry to highlight local products. Foodland Ontario, Aliments du Québec and Buy B.C. are the most well established and best known. Unfortunately, the federal government has no policy to promote the purchase of local foods. However, the federal strategic framework, growing forward 2, provides for various cost-shared agriculture programs.

In 2013, Quebec developed the Proximité program, which is funded in part by the federal government and encourages buying local. This buy local policy, followed by institutions such as hospitals and shelters, allows the farm sector and local processors to get more of their products on Quebec dinner tables.

I think federal institutions have a role to play in local food production. For instance, I would love to eat local in our cafeteria. Eating local goes hand in hand with good health.

Canada should lead by example and be a world leader when it comes to healthy eating habits. Two examples come to mind. Last summer, the Quebec National Assembly decided to start growing vegetables. It replaced its flowerbeds with corn, a mini orchard, root vegetables and herbs. Two beehives were even set up on the roof to produce honey.

● (1815)

It is an ambitious urban farming project unlike any other around the world. With a growing area of 2,000 square feet and 130 crop varieties, the gardens will be used to feed customers at the National Assembly restaurant. Any surplus will be donated to a local charity.

According to the research done by the National Assembly, it will be the first parliament to become so involved in the urban gardening movement. Many years ago in the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt launched a similar project in the White House gardens during the Second World War.

Ms. Roosevelt's initiative fell by the wayside, but Michelle Obama revived it in 2009, during the economic crisis, to encourage people to eat healthier.

I find these two examples very inspiring for Canadians. It seems to me that a country like Canada has the means to support such initiatives, to be on the forefront and to lead by example. I believe in the importance of building networks of farmers and retailers, so that Canadian products can reach our grocery store shelves, particularly by creating direct links between farmers and major food chains.

This bill is part of the NDP's commitment to sustainable development. Buying locally means reducing transportation of food and therefore greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. It is vital that we work with producers in order to foster a better understanding of food miles and to increase transparency when it comes to the origin of the food on our table.

I would like to talk about something that is important to consumers: price. We know that food costs in Canada are not high. On February 7, we celebrated food freedom day. By that day, the average Canadian had earned enough income to pay his or her grocery bill for the entire year.

There is a myth that the price of local food is higher than imported food. A study was conducted to determine whether this is true. Researchers found that seasonal food costs the same and sometimes even less. That means that buying locally benefits consumers in the short and the long term. Not only do consumers purchase local food at affordable prices, but they also invest in their communities. In some cases, it is true that local products can be a little more expensive because of production and distribution factors.

As the deputy agriculture critic, I often talk about finding means of supporting and promoting strategies that will increase farmers' profits through direct sales. This benefits both the consumer and the producer. We often talk about community supported agriculture, or CSA, and other social enterprises. The entire agriculture sector could benefit from initiatives that would reduce barriers to farm gate sales.

Today, I met with a number of agriculture stakeholders. They told me that they would like to see more measures like this bill. They want more leadership and vision from the federal government.

I believe that my colleague's bill is a step in that direction and that is why I congratulate her and support her bill. We have already heard positive comments from the Liberals. Only the members opposite are left. Therefore, I encourage the Conservatives to learn about this bill and perhaps listen a little more closely.

I would like to congratulate my colleague once again.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today for the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to underline our government's commitment to a number of things; first, to protect the livelihood of farmers who depend on international markets to sell their crops, and second, to share our support for the purchasing of locally grown food by citizens and residents of this great country of Canada.

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Buying local is an excellent way for consumers to enjoy the safe, delicious, high-quality food that Canadian farmers produce. It is a great way to support our hard-working family farmers. The closer to home, the better.

However, it is also important to note that there are clear roles for federal, provincial, and territorial governments in this respect, and that is the primary reason why our government cannot support this bill. Provincial governments, for example, have a key role to play in defining what local food is. Federally, our government's approach to locally grown food focuses on national efforts to increase consumer awareness and knowledge of Canadian agriculture and agri-food, not unlike what my colleague from across the way was talking about.

We are also mindful of Canada's growing ethnic diversity and consumer interest in specialty foods imported from countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Equally important are Canada's commitments under various multilateral trade agreements. Canada is obliged not to discriminate against food imports from our international trading partners.

This is critical when we consider that almost 50% of Canada's agriculture production is exported. Canadians farmers and processors depend on trade, and they benefit directly from increased access to international markets. Our government understands this. Our Prime Minister, our Minister of International Trade, and our government are pursuing the most aggressive trade agenda in Canadian history. That is to help the agricultural industry continue to grow and to prosper.

Canadian farmers are among the best in the world, and the impact of agriculture on our economy cannot be overstated. As a whole, the sector employs one in eight Canadians, and represents 8% of our gross domestic product. In 2012, Canadian agriculture and agri-food export sales totalled nearly \$44 billion.

Our government's goal has always been to set the right conditions for farmers and processors to compete and succeed.

One important way we are doing that is through Growing Forward 2. No one seems to mention that, but it is a significant tool that was agreed to by all the provinces and territories. It is Canada's new agricultural policy framework. GF2, as it is called, is driving innovation and long-term growth for Canada's farmers and processors.

In addition to a generous suite of business risk management programs, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are investing more than \$3 billion over five years to support innovation, competitiveness, and market development. This includes a 50% increase to those provinces and territories for program delivery.

GF2 gives provinces and territories the flexibility they need to invest to meet local needs. It gives them the tools to ensure that farmers can remain competitive and capture new and existing markets, which include, of course, markets for local food.

For instance, in Quebec, \$5 million in GF2 funding has been targeted to developing local markets. The initiative called "Programme Proximité" encourages farmers to take advantage of the business opportunities that local markets provide.

In Ontario, the province is funding a new initiative to support the expansion of the Eat Local Sudbury Co-op. The co-op aims to deliver locally grown food throughout North Eastern Ontario, which is great news for farmers and consumers across the region.

Also under GF2, Yukon—and we do not often think about Yukon as having locally grown foods and agriculture—is using funds to get a wider variety of farm products into farmers' markets and restaurants, and onto store shelves.

● (1820)

An example is in New Brunswick, where market development, product enhancement, and diversification programs, again under the GF2, support farmers' efforts to capture new markets, be they local, national, or global.

These are just some of the examples of how Growing Forward 2 investments are helping to grow local markets for farmers across this great country.

The provinces and territories are getting local food initiatives off the ground. The wheels are in motion, and imposing a pan-Canadian strategy for local food could very well bring any progress we have been making just about to a screeching halt.

Growing Forward 2 is an exciting step forward, and it is serving the agricultural industry well. Its strong focus on innovation, market development, and competitiveness will position Canadian farmers and food processors for growth and prosperity in the years to come. With its built-in flexibility, Growing Forward 2 supports the diversity of markets available to farmers today.

The world's population is on the rise. There is an increasing demand globally for a high-quality and sustainable food supply. Our global customers appreciate the quality and consistency of Canada's food and agri-based products.

Opportunities for our farmers and processors are continuing to grow, and we need to be ready to seize those opportunities. We must keep expanding our customer base, ensuring that more of our great Canadian foods reach more consumers across Canada, those included in local markets, but also around the world. In short, we must produce locally and think globally.

At the federal level, our job is to look at the big picture and the longer term. We are committed to ensuring that farmers, and the entire sector, have the tools and resources they need to stay ahead of the ever-changing demands of consumers. That is why we are making strategic investments through Growing Forward 2, in the new AgriInnovation, AgriMarketing, and AgriCompetitiveness programs.

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For instance, through AgriInnovation, we are investing to help turn traditional crops, such as mushrooms, grapes, flax, and buckwheat, into new revenue streams for farmers. Through AgriMarketing, we are helping to develop and enhance new markets for Canadian-grown oats, livestock, and grains.

These are just a few of the examples of the great things happening to support our farmers, thanks to the flexibility of the Growing Forward 2 program.

Again, our government recognizes the value of local markets. They are an important part of the big picture.

Federally, our goal and our role is to ensure our farmers, processors, and exporters are strong today and that they remain ahead of the competition well into the future. This has been our focus from day one, and it is not negotiable.

Therefore, I invite my hon. colleagues to continue to acknowledge the roles that governments play in supporting farmers' participation in all markets, whether they are local, national, or global.

Let us also continue to support the great local initiatives taking place in the provinces and territories thanks to the flexibility afforded by the Growing Forward 2 program.

Let us continue on the path we have in place, one that is based on consultations with farmers themselves. That is what Growing Forward 2 is about, respecting the voice of farmers and processors, and promoting our great Canadian agricultural industry here at home and around the world.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 28, 2013, I asked a question regarding our correctional system, which is having a very hard time rehabilitating Canadian prisoners.

The question had to do with the report by the Correctional Investigator, Howard Sapers, who revealed that a large number of prisoners who are members of minority groups, for example aboriginal offenders, leave prison without having accessed programs or having received the rehabilitation they absolutely need. The minister claimed that there was nothing to worry about and that the existing programs were quite adequate. I disagree.

This Conservative government continues to ignore the negative impact of its Safe Streets and Communities Act. By bringing in mandatory minimum penalties and harsher punishments for young people, the Conservatives have plunged us into a real crisis. The prison population is drastically increasing.

It has been established and documented that aboriginal people and visible minorities are over-represented in Canadian prisons. The number of aboriginal prisoners has increased by 46%. They now represent one-quarter of all inmates, but only 4% of the Canadian population.

The numbers are even worse for aboriginal women, who have seen an 80% rise. Nearly one-third of women in jail are aboriginal, although they represent just 5% of the women in this country.

Things are just as bad for visible minorities. The population of black, Hispanic, Asian and Indian inmates has grown by nearly 75%. Specifically, the number of Afro-Canadians in federal institutions has grown by 90% since 2003.

In his damning report, Mr. Sapers gave a detailed description of the cultural transformation occurring within our prison system and suggested that the federal government create a clearer, more culturally appropriate corrections policy to support the rehabilitation of people belonging to these groups. He recommended introducing culturally appropriate programs, hiring multilingual staff and establishing ethnicity liaison officer positions in Canadian institutions.

Despite the urgency of the situation, the minister brushed off the recommendations. Obviously, he needs a little reminder. Rehabilitation is one of the two main objectives of incarceration. If the government is truly committed to making our streets and communities safer, it has to reduce the risk of people reoffending.

Our priority should be to ensure that our correctional system can deliver effective rehabilitation programs. Aboriginal people and visible minorities have the right to culturally appropriate programs that take their identity and their community realities into account. We will not help them reintegrate into society by isolating them even more.

On the contrary, more often than not, because of the Conservative government's failure to act, they do not reintegrate successfully and end up reoffending. So many individuals left to their own devices continue to grapple with the same problems as before and end up back in court. By not breaking that vicious cycle, we end up wasting public funds.

Now that the minister has had several months to digest the numbers in Howard Sapers' report, does he understand the magnitude of the crisis?

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1830)

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the New Democrats, who time after time raise the issue of increasing rights for prisoners, our Conservative government is primarily concerned with the rights of victims. The NDP has in fact voted against giving victims more information about criminals convicted of victimizing them and ending early parole for white-collar fraudsters such as Earl Jones. The New Democrats even opposed and voted against my own private member's bill that stopped prisoners from making frivolous complaints. I would add, despite the objections and the adamant opposition of the NDP, that I am proud to say that my bill received royal assent in 2013.

Since the member for Alfred-Pellan has asked what our government does to ensure the correctional system actually corrects criminal behaviour, I am more than happy to tell her.

The Correctional Service of Canada offers a wide range of interventions to convicted criminals sentenced to federal time and has long been recognized as an international leader in the development and delivery of correctional programs. Indeed, evidence consistently demonstrates that our programs contribute in a very significant way to ensuring that when criminals are released from prison, they do not go back. This is shown by a lower likelihood of recidivism.

Our correctional programs enhance public safety results for Canadians by making criminals accountable for their behaviour and by teaching skills that can be used to help them become contributing members to Canadian society, in some cases for the very first time in their lives. Additionally, those criminals who have been identified as requiring specific correctional programs, such as mental health and drug services, will be afforded access to these programs throughout their sentences.

To this end, the Correctional Service of Canada began piloting the integrated correctional program model in January 2010. It was designed to enhance program efficiencies, program effectiveness, and public safety results by combining the most effective aspects of existing interventions with the most promising innovations in the area of correctional programming.

Members of our government are very pleased that our measures to combat crime are working. Recidivism is down. Crime rates are also down.

I call on that member to stop opposing us on all of these measures and to get on board with making our communities safer.

•(1835)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer the parliamentary secretary.

She spoke of victims' rights. Victims rights are addressed by rehabilitating inmates. If we want to have fewer and fewer victims, then we must respect what the correctional system is meant to do. One of its two main functions is to rehabilitate inmates in order to enhance public safety. Experts agree on this. In fact, one of those experts is the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Sue O'Sullivan. By cutting inmate reintegration programs, the Conservative government is undermining the safety of our communities and hindering the correctional system. It is not by cutting reintegration programs that we are going to make our communities safer.

I am sure that the parliamentary secretary agrees with me on that.

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the member opposite missed what I said in my first remarks, but recidivism is down and the crime rate is down. Apparently something is working.

Again, I can go on and talk about all of the common sense measures to tackle crime that the NDP has voted against. New Democrats voted against repealing the so-called faint hope clause, which gave early parole to convicted killers. They voted against ending house arrest for serious and violent crimes. They even voted against cracking down on drug dealers who target our children. Time after time when they have had the opportunity to choose between the rights of victims and the rights of criminals, sadly, they have chosen the latter.

Despite the objections from the New Democrats, Canadians know and can trust that our Conservative government will continue to work to combat crime and continue to support the victims of crime in order to keep our streets and communities safe.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:38 p.m.)

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