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Monday, June 2, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 2, 2014

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

LINCOLN ALEXANDER DAY ACT

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC) moved that Bill S-213, An Act respecting Lincoln Alexander Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I was proud to introduce Bill S-213, an act respecting Lincoln Alexander Day, and I am pleased to rise today to speak to this bill, which would designate January 21 of each year as Lincoln M. Alexander Day in memory of a great Canadian who inspired millions of his fellow citizens.

As the member of Parliament for a constituency that includes much of Linc's former constituency when he was a member of this House, I am greatly privileged. As a parliamentarian who had the good fortune to meet Linc, talk about politics with him, and learn from his sage advice, this is indeed a great honour.

As many in the House will know, January 21 was Lincoln Alexander's birthday. As such, the designation of this day is fitting for all that he contributed to this country.

To begin, please allow me to highlight just a few of the accomplishments of this great man. He was a very popular lieutenant-governor of Ontario from 1985 to 1991. He was the MP for Hamilton West from 1968 to 1980. He was a trailblazer for visible minorities as the first black MP and cabinet minister. He was a champion of the Order of Canada and Order of Ontario. He was a chancellor at the University of Guelph.

He passed away in October, 2012, at the age of 90. He was so beloved that thousands visited as he lay in state at the Ontario legislature in Hamilton City Hall. His state funeral in Hamilton was attended by thousands of his fellow citizens, in addition to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of Ontario, and a number of former prime ministers and premiers.

Many schools in Ontario have been named in his honour, as well as the Lincoln Alexander Parkway, which is a major expressway in

Hamilton, and which I am on most days when I am back in the constituency.

Despite all of these accomplishments and many more, above all else Lincoln Alexander was a champion of young people. He was convinced that if a society did not take care of its youth, it would have no future. He also knew that education and awareness were essential in changing society's prejudices and sometimes flawed presuppositions about others. That is why it is so fitting that so many schools are named after him. He himself had been a young person who sought to make his place in his community so that he could contribute to his country.

As a young boy, Lincoln Alexander faced prejudice daily, but his mother encouraged him to be two or three times as good as everyone else, and indeed he was. Lincoln Alexander followed his mother's advice and worked hard to overcome poverty and prejudice. Through his hard work, he made a name for himself both professionally and politically.

At an early age, he experienced first-hand how hard work and education make a positive impact on life. After becoming the first in his family to attend university, Lincoln Alexander graduated from McMaster University in 1949. As a university graduate and war veteran, and having worked his summers at the Stelco steel mill in Hamilton, Lincoln hoped to join the company's sales team. However, this was not to be the case for a man of colour. This unjust attitude was, unfortunately, all too common back then.

Frustrated, Lincoln Alexander realized that self-employment made the most sense for a young black man with ambition. He decided that he would choose a line of work in which he thought that he would not be affected by people's unjust views. Pursuing further education, he enrolled in Osgoode Hall Law School.

While at Osgoode Hall, he heard the dean make a comparison using a racial slur while giving a lecture to his class. Lincoln Alexander was shocked. He stood up and asked the dean what he meant by using that slur. When the dean answered that it was just a saying that everyone was using, Lincoln Alexander responded by saying, "You're in a position of authority, sir, a leader in the community. A leader has to lead and not be using such disrespectful comments without even thinking about them".

He was public and outspoken in his fight for the rights of others, and in so doing, he became a spokesperson for all.

Private Members' Business

Lincoln Alexander's interest in young people came from his time as a young lawyer in Hamilton, when he took the bus to work every day. He loved the social interaction with different people from his community on the bus, and he often spoke to young people, children, high school students, and young adults. They gave him insight on the issues and concerns of young people. Hearing their stories and their enthusiasm for change, Lincoln Alexander became energized, and this laid the groundwork for his interest in social justice and the issues facing the youth of the day.

After being appointed as Queen's Counsel in 1965, Lincoln Alexander realized that politics was a way to raise awareness on the issues surrounding social injustice. He also knew that educating young people and creating programming for them was a way of eliminating barriers and building bridges in the community.

Encouraged by Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, Lincoln Alexander ran for a seat in Parliament, and in 1968 he was elected and became the first black member of Parliament in Canada. In his first speech in the House of Commons as a member of Parliament, Lincoln Alexander reminded his colleagues that as a member of Parliament, they should be engaged in the hopes, fears, disappointments, legitimate aspirations, and despair of each and every Canadian, ever mindful that involvement demands commitment in terms of actions and deeds rather than just words.

Lincoln Alexander served as a member of Parliament for 12 years until 1980. However, it was in 1985, when he became the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, that he was truly able and determined to focus his efforts on advancing the cause of young people and fighting racism.

He was very open about the need to look both internally and externally to find the answers to the problems of the day. He frequently related the difficulties he had with racism, understanding the need to be vulnerable and open to sharing experiences in order to educate.

Lincoln Alexander loved to get to know people. These exchanges fed his desire to create a unified society in which all people were equal. He listened intently to individuals who shared their experiences, good and bad, and always with genuine interest in their lives.

After losing the 2004 election, I remember meeting Linc at an event. He actually grabbed my tie and pulled me down to his face and said, "Sweet, if you want to serve the people and win an election, you have to work hard".

As Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Lincoln Alexander visited over 250 schools. During every visit, he spoke to students and promoted the importance of education. He stressed the need to work with young people and spread the anti-racism message. He wanted to teach young people to be proud of their heritage, reminding them that we are all equal. He instructed them to stand up for themselves and do what is right.

After his term as Lieutenant Governor, Lincoln Alexander became chancellor of the University of Guelph in 1991. He was the university's longest-serving Chancellor, serving for an unprecedented five terms, until 2007.

Lincoln Alexander carried on his natural rapport with students and made a point of speaking to each and every graduate. Robert McLaughlin, vice-president of alumni affairs at the University of Guelph, said, "When you meet him and when he looks at you and shakes your hand, you think that he has waited his whole life to meet you. You have his undivided attention".

Lincoln Alexander prided himself on promoting education, equality, and fairness. He believed in promoting leadership and in investing in our young people, and as chancellor at the University of Guelph, he had a perfect platform to do just that.

In honour of his leadership and dedication, in 1993 the Government of Ontario established the Lincoln M. Alexander Award. This award, reflecting Lincoln Alexander's vision, recognizes young people who have demonstrated exemplary leadership in ending racial discrimination.

Through his determination and his strength in life and leadership, Lincoln Alexander paved roads and opened doors for today's young people. Using his good judgment, tolerance, compassion, and humanity, he worked tirelessly to instill these values in young people and to improve race relations throughout the country. His efforts were aimed at encouraging individuals to never give up, and he offered himself as an example of someone who never backed down.

That is why this bill is before us today. May Lincoln MacCauley Alexander's persistence and resolve in breaking down social barriers and promoting the importance of educating our young people be remembered by all Canadians through the recognition of January 21 each year as Lincoln Alexander Day.

•(1110)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my fellow Hamiltonian, the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Of course, we know in Hamilton why this honour should be bestowed upon Linc, as we all know him. Perhaps I could give the hon. member an opportunity—given that there are millions of Canadians who are born, raised, and die, but only a limited number of calendar days—to explain why the pride of Hamilton should be registered as a federally recognized day. Perhaps the member could give a short summary of why he believes this is important not just for us Hamiltonians but for all Canadians.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Hamilton Centre, whom I see often in Hamilton. When we ran into Linc, I witnessed many exchanges that he had with Lincoln Alexander as well.

Linc passed away at 90 years of age. He was still involved in events at that age. The member asked me for further evidence above and beyond what I spoke about, so that might be the best testimony I can give to Lincoln Alexander on top of all of the things he had already done: Linc continued to be a part of the community. We saw him racing around in his red motorized scooter at events. He never stopped being part of the community.

Private Members' Business

For him, it was about the people of Canada. It was about breaking down barriers. It was about being real and authentic and being part of the community, and he never stopped, right up until the time his physical body was unfortunately unable to continue. Marni, his widow, supported him all the way through.

One of the greatest testaments to Linc's popularity was at his funeral. The member for Hamilton Centre joined me at the funeral. Hamilton Place was filled with people. There was so much sentiment from so many people, people whose lives he had touched.

Linc touched many lives, and not only youth. I emphasized youth, but he touched many adults from all walks of life. As the person from the University of Guelph mentioned, when Linc shook people's hands and looked into their faces, they knew he was there with them. He was not looking past them. He did not have some other agenda. He just wanted to know people and he wanted to encourage them to be the best Canadians they could possibly be.

• (1115)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the member's last point in terms of being the best Canadian one can be.

It is fair to say that Lincoln Alexander's impact went far beyond a defined community, whether it was in the prairies, the Atlantic region, or any region of Canada. Individuals would draw inspiration from Linc in the things that he accomplished in the time that he accomplished them.

I am wondering if the member would expand on that particular point in terms of the number of Canadians who drew inspiration from the attitude and the manner in which Mr. Alexander carried himself.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Lincoln Alexander's dad was a carpenter by trade, but he was not able to get a carpenter's job. He was a porter on a train. It was the only job available to a man of colour at that time. His mother was a maid. Despite all of that, Lincoln Alexander made a life commitment to be an extraordinary Canadian because of the encouragement of his mom and dad. As my colleague mentioned, Linc's commitment went far beyond Hamilton, far beyond Ontario. It really was nationwide.

In fact, on the Elections Canada website there is a good story about Lincoln Alexander. A friend came to him after he was elected with a cut-out from a newspaper in the United Kingdom about how big his election was as the first black man in Parliament, so Linc was a spectacular influence not only on the entire country but globally as well, because he had the courage and the tenacity and the work ethic to make sure that he changed the status quo. As the Elections Canada website indicates, he came to Parliament, which was really a white man's domain; he was joined by one other woman at that time, and really changed the complexion of Canadian politics.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate. I particularly enjoy the fact that it is one of the few times we get to reach across the floor and be in agreement. For all the headlines of fighting and the various things we get into around here, there are times when we are able to rise above that and do justice to this profession and the people who elected us.

I want to thank my colleague, the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale for leading off the debate and sponsoring the bill in the House. He has done great service and justice to all that Lincoln Alexander has meant to Canada and to Hamilton, so I certainly will not repeat any of the milestones, except to maybe add a few pieces to the story.

First, I love the fact that when I checked the *Hamilton Spectator* website this morning, in the local section there was a headline that I am sure my colleagues saw. Certainly the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, and our colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain are very supportive of the bill. I am sure it warmed their hearts, as it did mine, to see one of the headlines, on this day that we begin debating the bill, that says “The Linc” is to be extended. The “Linc” speaks to a secondary highway in Hamilton that links the west mountain and the east mountain. That is as far as I am going to go on what all of that means.

The great irony that everyone loves is that it is a perfect connection. Of course, “Linc” is his name. When I say Linc, it is not disrespectful. The first thing he would do after someone said “Hello Mr. Alexander” was to say, “No, call me Linc”. Everyone knows that, so my references from here on in will likely be to Linc. I am referring to my fellow Hamiltonian in the most respectful way that I can, and showing the camaraderie and relationship that Linc had with the city.

The great irony of having the link named “The Linc” is that Linc never had a driver's licence in his whole life and he is one of the few people who has a highway named after him. That is one more accomplishment that he did not necessarily set out to do, but managed to do anyway. There, in the *Hamilton Spectator* today, the spirit of Linc lives on.

I am hoping that all members will be supportive of this. As a result of the bill being passed in both of these places, Canada as a nation will forever remember Linc.

Everyone here makes the history books, but most of us are footnotes in the great historical span of Canada. It really is something to have personally known an individual who looms so large in a nation and, with a little hometown pride, it feels good when they are from one's hometown city.

This is an important day for us in the House who represent Hamiltonians, and our entire community. When Linc was appointed lieutenant governor, in 1985, that happened to be the same year I was elected to city council. After we had the big celebration, what I remember most is that I was finding it hard to believe that a position so important was going to be represented by a Hamiltonian. However, when we thought about it being Linc, it was not such a surprise.

In 1990, when I was lucky enough to be elected to Queen's Park, again, there was that burst of pride. We were sitting in the House when the throne speech was to be read, and it was Linc who came through the door. He just smiled and winked to those of us from Hamilton as he walked down.

He pulled off the impossible. He had this way about him that was so real.

Private Members' Business

● (1120)

My colleague who just spoke is absolutely right. If we walked up to him, there was this sense of familiarity. He would look at us as if he thought he had a new friend. There was just that sense from him. It was not only that, but he had the royal jelly. When he walked into a room, there was that presence, and that was before he became lieutenant governor.

I remember one time when we were at Hamilton Place and it was a police appreciation night. This was not long after he had retired, so he was still in robust health. I remember him walking out. He had a number of police uniforms. He was an honorary police chief of a number of police services. It must have been the Hamilton one he was wearing that day. This big, strong, strapping officer in this uniform came walking out on the stage. He walked up to the microphone. I can still remember that. One could hear a pin drop. Linc said, “Do I look good in this uniform, or what?” It was such a solemn occasion, yet there was a “Lincism” there. That is the kind of guy that he was.

If I can, there are a couple of claims to fame for my riding, our riding, because we fight over how much of our ridings we get to claim from Linc.

Ellen Fairclough, also a predecessor of ours, was the first woman in cabinet, in 1957. She was made a secretary of state. The following year she became a full minister. This riding has great history. The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale and I are pleased to provide the historical footnotes that made Linc so important in our time.

However, I will go for a little more claim of him than my colleague, simply because he lived on Proctor Boulevard, which is in the heart of my riding. Not only that, I made it into his book. This is nothing but pure bragging. I make no bones about it. If it is possible to name-drop in this place, I am doing it.

Linc wrote in his book:

There is no bigger supporter of our men and women in blue than me. I am an honorary chief of several police services, and the honorary commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, whose headquarters in Orillia is named after me. It was in 1994 that [the member for Hamilton Centre], who was Ontario's solicitor general at the time, visited Hamilton council to announce that the new four-storey OPP headquarters in Orillia would be named after me. OPP Commissioner Thomas O'Grady also spoke at the announcement event, and they presented me with a framed artist's drawing of the headquarters.

There is a great little side story that goes with that. We were in the mayor's office. Next to the mayor's office was his assistant's office, which also acted as a green room. There was a large coffee table there. I do not think it was real marble, but it was a nice coffee table. With regard to the picture that Linc was talking about having been presented to him, the OPP Commissioner, Linc, the mayor, and I, all put our feet on this thing and held the picture. It was a nice photo op. The only problem was the entire table collapsed and broke into about six pieces. I said to the current sitting OPP commissioner that Tom O'Grady promised that table would be replaced. To the best of my knowledge, that has not yet been replaced in Hamilton City Hall. There is a debt that the Ontario office of the Solicitor General owes to Hamilton City Council.

I have one minute left, and I want to wrap up. I hope that I have done justice to Linc. I tried to show some humour in the sense of the man, the person we got to know individually, but also recognition of the respect that we have and we need to show. What is important is the statement of passing this bill from our generation now to future generations. Linc stood for the values of Canada. Therefore, when we celebrate and honour Linc, we honour Canada; we honour the values that are Canada.

● (1125)

I look forward to the moment when we will all rise unanimously, supporting this important bill to mark the life of this important man.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of Bill S-213, an act respecting Lincoln Alexander day, sponsored by Senator Don Meredith. I commend the hon. senator for this excellent initiative on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, the Liberal caucus in the House of Commons, and the Liberal leader, the MP for Papineau.

When the hon. Lincoln MacCauley Alexander was appointed as the 24th lieutenant governor of Ontario, he chose as his official heraldic motto the three words that he then felt—along with the huge number of Canadian men, women, and youth, of all creeds, ethnic backgrounds, and political persuasions, who had witnessed or benefited from his initiatives—to be the three pillars of his already accomplished life. Those words were “confidence, determination, and perseverance”.

[*Translation*]

With his humble background, it took confidence, determination and perseverance for him to successfully overcome racial barriers that were unjust, absurd and intolerable.

He was the first black man to become a partner in the first interracial law firm, Duncan and Alexander. He was the first black man to be elected to the House of Commons, the first to be appointed a minister of the Crown, the first to chair Ontario's Workmen's Compensation Board, and the first to be appointed as a vice-regal representative. He is an outstanding example of tremendous courage and success.

Little Linc, as he calls himself in his memoirs, would go a long way from his humble beginnings in Toronto. His mother was from Jamaica and worked as a maid; his father was from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a carpenter by trade who worked as a railway porter.

● (1130)

[*English*]

Senator Meredith reminded us that young Linc's mother would say to him, “Go to school; you're a little black boy”. He would follow this advice, his mum's order, to the letter, through kindergarten, elementary school, and high school, where he excelled. He did not stop his quest for knowledge and personal achievement there. He went on to study law at Hamilton's McMaster University and Toronto's Osgoode Hall, graduating in the top 25 percent of his class.

Private Members' Business

Whether in his personal life or professional life, including as lieutenant governor of Ontario, education was always a need, a priority, and a passion, for Lincoln Alexander. No wonder so many educational facilities bear his name. The Lincoln Alexander public schools, in Ajax, Hamilton, and Markham; the Lincoln M. Alexander school, in Mississauga; and the University of Guelph's Alexander Hall, all bear testimony to this learned man's ardent lifelong promotion of education. No wonder so many institutions of higher learning have awarded him honorary degrees: the University of Toronto, McMaster University, University of Western Ontario, York University, the Royal Military College, Queen's University, and so on.

[*Translation*]

In so doing, those institutions quite rightly celebrated the hallmarks of Lincoln Alexander's life and career: the constant pursuit of knowledge, the quest for excellence and the love of education.

As a teacher myself, I wish to add my voice to the celebration of Lincoln Alexander's legacy.

Lincoln Alexander was a man of knowledge, but even more than that, he was a man of courage. He had the courage to stare down any racism, latent or overt, that he encountered over the years, and he always proudly affirmed, with modesty and dignity, his right to be different and equal.

He did so as the only black student in his kindergarten class and in the faculty of law at McMaster University. He was denied a sales job at a steel plant in Hamilton on the pretext that it would be bad for the company's image if a black man were to hold that position. He had to deal with racist comments from the dean of law, and despite his remarkable academic achievements, a number of well-established law firms refused to hire him.

Lincoln Alexander also had the courage to put justice, freedom and the common good above his own well-being. Thus, in 1942, at the age of 20, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force, where he served until 1945, having achieved the rank of sergeant.

[*English*]

Lincoln Alexander's courage has been amply recognized by the Canadian Armed Forces, which awarded him the War Medal 1939-45, and the Canadian Forces Decoration, also giving his name to a Royal Canadian Air Cadet squadron, the Scarborough-based 876 Lincoln Alexander Squadron.

The Ontario Provincial Police also recognized his contributions to peace and order, naming the building that houses the OPP's headquarters in Orillia, Ontario after him.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Lincoln Alexander also used his courage and his pursuit of excellence to serve Canada, the country he loved, when he became the governor of the now-defunct Canadian Unity Council, a non-profit organization whose mission was to promote Canadian unity.

Before I close, I think it is important to mention the many honours Lincoln Alexander received for the significant contribution he made

to youth, the legal profession and Ontario and Canadian society as a whole.

[*English*]

What an impressive list his distinctions make: member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada; Companion of the Order of Canada; Member of the Order of Ontario; Knight of the Order of St. John; Canadian Volunteer Service Medal; Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal; 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal; Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal; Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, and so on.

In closing, I leave members with the very words of the Hon. Lincoln Alexander, as quoted by Senator Don Meredith in his January 2014 address to the other place at the second reading of Bill S-213, "It is not your duty to be average. It is your duty to set a higher example for others to follow. I did. You can. You will".

It is the duty of the House to set a higher example for all Canadians to follow by giving them the opportunity to strengthen their belief in the benefits of lifelong learning, their commitment to a fair and progressive Canada and their acceptance of diversity.

Let us follow the example set by Ontario's legislators when, in December 2013, they voted for January 21 to become Lincoln Alexander Day.

Let us follow the example set in the House by the member for Hamilton Mountain when she introduced Bill C-563, an act respecting a Lincoln Alexander day.

Let us vote unanimously to make January 21, the birth date of the Hon. Lincoln MacCauley Alexander, our national Lincoln Alexander day.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak after the members for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Hamilton Centre and Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale. They have a done a fairly good job of addressing all the points that should be made about Mr. Alexander, the first being his history in terms of his input into this process of politics, the second his input into being a Canadian citizen and being proud of, and living that type of life, and, third, his commitment to public service.

I will not try to reiterate each and every one of the points that were made, but it should be noted that the government is in support of Bill S-213. It is my hope, as the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville mentioned, that the bill is passed unanimously, and I hope that is the case.

I would also note the comments by the member for Hamilton Centre about the opportunities we have every once in a while to work together and speak in unanimity on a specific topic.

Sometimes when folks back home ask me about the conflict or the apparent disagreements that take place in the House of Commons from a government and opposition perspective, I hearken back to the time of minority governments, from 2006 to 2008 and then 2008 to 2011, when, despite all of our differences, time and time again not only was there a requirement for at least one other party to support government legislation, but there was a need for us to work together for the betterment of our country.

Private Members' Business

I reflect on that a bit when I think about Mr. Alexander and his number of firsts, such as being the 24th lieutenant governor of Ontario from 1985 to 1991, the first black person to hold that position. He was the first person in his family to attend university, where he obtained a law degree. He was the first black member of Parliament and, under prime minister Joe Clark, Mr. Alexander became the first black cabinet minister. He also served an unprecedented five terms as chancellor of the University of Guelph, a first as well. As was mentioned, whenever it came to Lincoln Alexander, being first in a number of these categories certainly befits who he was.

I had a chance to look at his history. This was a man who achieved so many honorary degrees from universities: the University of Toronto in 1986, McMaster University in 1987, the University of Western Ontario in 1988. He skipped a year and did not receive one in 1989, but received one in 1990 from York University, in 1991 from the Royal Military College in Kingston, and in 1992 from Queen's University. Those are not honorary degrees that are bestowed upon just anyone. The fact that one would achieve those from so many different top-notch and respected universities in our country is quite something.

He was also an advocate when it came to education, and equality was one of the most highly regarded beliefs that he had. All members have spoken about his book, which is entitled *Go to School, You're a Little Black Boy*, and he used that inspiration to pursue higher learning and strove to influence youth to do exactly the same.

When he was lieutenant governor, he had three specific goals at the centre of his mandate: addressing youth-related issues in education; fighting racism; and advocating on behalf of seniors and veterans. He set out to meet these goals by delivering inspiring speeches throughout the country and continually challenged educators to not simply give lip service to anti-racism, but to accept that responsibility and lead.

Having served as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Mr. Alexander was an active advocate on veterans' issues. He was serving as chancellor of the University of Guelph when the devastating events of 9/11 took place. Later that year, while marking Remembrance Day at the university, he took the opportunity to salute the armed forces and delivered a message of hope. He said, "Together, we will battle against narrow perspectives, ignorance, and racism".

• (1140)

It was that objective that he never lost. Whether in grade school, high school, university or in the House of Commons, whether as a lieutenant-governor in the province of Ontario, as a chancellor or as simply a member of the community in Hamilton, he never lost the vigour and fight against ignorance and racism. He noted the toll of suffering and sacrifice that veterans had endured, and urged the crowd not to forget. He also said, "Their blood and tears were the awful price for the peace, comfort, and democracy we enjoy...We should never forget".

Yesterday in the Niagara and St. Catharines community we had one event celebrating Declaration Day, commemorating those who went before us. I do not think Lincoln Alexander actually needed

June 6, June 7 or November 11 to remember those who sacrificed themselves for our country and our democracy. He used every day of the year to do that.

It was early in his law career, during a visit to Africa, when he was confronted by the boundless issues of racism, colonialism, political turmoil and poverty, that he discovered his political calling. The trip, he said, instilled in him a sense of pride and shaped his desire to promote leadership within the black community. He credited that trip to inspiring him to become the first black member of Parliament in Canada and eventually the first black cabinet minister of our country.

These achievements served as an example for both the black community and for Canada. Linc was never shy to describe his life as a cabinet minister, and never determined that it was not for him to tell people about that experience. It was that experience that he believed should be transferred to all others in our country, whether they be minority or they be black, that the opportunity to serve in the House of Commons was not something that was for just a few; it was for those who were prepared to serve.

Mr. Alexander was a symbol for democracy and he spoke for anyone who suffered from prejudice or injustice. He believed in unity and he focused on the similarities that bound and drew our country together. He once stated, "One is not elected...to be a spokesperson to any particular segment of the constituency". It showed that his sense of justice surpassed creed, colour and any type of social standing.

Canada prides itself on its diversity. Our diversity strengthens our nation by building an inclusive society that values differences and fosters a sense of belonging. We do not have to look too far over the last number of years to see, each and every year, an average 250,000 new Canadians making that statement and understanding that the principle of belonging is a value that is instituted within them because of the institutions of our great country. Lincoln Alexander was the embodiment of those Canadian values. He stood for justice and equality and most of all he believed in service to others.

Declaring Lincoln Alexander day in Canada would formally recognize, as Canadians, a lifelong commitment to public service and multicultural understanding. It would also serve to underline Lincoln Alexander's leadership in promoting human rights, justice and the importance of education. However, at the end of the day, when we look at the naming of Lincoln Alexander day, it is not something just to commemorate and honour him. What he would have said was to use that day to justify why we needed to keep fighting in our country, whether at the political level, the personal level or within our own communities, the aspects and values of what we are as Canadians in terms of multiculturalism, acceptance and understanding that people who come here, regardless of where the country of origin was or what position they held or what their last name happened to be, that there is an opportunity for them here to become not only permanent residents or Canadian citizens, but to add value to what it is to be Canadian.

Private Members' Business

I have a feeling the bill will pass unanimously. Every time we celebrate Lincoln Alexander day it is not just to remember Linc, but also to remember who we are as a country, the values we hold as individuals, the values we bring forward, and show the rest of the world what it really is to be Canadian, what it is to lead and to understand what that leadership is.

Every once in awhile, we can look back on the work that we do as parliamentarians and say that we did something right and that we did something good. Today is a step forward in honouring Lincoln Alexander and what he stood for. I certainly look forward to seeing all of us stand in unanimity when the bill is passed.

● (1145)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Hamilton Centre said earlier, it is not that often that all of the members from Hamilton are in agreement because we have a good number of NDP members, but we have other parties there. In this case, I am very pleased to stand in support of the motion of the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

For the record, New Democrats recognize that January 21 should be a day to mark the life of Lincoln Alexander. He was a man whose appeal crossed party lines. His life was a great example of service, perseverance, humility, and number one, humanity.

In fact, the member for Hamilton Mountain put forward a similar motion last December because our thoughts are very similar on the respect that we had for Lincoln Alexander.

He was born in 1922, and as members have heard, he passed away in his 90th year. I would say of Linc that he lived a life very worthy of the respect that we see him receiving here today. He was first elected in 1968. Those of us who lived at that time should give thought to the fact that in 1968, the civil rights movement in the United States was fighting just to have black children go to university. At that time, Linc was elected Canada's first black MP. It says so much about Linc and it says a lot about our country at the time too.

He held respect. He was re-elected in 1972, 1979 and 1980 and served in the House of Commons until 1985. He went on under the Clark government to be the first black labour minister.

He received the Companion of the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario. After leaving office, he was a five-term chancellor of the University of Guelph. Most importantly is the book he wrote, the *Go to School, You're a Little Black Boy*. I do not think I have heard it referenced, but that is what his mother used to say to him every day to instill in him the need for education.

I had the good fortune to have conversations with Linc from time to time and one of the things both of us shared the view on was that with knowledge comes responsibility. I would suggest that the knowledge he gained over the years he put to good use. He lived up to what he saw his responsibilities were.

He was born in Toronto and he served in the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Second World War for three years. In Hamilton, I have to say, we quickly forgave Linc for having been born in Toronto for

he moved to Hamilton to court his future wife, Yvonne. He received a Bachelor of Arts at McMaster University back in 1949.

I would like to share a couple of stories because I have a few minutes left. The member for Hamilton Centre will relate to this one. Linc did not have a driver's licence, but in his later years he had a red scooter. He was notorious for going through our malls at speeds at which he might have been pulled over otherwise. But this wonderful man was received every place he went, most importantly as a friend. No matter what strata one was living in, from the top person in Hamilton to the average worker in the streets, they all loved Linc.

Shortly after 9/11, in Hamilton there was a firebombing of a Hindu Samaj. In all of his life, Linc had stood up against racism. Mayor Wade in Hamilton started a group called the Strengthening Hamilton Community Initiative. That is where I first came to know Linc, who was named the honorary chairman of that group. From what we hear today about Lincoln Alexander, he may be honorary, but he was there working side-by-side with us. It was very important to have that kind of guidance.

● (1150)

Again, as the member for Hamilton Centre indicated, when Linc came into the room he was a physically imposing man of about 6'2". He also was a dynamic individual; there was a natural gravitation to him.

We had people in that room who represented the diverse community of Hamilton and business leaders as well. A man of his integrity drew people together. There were Muslims and Jewish people in the room. That organization actually wound up putting out press releases on the Middle East that were signed off by our Muslim and Jewish communities in Hamilton. That is the kind of leadership this man was capable of providing.

Another side to Linc was his personal humour. One of the things that he did to me and with me is this. When I was first elected in 2006, there was the dinner downtown at a restored CN station that had been converted by LIUNA into one of the best places to come for a meal and a social gathering. I was dressed in a brand new suit. Going in through the door, I heard a booming voice behind me say, "Wayne, get me a chair". I grabbed Linc a chair. He said, "Put it here beside the door". I put it there. He sat down in the chair and introduced me to every single individual coming through that door.

Linc was Progressive-Conservative and I was not. However, that did not matter to Linc. That is what endeared him to everybody in our community. He was a human being, first and foremost, who loved everybody. He had kind of a gruff sound to him. He would come through that door and we knew he was there and if he was unhappy, we knew it too. However, he was always gracious, always respectful, and always ensured everybody in that room had a say in what was happening.

Private Members' Business

He was raised a black boy, in the forties, when times were so different than they are today in this country. We have not gotten over racism totally, but back in the forties, it was far more a part of Canadian life than we would like to say. He rose above that. He stood head and shoulders above it. If we look at his life history, every single thing he did, he did well. He lived up to the request of his mother and his father to put his everything into every aspect of his life.

If I am standing here with pride, I know it is shared by the other members from Hamilton. I know it is shared by this House. This was a life well lived, a life that was full of service to not only his community and his country, but to the world community. At that time, seeing the symbol of a black man, in 1968, rising in the House of Commons and shortly thereafter becoming the minister of labour in this place, in so many corners of the world they could turn to Canada and say, "This is how it should be". Lincoln Alexander was the person who was able to turn to us and say, "Yes, we're working together". It was never Lincoln Alexander above us; it was always Lincoln Alexander with us.

I speak for the guys and gals from Hamilton. That is how he would have said it because Linc was part of our community. As we close our portion of the debate, he was what was good in Hamilton and, in many ways, when we look at this place and the service he gave here, he represented what was good with the dignity and deportment he brought here.

As my time is coming to an end, I am standing here with the feeling I want to talk about this much more. However, I am sure after the House adjourns today, we will have a chance to gather and chat about the life of our friend, Lincoln Alexander.

• (1155)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

I would advise the member that he will have six and a half to seven minutes in his speech before the time for the consideration of private members' business expires.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it certainly is an honour for me to be rising here today to speak on this private member's bill.

Going back in history, there has always been a great rivalry between Hamilton and northern Ontario. We do not very often agree on anything and we quite often kid ourselves, especially the MPs from Hamilton. All three of them would dearly love to be from northern Ontario. I can swear to that. However, we can really agree on this bill.

Lincoln Alexander was a great Canadian. I can remember running into him, or, I should say, he almost ran me down when, one day, we were both visiting Queen's Park. He stopped. We had a little chat and we shook hands. One knows when one is shaking a real person's hand. It was pretty easy to tell that he was really a warm, kind-hearted person. It certainly was an honour for me to meet with the great man from Hamilton, who should have been from northern Ontario.

[Translation]

The NDP believes that January 21 should be designated Lincoln Alexander Day in tribute to the Hon. Lincoln Alexander, a man whose political work transcended party lines and whose life was an example of dedication, perseverance, humility and humanity.

Mr. Alexander was born on January 21, 1922, and died on October 19, 2012. He was the first black MP and he was elected in 1968 at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. It was not easy to be a man of colour at that time.

He represented the riding of Hamilton West and was re-elected in 1972, 1979 and 1980, serving in the House of Commons until 1985. He became the first black cabinet minister in Canada when he was appointed as labour minister by Joe Clark in 1979.

In 1985, he was appointed as the lieutenant governor of Ontario by Brian Mulroney, and he held that position until 1991. In 1992, he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada and received the Order of Ontario. After leaving his position as lieutenant governor, Mr. Alexander became chancellor at the University of Guelph, where he served for an unprecedented five terms.

In 2006, he published a book entitled *Go to School, You're a Little Black Boy*. He wanted to emphasize that education is essential to breaking down racial barriers.

Born in Toronto in 1922 to West Indian parents, Mr. Alexander served with the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1942 to 1945 during the Second World War. He completed an undergraduate arts degree at McMaster University in 1949 and graduated from the prestigious Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto in 1953. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1965.

With the first anniversary of Lincoln Alexander's death rapidly approaching, his wife contacted Hamilton region MPs with a proposal to create a national day in Linc's honour. She talked to Conservative and NDP MPs, and the NDP members were the only ones who responded quickly. We hope for unanimous consent because Linc was a Conservative member and the Liberals were on board.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons stated that the Conservatives would support the initiative, but that the unanimous consent vote would have to take place while he was not in the House because he has always maintained that MPs should not use motions adopted unanimously to get around the legislative process.

I can assure the people of Hamilton—who, like my colleagues, wish they could live in northern Ontario—that we will unanimously support this bill.

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. 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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

CANADA-HONDURAS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-20, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, the Agreement on Environmental Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are 53 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-20.

Motions Nos. 1 to 53 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

● (1205)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 10.

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Motion No. 12

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Motion No. 13

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 13.

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 14.

Motion No. 15

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 15.

Motion No. 16

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 16.

Motion No. 17

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 17.

Motion No. 18

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 18.

Government Orders

Motion No. 19

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 19.

Motion No. 20

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 20.

Motion No. 21

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 21.

Motion No. 22

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 22.

Motion No. 23

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 23.

Motion No. 24

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 24.

Motion No. 25

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 25.

Motion No. 26

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 26.

Motion No. 27

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 27.

Motion No. 28

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 28.

Motion No. 29

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 29.

Motion No. 30

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 30.

Motion No. 31

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 31.

Motion No. 32

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 32.

Motion No. 33

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 33.

Motion No. 34

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 34.

Motion No. 35

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 35.

Motion No. 36

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 36.

Motion No. 37

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 37.

Motion No. 38

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 38.

Motion No. 39

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 39.

Motion No. 40

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 40.

Motion No. 41

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 41.

Motion No. 42

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 42.

Motion No. 43

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 43.

Motion No. 44

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 44.

Motion No. 45

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 45.

Motion No. 46

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 46.

Motion No. 47

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 47.

Motion No. 48

Government Orders

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 48.
Motion No. 49

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 49.
Motion No. 50

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 50.
Motion No. 51

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 51.
Motion No. 52

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 52.
Motion No. 53

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 53.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the amendments we are proposing.

Bill C-20 does not reflect the approach we will take when we form the government in 2015. Our approach to international trade is different from the other parties' because we accord it more importance.

Before becoming an MP, I managed a business that was starting to sell specialty goods on its website in order to reach a broader market in Canada. When the company started getting orders from Europe and the United States, it started exporting.

Exporting companies in Canada do not get very much support at all. The data speak for themselves, especially when we compare Canada to European Union countries, the United States and Australia.

Canada spends \$12 million to \$13 million a year to support its exporting companies. Australia, which has a much smaller economy than Canada's, strongly supports its exporting companies by investing \$500 million in them. That is a considerable difference. For every dollar the Canadian government spends on supporting exporting companies, the Australians spend \$50 million on supporting theirs.

The same goes for the United States and the European Union. The countries that are enjoying real success when it comes to international trade are investing in their exporting companies.

● (1215)

[*English*]

That is not what happens here in Canada. The Conservatives would argue that they bring forward trade agreements and that it is all they need to do. However, when we look at the figures, we can see that the idea that just bringing forward trade agreements is somehow a guarantee of prosperity is very clearly denied by the facts.

First off, we know, and you know, Mr. Speaker, coming from an area of this country that has been devastated by some of the policies of the current government, that we have lost 500,000 full-time, family-sustaining jobs in manufacturing since the Conservative government came to power. That is appalling. The Conservatives would say that they have created some part-time jobs. As we know, at the end of December 2013, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce produced a very accurate and effective report that talked about job

creation under the current government. It said that in 2013, 95% of the jobs that were created were part time.

We have lost half a million full-time, family-sustaining manufacturing jobs. The government has tried to replace them with part-time jobs and temporary foreign workers, but the reality is that in the end, the communities are much further behind. Since the Conservative government has come to power, there have been 300,000 more Canadians looking for work, about 1.3 million in total, than there were when the government assumed office. We are seeing increasing unemployment and a colossal loss of manufacturing capacity and jobs, and at the same time, we are seeing that the government has put in place strategies that create only part-time jobs.

The government would then defend itself by saying that it has signed some trade agreements, and that is a guarantee of future prosperity. I have the figures here of some of the countries with whom we have signed trade agreements and what has actually happened in terms of our balance of payments. When we look at Canada's balance of international payments, we are in record deficit under the current government. What that means is that we are importing far more from other countries than we are actually exporting. Our exports are stalled in part because of the devastation in manufacturing capacity. We have a record level of deficit in our balance of international payments.

When we look at merchandise trade with these countries we have signed free trade agreements with, we see in each case that Canada is actually in a deficit with each one. In Mexico, we are in deficit, and that deficit is growing. In Israel, we are in deficit, and that deficit is growing. With Chile, we are in deficit, and the deficit is growing. In Costa Rica, we are in deficit, and, again, the deficit is growing. Even with Switzerland, we are in trade deficit, and the deficit is growing. If we look at the countries of the European Free Trade Association, we see again a deficit. We see a deficit between Canada and Peru, and the deficit is growing.

The reality is that the government has signed agreements that have been very poorly negotiated, in many cases, and with regimes that do not reflect Canadian values, notably Colombia, where human rights violations have actually increased since the signing of the trade agreement. The fact is that the Conservatives cannot point to successes. We see in virtually every single case that we are in trade deficit, which explains the record deficit around international payments. We can see that the Conservative approach is just not working.

That is why we are offering a whole series of amendments today. What we are saying is that the government really needs to take a new approach when we have lost half a million manufacturing jobs and when its sole achievement is to say that 95% of the jobs it creates are part-time. People cannot pay their mortgages with a part-time job. They cannot put food on the table every day with a part-time job.

Government Orders

Conservatives would suggest they could take two, three, four, or five part-time jobs and maybe cobble together a full-time income. That is really not what Canadians expect. What Canadians expect is a government that actually cares about their economic prosperity and instead of signing poorly negotiated agreements, actually puts in place a trade strategy that includes—and this is extremely important—addressing the fact that Canada does almost nothing to support major exporting enterprises and businesses in our country. When we see Australia spending \$500 million and Canada spending \$12 million to \$13 million—we have never been able to get the exact figure from the government—that shows a crucial lack of support for the export sector.

I come from Burnaby—New Westminster, which is the most diverse riding in the entire country, even though my colleague from Newton—North Delta will probably try to disagree with me on that. We have over a hundred languages spoken and diasporas from around the world. These are people who have come to Canada to build their lives here. We have important components of populations coming from Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe. The business trade organizations that many of these new Canadians set up to try to stimulate trade with their countries of origin are getting no support from the government at all.

There again we see another reason we are in deficit everywhere and bleeding red ink everywhere. The government really thinks that a ribbon-cutting ceremony or signing a trade agreement, no matter how poorly negotiated, is sufficient. It does not do any follow-up.

Mr. Speaker, I know you will be appalled by this situation. I can see it on your face. The fact that the government does not even do studies, prior to and afterwards, on the impact of the agreements shows how improvised it is. The approach of the Conservatives is improvised, and that is why it has been a failure.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to say one last thing about Bill C-20. I will quote Carmen Cheung, a researcher at the International Human Rights Program:

These past five years have seen a dramatic erosion in protections for expressive life in Honduras. Journalists are threatened, they're harassed, attacked, and murdered with near impunity, and sometimes in circumstances that strongly suggest the involvement of state agents.

In my opinion, these are systematic violations, and my colleagues who will be speaking shortly will also quote experts who raised these points in committee.

It is clear that Canadians will not support this agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate when people speak extemporaneously in this House, as my friend, the hon. member, just did. The trouble is that when he is pulling facts out of thin air, and actually fictitious facts, it is better to read from a text where he may have some substance.

He was very cavalier with his facts in that diatribe. The statement that “95% of jobs created in Canada are part-time” is false. That is incorrect. I would like some support for that.

Second, he said there was \$12 million to \$13 million provided by our government to support exporters. That is absolutely false. I guess 85% of the automobiles manufactured in Ontario are exported, and our government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to the auto innovation fund. Does that not count?

This is a cavalier and reckless use of the facts. I should expect it from this member, because in 2010 he made a statement that free trade has cost Canadians dearly, and his remarks today echo that once again. Once again, there is absolutely zero support for such statements.

I have just offered two or three facts from his speech, and I would like the hon. member to stand in this House and provide some factual basis for what he is telling the members of this House.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we will start with point three. The hon. member should have completed the quote. It was that the Conservative approach on free trade was costing Canada dearly.

The member for Durham cannot deny half a million lost manufacturing jobs. That is half a million families who have lost their breadwinner because of the policies of the government. He may deny the facts, but the facts exist nonetheless.

The other thing that was fascinating was that he was attacking the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce did its annual review of 2013 and published the report, which indicated that 95% of the jobs created in 2013 in Canada, those net jobs that the Conservatives love to talk about, were actually part-time in nature.

He can attack the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and he can go at it in the same way that the Conservatives attacked the Chief Justice, attacked Sheila Fraser, and attacked the Parliamentary Budget Officer, but the facts are the facts. Even though the Conservatives do not like to look at facts, the facts are staring them right in the face.

My final point is on this idea of the promotion and publicity budget. We have been asking the Conservatives for many years to release those numbers. They have refused to do so. We estimate \$12 million to \$13 million for publicity and promotion of exports, and they have refused to confirm or deny the figure. However, we do know, because the Australian government is a lot more open, that Australia has spent \$500 million in promotion for their exports around the world.

We have the facts, and the Conservatives do not.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Sticking with theme of the facts, Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to recognize, or Canadians to realize, that the New Democratic Party, in the history of the House, has never, ever voted in favour of a free trade agreement. When I say “voted in favour”, I mean standing in their place when there is an actual recorded vote and voting in favour of a free trade agreement.

Government Orders

Here we are talking about Honduras. I understand that again the New Democrats will be voting against the free trade agreement. We in the Liberal Party see value in freer trade among countries throughout the world. We have concerns in regard to the whole trade file, and I will get the opportunity to talk to that when I speak to the bill, but the question I have for the member is this: does he, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, believe that there is any merit whatsoever to free trade agreements? If so, why is it that New Democrats have never, ever voted in favour of a free trade agreement?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that member is obsessed with the NDP. If you are obsessed with the NDP, at least get your facts right.

We were the—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Burnaby—New Westminster has been here a long time. He knows he has to direct his comments to the Chair, not to other members in the House.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. You are absolutely right.

We defended the Auto Pact. We voted for the Canada-Jordan agreement in the presence of the member, so it is not as if he is ignorant; he is just trying manifestly to forget. We have supported the FIPA agreements. Of course we have supported trade. We actually put forward a fair trade approach, which is quite different from the approach of the Liberal Party.

I do want to say one thing about the Liberal Party. It supported the Canada-Colombia deal. This is a regime that has the highest rate of killing of unionized people, labour activists, and human rights activists on the planet. The Liberals said that if Canada signed the agreement, somehow, magically, the human rights violations would go away. Instead, they have increased.

It is deplorable. The Liberals should stop standing with the Conservatives—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe I can start off by rebutting the facts.

One of the things that the member just stated is that he voted in favour of the Jordan agreement. I would again tell the member to look at the record. The New Democrats have never voted in their place in favour of a free trade agreement. This one is yet another piece of legislation on which we know the New Democrats will be voting against free trade.

I say that because there is a fundamental difference. We within the Liberal Party have been progressive in our attitudes toward recognizing the value of free trade and looking at ways in which we can allow for additional flow of goods and services because we believe that at the end of the day, thousands of jobs are created. The more Canada gets involved in global trade, the more the quality of lifestyle for all Canadians is improved. The numbers will clearly show that.

Indeed, we are a trading nation. We need and are dependent on world trade. That is what enables us to have the lifestyle we have today. It is what enables us to say that Canada is one of the best

countries in the world to live in and, I would argue, as I am a bit biased, perhaps the best. Not to recognize the importance of trade is wrong. Although I should perhaps not give advice to my New Democratic colleagues, I think they are missing the boat on this.

When we look at the overall picture of trade and whether the government has done well or done poorly, what we find is that the government has not done all that well on the trade file, although it often talks about free trade agreements and says that it has done more trade agreements than the Liberal Party and so forth.

I like to keep things relatively simple, so let us look at overall trade. When the Conservatives took the reins of power a few years back, we had a huge multi-billion-dollar trade surplus. How does that compare with today, in the time since the Conservatives have been in government? It did not take long—only a matter of months, maybe a year—for them to turn that multi-billion-dollar annual trade surplus situation that Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin created into a massive trade deficit. We have been running deficits of billions of dollars on the trade file with the current government. I do not have the actual facts, but I would suggest that we probably have a larger trade deficit with the current government than with any other government in the history of Canada. I cannot say that for a fact, but I would not be surprised if that was the case.

What does that mean for the average middle-class family in Canada today? It means the loss of potentially tens of thousands of jobs that could be assisting in driving our economy forward. That is what it means in terms of the impact on our great country. This is where the government could have and should have given more attention.

We recognize that there is value to agreements of this nature. If we look back to the history of this particular trade agreement, we see that it dates back to 2001. There was Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Those were four countries back in 2001 for which there was recognition that we needed to advance and recognition that there was a potential to get into some trade agreements. It has taken the government a number of years to continue that process through and to ultimately achieve an agreement.

● (1230)

It should be no surprise that the Liberal Party is voting in favour of this agreement. No one should be surprised by that. There are changes we would have liked to have seen.

Our concern is the bigger picture. I will draw a comparison. During the 1990s, when I was an MLA, we had a huge trade mission. Team Canada went to Asia. Through the prime minister and that team approach, provinces, business leaders, and labour organization representatives were invited to participate in the team Canada approach to trade. The mission went to China, among other countries. Literally hundreds of millions of dollars of extra economic activity was created.

It took our Prime Minister quite a while to actually go to China, but when he did, the biggest announcement he had when he came back was that he was able to get a couple of panda bears to come to Canada. News flash to the Prime Minister: Manitoba had a couple of panda bears come to our province in the 1990s.

Government Orders

For the Liberals, it is not just the signature on a piece of paper saying that we are going to have a trade agreement. We recognize the value, and we want to see that take place, but it is overall trade. This is something we believe the government has failed in.

To what degree has the government been successful working south of our border, in the United States, where a good portion of our trade goes, and in many other countries around the world?

I feel very passionate about the Philippines, a country we in Canada are more dependent on in terms of immigration numbers than ever. Why do we not look at the possibility of entering into some sort of a trade agreement with a country like the Philippines, where we are growing in terms of the size of the population? There would be many benefits for both countries from expanding economic trade, tourism, and products and services. These are the types of things we should be hearing more about. I was glad that we had something in regard to Korea.

With respect to the Honduras trade agreement, we had a press release from the pork producers. Manitoba has a wonderful pork industry. I have had the opportunity to tour the farms on a Hutterite colony, where piglets are born and raised to a certain age and then brought to Brandon, where they are processed and packaged at Maple Leaf.

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs in Manitoba alone. I believe that the plant in Brandon employs over 1,000 people. There are huge job numbers created in the pork industry in the province of Manitoba. They are good, quality jobs that are putting bread and butter on the table and providing a good quality of living for a lot of Manitobans.

With this particular agreement in place, it is expected that we will be able to do that much more in terms of the pork industry in Honduras. That is good for our province.

Let us not be fearful of free trade agreements, but let us make sure that we do our homework and deliver the best agreements we can. We should also go beyond trade agreements and start taking that team Canada-type approach of former Prime Minister Chrétien to bring Canadians to other countries to develop economic ties. By doing that, we will be creating thousands of jobs here in Canada.

● (1235)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg North for his speech and for the Liberal Party's support of the Honduran trade deal. His remarks showcasing the NDP's decades of opposition to trade were absolutely on the money.

The member also made reference to the historic team Canada missions that the last Liberal government, under former Prime Minister Chrétien, held. He mentioned the China mission in particular, which had 600 people on a plane. There were many mayors and premiers and that sort of thing. He said that after those missions, "literally hundreds of millions of dollars of...economic activity was created".

I would invite the member to look at the testimony before our trade committee from just two weeks ago from Professor Keith Head

of the University of British Columbia, who actually did an empirical analysis of the team Canada missions and showed that the member's statement is actually incorrect. From those missions, which Professor Head characterized as more photo-op driven than meaningfully driven, there was actually no positive impact on trade. They were photo-op driven. In fact, Professor Head talked about serving beaver tails in China. We are actually making commitments to trade commissioners to expand trade for small and medium-sized enterprises.

I would like the member to tell this House where he is getting his figures of hundreds of millions of dollars driven by the team Canada missions.

● (1240)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, without any hesitation, I would love to draw a comparison to the current Prime Minister's China deal, when he brought over panda bears, and contrast with the team Canada approach of former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

When he talks about the number of dollars, I could not give a specific actual dollar amount. However, as the member has pointed out, with the number and quality of individuals who were able to build relationships, sign deals, and so forth, I believe that we were going into the hundreds of millions of dollars. That might not have all transpired within 14 days of their departing from China. I suspect that through time we will see that there have been many economic benefits because of the individuals who were involved.

The point is that for many stakeholders, including premiers, mayors, business leaders, and others, the prime minister felt that it was good to take them to build those economic and social relationships to enhance the relationship between the two countries.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. friend from Winnipeg North. I would like to ask the member if there are any countries in the world whose specific records on the environment, labour rights, or human rights would prevent the Liberal Party from voting in favour of a trade deal.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one could easily reverse that question. We could look at countries for which free trade agreements have been signed, and the New Democratic Party has never voted for one of them. The New Democrats have never stood in their place inside the House of Commons and said that they think it is a worthwhile venture and that they are going to vote in favour of free trade.

What I believe is that the Liberals, unlike the New Democrats, have our head above the sand. We look on the horizon, and we realize how important trade is to our country and that the best way for us to continue to develop in the future is to ensure that there are nations that are prepared to trade. Where we can enhance that trade, I believe that as a nation we should be doing that. All we need for proof is to look at our history.

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Again, I would emphasize that it is not just signing an agreement that is important. What is important is that we take a multi-faceted look at the ways we can improve and enhance the types of materials, resources, services, and products being exported out of Canada. If we do it right, we will be able to accomplish what former Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin were able to do, and that is have massive trade surpluses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP's deputy international trade critic, I am pleased to rise at report stage of Bill C-20, which has to do with the trade agreement between Canada and Honduras.

I found my Liberal colleague's speech very interesting. My colleague from Victoria raised a particularly relevant question about whether human rights, environmental standards or health and safety standards would prevent the Liberal Party from voting in favour of a trade deal. He can say what he wants, but I attended two sittings of the Standing Committee on International Trade. The question came up regularly, and at no point did the Liberal member even mention this topic, except when the NDP invited witnesses who spoke about human rights.

As for the agreement between Canada and Colombia, which my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster mentioned, I was not a member of the House at that time. I did, however, follow closely what was going on in the House, since I was very interested in its work. Once again, I can say that the Liberals were probably among the biggest supporters of the agreement and among the fiercest critics of those who opposed the agreement because of Colombia's human rights violations.

My speech will focus on explaining the NDP's approach to international trade to our Conservative colleagues in government and our Liberal colleagues. The stories we keep hearing are 10, 15, 20 or 30 years old. Things have changed and we have also changed. As an economist, I have many times told committees, both in the House and outside, that I am not opposed to trade agreements. On the contrary, I support them. They play a very important role in Canada's economy. We cannot support and sign every trade agreement without considering some factors: what is the content of these agreements and what is the human rights and environmental situation? All of those questions should be taken into account.

At this time I can tell my friends in the House of Commons that the NDP's approach is to examine trade agreements under three different lenses. The first is human rights, which is essential, followed by environmental rights and workers' rights.

In the case of the Colombia agreement, for example, we were told that this type of agreement is vital in order to give the Colombian government an incentive to improve its human rights record. Nothing has changed since the agreement was signed. Furthermore, the Conservatives and the Liberals are collaborating in order to block a proper consideration of the reports on trade agreements that would indicate the progress made. We regularly receive reports, as that is a requirement that was introduced, but we do not even study them.

With respect to Honduras, the situation is problematic. We have said this many times in the House. It will be even more problematic in the future. Honduras is one of the most difficult countries to live

in. We have often spoken about the number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. It is one of the highest rates, if not the highest, in the world. I am convinced that we will be discussing this topic again. There are also other elements.

At one of the meetings of the Standing Committee on International Trade, I cited the case of a journalist, Carlos Mejía. He was a member of the reflection, investigation and communication team for Radio Progreso, which is affiliated with the Jesuits. He really cannot be considered a radical, and he was working on the ground. Carlos Mejía was stabbed to death in his home. This crime has not yet been solved. He was the 34th journalist to be murdered since the 2009 coup. Some of them have been murdered since the supposedly democratic elections in 2012.

On a number of occasions, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked for protection for him and that the government take a special interest in his safety because he was in danger. The government did nothing.

I believe that 15 of these 34 cases were specifically tied to the work these journalists were doing on the ground, for example for the opposition or on the issue of corruption, in a supposedly democratic country.

● (1245)

The Honduran government has problems with governance and protecting human rights, yet we are being asked to support a trade deal with the country without adequately addressing that issue.

On this side of the House, unlike the Conservatives and Liberals, we feel that human rights is an important issue. I am not surprised by the Conservative stance because it is in line with their overall approach: they sign just about anything because these are side issues that are not overly important. I understand that. At least they are consistent.

However, their arguments are not coherent. We are being told that a free market will help the country strengthen its democracy, as though there is a connection between the two. History has shown that there is no direct link between a democratic political regime and the free market. In case there is any doubt, I have two specific examples.

The first example is that of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, a country that served as a testing ground for neo-liberal policies in the late 1970s after Salvador Allende was overthrown. It was such a popular experiment that the University of Chicago and its infamous school of economics sent researchers there to establish a free-market economy. The first delegation was led by Milton Friedman. Those who went were known as the "Chicago Boys".

Was Augusto Pinochet democratic? Definitely not. He was the head of a totalitarian regime. Did Chile's free-market approach result in democracy? No one can seriously claim that. Augusto Pinochet remained in power a long time, until well after those policies were implemented. In the case of Chile, it is clear that totalitarianism and the free market went hand in hand.

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We can go as far back as Benito Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy, which was a good friend to businesses. Once again, it was an undemocratic, totalitarian regime that fully embraced the free market at the time.

The government is telling us that free trade is absolutely essential to the progress of democracy and democratic governance, but that is nonsense. On several occasions, I asked the companies that testified before the Standing Committee on International Trade and our Conservative and Liberal friends to show us some kind of evidence that countries that have problems in the areas of democratic governance and respect for human rights have made any progress in that regard as a result of a free trade agreement, but no one was able to. Our friends seem to feel that it is enough that they believe it is true, but there is no evidence to support it.

I will not dwell any longer on the issue of human rights because I know many speakers want to address that issue, but it is of the utmost importance to us. That is why we responded favourably to the trade deal with Europe. That is why we are open to a trade deal with South Korea. It is because these two examples do not pose a problem in terms of human rights.

The second lens under which we examine free trade agreements helps us determine whether the potential partner is a strategic one. Of course, Europe and South Korea are strategic trade partners for Canada. However, of all the countries in the world, Honduras is currently Canada's 104th largest trading partner, so from a strategic perspective, I do not think that the government can argue that it is so urgent that we sign a trade agreement with Honduras that doing so should take precedence over the extremely important matter of human rights.

The third lens, which does not apply in this case, allows us to examine the content of trade agreements. The reason we are withholding judgment with regard to the agreements with Europe and South Korea is that we do not know the terms of these agreements. Nevertheless, we are going to use this approach with all trade agreements, rather than just blindly supporting them based on the unfounded principle that trade agreements are essential to the progress of democracy and democratic governance.

● (1250)

[English]

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his participation in some of our trade committee hearings in the last few months.

There are two points that I will make.

The member mentioned Honduras and other trade deals that we have negotiated. However, Honduras is in our hemisphere and Canada is the sixth largest donor to Honduras. We firmly believe that with development and diplomacy, comes trade and betters the quality of life for Honduras.

The member also referenced Colombia and mischaracterized its record in the last few years immensely. It has doubled the size of its middle class in recent years and doubled its GDP. Part of that is attributable to the free trade agreements that Colombia has signed with countries like Canada. In fact, its crime is down, governance

and human rights are improving in that country and the people are benefiting on the ground.

As an economist, does the member not promote an expanded middle class and opportunity for Colombians and Hondurans by engaging with countries like Canada in our own hemisphere?

● (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I support trade agreements that benefit both signatory countries. That is not the case here.

I am pleased that Colombia's economic situation has improved somewhat, but has the human rights situation in Colombia improved? My colleague from Durham did not say anything about that. The answer is simple: no.

If he really wants to say that Colombia's human rights situation has improved dramatically because of the trade agreement, then he should let the committee look at the reports on the subject. We do not even have access to those.

Is he saying that the trade agreement with Colombia has improved human rights? His question was not even about that; it was about economic progress. We know that union people are still being killed in Colombia. We also know that the government is still having problems with democratic governance.

Canada should use its bargaining power because Colombia would benefit economically and so would we. We would probably benefit to a lesser degree because our economy is more advanced.

However, we should use our bargaining power to ask—no, to insist—that our trading partners enhance their environmental and labour standards, and especially their human rights standards. The Conservatives, like the Liberals, have refused to do so.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with this trade deal, Canada is the second largest foreign investor in Honduras. This is the elephant in the room with most of the trade deals with these developing countries.

Canada wants protection for its multinationals who are taking their profits from resource extraction in Canada and investing it in other countries where labour and environmental conditions are lower, but they want very strict control over their ability to invest and make their money back. Is this not really what these free trade deals are with these countries?

We have seen the evidence presented that it has not increased trade, but it has opened the door for Canadian companies to take advantage of these developing markets and natural resources in those areas. Is that not what is really at stake here?

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[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Western Arctic for that very relevant question.

In fact, that brings me back to my main argument. When it comes to international aid, for Honduras or any other country that needs Canada's assistance, certain conditions have to be met by governments before that international aid can be used. We do not hand out money without knowing how it will be spent or whether it will be used for its intended purpose.

In the case of agreements that help two countries trade freely, there are no such conditions. None of these agreements have binding obligations with regard to environmental standards, labour standards or human rights standards.

Why is Canada missing all these opportunities to negotiate with these countries and require these standards to be included in the trade agreement? It is beyond me. That is why we are going to study the issue of human rights for all agreements, this one and subsequent ones, because this issue is key to the support of the New Democratic Party as a social democratic party.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-20, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Honduras.

This is the second time I have risen in the House to speak to this bill. As a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, I also attended committee meetings during the study of the bill.

I am opposed to this bill for a number of reasons that I will get to in my speech and for the reasons that my colleagues have already mentioned.

First I will talk again about the NDP's approach to trade and our relations with other jurisdictions and economies.

The NDP is not necessarily opposed to free trade. New Democrats read the texts of free trade agreements before opposing or supporting them. That is the case with the Canada-EU free trade agreement. Naturally, it is an agreement that could benefit many Canadian sectors, but we have to study the details. We have to really see whether some sectors are more affected than others. We also have to have a more coordinated strategy to ensure that free trade agreements really do benefit Canadians and really do create jobs in Canada. We believe that there must be a coordinated approach and strategy for free trade between Canada and other countries.

I will therefore discuss the five main elements of our strategy.

First, we believe that there must be an impact analysis to determine whether or not trade agreements negotiated by Canada are good for Quebecers and Canadians. We must determine whether trade agreements will result in job losses or gains and in which sectors and industries.

Second, I believe that it is important for our trade agreements to strengthen Canada's sovereignty. I have to emphasize this point. The free trade agreements that we sign must also strengthen our freedom to establish our own policies. These agreements must help make us a

force to be reckoned with on the world stage. These agreements must support the principles of a fair multilateral trade system.

Third, especially in the case of Bill C-20 on the Honduras free trade agreement, all trade agreements must protect and promote human rights and prohibit the import, export or sale in Canada of any products manufactured in sweatshops by forced labour, or under any other conditions that do not meet basic international standards for labour or human rights.

As I will explain later, it is impossible to meet these conditions with Bill C-20 and with our free trade agreement with Honduras.

Fourth, all trade agreements must respect the notion of sustainable development, as well as the integrity of all ecosystems.

Fifth, and finally, I believe that every time the Government of Canada signs a free trade agreement, the decision to pass the enabling legislation must be submitted to a mandatory vote on whether or not the terms of the agreement are acceptable.

I must point out that the NDP's position on free trade agreements is the polar opposite of the Conservative Party's position.

At the committee meetings I attended, I noticed that the Conservatives were presenting a false dichotomy with respect to free trade. The Conservatives claim that we either have to commit to their free trade agreement or choose total isolation, both diplomatically and economically.

● (1300)

The reality is completely different and much more complex.

I would like to illustrate my point by sharing a quote from a meeting of the Standing Committee on International Trade. During this meeting we heard from a very important and well-informed witness, Bertha Oliva, the founder of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras. Her husband, Tomás Nativí, disappeared in 1981. During the meeting, the parliamentary secretary said:

Canada has a choice. In our own hemisphere we can either trade and engage nations—not just trading but helping build capacity—or we can choose isolation.

This is an example of the Conservatives' false dichotomy.

However, Bertha Oliva's response was particularly interesting. She said the following in response to the member for Durham:

We are not proposing isolation for Honduras. We don't want that. We don't want Honduras to be isolated from Canada or from the world. What we are saying is that we want the governments of the world and the Government of Canada to monitor the situation more regularly—and not only monitor the situation but also engage, have debate, and go to people in the communities where there are companies that have violated their rights, for which we have proof. We have proof that they have committed human rights violations.

Where those human rights violations have taken place and when Canadian companies are involved, we want there to be an attempt to repair the damage. There can be no claim that poverty and problems are being fought when, essentially, we have people who are ill, when there is no right to health care.

Bertha Oliva opposed the free trade agreement between Canada and Honduras, of course. She also told the committee:

Those who want to invest in Honduras must know that the situation does not make it possible to guarantee your investments.

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Honduras does not have a stable legal system, and its governance system is unstable and undemocratic.

Ms. Oliva also pointed out that the conditions are not in place to strengthen the people either—far from it, in fact. Communities therefore do what they can to intensify pressure since they are not consulted, which then leads to human rights violations.

It is important to point out that, in her testimony, Bertha Oliva indicated that Hondurans cannot participate in democracy in a meaningful way and that they often do not have a say in decisions made by the government. She mentioned that there is a reigning state of terror in Honduras. Since the election, there have been murders among the political dissident community.

As my colleagues have often mentioned in the House, Honduras is an unstable country, where over 600 women and over 30 journalists were murdered for political reasons. The consolidation of state power has given rise to an alarming phenomenon, and that is that most people are being persecuted through legal means. As Bertha Oliva said, it is impossible for people to exercise their right to disagree with what is going on in Honduras.

Ms. Oliva's testimony is rather worrisome in and of itself, but many other witnesses also spoke out against this free trade agreement, including Pablo Heidrich, an economist at the North-South Institute. He said something that really struck me, which is that the economy of Honduras is smaller than that of the Ottawa-Gatineau region. One therefore has to wonder whether a free trade agreement with Honduras will really help the Canadian economy.

We are also talking about a very limited market since there is a very marked income inequality in Honduras. Knowing that Honduras has a smaller economy than Ottawa-Gatineau, one cannot help but wonder why the Conservatives are in such a hurry to sign this free trade agreement.

I look forward to my colleagues' questions.

•(1305)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her presentation. It is very important to highlight some of the problems with this agreement.

One of the things that struck me earlier in the day, when the member for Winnipeg North was talking about Liberals and free trade, is that Honduras has the highest murder rate per capita on the face of the earth. It has vibrant drug trafficking centres. Again, it is probably one of the most reprehensible governments on the face of the earth.

To my mind, as the critic for human rights for the official opposition, I cannot see justification for a free trade agreement with this nation. However, if we are going to construct a free trade agreement with any nation, part of the language within the terms of the free trade agreement should include labour rights and human rights.

When I hear the member for Winnipeg North talking about the Liberal position, I have to ask, is he abandoning the long-held Pearsonism and Trudeauism, and all the values they proclaim to have

had around international human rights? Because the last 75 years would have gone for naught.

•(1310)

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's position in support of Bill C-20 and the free trade agreement with Honduras is similar to that of the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party and Liberal Party have very similar positions on free trade.

The NDP is opposed to this bill because we think that we need to negotiate agreements with countries that respect human rights. We know that, in countries like Honduras, drug trafficking operates with near impunity, human rights are regularly abused and democracy is under threat. We need to negotiate free trade agreements with democratic countries where we can be sure that environmental and human rights standards will be upheld.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during this debate, it has become clear that we need to know about the benefits of a free trade agreement, not just for Canada, but also for the other country. In this case, there is some doubt about whether we are moving in the right direction. This is a country that does not respect human rights at all.

The NDP wants to make sure that Canadians who know trade is important to our economy realize that we know it too. We are in favour of supporting Canadian exporters by opening up new markets.

Can my colleague explain why our criteria are so important? They are essential to ensuring that we are signing a trade agreement that will be beneficial and successful not only for Canada but also for the other countries, particularly in terms of people and workers.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

The NDP has three important criteria that it assesses trade agreements against. First, the proposed partner must respect democracy, human rights and acceptable labour and environmental protection standards. I mentioned that in my speech. Honduras does not meet this criterion.

Second, the proposed partner's economy must be of significant and strategic value to Canada. That is not the case here, because Honduras's economy is very small.

Third, we have to look at whether the terms of the proposed agreement are acceptable. Once again, that is not the case with our free trade agreement with Honduras.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak to Bill C-20, the Canada-Honduras free trade agreement. As a number of my colleagues have pointed out, New Democrats are opposed to this agreement, for a number of very good reasons.

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Others have mentioned it, but I want to reiterate the three pillars that we think are fundamentally important for Canadians when negotiating free trade agreements and the assessment of those agreements. First, is the proposed partner one who respects democracy, human rights, adequate environmental and labour standards, and Canadian values? If there are challenges in this regard, is the partner on a positive trajectory toward these goals? Second, is the proposed partner's economy of significant or strategic value to Canada? Third, are the terms of the proposed agreement satisfactory? On this last point, the Canada-Honduras agreement is another example of an agreement that was negotiated behind closed doors, so Canadians did not have access to the full details of the agreement during that process.

I am going to focus most of my speech on human rights. I have been in the House for almost 10 years and have had the opportunity to debate other free trade agreements, including, notably, the Colombia free trade agreement, where there were many human rights violations.

One of my colleagues noted that one of the ways Canada could position itself is to make sure there are binding terms within a free trade agreement that talk about human rights and the consequences if human rights violations continue.

We have attempted, a number of times in the House, to have a bill passed with regard to corporate social responsibility. The bill would hold Canadian companies to standards that we hold here in Canada, instead of finding extractive companies in particular doing business in other countries, where they violate all kinds of environmental, social, and human rights standards. That bill has never managed to get through the House.

I want to note one particular person who provided testimony before committee because I am going to focus on the human rights aspect. Ms. Sheila Katz, a representative from the Americas Policy Group at the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, said at the Standing Committee on International Trade, on April 22, 2013:

The Americas Policy Group has recommended that Canada refrain from concluding free trade agreements with countries that have poor democratic governance and human rights records. [...]

...Canada's eager recognition of a president who came to power in a military coup in Honduras in 2009. This is another example of Canada prioritizing the trade pillar of its Americas strategy above the rest. Since the coup, hundreds of regime opponents have been intimidated, arbitrarily arrested, disappeared, tortured, and killed. The Americas Policy Group is concerned that Canada has validated this regime by adopting a business-as-usual approach and signing a free trade agreement with Honduras in spite of its human rights record.

I am going to refer to a number of different articles with regard to the Honduran human rights record.

In an article by IWGIA, in *The Indigenous World 2010*, there was a bit of background, and then it talked about some specifics with regard to human rights abuses in Honduras. It is important to note the number of indigenous people in Honduras and the land mass that we are talking about:

Given the lack of an official census, it is estimated that the nine indigenous and Afro-descendant people living in Honduras number 1.27 million inhabitants.... The territory claimed by the indigenous peoples accounts for approximately 2 million hectares out of a total national land mass of 11.2 million. Only 10% have a guaranteed property title. Each of the peoples retains a degree of individuality, in line

with their habits and customs, and this is reflected in their day-to-day practices in terms of, for example, their community councils. Honduras ratified ILO Convention 169 in September 1994. In 2007, it voted in favour of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Apart from Convention 169, there is no case law to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

I think that is a very important point. The Honduran government is voting in favour of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and yet in the negotiations on this free trade agreement, I wonder whether indigenous peoples in Honduras gave, as noted in Article 19 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "their free, prior and informed consent".

I am going to cite a number of cases where there are ongoing human rights abuses with regard to land.

● (1315)

In Honduras, the indigenous peoples do not appear to have the same legal rights in terms of taking it to courts and being protected that way. In Canada, we know that the FIPA has been taken to court by a first nation from British Columbia and that is an example where even in Canada first nations say that Article 19 free, prior and informed consent, is not being respected by the Canadian government when negotiating trade agreements. In the same article it goes on to say:

The indigenous peoples form one of the poorest sectors of society and their marginalisation means that they play no part in the formal economy. Their main source of income lies in maize, beans, coffee, fishing and in the sale of handicrafts.

It went on to say, "When they provide labour to other productive sectors, they are paid around USD 5 for a 10-hour day". That is pretty stark.

In an article called "Human Rights Violations in Honduras: Land Seizures, Peasants' Repression and the Struggle for Democracy on the Ground" by Jeanette Bonifaz, a research associate at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, she details a number of very serious concerns with regard to human rights. She says:

In Honduras, arguably the most unequal country in Latin America, peasants are the victims of a glaring disparate land ownership structure. In 2009, when then-President Manuel Zelaya attempted to pass legislation that promised comprehensive land reform, he was ousted from power by a coup....

It is the land reform that seems to be at the heart at much of the oppression of the indigenous people.

She went on to say that:

Since the coup, peasants have suffered from increased repression, with death squads threatening and assassinating hundreds of campesinos while palm oil and hydroelectric companies accumulate land by dispossession.... Tragically, there seems to be no end in sight for the repression of land and human rights in the Central American country.

I do not have time in my brief 10 minutes to go through the numerous examples of persecution over land and agrarian reform that have taken place in Honduras and do not appear to be measurably better in this day and age. She goes through a period from the 1960s all the way up until present day. I want to cite something that happened in 2010.

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When Porfirio Lobo Sosa, a landowner, became the president of Honduras in 2010, the peasants began to protest and peacefully occupy lands, which only brought more state-sponsored repression against them. As a report from the Canadian Council for International Cooperation points out, "...the coup has provided the context for rolling back important gains in the peaceful and legal resolution of conflicts between peasant groups and powerful landed business interests over access to land titles."

In her concluding remarks, she said:

Without comprehensive land reform that protects the rights of Indigenous peoples and abides by the ILO Convention 169, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, as well as other crucial national and international agreements and laws, forced displacements and violence will continue to occur in Honduras. In addition, the judicial system needs to be revised, and proper investigations in the case of human rights violations need to take place. As the Inter-American Court of Human Rights asserts, "the State has the obligation to use all the legal means at its disposal to combat impunity, since it fosters chronic recidivism of human rights violations and total defenselessness of victims and their relatives."

She does cite a specific example of a hydro-electric dam that fuels violence. There has been a long-standing community protest. In fact, I come back to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People on free, prior, and informed consent. The community spoke overwhelmingly against this hydro-electric dam. Instead what happened is the government awarded 47 hydro-electric dam concessions to companies without prior consultation. Once the community spoke up and started to protest, we saw the repression start.

Why is it that our Canadian government, which supposedly supports human rights, would engage in a free trade agreement where the human rights violations are so egregious? I have to ask why.

• (1320)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot agree more with my hon. colleague on the fact that this is a government that is not concerned about the well-being of those in other countries.

Let us look at the types of free trade agreements the government is trying to put in place with a country that has one of the world's worst records when it comes to human rights, corruption, and transparency. It is not only with respect to a select few, it is even with respect to some of the politicians, some of the police, some of the business people.

Why is it that we are actually debating an issue that should be so clear to all of us. We should not be doing free trade agreements with countries such as this one.

Could the member explain her concern with respect to our export performance under the Conservative government's rule?

• (1325)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, in my very brief time, I am going to come back to the human rights piece before I deal with export. I want to quote Francisco Sanchez.

He is talking about:

Rio Blanco is the site of a five-month blockade seeking to prevent construction of the World Bank-funded Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project...would bury many sacred Lenca ceremonial sites and thousands of acres of fertile agricultural land. Local people also claim that the government is concealing a shadow project to construct a gold mine at the same time, which would use the water from the dam and electricity generated by the dam...

This is if it should it be built.

Francisco says:

If this project goes forward, it will ruin our river, poison the fish, and drown our forests. And what for? If we give up our lands, we'll still have to pay for electricity like everyone else.

In terms of the opening comments of member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing around the human rights piece, again I wonder why the government would engage with a government that has such a track record. I really hope there will be an opportunity for it to revisit the human rights record before this agreement is passed.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives like to pound themselves on their chests and say that they are the religious right in this country and they are the party of law enforcement, and yet they want to sign this deal with a corrupt government that has absolutely no passion for human rights, that deliberately goes out and gets people murdered, that jails people, that does everything it can to suppress anybody who opposes it.

Could the hon. member tell us what the Conservatives are thinking about when they want to sign this trade deal with this corrupt government?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to even begin to try to speak on behalf of Conservatives. I do wonder how they could possibly enter into a trade agreement. The member of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing talked about exports. Of course Honduras is 104th in terms of priority for Canada.

Back to the human rights abuses, what we have here is killing, arbitrary detention of thousands of people, severe restrictions on public demonstration, protests and freedom of expression, and interference in the independence of the judiciary. These are all well established by non-government organizations. Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and any number of organizations are documenting the human rights abuses in Honduras on an ongoing basis. They are well documented. The fact that there is not an independent judiciary, that people cannot get a fair trial, is well documented.

Why does the Conservative government want to support that kind of regime? It is giving tacit approval to the regime by negotiating these kinds of trade agreements.

I am hopeful, ever optimistic in this House, that perhaps people will take a step back and assess whether or not this is good for Canada on the international stage in terms of our reputation with regard to human rights.

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Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is so crucially important here is an understanding of the why, for a trade agreement of this nature. Last summer, as critic for international human rights for the official opposition, I received five delegations of indigenous people from Honduras, Colombia, the Philippines, and Mexico. All of them had generally the same story. That story went along the lines of the following: Canadian mining exploration companies came to their country and shortly thereafter their government started crowding them off their land. No one is suggesting that the Canadian companies have asked them to do this. However, I have told this story in the House before. It is the story of King Henry II and Thomas Becket, when in a drunken rage King Henry said, “Will no one rid me of this troublesome monk?” and two of his knights went out and murdered Thomas Becket. It is somewhat like that. There is an interest that wants to explore for materials and set up extractive companies in these countries. It is facilitated. The government uses its army, or in some countries goes so far as to use its death squads, to remove people. The indigenous people who stand up for their lands are often murdered or disappear.

I have a quote that kind of speaks to this. It says, “...the best way to improve things is by engagement not by isolation”. That was from James Bannantine from Aurora Minerals, I presume an extractive company. That was from testimony received at committee.

Sometimes people will say the trickle-down effect of trade is to improve human rights. There is a false dichotomy out there, presented by the Conservatives at times like this. It is either have free trade or complete isolation with that country. There is a very different reality that allows for people to go to these countries. Witnesses who came to committee on the free trade agreement spoke to having Canada engage with Honduras, but they want that engagement to focus on building institutional, judicial, and democratic capacity. Honduras is a country that has had a government overthrown by coup. It is very clear the military in charge is functioning with almost complete impunity. Normally that occurs when the judicial and other systems are not in place to offer protection to people. Thus it is not held accountable in any form.

From the standpoint of the New Democratic Party, and the members on the other side like to tout the fact we have opposed many of the free trade agreements before the House, there is criteria we look to. Is the proposed partner one that respects democracy, human rights, adequate environmental and labour standards, and Canadian values?

We had a corporate social responsibility bill put before the House, I believe prior to the 2008 election. Sadly, that bill, which would have required Canadian extractive companies functioning in other countries to function in terms of Canada's laws in that country, even if the other country is a failed state that does not have the laws and regulations that Canada does. That bill failed in the House by 12 votes. It just so happens that was one of the many times the Liberal Party chose to leave 15 members out of the House. I have no problem with people standing up in this place and saying what they believe, but I am very disappointed that they chose to abdicate their responsibilities at that time.

Another consideration that we have is whether the proposed partner's economy is of significance or strategic value to Canada. We have heard from other speakers that in this particular instance, in trading terms, our relationship is 104th. That does not sound like it is critical to us. Are the terms of the proposed agreement satisfactory? We believe this particular agreement fails that test. It fails it in many ways.

● (1330)

Over and over we hear the same stories. Honduras is a corrupt country with undemocratic practices, weak institutions and low standards. In terms of strategic value to us, it is not there. We add to that the record of human rights abuses, the murders, the torture and the disappearances.

We understand that trade is necessary to our economy. We favour expanded trade opportunities for our country and we want to support our exporters as well, but we do not want to sacrifice, or be seen to sacrifice, the values of our country in order to reach those agreements.

If we asked average Canadians what they thought of Canada, one of the first things they would talk about would be how they value our view of international human rights. In truth, I suspect many of them have little idea that at this point, Canada's reputation for the last 75 years has been pretty well lost in the world we have today. I am fumbling a little for words, because it is that serious.

I was shocked earlier today when I heard members of the Liberal Party say that they would support the free trade agreement with this corrupt regime. As a young person, I listened very closely to Mr. Pearson when he talked about rights. I also listened to Mr. Trudeau, when he was prime minister of our country, talked about rights. When I hear today that the Liberals favour trade with China, which has a terrible human rights record, and favour this trade agreement and will vote for it, they have abandoned those principles with which many of us, at one point in time, thought they were on the right track as a political party. I did not say I had reached the point of voting for that political party, I want to make that straight, but there were aspects of the structure of the Liberal Party of Canada at that time which I respected.

Honduras is a really poor country. It has that history of repression and undemocratic practices. When the regime was toppled in 2009, the following government actions were well criticized by international observers during the election. They said that it failed to meet the standards of the international community when it came to elections. There was a coup staged by the Honduran army under the pretext of a constitutional crisis. Where have we heard that kind of thing before? From failed nations around the world, whenever the government chooses to take over. If we look at Egypt today, whether people like or dislike the elected president of Egypt, he was deposed. He was elected democratically and deposed by a military coup. Where do we go when we start sanctioning those kinds of things?

I will put aside my notes for a few minutes, because it is so important to look at this, not in terms of trade but in terms of human rights and the fact that governments in many parts of the world are military in nature, dictatorships, where they function with impunity, an impunity that allows them to murder, pillage and to force people off their lands and to do it in the name of dollars.

Government Orders

We need to understand that the only way to change this is to realize that we have to fortify the institutions in that country, help lead them on the path to judicial reform and to democracy. Until we take care of the democracy, the trade we have with that country, to some extent, would be practically shameful. Thus, I am pretty clear that I cannot even begin to think of supporting this agreement.

• (1335)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague made a very heady comment during his remarks, and that was that Canada had lost its world reputation. We are one of the only countries that stands for unequivocal equality and rights for people around the world, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. We stand for rights for democracy, and we have taken strong stances on Ukraine and Israel. We have one of the best track records in terms of helping other countries, such as the maternal and child health initiative that was put forward last week, with over \$3 billion for aid in this incredibly important area.

Yes, we are a trade-focused nation because we know that when we help empower the economy of a country, the people who live there can have the same level of prosperity and freedom that we experience in our country, because their futures are in their hands. Trade helps countries, and we help countries. I think about the \$1.2 billion we have committed to helping climate change adaptation.

How can my colleague stand here in good conscience and defame our country when all that the House has done is stand for the rights and long-term prosperity of our country on the world stage?

• (1340)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, in no case, at no time would I ever defame Canada, but Canada's reputation in the world has been sullied by the current government that has put into place free trade agreements with countries with shameful human rights records, where they murder, pillage and force people off their land.

Yes, the government has done some good things in the world, there is no doubt about that, but it is signing agreements with Honduras and Colombia, drug and murder capitals of the world. If we start lining up what the positives have been and what the negatives are, the reality is that people in other nations see that as shameful, and they have told us that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to the proud Trudeau legacy, which we appreciate on this side of the House. He has said that Liberals today are betraying that legacy, but, if I recall, it was the Trudeau government that first recognized China diplomatically, and, in fact, the United States followed suit afterward.

Does the hon. member think it was a mistake to diplomatically recognize China or, according to his logic, should we have kept the doors shut to a relationship with that country?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, yes, opening the doors diplomatically is different than signing free trade agreements with countries. When we open a door diplomatically, part of our responsibility is to identify to that nation its shortcomings and offer assistance in capacity building around its judicial system and democracy.

However, from my perspective, when I hear the Liberal Party is prepared to support a free trade agreement with one the most horrendous human rights violators on the face of the earth, I am struck and troubled by it.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has been the spokesperson for human rights for our party for a very long time and I congratulate him on that because he is doing an excellent job.

I was astounded by the comments of the parliamentary secretary toward the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. Members of the Conservative Party like to call themselves Christians. They have prayer meetings and invite members to prayer breakfasts all the time, and yet they want to sign a trade agreement with a country that regularly kills people for speaking out or jails them. People disappear all the time in Honduras. Now the Liberals are supporting that.

Would the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek comment on both the Conservatives and the Liberals?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not going to comment on the religious values of any other person or party. That is private to them.

However, both of those parties are setting themselves up with the Honduran government. After having heard a number of comments today in this place about the failure of that country's human rights record, I find it very disappointing.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-20, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, the Agreement on Environmental Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras. Let me be very clear that I will be speaking in opposition to this bill.

I have heard a lot today about Conservative economics and the kind of growth that we have experienced. However, despite the rhetoric from across the aisle, I want to point out that the Conservatives did inherit an account surplus of \$18 billion. However, in the eight years that they have been in government, the current account deficit sits at \$62 billion, a negative swing of \$80 billion and an average decline of \$10 billion a year.

In the last two years, we have experienced 23 months of merchandise trade deficits. Under the current government, so-called a good economic manager but not, we have seen an increase in the percentage of raw or barely processed exports, reducing the importance of value-added exports. There seems to be a rush to give away our valuable natural resources, without growing the decent paying jobs in Canada.

The Conservatives seem to be in a hurry to sign a free trade agreement with Honduras. Let me make it clear that I am not opposed to free trade agreements, but we need to look at some criteria or some filters that we, as Canadians, should use when we look at free trade.

Government Orders

One of those filters is looking at the people with whom we going to sign these agreements, ones who respect democracy, human rights, adequate environmental and labour standards and Canadian values. If there are challenges in those areas, are the Conservatives just ignoring those issues or are they actually working on moving them in the right direction? We do not have evidence of that from Honduras.

Is the proposed partner's economy of significant or strategic value to Canada? This shocked me as well, 1%.

Are the terms of the proposed agreement satisfactory? We would say not.

There are numerous reasons, and one that we really do have to look at is the kind of state, the kind of things we know about Honduras.

In my other life as a teacher involved in international projects through the teachers' organization and CoDevelopment Canada, I had the privilege of visiting many of the countries in Central and South America, and participated in conferences and workshops. One thing about Honduras is that it is not a safe country in which to be a teacher, a journalist or to speak out against the current regime. In 2013 alone, there was an average of 10 massacres per month. We are not talking about a massacre each year. We are talking about 10 massacres each month. InSight Crime defined "massacre" as being when three or more people were murdered at one time. Just looking at the number of massacres alone, since 2010, there are 200 politically motivated killings.

Honduras is regarded widely, not just by those who are speaking against this, as one of the most dangerous places for journalists. According to the 2014 report by PEN International, at least 34 journalists have been killed since the coup, and there is almost complete impunity for perpetrators.

● (1345)

When we look at the kind of instability that exists in Honduras and the commentary by the international community, I am surprised that my colleagues across the way are in such a hurry to sign this agreement. It almost seems that they feel that as soon as they sign an agreement, they have addressed trade and improved it.

We have to look at the reality of what we have seen. My colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster painted a picture earlier of how the past three trade agreements in the countries he highlighted neither led to improvements in human rights nor added anything to our trade in a significant way.

Here is a quote from Stacey Gomez, coordinator of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation's Americas Policy Group:

We have long maintained that under the right conditions, trade can generate growth and support the realization of human rights. These conditions simply do not exist in Honduras.... [U]ntil there is a verifiable improvement in the country's democratic governance and human rights situation...the Canada-Honduras FTA will do more harm than good.

Every colleague in the House, those sitting across the way and those sitting at the far end on this side, needs to pay attention to that one line: "the Canada-Honduras FTA will do more harm than good".

I can go on to a quote from the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras. In my other life, I had the opportunity to sit in a circle with some of the families of the disappeared. I can tell members that it is very moving. It is very emotional. It brings home to us the kinds of horrors people live with in Honduras.

Here is a quote from them:

One of the main concerns in Honduras is the consistent trend of killings, physical attacks and threats against human rights defenders—including: Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and peasant leaders, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) activists, lawyers and journalists. All these attacks are carried out with almost total impunity.

We do not have any evidence either from the United Nations or any of the other agencies that the government in Honduras is even trying to address many of these issues, never mind making any significant improvement.

It behooves us as Canadians, when we jump into bed, so to speak, and start signing agreements and putting Canada's name on a document, to do some research and be careful of what it is we could endanger.

What is it that we want? This is only my first term as a sitting member of Parliament, and I can remember voting for a free trade agreement. It is rather disingenuous of my colleagues across the way and at the far end to keep saying over and over again that the NDP will never, ever vote for a free trade agreement. We support free trade, but bring us an agreement that meets the very basic criteria I articulated earlier, and they will see a rush of us trying to vote.

New Democrats want to reassure all Canadians, including my colleagues across the way, that we recognize the importance of trade. We recognize that in a global market today, trading has to take place, and it should benefit Canadians. However, we cannot just wear a blindfold, keep signing agreements, and ignore the situation of the working people and the journalists and the human rights violations that are taking place in those countries.

Sometimes I think the government is almost too scared to debate some of the free trade agreements it is negotiating in secret. It never wants to bring those kinds of details in. It then throws in a free trade agreement that does not even sound real.

● (1350)

We are looking at Honduras, a country where drug trafficking operates with near impunity, where human rights are regularly abused, where democracy is under threat, and where low standards would hurt Canadian businesses. I do not see how this free trade agreement would benefit either Canadians or people living in Honduras. What it will do if we sign it is give legitimacy to the very activities we should be condemning that are taking place in Honduras at this time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member seemed to give the impression that the NDP supports free trade, yet as I pointed out earlier, the NDP have never stood inside the House of Commons and voted in favour of a free trade agreement.

Statements by Members

Can the member indicate what free trade agreement every member of her caucus stood and voted in favour of? I cannot recall the NDP voting in favour of free trade. Like previous free trade agreements, I can appreciate that they do not support this one. My challenge to her and others who might decide to stand in their place today is to clearly indicate to Canadians what free trade agreement they voted in favour of, not when they said they would support the agreement but when they actually stood in their place and voted for it.

• (1355)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I wish my colleague in the third party at the far end of this House would sometimes do some analysis and say, “Let us take a look at what we’re actually voting on”, instead of always supporting things my colleagues across the aisle are moving.

What we are voting on today is a free trade agreement with a country that has the highest murder rate, with 10 massacres a month, very high drug trafficking, and human rights violations.

It is with great pride that I stand up here and say that we supported the free trade agreement with Jordan, and I stood in this House and voted for it.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the hon. member's comments on this free trade agreement. I have had the opportunity to travel to Honduras in the past. There is a great charity that works out of Peterborough called Friends of Honduran Children. It started over a decade ago making investments in schools, providing medications to young mothers and families, and assisting with nutrition. It is generating genuinely good results in Honduras. They are not perfect results.

When I listen to the hon. member, I hear her talking about throwing out something that is good in search of something that is perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect deal. What I would ask this member is this: Why would she prefer to throw out the good in search of the perfect? We may not get there, but we can certainly help Honduras?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, having done some work in Central America myself, including Honduras, I would remind my colleague that it is his government that has changed the criteria for international development. It is his government that has made cuts to CoDevelopment Canada, another project that was helping with sustainable development and helping Hondurans tackle some of their major issues. This kind of trade agreement is not going to help the Honduran people or take care of the gross human rights violations and the killings that occur there.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that my colleague understands this file. What we want for ourselves we want for others. What we want in that country is to have workers who have good working relationships and who are not afraid to go to work and wonder if they will come home to their families because they might be murdered. That is exactly what is happening in that country. Even the journalists are not making it home, because they are not able to have free speech and the government does not want anyone to know what is really going on. However, we know.

Perhaps my colleague could reiterate the importance of not signing this trade deal and why it is wrong to have the current

government and the Liberals supporting a trade deal that allows people to be murdered.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is not a good deal for Canadians. Whether one talks to teachers, journalists, people from minority groups, or anyone who has a different opinion than the current regime, they will tell us that they live in fear and that this kind of treaty is not going to help them.

Let us get into international development that would actually support and build a grassroots movement that would give people confidence to speak out against human rights violations.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

52ND MISSISSAUGA SCOUTS

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to acknowledge the young people from the 52nd Mississauga Scouts, in my riding.

On May 10, as in previous years, I joined this wonderful group of young people at Silver Creek Public School for their 9th annual food drive. We went through the Mississauga valley neighbourhood collecting food donations to help the Mississauga Food Bank for the summer season, when donations are lowest.

I am very proud to announce that about 4,200 pounds of food donations were collected for the Mississauga Food Bank that day.

I would like to thank the residents of Mississauga East—Cooksville who provided the donations, and congratulate Mr. David Chant, the cub pack leader, and his team, for organizing the food drive. Congratulations to the wonderful young people of the 52nd Mississauga Scouts for their enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work to help those in need. They are truly a shining example of the Scouts' principle of “duty to others”.

* * *

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVALS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, dragon boat races date back more than 2,000 years, around the same time that the Greeks began competing in games called the Olympics.

From the beautifully designed and decorated boats to the pounding of the drum keeping everyone in time, dragon boat racing and the ceremonies around it are steeped in tradition and cultural significance, while also seizing the imagination and excitement of many Canadians from diverse backgrounds.

This summer, we will see dragon boat festivals taking place across the country, in Victoria, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Welland, Windsor, Edmonton, Peterborough, and many more, with the largest festival in North America happening in Vancouver.

Statements by Members

I was lucky enough to race with the Toronto Chinese Business Association's youth team for two years in a row, in the Toronto International Dragon Boat Festival. From the humble beginning of only 27 teams participating in the first festival back in 1989, the Toronto festival has evolved to a much bigger operation over the past two decades. I know that the Toronto festival will continue to be one of the most exciting summer events in Toronto, for the twenty-sixth year in a row.

On behalf of the official opposition, I would like to wish the tens of thousands of participants, and the thousands more who will come to cheer on the racers, a happy dragon boat festival season across the country.

* * *

ART EXHIBIT

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, people of good conscience everywhere are outraged. Currently on display at the Ottawa City Hall is an exhibit glorifying individuals who have murdered innocent Jews.

This exhibit, masquerading as artwork, is called "Target", comprising projects of what the artist calls "assassinated Palestinian figures".

Let us look at these assassinated Palestinian figures. The first is Abu Iyad, the founder of the Black September terrorist organization. This group was responsible for the cold-blooded murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games, in Munich. The second is Dalal Mughrabi, who, in 1978, participated in the highjacking of a bus in Israel, murdering 38 people, many of whom were children. There are also five other individuals portrayed in this exhibit associated with terrorism.

Despite pleas from the Jewish Federation of Ottawa to remove this heinous display, the City of Ottawa refuses, citing that it might violate the artist's charter rights. What about the rights of the families of the murdered? Do they not have rights?

I demand that the City of Ottawa take immediate action to remove this display of hate now.

* * *

MEHDI ALI QAMAR

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my deepest sorrow at the death of Canadian doctor Mehdi Ali Qamar, who was killed in Pakistan on May 26. We believe that his murder was the result of being a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada community. Ahmadis have long been persecuted and discriminated against by extremist groups in Pakistan.

We truly hope that the Pakistani government takes swift action to stop this senseless violence.

People have the right to freely practise the religion of their choice, and these actions are a clear violation of that right. It is horrific to think that someone can be gunned down in front of their family simply because of their religious beliefs. We cannot tolerate actions such as these.

Canadians call upon the Pakistani government to ensure freedom of worship.

I would like to extend my condolences on behalf of all of us to the family members of Dr. Mehdi at their time of mourning.

* * *

● (1405)

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to second Bill C-422 in this House, introduced by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. With potential amendments, it is receiving wide support from both sides of this House.

The bill would expand the Public Health Agency of Canada's role against Lyme disease, in greater surveillance, prevention, control, research, education, and awareness.

Lyme disease is an emerging and debilitating disease in Canada. It is transmitted by ticks, and is now a risk in my riding of Oakville, and the GTA.

Canadians should be alerted that many victims go untreated due to misdiagnosis, as the symptoms are similar to multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, colitis, Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Anyone hiking in tall grass or brush in parts of Canada could be bitten by a tick and end up with a severe ongoing disability.

However, with early diagnosis, Lyme disease can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Canadian patients should know that the most reliable test for Lyme disease, the western blot test, is not available in Ontario and other parts of Canada, but some naturopathic doctors will provide it through laboratories in the U.S.

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night Josée Lemelin, a proud supporter of the Chicago Blackhawks, sadly watched her favourite team get eliminated by the Los Angeles Kings.

Her company, Passion Sport Logo, which has been located in the heart of Limoilou for 24 years, proudly produces a very high-quality logo for hockey players in the windy city, as I saw on May 22.

However, she is facing stiff, unfair competition that has forced her to reduce her staff from approximately 20 full-time employees to two or three part-timers, a sad reality that we are seeing all too often in Canada. Ms. Lemelin will continue with her small business, trying to make an honest living and get a fair price for her product.

That is why I, as an NDP MP, am reaffirming my commitment to build a fair society where starting a business, having a job or retiring will no longer have the potential to lead people down a path of poverty and uncertainty.

Our small businesses deserve better. I wish Josée Lemelin and her business all the best.

[English]

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1981, Canada enacted the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantees religious freedoms in strong terms. It means we cannot deny a job to a qualified applicant because we do not agree with their religious beliefs, as the Ontario law society recently did to graduates of Trinity Western University.

If lawyers pass the bar exam and have had a thorough legal education, it is beyond belief that they would be excluded from legal practice because of the religious beliefs of their school about marriage.

If anti-religious ideologues have led the Ontario law society to adopt such an extreme discriminatory measure, it is time for progressive-minded rights advocates to speak out loudly.

Such tyranny never stops with a single victim. This is not just a Trinity Western University issue, not just a law society issue; it is not even just a Christian minority issue. It is an issue for anyone who advocates for freedom from tyranny.

* * *

FATHER'S DAY

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Father's Day approaches, I would like to speak about my dad Ernie Zimmer.

He was born to two immigrant parents who homesteaded in Roblin, Manitoba. He worked hard on the farm before moving to Dawson Creek, B.C., where he became a carpenter and met my mom and they were married.

My dad taught us, through his words and actions, that being a Christian meant living those values with integrity, humility, and sincerity. He taught my brother and I that God was number one, to work hard, be humble, be honest, and speak up for what is right.

I still remember that once I did not want to attend a meeting, as I knew I would have to stand up for what I believed. He said in his calm principled way, "Evil triumphs when good men stay silent", so I went to the meeting.

I can still find my dear old dad at the local Tim Hortons having a coffee between working on cabinet projects. He is known as a reserved but friendly gentleman who is always willing to share a table and a conversation.

I admire my dad, more than he knows, for all that he has done for us and for being my example of what an earthly father should be.

I love you, Dad. Happy Father's Day.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada could be leading the fight against climate change, but instead we have become an international embarrassment. Beyond just muzzling our scientists, last week it was revealed that the government was

Statements by Members

even muzzling weather forecasters at Environment Canada by not allowing them to discuss climate change in public.

The Conservatives have systematically undermined scientific freedoms, defunded basic research capacity, dismantled the National Research Council, and gutted environmental assessment.

The Conservatives think that if we do not talk about climate change and measure its effects that maybe it will go away. Canadians know better. They know that climate change is happening and that the Conservatives climate change denial will not help Canada transition to renewable energies.

That is why New Democrats are working to legislate science-based emission standards. We have a plan to transition to a lower carbon economy that includes smart investment in Canada's clean energy sector and developing our natural resources more sustainably.

It is time to take action on climate change.

* * *

● (1410)

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn about the shameful comments made by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin regarding the men and women who serve our country.

Our Canadian men and women go to war in the defence of freedom, taking the fight against terrorism overseas to Afghanistan and many other countries.

That NDP MP thinks not. Here is what the member said:

One day we will have to face that fact. Just because the Americans go to war does not mean we have to be idiots and join them..".

I call on that senior NDP MP to immediately retract and apologize for this reprehensible comment. If not, I ask how long it will be until the leader of the NDP takes action and denounces this inexcusable behaviour.

* * *

CLASS OF 2014

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud teacher and parliamentarian.

One of the biggest highlights for me as a member of Parliament is visiting schools throughout the year and meeting so many bright, innovative, and capable kids.

This time of year is my favourite. The grass is green, the sun is warm, and school is almost out for the summer. With the end of the school year comes graduation ceremonies.

Statements by Members

Over the last few weeks, I have had the privilege of watching graduating students at Princess Margaret Secondary School and Panorama Ridge Secondary School collect their high school diplomas. On Friday, I attended commencement at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and next week I will do the same at SFU.

What accomplished young men and women we have in Newton—North Delta. I am delighted by their potential.

To all students graduating this year, to the teachers who inspire them, and to the family members who support them every step of the way, I say a heartfelt congratulations and best of luck.

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is Canadian Environment Week.

While the international media seem focused on President Obama's global warming address, Canadians should take stock and be proud of our environmental record. Canada represents just 2% of global emissions, while the U.S. produces almost 20%.

We introduced strict regulations on the electricity sector two years ago that are expected to reduce emissions in this sector by close to 46% by 2030. The U.S. proposed rules are expected to achieve a 30% reduction. Canada's per capita greenhouse emissions are now at their lowest level since tracking began in 1990. Our country is known as a clean energy superpower, and we have one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world.

We are pleased that the U.S. is following Canada's footsteps, and we will continue to build on our record and work with the U.S. to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions internationally.

* * *

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES DAY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former member of the Canadian Forces, it is with pride that I recognize Canadian Armed Forces Day.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize our men and women who make up our Canadian Armed Forces. The dedication to our country and the many sacrifices made by our past and current members have contributed to shaping our country into what it is today.

When we think about freedom, democracy and the many other glorifying words that best describe our country, we cannot help but to thank those who have made it all possible.

In recent times we think of our efforts in Afghanistan, and our emergency relief efforts last year in the Philippines. Canada's contributions to past conflicts have been immeasurable, and we are a grateful nation that respects our forces and the role they have played in our history.

At times of peace, conflict, or local emergencies, our men and women with their respective families are there for us and serve with pride.

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I would like to acknowledge the past and present members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families, and to say thank you.

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● (1415)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP continues to display its true colours when it comes to free trade.

Canadians know that the NDP is anti-trade. Its members have never stood in the House and voted for any FTA. Now the NDP is trying to delay our ambitious trade agenda by attempting to delete every single clause in the Canada-Honduras free trade agreement.

It comes as no surprise that the NDP House leader would try these delay tactics. He said in the House that free trade has cost Canadians, clearly.

On this side of the House, we will not let the NDP stand in the way of economic growth. Conservatives know that by pursuing free and open trade, we create the economic opportunities that Canadian companies need to grow and succeed. This, in turn, creates jobs for Canadians here at home.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives promised to create jobs, they meant to say that soon the courts would not have enough staff to deal with all the Conservative crooks that get caught red-handed. According to our sources, the Minister of Employment is even considering creating a temporary foreign workers program especially for their lawyers.

Michael Sona was nothing more than a pawn in the Conservatives' grand robocall electoral fraud. Bruce Carson was hired to advise the Prime Minister despite Mr. Carson's notorious past. The case of Patrick Brazeau speaks for itself and I have not even gotten into the ongoing investigations into senators like Mike Duffy, who spent like crazy.

Those close to power and friends of the party who have yet to be targeted by the RCMP are glad to be enjoying their semi-retirement in the Senate. Former Conservative MPs publicly admit that they prefer their new lifestyle as senators. Now that they are working only three days a week, they have all kinds of free time.

The Conservatives can divide their time between the schemes and the boondoggles. The NDP is going to get ready to form an honest and hard-working government in 2015.

*Oral Questions**[English]***MEMORIAL TO VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM**

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 2010 Speech from the Throne, our government signalled clear support for a memorial to those who have suffered under Communism. Canada is and will always be a home for those fleeing Communist governments for a better life. This was best said Friday, when the Prime Minister made resonating remarks in Toronto. He stated:

...instead of Communism's oppression, they found Canadian safety.
 Instead of Communism's restrictions, they found Canadian freedom.
 Instead of Communism's grim determinism, they found Canadian opportunity.
 Instead of Communism's fear, they found Canadian hope.

The struggle of people from around the world—from Poland, from Ukraine, from Cuba, from Venezuela, and from other countries—has produced new Canadians who truly appreciate our freedom. This memorial will remind generations of Canadians that the freedom, peace, and democracy we have and work for hard at home is still a hard-fought battle around the world.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***PRIVACY**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just six months ago, a Canadian woman from Toronto named Ellen Richardson was denied entry into the United States because she had been treated for clinical depression. It was the Prime Minister's candidate for privacy commissioner who negotiated Canada's agreement for sharing this kind of highly personal data with the U.S. government.

Does the Prime Minister understand why Canadians find it more than a little bit creepy that the Prime Minister wants to name this guy to protect their privacy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the individual in question is a non-partisan public servant of some 30 years' experience and an expert in his field. He comes highly recommended. We are convinced he will do a good job, but obviously we will let Parliament examine this.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister nominated a new privacy commissioner who helped design extremely objectionable government programs to monitor and collect data on Canadians and their personal lives.

As a result, our privacy commissioner would be a watchdog over programs that he himself helped create and that allow the government to spy on Canadians without a warrant.

Can the Prime Minister understand that this is an obvious conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the NDP leader thinks that everything is a plot, but the candidate for this position is a public servant with 30 years of

experience and an expert in his field. He comes highly recommended.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, apparently the only people who do not see that this is an obvious conflict of interest are the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Party.

The code of ethics of the Barreau du Québec indicates that, to avoid conflicts of interest, lawyers must "take such reasonable measures as are required to ensure that confidential information or documents pertaining to the file are not revealed".

However, the Prime Minister's candidate was the government's lawyer in this case. He is party to confidential information on his government's major spying programs.

How can the privacy commissioner do his work if he is involved in all of these files? It is a conflict of interest.

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the individual in question has worked on many files for the federal government for 30 years. He is recognized as an expert and he is quite capable of testifying about his expertise before the committee.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Colonel Sanders is a nice guy too, but one would not put him in charge of the henhouse.

It is the privacy commissioner's job to ask the government for details of its surveillance and data-gathering programs and determine whether those programs violate the private lives of Canadians. However, this commissioner would have the legal obligation under his code of ethics to conceal information even from his own staff about spying programs he helped create, because he was acting as the attorney for the government at the time.

Are the Prime Minister and his pal, the Liberal Party leader, really the only two people in Canada who do not understand this obvious conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we know well, and see a demonstration again today, of the highly ideological, conspiracy-based theories of the NDP leader.

As I said, the individual in question is an expert in this field. He has spent 30 years as a distinguished public servant. He is fully able to understand both his role in the past as a public servant and his future role as privacy commissioner and would execute his responsibilities accordingly, and he will be able to explain that before committee.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the highly personal medical data of people like Ellen Richardson were shared with the American government through the program this man put in place.

Ms. Richardson was at the airport and was headed on a cruise. A second later, an American border guard denied her access after reading her medical record, which was provided by the Government of Canada.

Does the Prime Minister realize that this is a serious violation of Canadians' privacy? Does he understand that Canadians are worried about this individual's appointment?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP believes that someone who worked for the federal government is incapable of being privacy commissioner. That ideological position is ridiculous. Mr. Therrien is an expert. He is quite capable of explaining his expertise to the committee.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the employment minister expressed “limited interest” when Alberta's labour minister proposed that his province monitor the temporary foreign worker program to make sure that such workers were not being abused.

Since the government is doing nothing at the federal level, with zero employers blacklisted for employee abuse, why does the Prime Minister not gleefully accept such offers from Alberta and other provinces in their own areas of jurisdiction? Does he not care about worker abuse?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course there are responsibilities in this regard for both levels of government, but once again, the position of the Liberal Party on this matter is completely bizarre. When the government brought in reforms precisely to ensure compliance and create employer blacklists, the Liberal Party opposed those measures.

We know the Liberal Party has a very different philosophy. It sought the long-term expansion of this program. Under the reforms that we brought in, the numbers have been coming down and will continue to come down in the future.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual, that is a total manufacturing of history on the Liberal Party.

The Prime Minister can talk all he wants about new powers and jail time under the temporary foreign worker program, but none of this matters if he does not use any of these powers. Since not one employer is on his blacklist for employer abuse, I repeat, not one, no one is risking a penny in fines or a day in jail.

Will he finally do something serious and accept last week's Liberal motion on true enforcement of this program?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a number of well-known cases, the government has taken the force of an action and, as we know, has imposed a moratorium on a portion of the program pending further action.

However, once again, on one day the Liberal Party is demanding that fewer numbers be admitted under the program and on the next day Liberal members of Parliament are going to the minister of employment demanding that he overturn decisions and admit more temporary foreign workers.

Our position is clear. We are committed to making sure that if Canadians are available, Canadians always get the available jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 40,000 families and individuals are on the waiting list for affordable housing in Quebec. Subsidies available through federal agreements on social housing are coming to an end, and the future of one-third of these units is uncertain.

The Liberal Party of Canada is committed to ensuring that our communities receive predictable, stable long-term funding. Can the government say the same?

Will the government commit to coming up with a long-term housing plan together with the municipalities and the Government of Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in typical Liberal fashion, the member has forgotten what his party did. Liberals actually ended the agreements on social housing back in the 1990s.

What we have done in response is renew our investment in affordable housing right across the country. We also have done something to address the issue of homelessness. The Liberals do not like the idea of Housing First, which is an evidence-based proven model. That member has spoken out against evidence-based initiatives to help those who are homeless and those who are struggling with affordable housing.

We will not follow the Liberal example when it comes to helping individuals with housing.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are reports from Brussels today that the Canada-Europe trade talks have stalled yet again. One official said, “It was premature...to announce a deal. There is a sense of embarrassment in many quarters”.

Oral Questions

An embarrassment. Is the Prime Minister the least bit embarrassed that he has botched a trade deal with the world's largest economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question from a party that does not even know whether it supports the trade deal. The Canada-European Union trade deal we have announced is obviously the biggest trade deal in Canadian history. Technical negotiations will be completed very soon, and I look forward to seeing if there is any trade deal on the face of the earth that the ideologues over there can possibly support.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we would never announce a trade deal that is yet to be negotiated. Unlike the Liberal leader, we would never stand and applaud a trade deal we have never read.

[*Translation*]

We all remember when the Prime Minister flew off to Europe right in the middle of the Senate scandal, hoping to use the new agreement to draw attention away from corruption within his party. We all suspected the announcement was rushed for political reasons, and now we know.

Why did the Prime Minister sign the agreement before it was even close to being finalized?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another question, another conspiracy.

[*English*]

The NDP says that it has not had an opportunity to read the trade deal. As we know, every major organization in the country has endorsed the deal. I would be happy, after question period, if the leader of the NDP has not seen any of the documents, to send them over to him so he can finally read them.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): What deal, Mr. Speaker?

[*Translation*]

The Obama administration is introducing new regulations—

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition now has the floor and I would like to hear him.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the Obama administration is introducing new regulations to reduce the main source of pollution responsible for climate change: coal-fired power plants.

In Canada, the Conservatives have postponed imposing new regulations on the oil and gas industry time and again.

Three months ago, the Conservatives promised a climate change plan for the oil and gas sector by mid-year. It is now June.

Will the Conservatives follow the American lead, yes or no?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcomed the announcement by the Obama administration about greenhouse gas reductions for power plants.

[*English*]

However, the fact is, once again to correct the leader of the NDP, that we actually announced the regulation of this sector two years ago. Not only have we already been acting but, under the regulations this government has already brought forward, we will have 150% larger reductions than those in the United States.

We are acting sooner, we are acting bigger, and I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to look at the facts rather than his conspiracy theories.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, economist Andrew Leach says that failure by the Conservatives to take action as the U.S. moves ahead is in fact threatening Canada's economy, "...this will make it harder to sell oil sands products. Profitability and tax revenues will take a hit one way or the other".

When even the oil and gas industry is calling for clear rules, what will it take for the Prime Minister to finally act?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP praises the action today of the Obama administration, acting two years after this government acted and taking actions that do not go nearly as far as this government went.

The Leader of the Opposition today has shown he is unaware of the Canada-Europe free trade agreement, unaware of the government's GHG emissions reduction for the electricity sector, and thinks somehow that 30-year serving public servants are part of a vast right-wing conspiracy. That is why the NDP is going nowhere.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to take action on our largest emitter, and the only thing growing faster than our emissions is the number of climate change deniers around the cabinet table.

The Conservatives have said for years that we need to wait for the U.S. to take leadership. Here is the leadership. Obama is taking action, and yet still we wait for the Conservatives to introduce their long-delayed oil and gas regulations.

Last week at committee, the Minister of the Environment said she that did not know when they would be coming out. Could someone over there, anyone, tell us when these regulations will be tabled?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the move on the part of the United States. We took action on this two years ago, which means our regulations will come into effect earlier than in the United States. We also estimate we will achieve a 46% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in this sector by 2030, compared to 30% in the United States.

Oral Questions

We should also note that we have the cleanest electricity system in the world, with 77% of our electricity supply emitting no greenhouse gas, compared to in the United States which is at 33%.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the climate change file that Conservatives have been mishandling.

The number of temporary foreign workers approved for P.E.I. has skyrocketed under the current government. It approved more than 1,300 foreign workers. Meanwhile, nearly 12,000 islanders are unemployed. Only Kijiji economics could consider 11% unemployment to be a labour shortage.

Why is the government importing cheap, precarious workers instead of helping Canadians find jobs?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very legitimate question, which is precisely why our government brought in sensible changes to the employment insurance program last year. It makes no sense that people would be collecting employment insurance benefits right next to employers for which they are applying to work.

We want to encourage unemployed people to be connected to employers that are offering jobs and to encourage those employers to offer the jobs to the local population first. That is what those EI reforms are designed to do. That is what the NDP opposed, and it makes no sense at all.

•(1435)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about a shortage of skilled labour. The unemployment rate in Prince Edward Island is 11%, and the Conservatives are approving temporary foreign worker permits for McDonald's, Burger King, Domino's Pizza and Cora.

That is not how an economy should be managed. It is resulting in higher unemployment and the abuse of temporary foreign workers.

Will the minister finally commit to launching an independent investigation to get to the bottom of this?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right to raise this issue. I find it odd that employers are having a hard time filling available jobs in a market where there is high employment and a lot of people are receiving employment insurance benefits.

That is why we carried out the EI reform last year—which I think was perfectly reasonable—in order to encourage the unemployed and employment insurance recipients to actively look for work.

We will be making additional changes to the temporary foreign worker program to more strongly encourage employers to hire local employees.

VETERANS

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, Jenifer Migneault, from Brome—Missisquoi, tried to meet with the Minister of Veterans Affairs to talk to him about the loved ones who support soldiers dealing with PTSD.

Instead of facing up to his responsibilities, the minister ran away. He clearly has no class or empathy.

Will the minister finally agree to listen to Ms. Migneault?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in some cases veterans who have a serious injury related to their service receive over \$10,000 a month in financial benefits from the Government of Canada. This is in addition to world-class rehabilitation and retraining on top of exceptional medical care.

I have, and will continue, to work with veterans and their family members, and I hope that member stops playing politics with our veterans.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister to put his talking points down and listen to the question. The question is very clear.

Jenifer Migneault is in a desperate situation trying to help her husband who is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after serving in Afghanistan. This minister should meet with her in order for her to discuss her concerns so she can in turn help her husband.

The minister's actions the other day were nothing to brag about. Therefore, I give the minister a chance to redeem himself. Will the minister now announce to the House that he will meet with Jenifer at a time that is convenient for both of them so she can have a proper airing of her grievances against the DVA?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not about to politicize an individual veteran's case on the floor of the House of Commons and neither should the member be doing so.

I care deeply about the well-being of Canadian veterans and their family members. I always have and I always will. That is why I asked the parliamentary review of the new veterans charter to look at this very issue. With veterans affairs spending \$700 million more each year than in 2005, we are moving in the right direction.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all communities in Canada, Ft. McMurray needs infrastructure. What does the Prime Minister do? He cuts infrastructure dollars that are to be spent this year by 80%.

Why is the Prime Minister putting his own personal re-election agenda of 2015 ahead of the important infrastructure dollars that are necessary for our communities this year? Why is he doing that?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the preamble to the question is totally false.

[English]

Our government is set to balance the budget by 2015, while making historic investments in infrastructure. This is completely opposite to the Liberals who want to hike taxes by \$11 billion a year to fund infrastructure spending alone.

The people who manage their own money know their budget does not balance by itself.

• (1440)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change is battering our already fragile infrastructure. In Toronto this past year, we suffered the devastating effects of the ice storm and the unprecedented flash flooding. The Conservative response was to slash infrastructure spending by close to 90%, starving municipalities of the urgently needed federal support.

When will the government provide municipalities with sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding to deal with the 21st century infrastructure needs?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the FCM has been involved all along in the process to build the new building Canada. It assisted in 12 round tables with us. It has been supportive of all the plans.

Now the Liberals are trying to do politics with the ones they are seeing. We have delivered the longest and biggest plan ever for the country. Never, before our government, has infrastructure been supported so much. That is because of our Prime Minister.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's inaction on climate change is translating into delays for approving key projects such as Keystone XL.

The Prime Minister says that he is waiting for the United States to act, but President Obama has acted. In the meantime, the Conservatives still seem to be stunned.

Why is the Prime Minister incapable of protecting our interests? Where is the action plan for climate change? On Obama's desk?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think many people forget that Canada represents less than 2% of the global emissions, while the United States produces almost 20%. The coal-fired energy generators in the United States produce twice the greenhouse gas emissions as all of the emissions produced in Canada.

We are pleased the United States is following Canada's footsteps, and we will continue to build on our record and work with the United States to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions internationally.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the job market has not bounced back since the 2008 crisis.

In fact, we are still 300,000 jobs shy of pre-crisis employment levels, and the Conservatives still do not have a plan for stimulating the economy. What is more, they decided to get rid of the hiring credit for small business. Small businesses create good jobs. Everybody knows that.

Why do the Conservatives not want to understand that and act accordingly?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a bit rich coming from the New Democratic Party. It voted against the hiring tax credit in the first place. It was always meant to be a temporary measure to help small businesses during the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.

Unlike the New Democratic Party, we recognize the vital role small business plays in this economy and in the job creation they provide.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, temporary measures to try to help small businesses are all the government has to actually help the real economic drivers in this country. Shameful.

We have taken the time to listen to small businesses, and they are telling us that they are still getting gouged. They are still getting gouged by unfair credit card fees, fees that are some of the highest in the industrialized world, reducing new job growth and investment.

Even the Competition Tribunal agrees that only Ottawa has the power to fix the uncompetitive practices by credit card companies, but the minister has done nothing. Will the minister agree to better support small businesses by finally taking action to lower merchant fees before—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Oral Questions

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, Canadian consumers deserve access to credit on fair and transparent terms. We have taken measures to provide for and protect Canadians who use credit cards by banning unsolicited credit card checks, requiring clear and simple information, providing timely advance notice of rates and fee changes, limiting anti-consumer business practices, and ensuring that prepaid cards never expire.

We have done other things, like freezing EI premiums for three years that have helped, again, small businesses, and putting \$660 million back into the pockets of job creators. The NDP voted against them.

• (1445)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is the Conservative ad campaign to Canadian consumers and small businesses: “The Conservative Party of Canada. We're not happy until you're not happy”. The Conservatives have to do better than this. They should at least promise not to do any more harm.

The Conservatives cut the hiring credit for small businesses. This one program alone helped half a million Canadian businesses hire new employees. Why not reintroduce this practical, common sense measure into the budget so that we can put Canadians back to work?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this government, time after time, has taken the proper measures through budgets and other implementation measures to help provide job creators with the measures that they need to build this economy and create jobs.

We have frozen EI premiums for three years, putting \$660 million back into the pockets of those small businesses and job creators, but the NDP votes against these measures. It wants to propose a \$21-billion carbon tax on every small business in this country and on every Canadian.

Canadians are not buying it.

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. The Conservatives introduced one small, good measure into a budget that the NDP voted against and, rather than reintroduce the good measure, they bring in a bad budget without the good program that Canadians actually need. Canadians are struggling to make ends meet, but the Conservatives are only listening to their well-connected lobbyist friends.

Maybe as the Prime Minister heads off to Europe, he will address the real challenges in the Canadian economy. There are 1.3 million Canadians out of work. Youth unemployment is twice the national average. Household debt is at an all-time record high.

When are the Conservatives going to bring in the practical solutions that will help this economy and get Canadians back to work?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, our government is focused on what matters to Canadians, that is jobs and that is economic growth.

Even though the global economy remains fragile, our economic policies have helped protect Canada. Over one million net new jobs have been created since the deepest part of the recession, 85% of them are full-time jobs, and 80% are in the private sector.

This is the strongest job growth of the G7. The opposition proposals will destroy jobs. Both the IMF and the OECD forecast Canada to be one of the strongest growing G7 countries in the years ahead.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is showing economic leadership. My constituents want a balanced budget, and we are firmly on track to have just that.

In an uncertain world, it is this Conservative government that is leading the charge on economic responsibility. Canada's fiscal position is earning praise the world over and is considered a model for others.

Could the Minister of State for Finance please explain why countries around the world are looking to Canada for financial guidance?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, other countries know that budgets do not balance themselves. That is why observers from around the world, including Europe, Asia, and Africa, are studying our sound approach to eliminating the deficit. They admire that our Conservative government is not raising taxes or cutting support to important social programs to balance the budget. Instead, we have focused on reducing waste and ineffective government spending.

That is leadership, and it is why countries around the world are looking to our Prime Minister and our Minister of Finance for guidance.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government decided to go ahead and make cuts to nursing services in federal penitentiaries. Once again, the correctional officers and nursing staff will have to bear the brunt of the Conservatives' ill-advised decisions. Prison guards are not health care professionals.

Does the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness think it is right that prison guards, who are already overworked, are being asked to administer medication to inmates?

Oral Questions

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, correctional officers are there to make sure that criminals stay behind bars. It is not up to them to play pharmacist's apprentice. That being said, I can reassure my colleague that inmates are getting all the medical and nursing care that they are entitled to and that we are legally bound to offer them. I can also assure her that victims are our priority.

• (1450)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister can continue to spin the government's line that cuts in prisons have no impact on public safety, but front-line correctional officers know better. Prisons across the country have seen their health service hours slashed. Many have gone from 24-hour care to just 12 hours, and non-medical staff now end up being responsible for administering medication.

Why is the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness continuing to compromise the safety of corrections institutions and staff, or does he really think that guards and nurses have interchangeable roles?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat in English that correctional officers do not, cannot, and should not administer drugs to inmates. That is why we will be providing our inmates with the services that they need legally.

When will these members stand up for victims and make sure that we keep criminals behind bars?

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very happy to hear the news over the weekend that Sister Gilberte has been released and thank those Canadian officials who helped with that. She was, of course, abducted by suspected Boko Haram gunmen in Cameroon. Tens of thousands of other civilians, though, are being affected by this.

I just wanted to ask the government what specific measures it is taking in the region, Nigeria, Cameroon, et cetera, to deal with security problems in the area. We know that the government has committed some resources. We need to know what other things it is doing, not just to help with Canadian hostages. What about those girls who were abducted, as well as the security of other people in the area?

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very happy that the nun has been freed and we want to thank everyone involved in getting her released.

As for other areas, as we have said on numerous occasions, we have a program helping the Nigerian government. We are assisting the Nigerian government with our allies in working toward the security situation of the region. Canada is very much concerned about those areas and will continue helping the Nigerian government with our allies in whatever capacity we can.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the release of Sister Gilberte is wonderful news, but we must not forget that Boko Haram continues to violate human rights, and particularly the rights of young women and girls.

This terrorist group represents a threat not only to Nigeria, but also to the entire West Africa region. The fight against this threat requires a concerted international approach.

What specific measures is Canada taking with its allies to address the problems of instability in West Africa?

[English]

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that this requires a concentrated international approach, and that is exactly what Canada is doing. We are working with our allies in helping the Nigerian government attain the capacity to fight this war.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned as much as you are about the situation in Nigeria with Boko Haram, which Canada has listed as a terrorist organization. We will continue working with our allies to assist all African governments fight terrorism, which is a scourge on the continent.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister confirmed Thursday that Veterans Affairs Canada has a hard time communicating with veterans. It is spending millions of dollars during the playoffs on self-serving ads instead. The phone number at the end of this multimillion dollar ad is the same one they gave veterans after closing nine regional offices, the one veterans have a hard time getting through to anyone on.

Can the minister tell us, if he is so keen on spending millions on ads to communicate with veterans, why is he using a number no one ever answers?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we call that number ourselves and people do in fact answer it.

The services and programs available to Canadian veterans are wide-ranging and among the best in the world. Veterans have access to a network of 4,800 mental health professionals nationwide, top-of-the-line medical treatment, and generous financial assistance. It is important that we communicate with Canadian veterans to ensure that they are aware of the services and programs available to them and that Canadians want to know about.

Oral Questions

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister had every opportunity to communicate with veterans and their families but instead ignored Mrs. Migneault after committee on Thursday. Not noticing her would be more believable if the parliamentary secretary had not also pushed his way past her.

Ignoring veterans is not communications. Spending millions to advertise a number that does not work is not communications.

Will the minister at least apologize to Mrs. Migneault for his unacceptable behaviour on Thursday and to veterans across Canada for pretending that millions spent on ads actually helped them get the services that they deserve?

• (1455)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year Veterans Affairs invests \$3.5 billion of which 90% goes directly to veterans' services. Less than 1% of that total annual budget is spent on advertising and communications to veterans and Canadians. This means that for every dollar spent on advertising, Veterans Affairs spends more than \$800 on programs and benefits for veterans themselves. This is the cost of doing business because we care for our veterans and their families.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORT

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ParticipACTION is Canada's leading voice of physical activity. However, although it is more important than ever to promote physical activity, especially among young people, and to combat obesity, the government just cut 55% of this organization's funding.

This is further proof that the Conservatives do not have a long-term vision. They refuse to invest money so that young Canadians can be in good health, which will put additional pressure on health care systems when these kids get older. How can the government justify such draconian cuts to such a worthwhile program?

[English]

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is wrong. In 2007, our government was proud to relaunch ParticipACTION to promote sports and physical activity among Canadians of all ages and abilities. There was a one-time funding. Other than that, ParticipACTION receives regular funding from Sport Canada.

We are very proud to support ParticipACTION and all other sporting bodies on behalf of the government.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the government had been investing \$4.5 million a year for a number of years in ParticipACTION, which is a very necessary and important program, but now, without any warning, the Conservatives have slashed over half of the ParticipACTION budget.

Slashing funding at a time when only 5% of children meet the physical activity guidelines just does not make sense.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health how she can explain to Canadians that the government is slashing funding for a program that

saves health care dollars and keeps people healthier. How can she explain that?

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the member is wrong. It was our government in 2007 that relaunched ParticipACTION to promote sports and physical activity among Canadians of all ages. During this period, ParticipACTION was given special funding and it was expected to leverage this financial contribution for many years while evaluating and attracting new money from the private sector. Federal funding will continue and we are pleased to see it has developed partnerships in the private sector and non-profit partners to share the load with the taxpayers.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some 13% of licensed drivers in Canada are between 16 and 24 years old. This group accounts for about 22% of fatalities and serious injuries of drivers in Canada. No parent would feel comfortable with these statistics. We all just want our kids to be safe.

Can the Minister of Transport please update this House on what is being done to address this serious issue?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken concrete action in bringing in regulations to make vehicles safer, and ensuring that safety tests are improved for our kids specifically.

Just as important, we develop and we work with other organizations on awareness programs. One of them is one that I attended this morning at Nepean High School for Parachute Canada about distracted driving. I can say that we heard from Kathryn Field whose son Josh died as a result of one second of looking at his cellphone. I encourage all members to be proud. This government will continue to work with leading organizations like Parachute on texting and driving and making sure that our kids are safe.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Syria's civil war has killed 150,000 people and left over nine million people in Syria in need of help.

The UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution in February that demanded unhindered aid access in Syria, but the resolution has failed to make a difference. Now the UN Security Council is considering a draft resolution to allow cross-border aid deliveries into Syria without government consent.

What efforts is the government taking to support the passing of this resolution?

•(1500)

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in Syria is a real tragedy. For that reason our government has been very active. More than \$630 million has been budgeted to provide assistance to the Syrian people.

The government is doing everything it can to ensure that these humanitarian corridors are as open and accessible as possible in order to help people truly in need.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after denying for months that repeated drug shortages were a problem, and after turning down the NDP's request for a mandatory disclosure of the shortages, the government has just launched a website on which comments can be left.

This seems to be an improvised measure that benefits the industry, which prefers voluntary disclosure.

How will the Minister of Health ensure that health professionals and seniors are consulted?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that drug shortages are not just a local, regional, or national problem but are a global issue, and we take them very seriously. That is why we have worked for quite some time with the provinces and territories and drug manufacturers on a pan-Canadian strategy to address this issue. It is working well, but we are concerned about making sure that it is the best it can be.

We have launched consultations to see if we do need to move from a voluntary approach to a mandatory approach. The member is welcome to provide input on that process.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, medical isotopes are used by health professionals to diagnose and treat a wide variety of illnesses, such as Parkinson's disease and cancer. Our government has identified the development of a secure supply of medical isotopes for Canadians as a key priority.

With respect to the recent announcement of funding for TRIUMF, could the Minister of State please update the House on how our government is addressing this need?

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I announced funding that will be used to purchase equipment for the TRIUMF facility in Vancouver. This leverages significant industry support and will create a new institute for accelerator-based medical isotope production.

Our investment will produce medical isotopes with cyclotrons, through the use of electricity and magnets, which does not produce nuclear waste. We will also train highly qualified personnel and help commercialize new therapeutics.

Oral Questions

I look forward to seeing the results of this investment, which addresses an important need and shows the world that the west means business.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Parks and Wilderness' new report released today shows that out of the 10 longest coastlines in the world, Canada comes last in terms of protection. The United States protects 30% of its coastal areas, while Australia sets aside 33%. Even China protects a greater percentage. Canada is dead last, protecting only 1%.

Why have the Conservatives allowed Canada to fall so far behind?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this report also acknowledges that our government has made significant progress in the area of marine protection. We have designated three new marine protected areas and have created three national wildlife areas, including the world sanctuary for bowhead whales. This commitment was reiterated in our latest economic action plan. As a result, the Prime Minister recently announced our new national conservation plan, which includes \$37 million to strengthen marine and coastal conservation.

We are getting the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORTS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, in response to my questions about Athletics Canada's unexplained and incomprehensible decision to hastily back out of the Coupe-Québec des nations 2014, the Minister of Heritage displayed her complete ignorance.

The only thing we learned from the feeble platitudes she delivered is that the Minister of State for Sport is very involved in this matter. That is exactly what we are worried about.

I would like to ask my question again, this time to the Minister of State for Sport. Did his involvement include strong-arming Athletics Canada into dropping the Coupe-Québec des nations 2014 and depriving Quebec athletes of the opportunity to compete as equals with athletes from another nation?

•(1505)

[English]

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is the single largest contributor to sport in our country. We support national and international events all across the country. Every request has to come from the national sports organizations.

Point of Order

This member should get his facts straight. If he needs help, we can talk to him and explain how the system works. It has to come from the national sports organizations. It has to be a sanctioned event. Then we will fund it.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, so far in question period we have been treated to a climate change shell game. It has not gotten to the truth of the matter.

President Obama has taken meaningful action, with a comprehensive plan that will allow the United States to meet its Copenhagen targets by 2020. Our nation, with the same target, chosen by the Prime Minister, is going to completely, 100%, miss the Copenhagen target. Even using Hudak-style new math, the 150% answer we just heard from the Prime Minister does not wash.

When will we see a comprehensive, economy-wide plan that actually reaches the Copenhagen target?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I go back to the facts. We obviously welcome President Obama's announcement today. He announced specific measures to reduce GHG emissions in the electricity sector and to reduce those by 30% by 2030.

This government, two years ago, began implementing its regulations that will reduce our emissions in that sector by 46% by 2030. We already, even before beginning, had an electricity sector that was cleaner than that in the United States.

If the member is so impressed with the actions of the Obama administration, I am sure she is also impressed by the actions of this government.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is an exciting day in the "Electric City". After undergoing significant renovations and upgrades, with support from the building Canada program, the Peterborough Airport officially welcomes the Seneca flight school with the official opening of the Peterborough Campus hangar. The Seneca commercial aviation program is in every way a world-leading program, and Peterborough is proud to be its new home.

Given his efforts to personally attend the ceremonies unveiling the Peterborough Airport expansion, would the Prime Minister like to take this opportunity to congratulate Seneca College and the City of Peterborough on their exciting new partnership?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for giving me notice of this question and also for the interest I know he takes in developments in his area. This project is a very exciting one, as he says, for the region of Peterborough, one of many exciting building Canada projects in the area. I do want to congratulate both Seneca College and also the Peterborough Airport for this and to congratulate them on what is indeed an exciting new partnership.

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today.

Canadian Forces Day is an opportunity for Canadians across the country to recognize the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform make on our behalf.

[*Translation*]

I am very pleased to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of 11 members of the Canadian forces who are participating in Canadian Forces Day today:

[*English*]

Sergeant J. Ouellet, Corporal L. MacDonald, Captain C. Stenner, Leading Seaman T. A. Taylor, Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class D. R. Peppar, Corporal F. Lauzier, Sergeant M. C. Jenkins, Master Corporal D. W. Ellery, Captain A. J. M. Lacasses, Corporal E. Encil, and Captain H. Ristau.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a moment I will seek unanimous consent to table a document.

During members' statements, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville called on the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin to apologize. I want to point out that the member already apologized, which was appropriate.

[*English*]

I would mention, and I think it is ironic, that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville has never apologized for deliberately misleading the House on Bill C-23.

[*Translation*]

I seek unanimous consent to table this document, the response from the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. He did the right thing.

[*English*]

When is the member for Mississauga—Streetsville going to do the right thing and apologize for his comments in the House of Commons?

• (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There does not seem to be consent.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to the main estimates 2014-15.

I also have the privilege and honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development entitled “Study on Great Lakes Water Quality”.

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

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party wants to thank all of the witnesses for the briefs they provided to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development during its study on Great Lakes water quality.

One of the flaws of the report is that it does not make any recommendations regarding the effects of climate change, which we have heard a lot about today, on the ecosystem of the Great Lakes, or on the water levels or water temperature in those lakes. These three things did not appear to be important.

As a result, the New Democrats believe that Canada should immediately implement energy policies to prevent and mitigate the effects of climate change and to help Canadians and provincial and municipal governments adapt.

By trivializing the effects of climate change, the government is showing a lack of respect for science, scientists, environmental groups, aboriginal groups and communities. It must involve all of these stakeholders in developing a national plan to fight climate change and improve Great Lakes water quality.

* * *

[English]

AN ACT TO AMEND THE ASSISTED HUMAN REPRODUCTION ACT (SURROGACY)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-607, An Act to amend the Assisted Human Reproduction Act (surrogacy).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to have the support of the member for Mississauga South.

This bill is very important. As I started researching this, I had personal experience with the issue. Very good friends of mine went through challenges as a result of not being able to conceive children, and today they have a wonderful family.

Thousands of Canadian families struggle in this regard today, and sections 61, 62, and 63 of the Assisted Human Reproduction Act prohibit payment to a surrogate mother or payment for services

Routine Proceedings

related to surrogacy. At the same time, there is real hypocrisy, as we recognize these contracts when Canadians venture across the border to the United States or elsewhere around the world.

This is a pro-family bill. It would help families to have children of their own, to have their own families. I hope the bill finds support in all quarters of this House. It is time we moved to put these changes in place.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present a petition from residents of Canada who are concerned that the Chinese Communist Party launched an intensive nationwide persecution campaign to eradicate Falun Gong. Hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been detained in forced labour camps, brainwashing centres, and prisons where torture and abuse are routine and thousands have died as a result.

The petitioners ask Parliament to pass a resolution to establish measures to stop the Chinese Communist regime's crime of systematically murdering Falun Gong practitioners for their organs, to amend Canadian legislation to combat forced organ harvesting, and publicly call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions.

One petition condemns the actions of the government with respect to Ajax Mine. These petitioners are from the Kamloops area of British Columbia, and they are opposed to the open-pit mine as it is proposed to be built within less than a kilometre of a school.

● (1515)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition was sent to me by a woman named Shirley Samples, from Surrey, British Columbia, with over 2,288 signatures against the Enbridge northern gateway project. The project is being pushed by the Conservative Party to build a pipeline from Alberta to Kitimat, B.C.

Ms. Samples and other volunteers stood on the streets in Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, and White Rock collecting these signatures. Their expectation was to gather 500 signatures, and now, at almost 2,300 signatures, the petitioners are blown away by the response of British Columbians as we stand united against this bad proposal for British Columbia and Canada.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a growing movement of Canadians who are not pleased with our first-past-the-post voting system and how it does not reflect the number of voters who cast ballots for a party.

Routine Proceedings

I rise to present the signatures of these Canadians and a great many of my constituents, who call on the House of Commons to immediately undertake pan-Canadian consultations that would amend the Canada Elections Act and introduce a suitable form of proportional representation, one that ensures that votes cast are an equal and effective means to ensure fair representation in a Parliament where the share of seats held by each party reflects the popular vote.

They eagerly await the government's response.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have four different petitions that I am presenting today on behalf of citizens of Canada. They are pointing out that the current impaired driving laws are too lenient and they are asking Parliament to enact tougher laws and implement new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

RAILWAY TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House again to table petitions with respect to the Algoma Central Railway passenger service. Most of these petitioners are from the riding of Sault Ste. Marie. They want to have their voices heard here. They are from Richards Landing, Sault Ste. Marie, Goulais River, Desbarats, Prince Township, Echo Bay, as well as from Kapuskasing, Burlington, Barrie, Ottawa, and Winchester.

The petitioners are concerned with the fact that the government removed the subsidy to this rail line. Although it has recently reinstated the subsidy for one year, the petitioners remain concerned that the government is making decisions without stakeholder consultations. They are concerned about their businesses and the economy, and they want the government to act on this issue.

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to file today from a number of people in Regina and across Saskatchewan who are concerned about Bill C-18, which is presently before Parliament.

The petitioners are concerned that it would restrict farmers' rights and add to farmers' costs. They specifically call on Parliament to enshrine in legislation the inalienable rights of farmers and other Canadians to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first petition highlights the fact that girls are being discriminated against in the way of sex selection. There are over 200 million missing girls in the world at this point, and the petitioners are asking for Parliament to condemn this practice.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is regarding Cassandra Kaulius. She was a 22-year-old girl who was killed by a drunk driver.

Families for Justice is calling on Parliament to enact tougher legislation with tougher sentencing for those who are convicted of drunk driving causing death.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to rise today in the House to present a petition signed by thousands of people from Quebec, more specifically from Laval, in the neighbourhoods of Vimont, Auteuil, Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Duvernay and Saint-François.

These petitioners are calling on the government to save Canada Post. They are urging the government to abandon its plan to cut services at Canada Post and to explore other avenues to modernize the crown corporation's business plan.

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today from a number of constituents who have been working very hard for a long time to try to convince the government to create an ombudsman for the extractive sector.

As members may know, I have spoken to this issue a number of times in the House and I hope that this petition will encourage the government to go ahead and create that position.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in Trois-Rivières have been angry ever since Canada Post executives decided, with the government's support, to take an axe to services.

Once again, I am adding my voice to theirs and presenting this petition, which is calling for the government to review the situation at Canada Post and consider other options for growth instead of simply managing the drop in letter mail.

[English]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first petition is calling upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically-modified alfalfa in order to allow a proper review of the impact on farmers.

● (1520)

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is calling upon the House of Commons to amend the Food and Drugs Act to provide for mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods.

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is calling upon Parliament to refrain from making any changes to the Seeds Act or to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act through Bill C-18 that would further restrict farmers' rights or add to farmers' costs.

Clearly, the petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine into legislation the inalienable right of farmers and other Canadians to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds.

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions today.

The first is in relation to the need for a legal ombudsman mechanism for Canada's mining industry. The ombudsman would have the power to receive and investigate complaints, make public its findings, recommend remedial actions and recommend that the Government of Canada impose penalties.

This petition has been signed by dozens of people from every part of Gatineau, as well as people from Ottawa.

CRIMINAL CODE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is about potential amendments to the Criminal Code.

[English]

The petitioners request that we introduce legislation to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to include torture committed by non-state actors, private individuals, and organizations as a specific and distinct criminal offence.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from Londoners who are very concerned about a tragedy that happened in London last November. It had to do with the deaths of three family members who ended their lives because they felt that they would not be able to become Canadian citizens.

The petitioners are very concerned about the fact that there have been cuts to public service jobs, reducing staff who would have been able to process the applications.

They call upon the Government of Canada to ensure that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is properly staffed and resourced in order to reach decisions for applicants in a fair and timely manner as well as to allow immigration officials to consider all factors with respect to an individual's application for status, including humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by people from across Ontario, from Guelph and Toronto and all the way to Dryden and Kenora. They ask that the government, even though the ownership of the property has been transferred, continue to fund the important scientific work at the Experimental Lakes Area near Dryden and

Government Orders

Kenora so that the important work on commercial, recreational, and other kinds of fisheries can continue unabated.

[Translation]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House today to present a petition that seeks to fight human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Given that human trafficking is the third-largest criminal trade after drugs and weapons trafficking, the petition is calling on the government to take action.

CANADA POST

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 10, I knocked on doors throughout the city of Farnham in Brome—Missisquoi.

The majority of people told me that they are not happy with the cuts to Canada Post's services. The 140 people who signed this petition are calling on the government to reject the plan to reduce services at Canada Post and to explore new options for modernizing the crown corporation.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

VETERANS HIRING ACT

BILL C-27—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Public Service Employment Act (enhancing hiring opportunities for certain serving and former members of the Canadian Forces), not more than five further hours shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the Bill; and

that, at the expiry of the five hours provided for the consideration at second reading stage of the said Bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the Bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

• (1525)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

I recognize the hon. opposition House leader.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are aware that, sadly, this is the 67th time that closure and time allocation have been used during this Parliament, during this government. We all remember that the Conservatives always said they would not be like the corrupt Liberals. It seems they are just as corrupt as their predecessors. There is no doubt that they too want to suppress debate.

This bill has been debated for two hours. It is a new version of a bill that was botched, Bill C-11. That bill was introduced last year and had a number of problems. Now they have introduced another bill. They do not want any debate because they know that we will raise concerns about this bill, just as we did with Bill C-11. Even if we support Bill C-27, we still have to debate it in the House. That is the problem.

[*English*]

The other problem is the fact that even under time allocation, government members are not showing up for their speaking shifts. Twenty-six times last week, the speaking shifts were basically jumped. They did not show up. Neither Conservatives nor Liberals showed up for evening debate, even under time allocation. We are talking about strict limits on the amount of time, but they missed 26 shifts.

When factory workers miss their shifts, they get their pay docked. Nurses and doctors show up for their shifts. Single mothers, single parents, show up for their shifts. Why do Conservatives not start showing up for their speaking shifts? Why do they not do the work Canadians are paying them to do, and why do they not allow some debate in this House of Commons?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we are mixing two issues here. We are talking about a bill that is absolutely critical to helping our veterans and their families progress into meaningful quality-of-life endeavours in the public service. They are those who were injured in the line of duty, if you will.

I do not know what the member is speaking about, because I, for one, was here till midnight and change last week, and I am sure that my colleagues have been equally diligent.

However, there is more to this than just the objections raised by the hon. member. I believe that he is probably alluding to the fact that John MacLennan, president of the Union of National Defence Employees, stated, "It is not right", meaning this particular bill, "topping up opportunities for veterans at the expense of public servants. It is disrespectful to public servants". He went on to say that giving priority status to injured veterans should not be done at the expense of civilian unionized employees.

That speaks volumes about what the member opposite is alluding to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us right now is not about the content of any given piece of legislation; it is about the way in which we deal with legislation inside the House of Commons.

Whether it is New Democratic provincial governments or Liberal governments in the past, we have always used some form of closure at times to get legislation through.

What makes this government unique is that ever since it has achieved its majority, it has been using closure through time allocation as part of a normal process, to the degree that when legislation is brought in, the government House leader walks in and introduces closure. It is as if it is something that is completely acceptable and is part of the new norm.

It is important that we recognize that it is only this majority Conservative government that has abusively used closure in order to advance its legislative agenda, and that is the reality.

My question is not for the minister responsible for the bill that it is applying to right now, but more to the government House leader. Can the government House leader explain to this House why it is that the Conservatives persist in using closure as a part of the normal process of passing their legislation? It is highly undemocratic, and the manner in which this motion is being dealt with today in the House of Commons is unethical.

• (1530)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that the House leader has deputized me to proceed with answering these questions.

It is important that we move this debate from the House of Commons to committee after three days of debate on this important subject. I believe that I am correct in saying that all parties have put their positions forward. The Liberals are keen to study this at committee, while the New Democrats want nothing more than to stall and delay this legislation because their big public service union bosses have basically told them, or should I say, ordered them, to do so.

Our job as legislators is to propose new ideas that will move the yardsticks forward in an expedient way, keeping in mind that we are responsible for the well-being, care, and support of our veterans and their families. It is time to get on with this particular item.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some things are obvious here in the House of Commons. After three years, one thing that is pretty obvious to, I think, all Quebeckers and Canadians, is that the Conservatives are repeat offenders when it comes to shutting down debate. This is yet another example of that: the 66th in just over three years.

An hon. member: Sixty-seven.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, my mistake, it is the 67th gag order. Sixty-seven, who will up the ante? Next week, it could be 68.

An hon. member: The Conservatives.

Government Orders

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have managed to beat the Liberals' record, if you can believe it. We never thought they would sink even lower than the Liberals. They are making no sense at all. On top of it all, they are making MPs work until midnight. If we have to do it, we will, no problem, but at the same time as they are extending sitting hours, they are bringing in gag orders to limit time for debate. I am having a hard time seeing how they can justify that to the people.

As our House Leader of the Official Opposition says, they extend the hours of debate and then they do not even show up. Last week they missed 26 shifts. They should have been here debating since they were the ones who asked that the House work longer hours.

How do they explain that they are asking members to do the work, but they barely show up?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, we are going around in circles. I sincerely believe that items such as this, and this particular bill, have had ample and sufficient time for discussion.

Mr. Peter Julian: Two hours.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, the reality is, whether it is two hours or two hours and a half, to sustain and support our veterans, especially those who are injured in the line of duty and service to country, and their families, is the right thing to do and for all the right reasons. I suggest very strongly to get on with this and let the committee hear from experts about how moving qualified service-injured veterans to the front of the line for public service jobs is the right thing to do. If they have any objections to that, I would certainly like to hear them.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the minister speak. Our House leader said earlier that the bill had another form in another Parliament. I need to remind the House that it is the government that controls the legislative agenda. If this was such a priority for the government, it already had a previous bill. It has now been in power, unfortunately, for three years, and it has had three years to bring the bill forward.

If the Conservatives are that concerned with veterans and their families, my question for the minister is this. Why did he wait until recently to bring the bill forward and then shut down debate in Parliament? That does not make any sense. If they are that incompetent and this was a priority, why could they not bring it forward in a more timely manner, and why are they shutting down debate now?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2014 has paved the way for more veterans to move to the front of the line for federal public service jobs. However, the unions and the NDP want veterans to move to the back of the line. Of course, all of these complaints about the expediency with which we need to move this item forward are really framed in the context of stalling because they truly do not support our veterans. Eight budgets in a row have shown that they are voting against benefits, services, and support for our veterans. That speaks for itself.

• (1535)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me start by thanking the hon. minister for his hard work on the veterans file and everything he

does on a day-to-day basis to help Canada's veterans, and for his commitment and dedication. I have had the opportunity to work with him and I have witnessed this first-hand.

I also want to thank the minister for a number of initiatives he has brought forward since he has taken over the file, including initiatives in economic action plan 2014 and bringing this piece of legislation forward.

I wonder if the minister could highlight some of the positive impacts that this piece of legislation might have on Canada's veterans in transition to civilian life. Also, I wonder if he could tell us whether the unions support this legislation.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and his support on the veterans file.

It is plain that our efforts in this area are motivated by wanting to do the right thing for the right reasons on behalf of our veterans, especially those who have sustained an injury or a disability in service to our country.

Veterans Affairs has done a great deal of work over the last year to support the hiring of veterans in the private sector. In addition, corporate Canada has participated and become involved. It is very supportive of our efforts in the government to transition veterans coming out of the military, who are in need of a job, into a profession in the private sector. The government needs to move in sync with that, which is what this bill is all about.

Medically released veterans currently have fewer opportunities to access federal public service jobs. I sincerely believe that any opportunities to access federal public service jobs, and any opportunities that come up for employment, are often filled by those people in a higher priority category, before those listed in the regulatory priority would get consideration.

All we are trying to do is to move things along so that we can be more efficient, more effective, and more helpful in lending a hand to those in greater need, our veterans who are injured in the line of duty.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the 67th time allocation motion. It seems that the government is always under the gun. I am not sure whether the Conservatives know how to plan, but being under the gun all the time—this is important and that is important—means not knowing how to organize one's work.

Given that we are in a British-style Parliament and that the debates are used above all to flesh out the bills and enhance the work that has already been done, I wonder why the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is always in such a rush. Can the minister answer my question? Why are we always in such a hurry? Why does the government introduce bills without leaving us enough time to pass them?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, we are working hard over here. We are making great progress. We are delivering for Canadians, on many different fronts.

I hear an hon. member across the way laughing. He can laugh all he wants, but the joke is on him. He is over there and we are over here.

In any event, the NDP is taking its cue from the big union bosses. Unions and some Canadians may express concerns, but I am confident, through the dialogue we have had with veterans themselves and communities widely, that this is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do for those in need, people transitioning out of the military who have been injured.

I do not know what the opposition's problem is with respect to moving this bill along. As I stated, it is the right thing to do for our veterans and their families, and we should move on with it.

• (1540)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the last speaker indicated, this is the 67th closure motion limiting debate, which has become a common practice for the Conservative government.

One of the reasons we are so opposed to closure is because of the very last comment that the minister made. He said that we are over here and they are over there. We all take shots in the House, but the fact is that we all represent Canadians. We all have a point of view.

I would suggest to the minister that there are some good things in this bill. However, it would be better to debate the bill in its full context without the limited timeframes. That way, the minister can get out the good points he wants to raise, and opposition members, who want to, can raise a point that maybe needs to be added to the bill or support the minister in some of these things.

We all represent veterans and Canadians in the House. Regardless of whether we are in government or the opposition, this is the Parliament of Canada. This is a game that is undermining this place of debate by shutting down and limiting debate that would give us the best bill possible. That is what is wrong with this debate at the moment. I am not talking about the bill; I am talking about the tactic of the government to limit debate in the House of Commons and ram things through like a bulldozer, as it always does.

It is not the right way to do things in a democracy.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to move the bill along so it can go to committee. There is no reason in the world why this cannot proceed. It will be debated further. There will be more discussion and more opportunities for the parties opposite to engage. That is the process.

As I stated earlier, it is time to move on with some of the more critical aspects of what we need to do to help our veterans, to help their families, to help those in greater need, and particularly those who have been injured in the line of duty. I know the unions do not like it, but this is the right thing to do. We encourage the members opposite to move it along.

If I may, my earlier comment about them over there and we being over here was only because the member opposite was mocking my comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder how the minister feels in his government when we are over here and they are over there. That is what Parliament and democracy are all about. That same minister came from a service that represents justice. He was a police officer in Toronto. He represented justice and the laws of the land.

In a democracy, the laws are made in a parliament that leaves room for debate. I find it insulting when he says “the union boss” every time he stands up.

We know that this government likes chambers of commerce. The Minister of Finance and the other ministers go around the country and meet with chamber of commerce representatives. Does the government not have the right to meet with our country's organizations? Is the government anti-union?

Every time the hon. member stands up he seems to be attacking the unions. Is he really attacking the representatives of workers who are recognized under Canadian law?

Workers have the right to be unionized. Every time he rises, he insults Canadian workers. I have trouble accepting that. In fact, I would like him to apologize because it is not right.

In our country, workers have the right to have representatives, just as employers have the right to have chambers of commerce. The government does not attack chambers of commerce. What is this all about? Is he unable to rise and be respectful of all Canadians and their representatives? I would like to hear what he has to say about that because it is an insult when it comes from the House of Commons.

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if quoting someone verbatim should be an insult. I am in fact transmitting the very words spoken by John MacLennan, president of the Union of National Defence Employees, who said, “It's not right. It's disrespectful to public servants, topping up opportunities for veterans at the expense of public servants...”. Priority status to injured veterans should not be done at the expense of civilian unionized employees.

There is nothing offensive about that, other than the theme that there is a particular protectionist regard for a certain level of employees, and disregard for veterans and their families, who are those who have sacrificed and served this country and who, in the line of duty, are injured as a result.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to an incident that occurred last Thursday. It was rather ironic that, on that evening, I had the pleasure of giving a speech at 11:57 p.m. Unfortunately, I was unable to finish it, because it was supposed to be a 10-minute speech. However, it was a courtesy on the part of the Conservative government. I thank the government for allowing me to speak at such a late hour.

That same day, something very instructive occurred. In any event, what I saw on television about this incident was fairly instructive with respect to the Minister of Veterans Affairs' attitude towards Jenifer Migneault. One could see the despair on this woman's face in the face of the minister's inability or unwillingness to solve her difficult problem or to even respond to her, speak to her, smile or acknowledge her.

This is my question for the minister: does he not think that he is rubbing salt in the wound with this time allocation motion on a bill that deals with resources we want to give Canada's veterans?

Not even a week has passed and he is at it again. My question is this: was it really necessary to add insult to injury when dealing with our veterans?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, that is a bogus conspiracy theory if I ever heard one. However, I am not about to politicize an individual veteran's case on the floor of the House, as I indicated earlier, and neither should the member or his party. It is totally inappropriate. I, on behalf of our government, care deeply about the well-being of Canadian veterans and their family members. We always have and we always will, and that is why the bill is going forward. As well, we are doing a comprehensive review of the new veterans charter.

I also would like to suggest that if members are so concerned about the welfare and well-being of veterans and their families, it really would be a novel experience for once to have them vote for those kinds of things that we propose year after year in our budget to help veterans and their families, which members opposite do not support.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has moved another time allocation motion. This is the 67th time. I do not think it is out of concern that the government has imposed 67 time allocation motions in two or three years. I would like to talk about this some more, rather than just about the bill.

Veterans want guidance that will help them during their reintegration, while they are looking for a place to work and trying to become part of society again. Guidance is what they want. Opening the door to the public service is fine, but if the necessary guidance is not there, absolutely nothing is going to be accomplished. There is nothing in the bill about that, so I will stop there.

Sixty-seven time allocation motions. That goes to show that the government is incapable of working with Canadians. When a

Government Orders

government is elected with 39% of the vote, that means that 61% of Canadians voted against it. They want to be able to talk to the government. Every time Canadians talk to their government, or try to, the Conservatives take off in the other direction. It is completely ridiculous. It is unacceptable that the government has imposed sixty-seven time allocation motions.

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, with all respect to the hon. member opposite, he obviously does not know the full suite of support and assistance that is already in place for veterans and their families. One of the items that he maybe needs to be informed about is that in the new veterans charter, a veteran who are injured in the line of duty can avail himself or herself of up to \$75,000 for retraining and other assistance that he or she may require in order to transition to a good-paying, rewarding job in the private corporate sector.

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the minister says that he cares about veterans. I would like him to take the opportunity now in the House to rise and apologize to Jenifer Migneault and to say that he will agree to meet with her, as the NDP asked him to do during question period today. Could he do that, apologize to Mme Migneault and her family and also agree to meet with her?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, with all respect, I addressed this issue in question period. I have addressed it in this session of debate. I am focused on assisting our veterans and have been doing that, and will be continuing to do that. I care deeply about our veterans, but I certainly will not debate their issues on the floor of the House of Commons, and the member opposite knows that.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the minister is staying here with us. That is not usually the case. He usually turns on his heels when people talk to him.

I am pleased to be able to ask him how it is possible that we are dedicating so little time to such an important bill. What is even more ridiculous is that we are spending 30 minutes debating procedure instead of talking about the bill. That is not my choice, that is the choice of the government in power. Time allocation motion after time allocation motion, the government forces us to debate procedure, which is a clear sign of the government's disregard for democracy. Could we not spend the precious minutes we have left until the end of the session debating bills, not procedure?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite humorous that the member opposite would be accusing me of running from anything. I spent 40 years on the front lines in policing and have dealt with sufficient and enough people. While we are at it, it would be helpful if the NDP were to fess up to the inappropriate squandering of hard-earned taxpayer money and speak to that issue as well.

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Having said all of that, as we have been discussing, the debate has been going on for three days on this important subject. All parties have already put their position forward. I do not know what more there is that the members opposite are concerned about. I understand their concern about issues that are not particular to this bill. I would encourage them, for once, to put their political biases aside and help our veterans and their families get an uplifting help from this government, from all of us in Parliament, so they can get on with the aspects of their life that they are entitled to receive from us as politicians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to take advantage of the fact that the Minister of Veterans Affairs is here to point out that he was not in Quebec City last Wednesday.

Something tremendous happened in Quebec City last Wednesday: the opening at the Citadelle of the second-largest museum, the museum concerned with Canadian heritage and francophone military heritage. That jewel is also the residence of the Governor General.

The minister was not at that very important event, which was attended by hundreds of guests. Instead he sent a message by fax. He did not even send a federal government representative to such an important event organized to acknowledge our veterans. I was the only federal government representative there. I will always be there for our veterans.

When they need our help, we must make calls, go and see them and listen to them. The first thing they ask of us is that we listen to them. Then we see whether we can help them.

I invite the minister to take a step in that direction.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for attending. We are grateful for that. She has my absolute word that I will be going. I made that commitment already. I apologize for not being able to be there. I know it was a great event. I want to congratulate everyone who participated in it and supported that very fine museum. I feel badly about missing it, but I am on the ticket to be there, and I look forward to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (1635)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 159*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinogoe
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe

*Points of Order***POINTS OF ORDER**

TIME ALLOCATION FOR VANESSA'S LAW

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in relation to the point of order raised by the hon. House leader of the official opposition made on Friday afternoon.

I was quite prepared to see the House advance Bill C-17. I was prepared to leave it at that and take the victory for what it was and move on. However, since the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster confirmed at that time that he wished to continue with his point of order, I do want to supplement my hon. friend's intervention on it.

First, I did want to make this point, that the NDP House leader told the House that the hon. member for Oakville made comments in the House, "With the government leader's full endorsement and encouragement". I appreciate my counterpart's sense that my powers are all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-powerful. However, I can assure the House that in this case my hon. friend from Oakville proceeded entirely on his own initiative in the comments on Bill C-17 that he made, as every MP has the right to do.

That being said, I do wish to congratulate the hon. member for Oakville for his very successful efforts. I am proud of him as a colleague for having taken the initiative, even if I cannot share in any credit or blame for his having done so. His persistence last week in seeing the bill through to committee clearly paid off, given that the NDP did change its tune late on Friday afternoon on this matter.

Turning to the substance of his point of order, the opposition House leader claims that the time allocation notice, which I gave on Thursday evening in relation to Bill C-17, the protecting Canadians from unsafe drugs act, should be rescinded because he alleges there were no consultations on the bill.

As the deputy government whip said on Friday, our party does not reveal the content of the discussions of the House leaders' meetings.

It is common knowledge around here that the recognized parties' House leaders and whips, their deputies, and staff gather every Tuesday afternoon to discuss upcoming parliamentary business, along with the Clerk or her representative in attendance. Some weeks, such as last week, the House leaders will even gather for a second meeting. That is on top of the innumerable exchanges that take place by email, informal meetings, and phone conversations among these various actors.

Last week's House leaders' meeting would have been held on the heels of the NDP's Tuesday filibuster of Bill C-17, when it has been the expectation and hope of all other parties that the second reading debate would wind up that morning.

Astute observers of the business of the House would conclude that it was not in isolation that I gave time allocation notices on Thursday evening for Bills C-17 and C-27. Indeed, I only gave those notices once it had become obvious that no agreement for a time allocation motion under Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2), let alone any other firm agreement, could be reached among the required parties with respect to those two bills.

Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 145	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Bélanger
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Pécelet
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Thibault
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel	Valériote— 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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 Malpeque, Public Safety.

Government Orders

I can absolutely assure the Speaker and the entire House that both myself and my staff did put proposals on Bill C-17 to the NDP House leader and his staff, both verbally and in writing, last week. I have no difficulty whatsoever in assuring the Speaker that the requirement for consultations contemplated in the standing orders was fulfilled.

As to what that requirement is, I would refer the House leader of the official opposition to a ruling of the Deputy Speaker on March 6, 2014, at page 3598 of the *Debates*, in response to a point of order raised by the previous NDP House leader, where he opened by making reference to page 667 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition:

This is what is required when one of these notices is brought forward:

The notice in question is to state that the agreement could not be reached under the other provisions of the rule and that the government therefore intends to propose a motion...

The hon. government House leader, when he rose in the House yesterday, preceded his presentation of the motion with the following words:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2)...

That is all that is required by the Standing Orders. The nature of the consultation, the quality of the consultation, and the quantity of the consultation is not something that the Chair will involve himself in. That has been the tradition of this House for many years. What the Chair would have to do, in effect, is conduct an extensive investigative inquiry into the nature of the consultation. That is not our role, nor do the rules require it. Therefore, I am rejecting the request for the point of order.

In this case, while I might welcome such an investigations and Canadians, I can assure the House, would be most interested in its findings and I would be most satisfied for them to receive those, I do also understand the policy rationale for not conducting them. That is a policy rationale of encouraging full-ranging negotiations without a concern for potential investigations like that.

Finally, I would like to note the significance of the point of order raised by the opposition House leader. He has, however, inadvertently, given Canadians an insight into how the NDP approaches the business of managing the progress of legislation in the House of Commons.

• (1640)

The NDP members make a great deal of fuss every time the government makes use of time allocation to ensure MPs can get to vote on a bill. The NDP members keep track of how often it happens and make a big deal about that statistic. I have been heard to remark myself that often they seem to enjoy compelling us to run up that statistic.

Why does that happen? The NDP has now finally told Canadians why it happens. In raising this point of order it has asked that a notice of time allocation be rescinded or withdrawn on the basis that it is not necessary. The NDP is prepared to allow the bill to advance. This is the very first time the NDP has done that, the very first time it has told the House that it is prepared to advance a bill and thus that a time allocation motion need not be moved. Never before, since this Parliament began, some three years ago, has it taken this step. Never on any of those many occasions when New Democrats stood up to denounce the use of the scheduling device of time allocation have they pre-empted that step with a statement that they are willing to advance a bill. This, however unintended by the NDP, has given Canadians a valuable insight into the approach of the NDP and why,

as a result, the government makes use of the standing orders provisions to bring some certainty to the scheduling of debates and votes.

I hope, however, that this marks the beginning of a new approach by the NDP and not merely an unusual exception to the rule, brought on by the very effective comments of the hon. member for Oakville on the matter of Bill C-17.

I hope that we will see many more occasions where the NDP makes it clear that it is prepared to see a bill advance and, as such, resorting to Standing Order 73 is not required. There are several such notices on the order paper. I invite the NDP to advise the House which of those bills it is prepared to see advanced. Such a gesture would be welcome, and I am prepared to assure the House leader of the opposition it will be received in a non-partisan and co-operative manner.

Either way, I wish to thank the opposition House leader for having done a service in revealing to Canadians how it is that the NDP approaches debate in the House. This revelation will, I am sure, help to inform the views of all those who follow the work we do.

• (1645)

The Speaker: I appreciate the government House leader's intervention. Of course, we will come back to the House in due course.

* * *

VETERANS HIRING ACT

The House resumed from May 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Public Service Employment Act (enhancing hiring opportunities for certain serving and former members of the Canadian Forces), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Laurentides—Labelle.

I support this bill at second reading. This bill, just as a bit of historical reference, is a reworking of Bill C-11, which previously died on the order paper. I certainly welcomed this new bill, thinking that it would go a bit further than Bill C-11. Unfortunately, while I am supporting it at second reading, there are some issues with this bill. It still does not go far enough in addressing the shortcomings of the previous bill, Bill C-11.

Bill C-11, the previous bill, and this bill, Bill C-27, are based on many criticisms levelled by veterans groups and the Veterans Ombudsman regarding the government's career-transition services. Unfortunately, this bill overlooks an entire group of veterans who have trouble transitioning to a new career. The vast majority of veterans do not have the necessary degrees to obtain a position in the public service, and of course, many are simply not interested in a career in the public service.

Government Orders

The bill would amend a number of sections and would offer priority status to members of the Canadian Forces released for medical reasons, placing them in the highest priority category ahead of both surplus employees and persons on leave. It also would increase the length of the priority entitlement period from two years to five years. It is important to note, and many people may not realize it, that Veterans Affairs also includes RCMP veterans. RCMP veterans would not be eligible for this new priority.

The bill would give Second World War and Korean War veterans priority over other Canadian citizens. By expanding the definition of “veteran” to include military personnel having served at least three years, we would see a resurgence in the appointment of veterans to public service positions, and this priority would last for a period of five years. However, surviving spouses of former members of the Canadian Forces who served for three years would not get priority. This is in contrast to widows of World War II and Korean War veterans. We do not agree with these provisions as we believe that surviving spouses of all veterans who sacrificed their lives for our country should be given this preferential treatment. In designating several categories of veterans, it appears in this bill that we have abandoned the idea that a veteran is a veteran, which is, if I can say, a cherished principle of the NDP.

One aspect that is overlooked regarding the length of the priority entitlement period is that it would begin on the day a member left the Canadian Forces. This means that if members wished to contest the reason for their discharge or the length of time between their service and injury, their priority period would be decreasing by the day. As members may be aware, these procedures can take years to resolve. Members who pursued these courses of action would be at a disadvantage compared to other members of the Canadian Forces who did not have to appear before an administrative tribunal.

We believe that the bill does not go far enough and that it focuses on only a very small number of veterans in transition who have the training and experience necessary to pursue a job in the public service.

The government must implement the career transition recommendations made by the Veterans Ombudsman and the Auditor General. The government is balancing its budget clearly on the backs of our veterans and is proposing half measures that would not have a significant impact on the standard of living of veterans as a whole.

Rather than implementing the recommendations of the Veterans Ombudsman and the Auditor General, or even waiting for the revision of the new veterans charter, which will be tabled tomorrow in this House, so the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs could make recommendations about transition as a whole, the Conservatives chose to introduce a bill that applies only to a very small part of the transition program.

The priority entitlement period would end five years after a member of the Canadian Forces had been medically released. The eligibility period, as I said before, would increase from two years to five years.

• (1650)

We believe that an increased length of time is justified for veterans who wish to pursue university studies. For example, a regular

veteran, a regular Canadian, would take about four years to get a university degree. However, in the public service, advanced degrees past the first degree are often key to getting a good job in the public service. Even with that increase, it might be too late for them to take advantage of this hiring priority.

Veterans Affairs Canada, together with the Department of National Defence, should explore other collaborative opportunities with organizations. Some of these were outlined in the report of the Veterans Ombudsman that came out in June last year. We should explore opportunities with organizations such as the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries, the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada, and so forth.

It should be the job of the government, and part of this bill, to cultivate partnerships with organizations that specialize in job placement, mentorship, and internship opportunities, which, again, was indicated in the report of the Veterans Ombudsman. It should be developing affiliations with academic institutions and the provinces to translate military skills, experience, and training into civilian academic equivalencies recognized by provincial ministries of education. That was also from the Veterans Ombudsman.

It is pretty clear from the statistics that most departments do not hire veterans. A culture shift is required within government departments themselves. Of the few hundred each year who take advantage of priority hiring, 50% to 80%, depending on the year, will find positions in the Department of National Defence, not other departments. There should be a general effort made to ensure that this happens.

A universal deployment principle could be adjusted for Canadian Forces members who have been injured in the line of duty. The latest figures I have are from 2011-12. In that period, of the 942 medically released former Canadian Forces members, only 10% had a completed or partially completed post-secondary education. Nearly half of them had high school levels or less in education.

In the future, seven out of 10 jobs will require specialized post-secondary education. Therefore, the onus should be on the federal government to ensure that those opportunities are there for our veterans.

Equally interesting is that only 16% of the companies that were polled would make a special effort to recruit veterans. Clearly, knowledge and understanding of veterans and their experiences have not translated into the private sector.

Government Orders

Only 13% of the companies polled said that their human resources departments knew how to read the resumés of military applicants. That is understandable, because their training is a little bit different. I remember a few years ago, before the program ended when MPs had a chance to spend some time in the military, I was with the navy. I asked a question of the soon-to-retire captain of a ship. We were passing a cruise ship, and I said that there could be a cruise ship opportunity for him as a captain. He told me, quite politely, that his training really did not translate into being a cruise ship captain. People clearly do have to know how to read the resumés.

I would like to say one more thing about veterans, and Thunder Bay in particular, where the office recently closed. In 2012, 3,127 veterans were served in the Thunder Bay office, which is now closed. That office cost about \$686,000 a year to keep open. All the veterans offices that were closed cost about \$4 million. Strangely enough, that is the same amount of money, \$4 million, the government is now spending on veterans advertising. There could have been some better use of that money.

• (1655)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a government freeze on hiring right now. It has already cut about 20,000 jobs, with an expectation of cutting another 30,000 jobs.

My question is simple. I see this more as window dressing and as a very hollow bill. There may be a few people who might get jobs, if that. I am wondering if my colleague could comment on that observation, which is shared by many people.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. As I said in my short speech, I believe that the bill does not go far enough. It focuses on a very small number of veterans in transition. He is absolutely right that even that small number of veterans may not have the opportunity to take advantage of priority hiring. It really is unfortunate. If the government had decided to implement some of the career transition recommendations made by the Veterans Ombudsman and the Auditor General, perhaps we would be in a better position to help veterans.

I would be remiss if I did not mention again that, unfortunately, the government is balancing its budget on the backs of veterans, in spite of the good work of all parties on the new veterans charter, which will be tabled tomorrow.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his great speech. I was surprised by the percentage he gave, which is that 10% of veterans, out of 942, which is roughly 94 veterans, are going through this program. I was also surprised to learn that the RCMP is not included in this bill.

I would like my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River to try to explain to us why so many veterans are being ignored by the government.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, most Canadians do not realize that the RCMP is included under Veterans Affairs, and I think the government may think that RCMP veterans, in fact the large majority of RCMP veterans, have actually worked their entire lives and have retired at an opportune time from the RCMP. It does not address issues concerning RCMP veterans who are perhaps injured in the line of duty.

We do not have to talk about physical injuries. Just like members of the Canadian Forces, members of the RCMP are also subject, perhaps even more so, to certain injuries, such as PTSD, for example, and others that would put them on a new career track if they were included in this bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week a wonderful group of people from the private sector came to the Hill. It was an apolitical event where the private sector was being encouraged to look at individuals who have served in the forces. The argument is that not only do we owe a great deal of gratitude and thanks to members who have served in the forces but that they also have certain skill sets that could be utilized within different sectors of society, whether it is in the private sector or the public sector.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on the benefits of the skill sets members of the forces acquire by serving.

• (1700)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, many in the private sector, as evidenced by the statistics I gave earlier, do not even know how to read the resumés of people who have been in the Canadian Forces. It is understandable that a human resources director may not see how valuable experience as an infantryman is, for example, when it may not translate exactly into a particular business. I believe that as part of this bill, the government should be reaching out to private sector organizations, not just to public sector organizations, to ensure that veterans have the best opportunities possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Public Service Employment Act, concerns a top priority: our veterans. No one will say otherwise.

It is not enough to say that we are behind them. We must take action. After these people have put their lives and health at risk, it would be hypocritical not to provide them with all the assistance and support they need to return to civilian life.

This bill is an amended version of Bill C-11, introduced in the fall of 2013, which the government allowed to die on the order paper after seven days of debate. Even though we feel this bill does not go far enough and the main flaws in Bill C-11 have not been corrected, we nevertheless support Bill C-27 at second reading.

Government Orders

Enough time has been wasted, and much work remains to be done in committee. We must work to ensure that this bill truly helps veterans return to civilian life.

In its present form, this bill will not help veterans who are finding it hard to make the career transition from the armed forces to civilian life. The vast majority of them do not have a university degree, which is necessary to secure a position in the public service, whereas others simply are not interested in that kind of career. I understand why because soon there will be no more public servants.

Under subsection 39(1) of the Public Service Employment Act, preference is given to veterans of World War II and the Korean War. However, surviving spouses of former members of the Canadian Forces who served less than three years will not have access to this preference, unlike the surviving spouses of World War II veterans.

We disagree with this proposal because we believe all veterans deserve the same treatment. By creating so many classes, the Conservatives are abandoning the principle of a single class of veterans, those who risked their lives for Canada.

In view of the staff cuts in the public service, veterans do not have access to as many positions as they did previously. Employees who have been victims of the cuts take precedence.

There also appears to be a flaw in the bill regarding the period during which veterans have hiring priority over other candidates. We feel that the period during which employment priority applies is quite short.

Veterans wishing to earn a university degree will need about four or five years, in certain cases where the position requires a master's degree. This five-year period begins when the member is released. Consequently, if a member challenges the reason for his or her release or whether an injury is service-related, the priority period will continue to run during the proceedings, which may extend over several years. The member would therefore be put at a disadvantage relative to another member who would not have to challenge the matter before an administrative tribunal.

Private sector co-operation must be improved because people in the private sector are unaware of veterans' skills. Human resource departments do not know how to interpret the curricula vitae of veterans who apply for jobs.

The government has announced that it will reimburse veterans up to \$75,800 for training and transition costs. That amount will be spread over five years, and the budget has a ceiling of \$2 million. If the maximum amount is granted to every veteran, only 27 will be able to receive it, roughly five a year. When we think of the tens of thousands of veterans returning from Afghanistan, we wonder how many veterans will be able to take advantage of this program.

• (1705)

In a recent advertisement, which focuses more on the government's image than the service advertised, the Conservatives show a veteran standing in front of his closet. He hesitates between his uniform and a suit, as though he is merely making a clothing choice. However, the reality is completely different.

I cannot help but think of another veteran I saw. At the Remembrance Day ceremony on November 11, 2013, a man in his fifties leaned on his cane so that he could lay a floral wreath in front of the cenotaph. Having been wounded in training, he was forced to retire from the armed forces two years before he was eligible for a full pension. Today he must live on a pension that has been reduced by 35%, which puts him below the poverty line. He told me that he had enlisted in the armed forces to fight for his country and that now he had to fight against his country.

To sum up, there are two major classes of veterans: those the government presents to us in its advertisements and those who are fighting through an administrative maze against a bureaucracy that is preventing them from living their lives.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to my hon. colleague speak about Bill C-27, I was thinking it was quite incredible to force veterans to return to the labour market when they might not all be ready to do so. That really is a key point.

The government is trying to confuse people with Bill C-27. Once again, it has set aside the recommendations of the veterans ombudsman. They have been set aside several years in a row. People told me that this made no sense and that the government should see that, year after year, a report was issued and included the same recommendations every time, calling for more services and more care for veterans. The government is setting it aside today and distracting us with Bill C-27, which is not at all up to expectations.

I really would like to hear from my colleague on this. Can he tell us what we expect from this Conservative government and what we would like it to do?

Mr. Marc-André Morin: Mr. Speaker, we ask people to go and defend our convictions and our principles. They are brave, motivated people who put their lives and health at risk. The least we can do when they come home is to ensure that they have no more worries and provide them with a decent quality of life and standard of living.

I base my remarks on the experience of my uncle, who fought in World War II. He was wounded in a landmine explosion in which his brother was killed right before his eyes. He went through something absolutely horrible. When he came home, despite the therapy he received, he was no longer able to live in society because he was shattered. He went to work in a logging camp for 20 years until he could return to some kind of balance.

Today I believe we should do more for our veterans and ensure that they do not have to suffer misery after the trauma they have gone through.

• (1710)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about the two veteran classes he mentioned: those commonly called "older" veterans and "new" veterans, who have mainly served in more peace-oriented missions in Bosnia, on the Golan Heights and subsequently in Afghanistan. That was no peace mission, but the 60,000 veterans who took part in it fall into this class of so-called modern veterans.

I would like my colleague to describe for us his opinion and feelings about the injustice that is caused by the creation of two classes of veterans.

Government Orders

Mr. Marc-André Morin: Mr. Speaker, three of my uncles landed at Dunkirk and one of them died. To me, there is no difference between a Second World War veteran or a Korean War veteran and our young people who were recently in Afghanistan.

If there is a difference, it is that the latest generation of veterans experienced events that were even more traumatic and highly publicized in a context that was less clear-cut than in the days when my uncles went off to fight fascism. Now the causes are harder to understand. However, there should be no difference in the way veterans are treated once they come back to the country having carried out their duty.

[*English*]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before starting, I would like to inform you that I will split my time with the member for Ottawa—Orléans.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-27. I served for 23 years in the Canadian Forces, in the reserves, the regular force, and the cadet corps. I participated in the missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Afghanistan, in 2007, when we were starting to realize that we were not in a peacekeeping mission but at war.

I am pleased to speak to yet another important way that our government is creating new opportunities for Canada's veterans and still-serving members who want to join the federal public service. The veterans hiring act builds upon our efforts to create priority hiring for those men and women who are medically releasing from the military because of a service-related injury.

This new bill reflects our government's profound gratitude for the service and sacrifices of Canada's men and women in uniform, past and present. Just as importantly, it recognizes that Canada's veterans and servicemen and women are highly skilled and admired individuals who are known for their courage and dedication. It recognizes our government's appreciation for their leadership, their professionalism, and their teamwork.

Most of all, it recognizes that they are renowned for getting the job done, no matter what the mission is. Our government is proud of them. We are proud of their extraordinary contributions to our great country, and we want Canada to continue to benefit from their experience and expertise. They have a lot to offer, even when they are retiring at the compulsory age of 60.

Increasing access to career opportunities for veterans in the public service does all of this. It also builds on our many other important investments and initiatives to support veterans in their transition to civilian life, an ongoing eight-year commitment that started when we implemented the new veterans charter, in 2006, and one that has continued with the delivery of our economic action plan 2014, in February.

Our government has been single-minded in doing everything we can to ensure that veterans and their families have the care and support they need when and where they need it. This includes ensuring Canada's veterans make a successful transition to civilian life, which often depends on finding meaningful new employment.

The fact is that the average age of our releasing Canadian Armed Forces personnel is just 37 years old. These young men and women have the drive, skills, leadership, and experience to start successful new careers. That is why we are helping veterans and their families with vocational training and employment opportunities after their military service.

This includes a flexible new approach to training for eligible veterans in the rehabilitation program, which provides up to \$75,800 for even the most specialized training, if needed, and the hire a veteran initiative that is aimed at connecting veterans with employers.

We are working closer than ever before with both the private and public sectors to remind them of the very real benefits and advantages of hiring former military personnel. We are committed to ensuring that veterans have the supports they need to successfully transition to civilian life.

We demonstrated this when our government announced that Canadian Armed Forces veterans who are medically released due to a service-related injury or illness would be given the top level of priority consideration for job openings in the public service.

The veterans hiring act builds on this. We want to help move veterans to the front of the line when it comes to hiring qualified Canadians for federal public service jobs.

● (1715)

As well, this initiative would provide even further support for all medically released veterans, by extending their existing priority entitlement period from two years to five years.

However, our government proposes to go even further.

The bill adds new measures that would benefit even more veterans and Canadian Armed Forces personnel. Among other things, we would extend additional hiring opportunities to other honourably released veterans and still serving members who want to start a new career in the federal public service.

Through the amendments we are proposing, qualified veterans who have at least three years of military service will be given access to internally advertised positions. We will also allow them to continue to compete for these internal postings for a full five years after their release from the Canadian armed forces.

As well, these veterans would receive a hiring preference in the externally advertised hiring process if a veteran is equally qualified and has been honourably released and has at least three years of military service. Simply put, if a veteran is as qualified as the other candidates, the hiring priority will ensure that the veteran gets the job.

Government Orders

During their service to Canada, Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans have acquired the skills that make them ideal employees. These new measures recognize that. They have demonstrated their commitment to Canada, and it is now our responsibility to ensure that they have access to the employment opportunities they need to be successful when their time in uniform is complete.

At the same time, the five-year hiring preference would provide veterans with sufficient time to further upgrade their education and skills if required, before they seek work in the federal public service. This measure would ensure exactly what I mentioned at the outset of my comments, that our government will continue being able to tap into a remarkably skilled and dedicated pool of individuals, a pool of talent that was created through our country's investment in their training and development.

Although their time in uniform is complete, their dedication to Canada remains, which is why I am pleased that these measures would help veterans continue their service to Canada in the public service. This is the right thing to do for every Canadian who has proudly worn our nation's uniform.

We hope all members of the House will throw their full support behind these measures. Let us move quickly so that we can put these enhancements into effect as soon as possible. Our nation's veterans and still serving members deserve our support, and our government is proud to deliver it.

Obviously it is a shame that the Union of National Defence Employees is unsupportive of what is being proposed. It does not agree that we should recognize the service of Canada's veterans by providing them with access to jobs that will help them and their families succeed. Instead, it wants to see them moved to the back of the line behind civil servants. I strongly urge the NDP to bring the union bosses onside and support this legislation.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support this bill. However, for several reasons the NDP believes that it does not go far enough. In my riding, I meet a lot of veterans and their families. These veterans and their loved ones have to cope with a lot of problems. They feel that they do not get enough support from the government.

The government decided to cap its training spending at \$2 million over five years. That is a way of restricting access to the program.

Why did the government decide once again to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans?

[English]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, our government is taking care of veterans. This legislation would allow serving members who are honourably discharged to use their skills and participate in the internally advertised jobs in the public service.

It is a shame that we who served in uniform are not considered qualified for these jobs. This is the reason that I am here in Parliament today, to fight for Bill C-27.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to first thank the member for Pickering—Scarborough East for his service to our country at the various fronts that he referred to. However, his words ring hollow.

On Thursday of last week, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said that the Conservatives increased their advertising budget by \$4 million. However, their budget for career transition counselling increased by \$11,000. That means they are going to serve 296 veterans in career counselling. That is 296 resumes. We have 40,000 veterans coming out of Afghanistan, but it is 296 resumes, at \$1,000 a piece.

The government has taken 20,000 jobs out of the public service, and it is going to take another 30,000 jobs. It has put on a hiring freeze. Therefore, I would suggest that the member's words ring hollow.

I would ask the member to give me some substance, not words. Does he know how many jobs will be provided? When the member says that the government is doing everything it can, I do not believe it, and Canadians do not believe it. Tell me how many jobs will be created by this bill for these veterans.

• (1725)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, the member is spouting numbers left, right, and centre. I think that this legislation would allow armed forces members access to services. It would not necessarily qualify them, but at least they could access the service.

Our government has eliminated compulsory retirement in the public service. However, in the Canadian Armed Forces, one needs to retire at 60 years of age. There are able people who can work longer. Even if there is one job, it is more than zero, and this legislation would provide it.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East for the service he has given to our country and for graciously sharing his time with me today.

[Translation]

It is the men and women in uniform who have served and sacrificed so much for our country, and those who continue to do so, who have made our nation what it is today.

[English]

That is why I am pleased to rise today to support the government's efforts to recognize these sacrifices by helping our veterans find meaningful employment in the federal public service. It is the least that we can do.

[Translation]

Our veterans are the ones who have defended our freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law and the ones who, too often, have given their own lives doing so.

[English]

Their sacrifice has allowed us the freedom and peace to pursue and realize the great riches and potential that our country offers.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Indeed, Canada's veterans personify the ideal of commitment to cause and country. They embody honour and modesty.

[English]

Each week, I run into many veterans, whether I am stopping by at the Orléans branch of the Royal Canadian Legion or participating at different commemorative events. There are a considerable number of military personnel and veterans in Ottawa—Orléans, and of course, Branch 632 is the friendliest Legion in the region.

[Translation]

When veterans are asked about their service, their sacrifice or the reasons why they served, their answer is almost invariably because it was their duty.

[English]

They did much more than that. They have made Canada a nation that is universally respected around the world. They have helped those in crisis and in need. They have helped to keep the peace in many troubled areas far from Canada.

[Translation]

When all other avenues failed, they fought to protect our way of life and preserve the right of others to live in freedom.

[English]

The proud record of Canada's veterans explains the government's deep commitment to recognizing their service and honouring their sacrifice every day.

The government continues to strive to ensure that veterans and their families receive the care and support they need whenever and wherever they need it.

[Translation]

The veterans hiring act further solidifies the government's commitment and determination to be there for those who have always been there for Canada.

[English]

It is our responsibility to ensure that veterans have access to a broad range of programs and services to help them achieve new success after their time in uniform is complete.

The measures we are proposing today will greatly help veterans succeed by creating new opportunities for veterans and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces to start rewarding new careers in the federal public service.

[Translation]

We will create a five-year statutory priority entitlement for Canadian veterans who are medically released for service-related injuries and illnesses.

● (1730)

[English]

This change will move these veterans to the front of the line, ahead of all other groups for jobs in the federal public service and by doing so, it will recognize their very real sacrifices for Canada.

[Translation]

Additionally, these new measures will extend the priority entitlement period for all medically released veterans from the current two years to five years.

[English]

This means that eligible veterans whose military service is cut short by a career-ending injury or illness suffered in the line of duty will have the time they need to find a federal public service job.

However, we must not forget our other honourably released veterans and still-serving military personnel. As outlined in economic action plan 2014, the government made a commitment to allow eligible, still-serving military personnel to participate in the hiring process for internally advertised positions in the federal public service. This eligibility would extend for a full five years after their release from the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Translation]

To ensure our veterans move to the front of the line for federal public service jobs, a hiring preference for our veterans will be established.

If a veteran has the same qualifications as another applicant in an externally advertised hiring process, the veteran will get the job.

[English]

This new hiring preference will be available to all veterans who are honourably released with at least three years of military service. It will last for up to five years from their release date.

[Translation]

This will give our veterans who want to upgrade their skills and education before entering the public service the time to do so. This is great news for these remarkable men and women, and it is the kind of action Canadians have come to expect from us.

[English]

Check our record. The government, regardless of fiscal pressures or economic uncertainties, has delivered on its pledge to maintain and enhance veterans' programs and benefits.

Due to the action taken by the government, the annual budget of the Department of Veterans Affairs has increased by a total of almost \$785 million since 2005. In total, almost \$5 billion in new funding has been invested towards enhancing veterans' benefits, programs and services.

At every turn, we have been adapting our programs and benefits to meet the changing needs of the men, women and families that we serve.

[Translation]

We have been streamlining the way we provide this support. We have been simplifying and reviewing our programs and policies.

Government Orders

[*English*]

We have been introducing new technologies to deliver better and faster service. It is all part of our cutting red tape for veterans initiative, because on this side of the House we are actually allergic to red tape.

The government has made significant improvements to ensure the best care, support and benefits for Canada's veterans and their families.

[*Translation*]

Turnaround times for processing veterans' disability benefits have been significantly improved.

[*English*]

The approval time for access to rehabilitation services has been cut in half from four weeks to two.

[*Translation*]

Paperwork has been reduced.

[*English*]

We are listening. The government is implementing a comprehensive approach to serving veterans that is responsive, inclusive and flexible.

[*Translation*]

Passing this legislation will keep this momentum going. The implementation of these measures is key in helping veterans and releasing members of the Canadian Armed Forces make a successful transition to civilian life.

[*English*]

We are keeping faith with the courageous women and men who have served and continue to serve our country so well.

[*Translation*]

All members should demonstrate their own support and commitment to Canada's veterans and serving members by supporting this bill.

I thank members for their kind attention.

• (1735)

[*English*]

I will be just as attentive to the questions put to me by members of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to ask him why the Conservative government is allergic, as he put it, to the recommendations of the ombudsman and the Auditor General.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member very much for his question. I must also thank him for the extraordinary service his colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, provided to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and thank

the committee for the work it did to make recommendations to the government.

I want him to know that we listened to the ombudsman's recommendations. The report will be tabled in the House tomorrow, and the government will respond to it in due course, without delay. I am sure the hon. member will be very pleased with the results.

In the meantime, I invite him to support this sensible bill that all veterans, especially those who need better access to federal jobs, will benefit from.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot help but notice that the member has done a reasonably decent job presenting what I suspect are a good deal of speaking points that come directly from the Prime Minister's Office saying "We do this. We do that". However, if the member were to canvas many of our veterans, he would find that there are some very real, tangible concerns in regard to services provided by the government. A good example of that is the number of offices that were closed, taking away that face-to-face contact in favour of telephone contact.

My colleague, the member for Guelph, had posed a question to one of his colleagues in the Conservative Party, asking what it meant in real jobs. Could the member tell us if the government done any sort of analysis? What does it believe will materialize in terms of actual jobs for the program he is promoting today? Are we talking 1 job, 20 jobs, 200 jobs? Does the government have any sense of this, other than the fact that here is a bill, here are some great talking points? Does he know what sort of job numbers we are talking about?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I find it regrettable that the hon. member for Winnipeg North comes here with cheap shots. Just to reassure everyone, I write my own speeches, I do it in both official languages and I do it with the dignity that is commensurate with what is required in the House.

As far as how many jobs would be created, I will just say not one. This bill is not about creating jobs. It is about helping veterans to get to the head of the line and to have access to the jobs. It is to offer them hope, which is what veterans deserve.

If the hon. member just talked to his friend next to him, the hon. member for Guelph, who is a member of the committee on veterans affairs and who co-operated with the committee and contributed in a positive way, he will be very happy to see the report that the committee will deposit tomorrow, which the government will respond to in due time. Hopefully, for once, the member can come and vote in favour of that and in favour of all the programs that we put forward to help veterans.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the fabulous member for Saint-Jean.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Public Service Employment Act, for our veterans. This bill, like its predecessor, Bill C-11, is a response to the many criticisms made by veterans' groups and the ombudsman himself of the government's career transition services.

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I am very familiar with these criticisms, having been the deputy critic for veterans affairs during the first year of my mandate, having remained close to our veterans ever since, and having always lent them an ear. It is important to me that their sacrifice be honoured and that they never be forgotten or ignored.

Unlike the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I will not turn my back on veterans or soldiers, especially when they want my attention. I want to take this opportunity to extend warm greetings to the veterans in Quebec City and particularly the Royal Canadian Legion, which does exceptional work in Quebec City.

Bill C-27 does not measure up to veterans' expectations. And yet, their demands are clear. They want front-line services. They want services, just as they served their country. They went where no one wanted to go because the government asked them to, and today all they want is for the government to understand that when some soldiers return from a mission, they find it difficult to get back into the labour force.

Some soldiers have no choice but to become veterans rather quickly because they were wounded while on duty, either physically or psychologically. Let me say again that they do not choose to become veterans. It is important to understand that a wounded soldier will go through a period of genuine mourning for what he or she has lost.

Whether it is a soldier whose leg was shattered into a million pieces by an explosive device, a soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or a soldier suffering from an unexplained health problem, that soldier will grieve the loss of his former health. Accepting and adjusting to a new reality is an arduous, lengthy process.

That is why services are critically important and why Veterans Affairs Canada needs staff to help veterans get through this difficult time in their lives. Soldiers, unlike civilians, have been programmed. The government has a responsibility to invest resources into deprogramming them.

When the federal government opts to send our military members on either a combat or a peacekeeping mission, it has a responsibility to look out for their welfare before, during and after the mission. Experts, in particular experts in the field of health care, must be hired, something the government is not doing. If it were hiring these experts, we would not be reading all the time about soldiers and veterans committing suicide because they failed to get the help they needed. It has come to that.

My colleague opposite claims that a government has never done so much for veterans. Nothing could be further from the truth. Veterans and the Canadian public know that. Truth be told, never has a government done so little for our veterans.

Bill C-27 will in no way help veterans experiencing problems transition smoothly into another career. The vast majority of them do not have the degrees required to secure a job in the public service. It might take them a very long time to get these degrees. Others are simply not interested in a public service job, and it may well be that a given prospective job is not suited to the veteran's new health situation.

A veteran has some good days and some not-so-good days.

• (1740)

A veteran's health can be quite precarious. It can be good one day, and poor the next. Drugs can of course alleviate the pain and side effects, but there are no guarantees.

On June 20, 2000, former Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire was rushed to emergency after being found on a park bench in Hull. Inebriated and suffering from a reaction to anti-depressants, he almost slipped into a coma. This proved to be a wake-up call for the civilian world and an introduction to PTSD. We do not want to turn back the clock to that time when PTSD was unknown and left untreated. It is time to acknowledge the situation and allocate the resources needed to address the problem.

I have read a great deal about PTSD. I have also met personally with many veterans suffering from PTSD. I know they are struggling constantly to live in the present. They need to be able to count on having reliable and effective resources at their disposal, especially since soldiers may experience PTSD episodes only later, be it two years or twenty years after an actual mission. There is no way of knowing for certain.

On August 26, 2013, the Veterans Ombudsman released a report that focused on vocational training for veterans transitioning to civilian life. None of the ombudsman's recommendations is included in this bill. The same goes for recommendations made by the Auditor General in the fall of 2012.

The NDP is of the opinion that the Conservative government should implement, not shelve, the ombudsman's recommendations. It is really shameful to see a report, whether it comes from an ombudsman or from the Transportation Safety Board, shelved because of Conservative ideology, especially when it had the backing of all political parties in a parliamentary committee and was followed up on. It is truly a shame and it makes no sense at all!

Ombudsmen are appointed to prepare reports so that the government can listen to the concerns of all elected officials in the House. It is truly awful, shameful and disgusting to have these reports produced year after year, only to see the Conservatives scrap or completely ignore the recommendations put forward and then scrambling to backtrack. It is crazy really. A responsible government does not act this way.

What upsets me even more is that the government deliberately decided to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans. It decided to make major budget cutbacks that directly affect our veterans, something that London or even Washington did not dare do, even in times of belt-tightening.

This really comes as no surprise, since we are dealing with an irresponsible Conservative government that still cannot account for \$3.1 billion in anti-terrorism funding. More than a year later, the money is still unaccounted for. Where is the explanation? How were these missing \$3.1 billion spent? The government has not been able to shed light on this mystery and yet it has no problem making cuts that affect veterans.

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This Conservative government lacks the courage it should have. It is unable to provide the parliamentary budget officer with all of the relevant information when it announces budget cuts, proving in the process that these cuts are made hastily and haphazardly, completely in the dark. That is how the Conservatives govern. How truly terrible is that.

This is where we find ourselves in 2014, with a Conservative, or should I say Reform-minded, government. It should be ashamed of proposing half-measures that will have no real impact on the quality of life of veterans in general. It should be ashamed of its actions. Having served for quite a while on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I know what could be done in terms of long-term health care for veterans. They could be given access to improved follow-up services and receive help from specialists. I am also thinking about the work that the Veterans Review and Appeal Board is not doing.

• (1745)

Decent pensions should be granted so that veterans are not forced to make repeated requests until they finally receive the full benefits to which they are entitled.

I find it truly offensive to treat people who chose to sacrifice their lives for us in this manner.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once we cut through all the partisan rhetoric of what was said there, there are a couple of themes that are important. The first area is services. There is no doubt that we need to do the best we can in those areas as well.

On this bill specifically, there were some comments made about people being released at 37 years of age, people who have plenty of time to make a good contribution to the workforce. The skills these veterans are bringing back in terms of teamwork and leadership can contribute to organizations. Under the hire a veteran program, Cenovus Energy and Intuit Canada have realized the skills that some of these veterans can bring to the table in organizations. Now we are proposing a bill that would allow those skills to be brought to the public service.

What that member said through all that rhetoric was that it is not even worthwhile, because that attachment and that work are as important in the rehabilitation of these people as anything else is, so she is saying we should throw the baby out with the bathwater.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I am not a fool. I understand exactly what they are telling me.

They are saying that they are going to save some money on the backs of veterans. I am sorry, but we decided to send them on missions. We know that these missions can be costly and we know in what state our soldiers can return. If we are not able to invest in giving them the care they deserve when they get back, then we are not in a position to say that we can accomplish the mission.

I am sorry, but we need to be there for our veterans. I would agree that we have made some advances in terms of the professional

transition aspect, but this bill is simply a way to distract people, when I am talking about something very important.

What is important is the health of our veterans, and the Conservative government does not seem to want to go there, because it knows that it will cost money. Yes, it will cost money, but we do not have a choice.

We decided to send them to Afghanistan and on other missions. We simply have to pay. That is how it is. Period.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Québec for her observations. They are absolutely accurate. This bill is hollow.

She talks about balancing the budget on the backs of veterans. Just so she is aware, and this might surprise her, the Conservatives have allowed \$10 billion to lapse between 2013 and 2014. They were scheduled to spend \$10 billion more on various services for Canadians, but they cut it back so they could balance their budget next year. Part of that was for Veterans Affairs.

However, they managed to increase their spending on marketing and advertising by \$4 million. The minister admitted that last week before the committee. They spent only \$296,000 on a program they call Career Transition Counselling that will help only 296 veterans. The amount that was spent on Helmets to Hardhats to help them find jobs was \$100,000, and most of that was for a new website.

I am wondering how alarmed the member for Québec is when she hears those statistics.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his wonderful comments and the figures he shared. It makes absolutely no sense to invest in websites and all kinds of things that do nothing to help veterans who are struggling.

When the Minister of Veterans Affairs turned his back on Jenifer Migneault when she was asking for help, it was because he had ignored the claims of veterans for hours, which is very sad.

I think it is important to point out that we all come from different parties and have different ideas. That is a good thing, but the veterans affairs file is a profoundly human issue. It is a human issue. It should never be a partisan one. We should not tear ourselves apart over this. We need to help our future, help our veterans.

I think it is disgusting that the government is investing in war machines and CF-18 replacements that will cost a fortune, but it is not able to invest in the human beings who operate that equipment. That makes no sense. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak to Bill C-27. What my colleague from Québec said is absolutely true. We do not have our priorities straight.

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I will obviously be voting in favour of this bill at second reading because it is a step in the right direction. However, the bill is not enough. One of the reasons it is not enough is that it always seems as though this government is responding because it is compelled to do so not because veterans are a priority for the government. We see it every day.

One of the reasons why I am interested in this subject is that we have a lot of veterans in Saint-Jean because we have a military base there, and most military members who have served in the Canadian Forces did part of their training at the base in Saint-Jean. We also have the Royal Military College, so we have a whole military environment. When members are transferred from base to base, some of them wind up staying in the area of one of their postings. That is true of Quebec City, with the base in Valcartier, but it is also true of us in Saint-Jean. A number of military members settle in the city of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu or in the region because their last posting was in Saint-Jean.

I am obviously very concerned about the situation in which we are putting our veterans. The Conservative Party and the Conservative government are not the only ones who have abandoned veterans. The Liberals did so as well. The cuts that the Liberals made in 1994 and 1995 when they were in power show that they were no more committed to helping our veterans or military members than the Conservatives. That is why we hope that the NDP will be able to take charge of this file after 2015 and give our veterans the help they deserve.

I am obviously going to talk about my bill, Bill C-568, which the government and Conservative members voted against. To my mind, once is not a habit. I can hold the Conservatives to account for their actions. They are always telling us that we voted against some budget measure or another when they are constantly serving up omnibus bills that contain measures on anything and everything. They then criticize us and attack us for not voting on one of the budget provisions, when that provision did not even have anything to do with the budget.

Now I am holding them to account for their choices. They voted against Bill C-568, my bill respecting long-term care for veterans, claiming that there was in fact no problem. When I meet with veterans, at the legion or other events in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu or in the region, the comments I get from my constituents are not at all consistent with what Conservative members are saying. The Conservative government is not addressing the real problems.

One of the problems I raised in Bill C-568 was the creation of two classes of veterans. This is a concept that we in the NDP oppose. The government and Veterans Affairs Canada have created two classes of veterans. On the one hand, there are what are called traditional veterans or war veterans, which means those who served until 1953, mainly in World War II and the Korean War, and who are still alive. On the other hand, we have modern veterans, which means those who served after 1953, mainly on peacekeeping missions, but also on war missions such as the one in Afghanistan.

Within this second class of veterans, the government has artificially created a third class. That third class is the class of veterans who served after April 1, 2006, or those who now fall under the jurisdiction of the new veterans charter.

● (1755)

As we can see, the consequence of making various amendments to different acts is that three classes of veterans have in fact been created: war or traditional veterans, veterans before the new charter and veterans after the new charter.

What is the main difference between these two subclasses of veterans? It is mainly the disability pension that was previously paid to our wounded veterans and that has been replaced by a disability award since April 1, 2006. I have had many conversations with veterans, and they have convinced me that, in practice and in many cases, they realize that the amounts of these two types of compensation for the same injury can at times differ by as much as a factor of 10 or 15. Consequently, the financial implications are that, with a ratio of 1 to 10 or 1 to 15, this creates a new injustice between these categories.

I will not go over all the arguments that my colleagues have advanced thus far. I would just be repeating what they have already explained very clearly to this point. However, I would like to go back to the incident that made the news last Thursday, when the Minister of Veterans Affairs actually ignored Jenifer Migneault. That incident was truly indicative of the lack of interest and compassion the Minister of Veterans Affairs has shown. It is that lack of compassion that veterans report to us in meetings in our ridings every day.

What is quite paradoxical is that, on the one hand, Veterans Affairs Canada has closed nine regional offices that gave our veterans access to services and, on the other hand, has spent millions of dollars advertising the services of Veterans Affairs Canada. Members have probably seen some of those ads on television or heard them on the radio in recent weeks. I am not opposed to the idea of advertising to inform veterans about available services, but advertising should be in addition to the services themselves. It should not replace those services. In other words, it should not be purchased solely for the purpose of concealing the fact that services have been cut for those who have served our country and sacrificed themselves. It is really terrible that, on the one hand, services are being cut, while, on the other hand, the government is buying advertising to conceal this state of affairs, which is a reality. Veterans tell us this every day.

I will close on that point. I am going to support the principle of this bill at second reading so that it is referred to committee and can be improved, because it really must be improved so that it actually meets the needs of our veterans.

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• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the member's last point in regard to what could potentially happen at committee. If we were to canvas Canadians as a whole, we would find there is a great deal of sympathy for what we are doing today and what we could be doing in the future in assisting members who are retiring from the Canadian Armed Forces after serving in Afghanistan in different capacities and in different areas. I believe there is a great deal of sympathy in regard to what we can do in Ottawa.

We recognize that the legislation does have significant flaws and that the government would do well at committee stage to listen very closely to what the stakeholders are saying with the idea of improving the legislation.

Does the member have specific thoughts about what he would like to see happen in terms of potential amendments?

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I am not very optimistic.

Although I do not have a great deal of experience in committee, I can say that my past three years in committee have convinced me that the Conservatives generally do not want to accept amendments that do not come from them, and that was particularly true of the amendments to the electoral "deform" legislation. The Conservative members did not want to accept amendments from the NDP.

However, the same ideas or amendments coming from the Senate and Conservative senators were considered acceptable. I have really witnessed some bad faith.

In fact, I do not expect much from the committee. An enormous number of improvements need to be made, and the ombudsman's report contains a number of them.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is a large part of the problem due to the fact that the Conservatives are incapable of using a long-term perspective to manage anything? If they were capable of doing that, they would be concerned about global warming, rail safety and many other issues.

If we send 40,000 soldiers to Afghanistan, it is reasonable to expect that tens of thousands of them will come back with very serious injuries and in need of care. The structure that will allow us to take care of them should already be in place. We should not be improvising now that the mission is over.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is assuming that the Conservative government's intentions are more honourable than they really are.

He spoke about the situation with VIA Rail. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the loved ones of those who died in this morning's accident on the Montreal-Quebec City line. This accident was particularly frightening. One wonders if the government really is that incompetent or if it simply wants to get rid of some of the crown corporations, such as Canada Post.

I take the train every week. One wonders, seeing the deterioration in service at VIA Rail, whether the Conservative government is simply waiting until the situation gets so bad that it can sell the crown corporation to a private company and get rid of it.

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure for me to rise in the House to speak on issues related to veterans. I am very happy to follow my colleague from Saint-Jean, in particular because we share an affinity for Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean in his riding. We both reminded the House not long ago of the 1994 budget of the Liberals that kick-started the decade of darkness for the Canadian Forces, and which closed that fine school. I was very proud that a number of years ago our government reopened Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, and that my friend Michel Maisonneuve has done a great job of building that centre of excellence back up. We hope to see it continue to produce fine young men and women leaders for the Canadian Forces.

Speaking of leadership, we are talking today about Bill C-27 and the subject of the veterans hiring act. It is important for Canadians who may be listening to this debate, or groups that are unsure about the subject, to know that this is truly a group effort. A few members of the House have suggested that there are not going to be many veterans who would qualify for the public service, or that it is going to be a very small group or contingent. That might be true. This might be only for dozens or, over many years, 100 or 200 serving veterans to transition into other public sector positions. However, it is an example of our government playing an active role in the subject of hiring veterans and, more importantly, creating a culture in Canada where hiring a veteran becomes commonplace.

I would suggest that does not exist at the moment. However, there are a number of groups that I will refer to in my remarks that, over the last five to 10 years, have been trying to create a culture of hiring a veteran in Canada. Why is that a good culture to build? I suggest, altruistically, that it is good to hire veterans. These are men and women who have served our country with distinction, at times putting themselves into harm's way, whether overseas in Afghanistan or on missions here in Canada. Therefore, it is good for the government, and indeed the private sector, to hire veterans. However, it is more than just altruism; it is good business sense. It is actually accretive, to use a business term, to the bottom line, because businesses are getting men and women with demonstrated leadership.

Whether it is a master corporal or a major-general, these Canadians have received training that is unparalleled throughout NATO and the developed world in terms of an educated military, one that is trained in leadership ethics, managing people, leading under stressful situations, and with a culture that is inherently loyal. The regimental structure that the military is based upon is based on loyalty.

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I have dealt with employers for many years, and one of their biggest challenges is retention. Somebody who is in high demand will go on to the next opportunity. Hiring a veteran helps to reduce costs over time, by retaining people who are inherently loyal. If employees show loyalty to employers with the opportunity of a job, they will return it, not just by meeting expectations but exceeding them. Therefore, the government is an important partner in the creation of a culture in Canada to hire veterans. I am pleased to be part of a government that has brought two bills before the House on this very subject. Whether 1,000 veterans are hired or one veteran is hired, it is a good step for Canada.

Bill C-11 was a priority hiring for injured veterans who were released as a result of injury, and Bill C-27, before us today, is on hiring veterans for the public service more broadly. This bill looks at Canadian Forces members who have given at least three years of service, and allows them an internal hiring opportunity in another part of government. Whenever I speak about veterans, I try to provide facts and educate others on this because there is too much rhetoric on this subject and not enough facts.

● (1810)

It might be news to some people in this House to learn that upwards of 4,000 to 5,000 people transition from the Canadian Forces each year. About 1,200 of those people leave for a variety of medical reasons, whether it is people with serious injury as a result of service, such as in Afghanistan, or those whose vision or hearing has become impaired and may lose their flight qualification, as I almost did in the air force when my hearing was damaged. We are looking at 4,000 to 5,000 men and women transitioning out of uniform each year. This bill would give those people one more avenue to explore as they plan their transition.

People who receive an honourable release from the Canadian Forces after a three-year service minimum have a level of priority within the civil service that would extend to five years. That number is important because it inherently recognizes that when they transition, veterans may receive additional training or get more education. The Canadian Forces can assist with that. In fact, there is matching of some payments for training programs and tuition payments, to allow people to continue their education while in uniform. In many cases, there is tuition assistance as they transition out. By building in a five-year period, we are acknowledging that people may release and decide to improve their skills or education. We want to ensure that opportunity in the civil service remains open to them.

As I said with respect to Bill C-11 earlier, if people release from the Canadian Forces as a result of a medical release, including an injury or a change in their medical category, they would be given the highest priority of hiring within the civil service. That is appropriate. It recognizes that the men and women who join the Canadian Forces give an unlimited liability to their country.

The most important decision that the members of this place make as parliamentarians is sending our men and women into harm's way. It is appropriate for us, in turn, to give these people the highest priority to find a position in the civil service.

I am glad to hear that many members, on all sides of this House, are here to support Bill C-27, the veterans hiring act. I am

disappointed because it is certainly clear in listening to the debate that not a lot is known about the subject and how many people transition each year. Unfortunately, the politics in this area creeps in so often. However, it is refreshing to see that, in principle, most members of this House will be supporting Bill C-27.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about what I alluded to at the outset, which is building a culture of hiring a veteran in Canada. I said that with Bill C-27 and Bill C-11, our government has been an important partner. In many ways, we have helped to nudge the private sector and other individuals in Canada into doing more for hiring our veterans. However, as a parliamentarian who served in the Canadian Forces for 12 years, and after my release has worked on veterans issues for the last decade, I also want to salute some of the Canadians who have been doing this in a steadfast and dedicated way over the last decade. Government should not be the answer for everyone. A lot of veterans will want to go into the private sector. There have been some real trailblazers in that regard.

In fact, another thing that our government did was to create the Veteran Transition Advisory Council. I am very happy to say the minister, just last Friday, met with the Veteran Transition Advisory Council, VTAC, as it is called, in Toronto, to hear its latest update. This is a group of business leaders from across the country. The previous minister gave a mandate to them to help break down barriers within certain industry sectors and report back to the government on how it can facilitate more hiring of veterans. In a similar way that Helmets to Hardhats helped veterans break into the construction industry, VTAC was meant to do that.

● (1815)

I would like to thank Shaun Francis, the chair of the True Patriot Love Foundation, who was the first chair of VTAC, and the vice-chair, Joel Watson, someone I am happy to call a very good friend, like Shaun. Joel served as a dragoon officer before becoming a lawyer in Toronto, and has continually given back.

The entire board of the Veterans Transition Advisory Council, which has been advising the government, has each started veteran-friendly hiring initiatives within their own companies. In some cases, that might mean dealing with the human resources department to educate them, to let them know that looking at military experience as an important determinant on who to hire is something they should focus on.

In fact, one of my last major initiatives as one of the founders of the True Patriot Love Foundation was working on a conference with Canadian employers called “From Battlefields to Boardroom”. The goal was to bring senior human resources leaders from companies across Canada to a conference to hear from veterans, to hear from other companies that are hiring veterans, to show them that sometimes accommodating a veteran in the hiring process or considering their military service to be equal to some related civilian experience, will go a long way in getting them a great addition to their team.

The conference also had leaders from the Canadian Forces educating private sector employers on the difference between a corporal and a colonel. A lot of civilian organizations that do not have veterans may not know the different types of service or types of education and training that our men and women in the Canadian Forces have.

The battlefields to boardrooms conference was a big step in breaking down barriers to hiring veterans. I would like to thank all of the participants in that event.

There are also groups that have been doing this as part of their outreach to Canadians in working with veterans and with our wounded. I spent time this Saturday with Scott Maxwell and Phil Ralph from Wounded Warriors Canada, in Uxbridge, at a fantastic thanks to our troops tribute.

Wounded Warriors is part of their charitable efforts, allowing Canadians to support the men and women of the Canadian Forces. They have encountered companies and employers who want to do more than just help financially; they want to open their hiring process and open opportunities within their companies to veterans.

I salute the entire team at Wounded Warriors. I know they have an upcoming employer fair, in Alberta. They will be spreading their message that it is more than just the right thing to do. Some of the best hiring decisions they will make will be by hiring men and women who have served Canada.

Probably the most fascinating group I have ever encountered, and I am happy to belong to it as well, is a group called Treble Victor. It was begun a few years ago by Don Ludlow and Mark Walden, and is currently led by Tim Patriquin.

This is a networking group of veterans that started in Toronto. After they have transitioned into the private sector, they meet with their HR department. They meet with their senior leadership and ask them, “Why are we not hiring more veterans?” Or they ask, “Are there barriers to the hiring of veterans in our company that we can address?”

They have had tremendous success. I remember a number of years ago, before joining this House, Gord Nixon, the CEO of Royal Bank, when approached by Treble Victor members within the bank, talked about doing a bit of an audit, asking how many veterans they had. He was amazed at how many there were within the national organization. They were then empowered to create a network within the bank to help other veterans find employment.

Canada Company is another spectacular example of good charitable work leading to employment opportunities for veterans.

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It was started by Blake Goldring and a number of prominent business leaders. I was happy to attend a lot of their events when I was a lawyer in Toronto. It started as a program to raise funds for scholarships for the children of the fallen. However, it soon grew into an employment initiative, as senior business leaders wanted to do more than just support them financially. They have the military employment transition program, the MET program, and a website of tools run by an RMC classmate of mine, Walter Moniz, reaching out to employers and allowing transitioning veterans to plug into opportunities in the private sector.

● (1820)

There are also groups like Military Minds, started by a soldier suffering from operational stress injuries, creating a community for people to rally upon. Now there are opportunities for employment from that.

When I was in Windsor, I met with the leaders of Delta Company, a group of business leaders from the Windsor area helping find employment for members of the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment.

Government is one part of building a culture here in Canada of hiring veterans. I wanted to salute some of the trailblazers, some of the people who have been at the vanguard of this subject.

I would also like the opportunity to thank a couple of members of this House. In fact, I would like to thank some members from the other side of the House, including my friends from Abitibi—Témiscamingue and Winnipeg North. Last week, they joined me in co-hosting the second annual celebration of service on the Hill, recognizing the parliamentarians and members of Parliament Hill staff who have served in uniform.

At the event this year, we also recognized some of the trail-blazing companies that have been implementing great hiring veteran programs for many years, such as General Electric, McDonald's, Thales, and TD Bank. The award for TD Bank was received by retired General Rick Hillier, who now works at TD Bank and helped the bank roll out a veteran hiring program throughout its national network of branches.

McDonald's started as a charitable sponsor of the True Patriot Love dinner and has now hired veterans throughout its organization. That is an organization where people can start small and go all the way to the top organically.

We wanted to recognize some of these trailblazers on Parliament Hill.

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I have heard concern here about Veterans Affairs ads. I will tell the House that if any member of the House has worked on this issue, like I have for the last decade, an important part of those ads is the information. The information is very important, because most young veterans from Afghanistan try and access most of their services online. There are 15,000 who have signed up for a My VAC account.

More importantly, though, is the image of the former soldier straightening his tie, taking his daughter's hand, and going out of the house. That has been a message and an image that I, personally, have been trying to send for many years to show that taking the uniform off, our veterans are the men and women of Canada. We are thankful for their service. They are dads. They transition into amazing soccer coaches, parent council members, and private sector employees. Even more important than the valuable information on services and how to contact them is sending the message that veterans can transition from uniform and have a meaningful post-military career, be a great dad, a great community member, and a great role model.

I would suggest that websites, which have been mocked by some in this House, are the number one way that anybody thinking of transitioning out of the forces finds out about it. They go to Google and they google it. The employers, businesses, and charities that have worked on this for ten years are all there.

It seems that the MPs in the House seem to forget that we now not only serve veterans who are 80 years old and 90 years old, we serve Afghan veterans with multiple tours in their 20s. We have to make ads. We have to be online.

I would invite members to look at journalist Kevin Newman's blog on the subject. We need a better and more unified website that scores highly and that people will see.

I would like to finish by saying that it will take government and the private sector to build this hire a veteran culture. We have to show that it is not only the right thing to do, but that hiring a veteran will make a business a better place.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for his speech.

Will the Conservative government go beyond words and rhetoric and finally recognize its sacred duty to our injured veterans?

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member asked that question because I love history and it allows me to speak for a moment on my favourite prime minister, Robert Borden. When Robert Borden went to conferences in London during the war, he visited our wounded on the front. He said that it was a duty for Canada to take of our injured.

If we look at the act in 1925 that began the Legion, and eventually decades later with Veterans Affairs, the government has committed to support and help our veterans. However, that has never remained static. It has always changed, and I will use an example to explain why.

The MP from my riding in World War One served at Vimy. He was elected to Parliament from the front in 1917. He died, sadly, as a

result of his post-traumatic stress disorder. However, he is not even discussed, and most Canadians do not even know he existed. Sam Sharpe was his name.

Now our government is evolving and we have opened 17 operational stress injury clinics. It is more than about a phrase or a term, it is about a commitment. If we look at the \$700 million on an operational basis in more funding each year with an accumulative total of \$4.5 billion in benefits, our commitment is clear, but we are also not going to be stuck in the past. We are going to evolve to meet the future needs of our veterans.

• (1830)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Durham for his service to our country and for his comments.

Frankly, I agree with his idea of creating a culture of hiring a veteran. I do not entirely agree with the touting he did of his own government and everything it has done, because members will hear and have heard already that it could be doing much more in a more significant way.

We talked about helmets to hard hats earlier, and we know how much of a failure that program was: \$100,000, and it hired very few veterans.

I am trying to be constructive. There is an opportunity for the government to be more engaged in this process by using what is called a "skills translator". They are using it in the United States for a quarter of the price that the current Conservative government is spending on ads for veterans during the playoffs. For a quarter of the price it will align, interpret, and translate the skills of many of our veterans into other jobs that are out there. It links veterans in the United States with the private sector, not just the public sector, at a very minimal cost.

I challenge the member to take this idea to his caucus, to his Minister of Veterans Affairs, and encourage him to embrace this idea of skills translators, at very little cost, to help our veterans more significantly determine their aptitudes and find employment.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the member for Guelph touched upon a subject I have worked on for many years, in fact, long before I joined this Parliament in 2012. I have met with the folks from monster.ca many times over the years. I know and have seen its skills translator. In fact, representatives are coming to my office in the next few weeks to show me the modifications to that translator.

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I commend the member from the Liberal Party for bringing a rational voice to the veterans affairs committee, and I say that sincerely. I know he has been productive, and I very much keep in touch with my colleagues. The previous member from his party, not so much, but I welcome his interventions.

Part of the challenge is that transition itself for veterans starts when they are members of the Canadian Forces. They are actually in DND when they are searching on Google and wondering if they should move back to where they enrolled from, such as Nova Scotia or B.C., or if they should stay where they are finally posted to. It has to be a case where DND and VAC work better together. Each has chosen a different model. If the member pledges to break down some of those barriers between those two departments, I will work with him on it.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for Durham for his thoughtful comments and his service to our country.

The member talked about some of the organizations that have been involved, such as the Veteran Transition Advisory Council and the great work it is doing. CEOs and leading people in organizations understand the benefits that these veterans can bring to their organizations. He also talked about the win-win.

The question I asked before was that, to me, there seems to be two parts to this. One part is the service to the veterans when they come back, and getting them ready. The second part of that is having a place for them to go. The private sector is stepping up on these fronts to do some of this work, and it is good business for the public sector.

I would like the member's input as to the importance of attachment, because these folks are used to being on a team. They are used to working as a team and so it is as important to make sure to continue that team effort back in the workforce.

Could the member talk a little about the importance of that work environment in continuing that team effort?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the member hit the nail on the head. In many ways, I alluded in my remarks to the inherent loyalty of the men and women of the Canadian Forces. They want to join a new team, in a lot of cases.

There are some programs out there, in fact, one of Prince Charles' charities, the Prince's Trust, works on entrepreneurship with veterans and that was supported by the True Patriot Love Foundation. However, the vast majority actually want to join a team. We need to ensure that we connect them better to teams that want veterans on them. That is why the Treble Victor Group and some of these groups have been building networks within national companies, including in Atlantic Canada, companies like McCain Foods, like IMP Aerospace. I met with them last week. They have a number of veterans already working within them. That helps the veterans transition in because they know someone has already blazed the trail.

We need to build better online resources to allow that mentoring to happen, without the government needing to intervene. If there is a forum out there, and this is what Kevin Newman was calling for in his blog, we need this to be facilitated by the veterans themselves. This is an example of where the government should get out of the way.

However, he is very right. The team-based approach is key for many veterans.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I really appreciated his comments on the government's efforts to help veterans transition to civilian life. That is a recurring problem that we have to try to fix. The bill will certainly not hurt in that regard.

However, I did not appreciate the government propaganda in my colleague's speech. He said that, since coming to power in 2006, the government has spent an additional \$6 billion on transition programs.

I did the math. That money was budgeted, but was not spent. Close to \$1 billion was not spent over the past seven years. The government keeps repeating that number, and I want everyone to know that it is not quite accurate.

Also, with respect to transition support for post-secondary and university studies, the government announced \$2 million, I believe, over the next five years. Divide that by 100,000 and it turns out that it will help just a handful of veterans, who will be able to go to university so they can be employable in the public service.

What does my colleague think of that amount? Should it be increased so more veterans can be helped? If that amount does not go up, the government will not even be able to help 50 veterans during that five-year period.

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the member and I served, for a time, on the veterans affairs committee, and I know he is sincere in his passion for veterans.

One thing I would invite him to learn more about is, as I said, the transition between the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs, which is key. When a lot of veterans decide they are transitioning at the end of their short service engagement or whatever contract they are under, they begin their education while they are in the Canadian Forces. We cannot look at just the post-release education without looking at the education gained in the Canadian Forces.

Groups like Canada Company and others have worked on a lot of universities, breaking down tuition barriers or reducing or limiting tuition for some veterans, depending upon the nature of their release.

Certainly, education is a key part of transition. The government is helping. Veterans are taking advantage of it. However, it is also key to create this hiring culture and to show that government is not the only answer, but we are part of the solution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Western Arctic.

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As many of my colleagues have said, we are going to support this bill, but we do not think that it goes far enough. We think that it raises questions that the government needs to answer.

First, with regard to the priority given to members of the Canadian Forces who are released for medical reasons, we are wondering what will happen to members who are released for medical reasons when the department or the board does not recognize the connection between their injury and their service. This affects me personally because I have been in touch with a veteran, Mr. Scalise, who resigned from the Canadian Forces because he was suffering from burnout; however, he failed to inform the armed forces that his situation was related to post-traumatic stress.

For four years now, Mr. Scalise has been fighting to have his situation recognized as being connected to his years of service. According to the bill before us, his priority entitlement period is almost up.

First, I believe that the time it is taking to process Mr. Scalise's file is ridiculously long and unacceptable. Second, the bill as it stands does not address Mr. Scalise's needs. This man could very well go back to school, upgrade his skills in various areas and eventually get a job. However, he will not have time to do so if the bill is passed as is.

Whether at the CEGEP or the university level, it takes between two and four years for veterans to acquire a specialization that will allow them to make the transition to a civilian job. We therefore have to give these veterans time to heal and get treatment for their post-traumatic stress before they go back to school.

This transition takes time. It does not happen overnight. The committee should look at this issue again to ensure that the bill that is eventually passed meets the expectations of veterans and truly allows them to reintegrate into the civilian world and the labour market.

The skills acquired in the military are not necessarily automatically transferable to civilian life. Skills upgrading is required. What is more, the private sector is not really aware of the qualifications or technical skills that soldiers develop. A collaborative effort needs to be made here. In fact, the ombudsman proposed measures to that effect, but they seem to have been completely left out of the current bill. That is too bad.

Under the new legislation, the system will have to adjudicate an individual's file to determine if the medical release is related to service or not. That is the case for Mr. Scalise. Like the ombudsman, we have concerns about this administrative uncertainty when it comes to maintaining hiring priority.

Would it not be better to use the recognition of the link between the injury and the service to determine the accessibility and length of the priority entitlement? This could be done in two ways: either the reason for release is designated "service-related medical release" or the link between the injury and the service is recognized by Veterans Affairs Canada.

● (1840)

Either way, we want the system to be consistent. That way some of the red tape can be avoided and we could ensure that veterans do not lose their priority entitlement. That is central to our argument.

This bill also creates categories of veterans; that is another issue. The NDP supports the principle of having a single category of veterans. The bill takes another direction. Veterans of the RCMP are not included in the bill and remain in the regulatory category. I think that a member of the RCMP who suffered a trauma and wanted to get out of the policing environment because it reminds him of the trauma should have hiring priority. He practically gave his life to serve the public. It is only right that the government acknowledge that it has a social and moral obligation to that individual, just as it is only right that the government acknowledge that it has a moral obligation to the people it sends into various conflicts or on various missions.

According to what I read in the veterans' class action suit against the government, the government does not even acknowledge this moral obligation. That is so sad. It is implied. I hope that the veterans will win their case against the government and that their lawsuit will be successful. I hope that the government has a moral duty to people whom it sends into conflicts and who return injured. I hope that we have a moral duty to support them and to ensure that these people get quality care, have a rehabilitation process supported by the government and have access to jobs offered by the government.

There is another side to this coin. At present, we are in a situation where different departments are systematically downsizing. Since the arrival of the majority Conservative government, there has been a series of cuts. Jobs have been systematically cut in different departments, and even if the veterans are given hiring priority, the jobs have to exist. If departments are not hiring, this priority is completely meaningless because there are no jobs available. There is no correlation.

I think this is a weakness that must be studied in committee, and we must ensure that this hiring priority is based on something concrete. It is unrealistic. They will not be able to implement it. I find that too bad.

I will not have time to talk about all the statistics, but there are not many veterans who find jobs in the public service compared to the number of veterans who have access to these types of jobs and the number of veterans who are qualified for these jobs.

We have been told that of the 4,000 veterans who could have been entitled to these jobs, 200 applied and 63 were hired. The employment priority really applies to a very small number of people. That is another aspect that will have to be analyzed in committee to determine what other support could be provided to those members who have finished their military career and those who have been injured in order to ease the career transition to civilian life. We must ensure that there is a transition. For the time being, there are weaknesses in that regard in what we have before us.

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•(1845)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague. I was here when the New Democrats forced the debate on sending our troops into Kandahar under Operation Enduring Freedom. We asked simple questions at that time. Where were our allies? Where was the support? What would they be faced with? We were thrown slogans about boots on the ground and how we were like 21st Neville Chamberlains. We heard this machismo sloganeering that showed that the government had no real plan for what would face our troops in Kandahar.

Now we see this bill, which we support, but I hear the same kind of sloganeering from the government about how it is part of the solution, and sometimes governments should get out of the way.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. Government sent these men and women to put their lives at risk. Government had them have their limbs blown off or suffer PTSD. They did it for the government. Therefore, when I see the government members talk about how government can be part of the solution, that the government should step out of the way, it was the government who put these people, our brave men and women, in these situations. It is the government that has the entire responsibility to work with the private sector and others, but fundamentally it is a government responsibility.

What does my hon. colleague think about these slogans he hears from the Conservative government with respect to its continual refusal to meet its basic obligations to the men and women who served our country?

•(1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, if I contrast the government's campaign and what is actually happening before the courts with our Afghanistan veterans, it is shameful. Absolutely shameful.

Afghanistan veterans are now forced to go to court to have their rights recognized. How can that be? Government lawyers claim that the government does not have a moral obligation towards them. That is totally wrong.

This is doublespeak here. On the one hand, the government claims to support veterans, and on the other hand, it is forcing them to go to court. That is unacceptable. Fortunately we are here to talk about it, otherwise we would only get one side of the story.

I spoke about this issue this evening and in particular about Equitas, and I noticed that there are not many Conservative members on the other side of the House. That is unfortunate. I will take another question if there is time.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague to explain a little further about the class action lawsuit. The Government of Canada and all of the ministers in the front row stood and had their pictures taken, for all of their propaganda purposes, with our men and women and sent them overseas. When

those men and women came home, that same government said that it did not have a moral obligation to follow through on that social contract, which has existed in our country since the First World War: if they serve our country, they will be looked after. The government takes the position that is only there when it is good for the photo ops, but let the veterans stand up for those rights and to take it to court.

Would my hon. colleague explain what he thinks about this attitude of using our men and women as props when it supports the government and then telling those men and women to take it to court when it comes to the moral contract?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, we would like things to be different and to not have this doublespeak, but that is unfortunately the case.

If we are to believe the Conservatives, veterans cost a lot of money. Senator Roméo Dallaire, who is well known, took exception to the rumour that veterans cost a lot of money and that we should not pay for them. That is how some Conservatives think, and they try to negotiate by cutting the costs of our military involvement throughout the world.

When we participate in a military operation in a given area, the primary costs are not related to the intervention itself, but to support for injured soldiers, who need help when they return to Canada. The United States learned that the hard way during the recent conflict in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to rise to speak to Bill C-27. Of course, I will be one of the few in Parliament who actually gets to speak to the bill, because we have gone to the process of closure very quickly.

I think it is unfortunate that closure took place today, when tomorrow and the rest of the week we will have many veterans here on the Hill. "Rock the Hill", they call it.

The Conservatives have not seemed to show much of the courage of their convictions in perhaps having the debate about this particular issue when the veterans are here on the Hill. They are very anxious to get this over with tonight. That is the reality of what the Conservatives have done here with closure. They have taken the opportunity we could have had to have the veterans here to listen to the different points of view of the people in this Parliament on this subject. Conservatives are very happy to get closure on the bill and get it away.

I have the opportunity to speak to the bill at second reading. Of course we support the principle of assisting with priority hiring for injured veterans and doing more for veterans within the civil service. How could anyone in this Parliament not be solid with that principle? What we argue at second reading is principle and how bills should be formed, using the knowledge we all have about the history of the service of the Armed Forces in Canada.

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My father was a veteran of the Second World War. He spent five years in Europe in Bomber Command. He always said that toward the end of the war, the CCF was very popular in Canada, and their numbers were well up. The government respected that and brought in very good programs for veterans when they returned from the war. It did not want to see this turn into a socialist paradise, which may have happened with these veterans who came back. It offered land in Edmonton. My father got a piece of land on a veterans estate. Veterans got an opportunity for low-interest loans to build their houses and to set up their families after being in the war and being away from their communities and their loved ones for the period of time they were in Europe, that five years. Compare that to some of the commitment our servicemen make today of 10 and 15 years overseas.

As well, the government at that time tried to hire many veterans, and my father got a job with the Department of Transport, working in the Arctic, taking care of the airports. The skills matched up in that regard, because he worked in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and that sort of relationship existed at that time.

As well, in every small community across Canada, there were lots of veterans who came back from that big war. The legions were working very well. There was comradeship and an opportunity in every small community to share with many other veterans. I remember growing up in this atmosphere of legions and the respect everyone in the community had for the veterans.

Compare that to today. The veterans come back from a foreign conflict, generally of a terribly undefined nature, where they are not involved in liberating countries. They are involved in inter-regional conflicts that have so many variables attached to them. When they walk away from those conflicts, do they have the honour people had coming out of the Second World War? Do they have the approbation of the citizenry across the country for which they have served? No. That does not happen anymore. Is there a large volume of veterans who can join together in common places like the legion? No. In fact, across the country, legions are shutting down.

In the major city in my riding, Yellowknife, even with Joint Task Force (North) there, the opportunity to maintain the legion has almost failed completely.

• (1855)

The times have changed. There is no structure anymore for veterans, like there was in the past.

The good side of it is that we recognize post-traumatic stress disorder. That was not part of the vernacular of the Second World War. We are much more understanding of the nature of the mental injuries veterans suffer in these conflicts.

Bill C-27 tries to provide some answers, but it is not adequate. We do not think we should change the principle that a veteran is a veteran. That principle should remain in the bill, but it is not there. That is one problem we have with the principles of the bill. They are not dealing with all veterans in the same fashion as they used to be dealt with. They are not taking care of people and keeping the commonality among veterans that is so important.

The Conservative government is offering up the opportunity to go into the public service. The public service has changed so much. It is

not the public service of 1945 to 1950. It is different. More specialized skills and education are required.

People may be put in priority positions that may not work for them. My Liberal colleague talked about the U.S. government program that includes skills identification. Quite clearly, it is important not to put people in jobs they will not be satisfied with and where there may fail. That would not help the veterans.

We need to pay careful attention to these people. They do not have the same opportunities veterans had in the past. They do not have the same volume of strength that 500,000 veterans had. The veterans today are thin in number. They are not a large part of the population. They need more specific attention. The Conservative government should be thinking about how it could provide the services these veterans require that would make their transition to normal civilian life successful.

This debate must continue until we come up with solutions. I look forward to the bill going to committee, because perhaps at that time, we could consider some of its details. We all agree with the principle that we should do more for the veterans, that we should find ways to integrate them into the workforce. How much more could we provide to the bill in committee on some of the issues we have identified in the very short time we have had to talk about this bill? We have a very short time to communicate in the House about the issues surrounding veterans.

We are doing our veterans a disservice by not continuing this debate for a period of time. They are going to be on the Hill, but they will not have the opportunity to speak to parliamentarians so we can carry their message forward in the House. We could do it at committee, but it is not really the same as talking here in the House.

The bill does not go far enough. We want to see it improved. We are willing to send the bill to committee. I encourage the government to take this seriously, to look at the other options put forward in committee, to listen to the witnesses, and to be open to amending the bill to make it work better for the veterans.

• (1900)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his remarks. Certainly I was proud when our government, a few years ago, extended the Bomber Command commendation to our air force veterans from World War II. I indeed hope that the member's family, or perhaps his father himself, got that for his medals.

The member made an interesting point about the so-called Rock the Hill event later this week. As the member may know, it is organized by Canadian Veterans Advocacy. He is asking why are we not having this debate when they are here. I would invite the member to just walk across the hall in the Confederation Building and meet with Canadian Veterans Advocacy, who work out of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore's office.

As a veteran myself, I have been quite offended by some of the work that group does. It is not sincere. It is not based on sound policy. I understand, at committee, that they have acknowledged that their funding has come from unions.

I would invite the member to actually get into the legions and start hearing from members specifically. To suggest that we are not listening to and debating with veterans is insincere. I would like his comments on who he speaks to beyond that group.

● (1905)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, but I do not agree with him. It was a couple of months ago that I had a very long and detailed conversation not only with a retired colonel in Yellowknife, from the Armed Forces, who explained to me many of the details of what was going on with veterans. I also had the opportunity to meet a serviceman who was experiencing the difficulty of getting his condition recognized by the authorities. Here is someone who is still in the Armed Forces, who has post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, and yet has had an incredibly difficult time getting through the bureaucracy to understand how he can get himself healed.

For you to suggest that we are not in conversation with veterans or that we do not hear from other people about the problems in the system is really unfortunate, because we are all committed to doing a good job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Just a polite reminder to hon. members, if they can direct their comments to the Chair from time to time, it helps the Chair to give some time signals and helps the member to guide their comments and stay on track time-wise.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously my question is for my colleague from Western Arctic, but I was shocked at the comments made by the member for Durham. He suggested that funding was coming from unions or other sources. During question period, the Prime Minister mentioned conspiracy theories. This seems a lot like a conspiracy theory that does not make any sense.

In fact, we spend a lot of time in the legions in our ridings, as do all members of the House. I worked with a veteran in my riding who was homeless. He did not have enough money to pay his rent. I will not name names out of respect for the individual. We managed to help him, but not by going through Veterans Affairs Canada. We worked out a solution by working with the municipality. The municipality had to help this veteran by providing him with housing

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until things got sorted out and we could finally work with the government. It took far too much time in my opinion.

My colleague spoke about this. I would like to hear his comments. It is all well and good to talk about hiring and all those things, but we have to look at the whole picture. The reintegration of our veterans is not just a one-step process, and I do not think that what we are seeing is sufficient. I would like him to elaborate on that.

● (1910)

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely that this process is not simply about hiring. It is going to take more than that. In many respects, the veterans are young people who are coming back. They are going to have to continue their work lives. We can look to the past as to how people accomplished that, but this is the modern age, where there are particular skill sets in many cases.

I think of MPs. If we leave our jobs as MPs, we can get skills retraining after one year on this job.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for West Nova, who is also the outstanding chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

As the son of a veteran who spent 36 distinguished years in the Canadian Armed Forces, I can say it truly is a privilege to join the debate today and to express my pride in the generations of men and women who have served our great country. These include my mother, both of my sisters, and my brother-in-law. Among those and my father, there are over 80 years of direct immediate family experience in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am just absolutely so honoured and privileged to have been part of that. I did not join myself, but I think about them every day and I care deeply about our Canadian Armed Forces.

I also consider it an honour to serve on our Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where I have gained an even greater appreciation of our government's efforts on behalf of veterans and their families. I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues on both sides of the House who sit on that committee. I believe genuinely that we all care very much, and collectively we are doing an incredibly good job on behalf of our veterans. I look forward to continuing to do so.

As some of my colleagues have already explained, our government is dedicated to caring for and supporting our men and women in uniform, past and present. As you know, our parliamentary committee is seized with two of the most pressing questions of the day: how can we make the new veterans charter even better; and how best can we state and demonstrate our commitment to Canada's veterans above all, and as well their families? I believe these two questions go to the core of what it means to serve those who have served our country so well.

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The veterans hiring act would build on this. The measures before us would add important new levels of support for veterans and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces by offering them greater access to jobs in the federal public service.

As we meet, both here and at committee, to discuss new measures and enhancements for veterans, I want to make it very clear to Canadians watching that they can also be proud of what we have already accomplished.

Since forming government, we have delivered for Canada's veterans by investing almost \$5 billion in new funding to enhance veterans' benefits, programs, and services. As a result of this new funding, we have been able to implement the new veterans charter as a more modern and comprehensive way to care for and support those who are injured in the line of duty.

Through the new veterans charter, we are now providing full physical and psychosocial rehabilitation services, vocational rehabilitation and career transition services, both immediate and long-term financial support, health care benefits, and one-on-one case management services.

Through these programs, benefits, and services, we are able to provide world-class care for seriously injured veterans, we can provide up to \$75,800 in training assistance for eligible veterans to start a new career, and we can provide a minimum pre-tax income of \$42,426 a year for veterans who are unable to be suitably and gainfully employed as well as for those in Veterans Affairs Canada's rehabilitation program.

On top of those measures, we can help eligible veterans with shovelling snow from their laneways or cutting their grass, we can have health care professionals and case managers visit them in their homes, and we can assist them with the cost of travelling to their medical appointments.

I must say that Veterans Affairs has helped my mother out tremendously.

We do all of these things because we are determined to help injured and ill veterans make the best recoveries possible as quickly as possible, and we are committed to ensuring that all veterans experience a seamless transition to civilian life.

Ensuring veterans have access to meaningful employment is yet another way we are delivering on this. In recognition of their sacrifice to Canada, we are proposing changes that will give qualified veterans the highest level of consideration for jobs in the federal public service. That is why we want to give medically released veterans more opportunities to start new careers in the federal public service.

• (1915)

We would provide priority access for five years for those released from the Canadian Armed Forces because of a service-related injury or illness. This measure would move them to the front of the line for the public service jobs they are qualified to fill and perform. As well, all medically released veterans would see their existing priority entitlement period increased from two years to five years.

Our government is also helping Canada's honourably released veterans to access federal public service job opportunities by proposing two new measures.

First, still-serving military personnel who have at least three years of service would have access to internally advertised positions in the federal public service. This measure would allow them to continue to compete for these internal postings for a full five years after their release from the Canadian Armed Forces.

Second, we would establish a hiring preference for veterans over other eligible applicants for externally advertised hiring processes. This means they could be appointed, if qualified, over other qualified candidates. In the case of the hiring preference for eligible veterans, this new measure would last up to five years from the day they were released from the Armed Forces.

We are doing all of these things because we believe veterans and still-serving members deserve such consideration and because we believe Canada would also be the better for it. Without these changes, we would run the risk of losing the valuable contributions of highly qualified individuals when their military careers end. That is why we will work in close consultation with key partners such as the Public Service Commission, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, and the Department of National Defence to create a fair and appropriate process. This process would allow Canada to continue to benefit from having invested in and supported veterans during their military careers, would ensure our federal workforce is enhanced and enriched by the valuable contributions that highly qualified veterans have to offer, and would at the same time permit eligible veterans to keep serving their country and to hone their experience and skills in a civilian capacity.

In short, these new measures demonstrate the value we place on the skills, the training, and the experience our men and women in uniform acquire in the Canadian Armed Forces. We do not want to lose that.

At the same time, Canada's veterans have done so much to help build our strong, free, and prosperous nation. These measures recognize that they have served Canada with courage and distinction and that they have been willing to sacrifice everything for a better tomorrow. We owe them the same.

I wish this program had been around when my sister and my brother-in-law left the Armed Forces. I am sure they could have benefited from it at that time. They are doing fine, do not get me wrong, but it is a good program. I encourage all members to support this important piece of legislation.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I wonder if he would share the view of the member of Durham who just stood in the House and said that he was offended by veterans who are speaking up on the fact that they have had to take a class action lawsuit. He said that they were not sincere.

Government Orders

I would like to ask this of the member about Kenneth Young, who served with the Royal Canadian Regiment. Is he not sincere? There is David MacLeod, 27 years with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and served in Afghanistan. Is he not sincere? We have Mike Blais, veteran of the Royal Canadian Regiment. Is he not sincere? How about Mark Campbell, severely injured by an IED in Afghanistan and now involved in a class action lawsuit? Is he not sincere?

When the member for Durham stands up and says that they offend him, is it that they are offending him because they do not follow the government's pitiful line on the treatment of veterans? Will the government show them some respect?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That's not what he said.

Mr. Charlie Angus: That is exactly what he said, Mr. Speaker. You are going to hear that all night.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I am not sure that the question is really relevant to the question that is before the House.

• (1920)

Mr. Charlie Angus: That was a speech, Mr. Speaker, so if you are telling me that when a speech is made—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Challenging the Speaker now, Charlie?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Kick him out.

Mr. Phil McColeman: You are not sincere.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Sorry if I have offended your government.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: He should leave this chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member will come to order. We are on questions and comments with the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Members are aware, of course, that the topic before the House is on Bill C-27. As I was saying, it does not appear to me that the question that the hon. member posed is in fact relevant to the question that is before the House, nor—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Points of order—

Mr. David Anderson: Sit down. Show some respect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The member will take his seat.

At the same time, I am certainly quite willing to let the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie field the question if he is so inclined.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak to what the member for Durham might have said or not said as I was not in the House, but I can speak to what the member opposite says or does not say in the House. Quite frankly, I do not often believe some of the things that come out of his mouth, so until I have an opportunity to review what the member for Durham may or may not have said, obviously I cannot comment.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of course agrees with the intent of the bill, which is to foster new opportunities for our veterans. It is a noble intent, but I have two specific questions for my colleague.

The first question is this. Can he tell Canadians and veterans who may be watching exactly how many positions have been cut from the public service over the last three years? The former parliamentary budget officer could not get an answer, but we hear estimates of between 40,000 and 47,000 jobs. Furthermore, there is a job hiring freeze right now in the public sector, so how does that create opportunities for veterans?

Second, would he help us understand why we are not moving to a skills translator system of the kind that is in place in the United States? In this system, the skills and aptitudes of veterans are determined, and they are then lined up for opportunities in the public sector and the private sector. That initiative would cost one-quarter of what the government is presently spending on advertising during the playoffs for veteran messaging. One-quarter of those costs could set up precisely that skills translator system.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, you were obviously distracted by the member for Timmins—James Bay, so you probably did not hear the question in terms of its relevance. I would suggest that those two questions were every bit as irrelevant as the question that came from across the aisle. They do not warrant a response. They are not at all specific to the bill that we are talking about.

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems everyone is in tune with the topic this evening, so I will try to continue.

We are talking about Bill C-27, and a lot has been covered on the bill itself. I look at it as one step toward what we are trying to do for veterans, together. There are probably a lot more steps that we have to take, and we realize that.

I will not go into details about the bill itself. That has been covered quite a bit. However, I would like to go into some of the background of what we have been attempting, together, members, private sector and veterans, to try to improve the lot of veterans and the opportunities for veterans.

For us in the House, it basically started with the new veterans charter. The whole idea was to move from an era where veterans were simply pensioned off rather than concentrating on getting veterans back into society. Those leaving the military should be given opportunities to get upgraded, to get skills and to find opportunities to transition into a full life within their communities.

I think every member of the House shares that wish and ambition. I do not think this is a political issue per se, although we do tend to get a little fixed sometimes on the difference of opinions. The reality is that our country expects us to honour these veterans. Our country expects us to invest in our veterans.

Government Orders

We know that taxpayers in fact have invested a lot in initiatives that take place right across the country. To quote a former veterans affairs minister, Hon. Greg Thompson, “Can you ever do enough for veterans?” We all know the answer is no. It is always a work in progress. There is always a lot that has to be done. Tonight is an example of one small step in the direction of trying to answer some of the questions they have, such as training opportunities, transition opportunities and certainly job opportunities. Not that government alone is ever going to fix it, but government has to set its own. Government has to work with the private sector. It has to work with the veterans groups.

Do we always agree? Absolutely not, whether it is members in a committee or whether it is people from various veterans groups themselves.

At the end of the day, we have to realize that over the years many military members have successfully retired into Canadian society and have not needed veterans affairs services. They are not clients of veterans affairs. They have successfully transitioned, in many cases on their own. With their wonderful training and mental outlook they have on life, they have become very productive members of society in a second career.

There are those who need our help. There are those who are really challenged either by mental or physical difficulties, some in active duty and some maybe in training exercises, but the kind of pressure and incidents they have run into means we have to pay attention to their needs.

What I have observed around the country, and in my particular riding, is there are those who are doing things and it is not government. One example I think of with great pride is Maple Grove Education Centre in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. It has a memorial club, all students, all volunteers. They built a monument to the Afghan soldiers who passed away. They did it with their own fundraising. It is an amazing memorial to those people who they believe, as young Canadians, sacrificed for the future and the betterment of our country, and did their bit in the world because they were asked to.

Surely, if young people can get that message, we can all understand the opportunities out there. We do have to listen. We will disagree. We will never totally be on the same page as to what is right and wrong, but we have to continue to make progress. We owe that to the military and to the veterans in our country.

I know most of us went through the Day of Honour not long ago. Next to the Greenwood air base in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, in the village called Kingston, there was a big turnout of veterans, military and interested community citizens.

● (1925)

Some time ago I was fortunate to be on a special committee of the House, looking at Afghanistan. We had a lot of witnesses and heard a lot of stories. The one that struck me was from a very brave woman from Afghanistan who said to us that we should remember that Canadians would get impatient with the progress that was taking place, but that we were making a difference. Our military had made a huge difference. There were now water supplies where there had not been before. Thousands of young girls were being educated and it was now over seven million. She asked us to understand that it was

not her husband's view as a male about women that would make a difference, it was her son's view. It was a generational change and that was what the military had done in helping a foreign country, in helping people they did not even know because they knew it was the right thing to do.

Our job is to look after those who are coming home. Our job is to provide opportunity. Our job collectively as parliamentarians is to understand and honour these people who have done so much for us. Tonight we are looking at one step, one piece of the progress we are going to make on this long road. We get frustrated sometimes in thinking about what could be or what should be. We have to remember, as we get in an animated conversation, there are a lot of good initiatives in place. A lot of good things are happening. A lot of progress is being made. Certainly a lot of people are gaining because we all have ensured they get the services and support they need. It is not the end of the story. It is not the end of the road. There is a long way to go and we have to keep at it.

I know we get quite worked up sometimes as parliamentarians. We get exercised over issues and details, but at the end of the day, I believe every member in the House believes and supports the military and supports the veterans. Whether we agree or disagree, at the end of the day we have an obligation to ensure initiatives take place that will support and help our veterans. They are watching us and measuring what we are doing. It is not about whether we agree or disagree. It is whether we together make progress where in a few years down the road we can look back and say that we supported the charter when it came in. It is supposed to be a living document. It is supposed to help veterans make the transition. All parties agreed when it first came in that it was the right way to go. We have to keep working to ensure it is the right initiative and the right document with the right results. We owe that to our veterans.

I will not go on any longer except I certainly hope we will support this initiative, not because it is the end of the progress and the end of the road we are travelling, but it is one step we can measure and put forward that offers more opportunity. Whether it is enough or not enough, we can debate that on and on. I expect there will always be a debate about whether we can do more. I believe we always will find that yes, we can, but let us do it together.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech, which was hardly partisan at all, much like the work he does as the chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I really appreciate that.

However, he spoke very little about the bill itself. That is a change because it has been talked about quite a bit. Nonetheless, I have found one or two flaws in this bill.

Government Orders

If the department does not recognize that a veteran's injury is related to his service and then that decision is overturned by the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, I think that it would place the veteran at a disadvantage because the five-year entitlement period would apply only after the board had rendered its decision, once three or four years had already passed.

Does the member agree that we need to amend the bill when it goes to committee and correct the flaw that I mentioned?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Kerr: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that a very productive member of the committee has just asked the question. I cannot talk about what amendments may or may not take place. It will be given a very thorough review.

I agree that one of the problems we face has caused a lot of distress for veterans, and that is the gap between when they leave the military and when Veterans Affairs picks up. We have to realize, with great commitment, that the benefit of the doubt has to be given to the veterans. Sometimes that seems to get lost in the process.

Whether veterans are recognized immediately is a challenge we should never let go of because if they are medically discharged from the military, we have to respect the fact that they are leaving their military career, not by choice, but because of the result of something that happened. They therefore should get full consideration when they are looked at in these types of programs.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who has served in the military, I am very interested in this whole issue and I would like to ask my hon. colleague, who has said some very fine words, what he thinks of the fact that there has been an unprecedented level of activism among our veterans in recent years?

When I was in the military, one hardly ever heard from our veterans. One hardly ever heard from our military. However, today, there is not a day that goes by without us hearing from a veteran, or a member of a veteran's family.

Does the member not think the government has come up short in terms of dealing with our veterans? Yes, there have been some very fine sentiments expressed, but have we actually served our veterans the way we need to? In this case, will the jobs be there for those veterans who seek that kind of employment when they leave the armed forces?

• (1935)

Mr. Greg Kerr: Mr. Speaker, certainly I know as a veteran the member understands that it is a good thing we are hearing from the veterans. It is called democracy. We believe it is important we hear what they are saying first hand. Even if we do not agree, or do not necessarily like what is being said everyday, it is important that we hear it. This is part of the progress of saying that an initiative may have not worked a hundred per cent and that maybe we have to review it.

However, it never means that we start with a premise that nothing is being done for the veterans. That is just absolutely wrong. There is a lot of good stuff and let us not leave that sense of fear among veterans that there are no good programs and services. What we have to do is ask how we improve on them. How do we ensure that this

initiative really does work for the veterans? That is our challenge and I believe if we work together, it will work and it will be very successful.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of serving for a time on the veterans affairs committee, which the member chaired very capable, and his passion is evident.

My question in many ways relates to the comments that the member for Timmins—James Bay was getting all worked up about. I would ask the member, in his position as chair, or really just as a parliamentarian, when he hears from independent advocacy groups, can independence and trust be placed in a group if they work out of offices of parliamentarians running contrary to the government and if they are funded by an organization—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In all fairness, when I asked a question about the same matter, I was told that it was not relevant. It seems odd to me that the Speaker would rule that the same question on the same topic would suddenly be ruled as relevant to questions and comments. I find that very surprising.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Certainly, members would know that issues of relevance are in fact compelled by the Standing Orders. The earlier intervention that I made in respect to the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay's comment, indeed, I did not feel was relevant at the time. I still allowed the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie to respond.

In the same vein, with the hon. member for Durham, we are getting into an area that is really questioning the veracity and/or legitimacy of certain advocacy organizations. Admittedly, it is an area that concerns the relationship between the topic at hand and the various organizations that represent them. I would just remind all hon. members to guard that type of commentary in relevance to the question in front of the House today.

I do not know if the hon. member for Durham was finished. Perhaps he could just finish up quickly and then we will go to the member for West Nova.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the clarification. I will rephrase my question this way for the hon. member in his role as a committee chair. In the rules of his committee and in his experience in that position, would it be normal for his committee to hear from a witness who is also an intern, a staff member, or a volunteer within the office of a parliamentarian? Would that be appropriate within the procedures of his committee?

Mr. Greg Kerr: Mr. Speaker, actually, I liked your answer on the topic very much.

In this study that we just finished, which we will hear more about tomorrow, we heard from some 55 or so witnesses who came before us. There were a variety of differences in opinion on the programs, and some would disagree with each other on occasion, and so on. We were careful not to go into why they were there or if they were from a particular organization or group, unless they registered that they were with an organization such as Wounded Warriors, et cetera.

The safe answer would be that we have heard from many different individuals, as veterans, with many different ideas. We tried to listen to them all.

Government Orders

● (1940)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the House that I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I am pleased to rise to speak to any bill that seeks to find meaningful and lasting employment for the men and women of the Canadian Forces who have served our country so well. For the last many years in Afghanistan and Libya, in the Balkans, and across the world before that, the men and women of the Canadian Forces have accepted unlimited liability when they volunteered to serve. They served on the understanding that when they came back, we would take care of them. That is our sacred obligation.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that this bill would do enough. It is a textbook example of how the Conservative government would take a half measure and exploit our universal support for our veterans to pass it as legislation.

There is no substance beyond the title. One of the most substantial efforts we can make on behalf of veterans is to help them find a career when they are released, medically or voluntarily, from the Canadian Forces. This bill might do this for a very small few, though I am afraid that it simply would not be enough.

Currently, medically released members of the Canadian Forces who served full-time are eligible for priority hiring as a regulatory priority, regardless of the reason for the medical release.

The bill before us, Bill C-27, would build on a piece of legislation introduced in November 2013, Bill C-11, which the government introduced as part of its communications plan to address the backlash created by the closures of nine Veterans Affairs Canada centres in communities across the country. Addressing some of the major insufficiencies of Bill C-11, the government has decided to surmount it with this new legislation.

This bill would amend the Public Service Employment Act to increase the priority of Canadian Forces members who are released due to a service-related illness or injury, from fourth to first overall. Importantly, this bill would further extend the eligibility to all reservists, including cadet organizations, administration and training service personnel, and Canadian Rangers, as well as increasing the time period of eligibility from two years to five years, retroactive to members released as of April 2012.

Additionally, Bill C-27 would build on its predecessor by increasing access to internal postings of the public service and priority over all others for external postings to Canadian Forces members and former members of the Canadian Forces who served at least three years and were honourably released. Furthermore, Bill C-27 would amend the definition of “veteran” in the Public Service Employment Act from the traditional definition of an individual with First or Second World War service, to include someone who “has served at least three years in the Canadian Forces, has been honourably released within the meaning of regulations made under the National Defence Act and is not employed in the public service for an indeterminate period..”.

On its face, there is nothing problematic in these changes, but as a solution for hiring veterans, it truly falls short. Nothing in Bill C-27 or its public relations counterpart, Bill C-11, would ensure that

veterans will get jobs. It is one thing to have priority to jobs in the public service, but it remains contingent on possessing the skills that match any number of the public service jobs that exist. In many cases, there is a wide gap between the skills possessed by a member of the Canadian Forces and the skills required in the posting.

There is nothing in this bill that would offer any form of skills translation or upgrading. Priority would be contingent on possessing skills that match the public service job first, and this bill offers no skills upgrading.

In addition, with the freeze on hiring, what jobs are Conservatives proposing that these veterans would fill? The government has guaranteed that there are no available jobs in the government. According to recent reports, the Conservative government will likely eliminate 30,000 more federal jobs on top of the 20,000 that it has terminated since 2012. When one couples 50,000 fewer jobs in the public service with the government's freeze on hiring, there is not much left that is available to released veterans.

In a piece in the *National Post* earlier this year, Barbara Kay wrote:

Recently the government proudly announced two new initiatives. The first pledges to give priority to veterans seeking civil service jobs. But Mr. Parent points out that thousands of veterans are incapable of working due to injuries suffered during their service. And since hiring freezes are in place over most federal departments, “priority” consideration for frozen jobs is not of much use.

Mr. Parent, the Veterans Ombudsman, also expressed concern that under the changes, which increase priority for Canadian Forces veterans, the system would have to adjudicate an individual's file to determine if the medical release is related to service or not. This will be important, considering that it will be the difference between priority to internal postings or external postings. It would create separate classes of veterans for federal priority hiring.

● (1945)

When dealing with seriously injured veterans, it is also important to consider that injured veterans are unlikely to find employment in line with their initial goals. Particularly since the beginning of the conflict in Afghanistan, our Canadian Forces are often not career soldiers. Many are or were reservists, who intended to continue in or return to civilian employment. When someone is injured, a lot of that goes right out the window. It is a long and often endless road from recovery to rehabilitation, and finally to employment. This bill neither shortens this road nor hastens the completion of one's effort.

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The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs heard from experts who agree that the key to successful rehabilitation from a serious disability is early intervention. Judy Geary, vice-president of work reintegration at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, explained to the committee, in November, that after six months off work, only 50% of disabled workers ever return to full-time employment, and that following two years of unemployment, re-employment is rare. It is unfair to present this bill as a panacea when it is unlikely to bear much fruit for rehabilitating Canadian Forces members.

It is largely with this in mind that the Department of Veterans Affairs has embarked on its most recent advertising initiative. At this point we have all seen it, given that the government has spent millions of dollars plastering it throughout prime time playoff slots. It is great production value, with a punchline that Veterans Affairs Canada can be counted on to provide career transition services. Despite all of this, not much comes from following the 1-800 number or the web link. One arrives at the standard web page where it boasts about this bill and having provided funding for 296 veterans. These are \$1,000 grants to develop resumé. That is pretty thin gruel for a man or woman who has served in our Canadian Forces.

Recently, I had an opportunity to question the minister and deputy minister of Veterans Affairs on the estimates. It became clear that while the Conservatives had the audacity to increase their Veterans Affairs advertising budget by \$4 million to promote the Conservative government, we learned, to our amazement, that they are only spending \$296,000 on those services themselves. It is more on advertising, less on services. Veterans deserve better jobs and services.

In the United States, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the federal government, along with many other private employers, use a skills translation tool, which allows veterans to determine the jobs for which they are best suited. Better yet, they help to determine how to translate the skills they already possess and determine which skills build the bridge to another.

Contrary to the opinion expressed by the minister before the committee last week, not all veterans feel best suited to take up jobs in policing once they are released by the forces. Like Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, they want to be financial planners. Like Corporal Mark Fuchko, they want to be lawyers.

By present estimates, a skills translator, the calibre of which has been used in the United States for over three years, would cost a fourth of what the government is spending on advertising the \$1,000 grants it will provide to assist CF members in writing their resumé. While I do not wish to detract from the possibility of jobs that might be created by public service priority hiring, the government has many other opportunities that it refuses to exploit, in favour of closing regional offices and advertising itself.

While I am glad that the government is finally acting on a recommendation put forward by the Canadian Forces Advisory Council that it has had before it for the length of its time in power, more than eight years now, I have sadly come to the conclusion that it is nothing more than a public relations exercise. As always, its talk is much more than what it actually does. I believe our Canadian

Forces members deserve the very best resources for translating their valuable skills learned during their time in the military into jobs in civilian life. I do not think that this bill does it.

Liberals will support the bill, but grudgingly. The government will have to demonstrate much more solidly a desire to help our veterans and Canadian Forces members find jobs and rehabilitate before it can tout itself as a champion for veterans and for the military.

• (1950)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague. I have to say that I enjoyed working with him and the rest of the committee to come up with what will be tabled tomorrow. I think he would agree that it will be another example of progress.

However, the member mentioned that this bill is not a panacea. Of course it is not a panacea and there is no silver bullet. There are measures that will address an issue and there are other measures that will address other issues, some of which will be tabled tomorrow and we will see how that turns out.

I have a couple of points and then a question.

First, veterans do watch hockey and every year there are 730,000 calls to that number that are answered, and services are given, which is a lot of calls a day.

With respect to job measures, there is a variety of programs. This is simply one measure to address one area. There are others, such as hire a veteran program where we have worked with Sanovas, 3M, and Intuit Canada; helmets to hardhats; and various other programs out there. The member is right, there is no panacea, it does not exist.

I want to ask the member about skills education and transferring, and upgrading education.

We already have in place \$75,800 for a member to upgrade his or her skills, and if he or she cannot use it, a spouse can use it. Would the member not agree that, again, it is no panacea, but it is a nice measure that would help a lot of folks develop those skills to get those kinds of jobs?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Edmonton Centre for all of his hard, collaborative work on our committee, and we will see the fruit of that tomorrow.

The member spoke about the \$75,800, but what I heard at committee was that very few people actually accessed that program. I heard that from those who came before our committee who wished to study accounting or law. Frankly, accessibility to these programs is a fact that the Veterans Ombudsman also brought forward.

Government Orders

To respond to the member's question, would it not be much better, for a quarter of the price of the ads that the Conservatives put on TV, that we use the skills translator? It would help our veterans determine their real skills and aptitude that could be translated into jobs, and not just the hope of a job in the public service, where it is hopeless right now frankly, but jobs in private industry. This is what they are doing in the United States.

There are some who have the aptitude to take advantage of the \$75,800, but many thousands more would be advantaged by a proper skills translator.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are almost at the 70th anniversary of D-Day, which is a moment that makes us consider the incredible sacrifice that our men and women have made. They are often called the greatest generation, and I would argue that the veterans today are still the greatest generation. Therefore, I am very concerned when I see the veterans who have had to go to court to fight for basic compensation from the current government. They are told by the government that its position is, “at no time in Canada's history has any alleged 'social contract' or 'social covenant' having the attributes pleaded by the plaintiffs been given effect in any statute, regulation, or as a constitutional principle, written or unwritten”.

The position of the current Conservative Party is that if one risks one's life for the people of this country, when one returns, there is not a fundamental obligation or social covenant that Canadians expect. The current government does not believe that exists.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what he thinks about a government that keeps telling us how great it is that it puts ads during hockey games, but goes to court and tells veterans that there is no such thing as a social covenant or an obligation to them.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, of course, the member for Timmins—James Bay has focused right in on the issue.

I have frequently asked the minister in this House why is it that in the House we speak of a sacred contract declared by Sir Robert Borden many years ago, of which the member for Durham spoke of earlier. It is a sacred contract that obliges us to look after our veterans. It is our first obligation.

Conservatives speak of it in the House, yet their hired lawyers in British Columbia deny that the sacred contract exists. They say it was mere political talk and tout designed to get votes. Well, the way the Conservative government uses the term “sacred contract”, I actually believe its lawyers, that it is just designed to get votes.

Last week I learned that the current government has increased its advertising budget by \$4 million, yet the Conservatives have increased the budget for a program called “career transition counselling” by \$11,000, which is 11 more resumés than they had funded before. Resumés alone do not find jobs.

The current government is failing our veterans and the Conservatives are failing in their commitment to honour our social contract.

● (1955)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to deal with what I believe is a really

important issue that Canadians want us to respond to and to do what we can for those who have served our great nation.

It has been a privilege of mine that I was afforded the opportunity to be a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I served for just over three years. I have a very high appreciation of the commitment and pride of those who choose to serve in the forces. One of things members of the forces recognize is the degree to which Canadian society as a whole has assigned so much value, appreciation, and thanks to those who made the decision to serve their country.

Earlier today through members' statements, I had the opportunity to express appreciation and to offer thanks to those members who have served in the past and their families and those members who are currently serving. Yesterday there was the recognition of Canadian Forces Day. Canadians from coast to coast to coast have recognized the valuable contributions of the past and today by those who have put their name forward and served our great country.

I hear a lot about the importance of what happens after an individual has had the opportunity to serve. I go to what I think is one of the greatest organizations that has had the right attitude in terms of those individuals who served, retired, and want to get engaged. I printed something from the Commissionaires website, an organization I have made reference to in the past. The website says:

Trusted, Everyday, Everywhere Commissionaires is Canada's premier security company, offering a unique combination of integrity, experience and innovation.

What I like is their mission. Their mission is to hire and support veterans. I would argue that no organization has done more in terms of being able to reach out to the degree to which our Commissionaires from coast to coast to coast have. They have done a phenomenal job in providing opportunities for retired service personnel.

Whether it is security guards, mobile patrols, everything from the taking of fingerprints to high-profile positions of security such as in medical labs to bases, it has taken the opportunity to demonstrate in a very tangible way that individuals who serve our country do have skill sets that can benefit society as a whole.

There are certain skill sets that are a given when a person is in the military. Some of those that come to mind are discipline, doing things in a timely manner, developing good teamwork, responsibilities, and skills.

One of the things that comes to mind is that some of the best cooks we would find in our country have been trained through our Canadian Armed Forces. We have specialty cooks who get the Red Seal. There are many different skill sets that are given to members of the forces and ultimately we could do so much more in terms of recognizing those skill sets.

● (2000)

I listened to my colleague, the member for Guelph, who has done an admirable job as the Liberal Party's critic for veterans affairs. He talks a great deal about the importance of taking career transition services seriously. If the government were to make that a priority issue, I and members of the Liberal Party would argue that we would have far greater success at finding employment for individuals who are retiring today from our Canadian Forces.

Government Orders

I love the contrast that the member puts to the floor of the House. All it takes is political will. We see a government that seems to be focused on political spin. We have a bill before us that is hard not to support. How can we not support the principle of the bill and allow it to go to committee? What our veterans really want to see is something that is a whole lot more tangible, something that is not going to create a false hope.

When we talk about this legislation, there are many current members of our forces and many veterans who are starting to believe that there are going to be hundreds or potentially thousands of jobs created by this particular piece of legislation. That is not going to happen. Look at the dramatic cuts to our civil service over the last few years. There are tens of thousands of jobs that have been lost or that are committed to being cut into the future. We have asked about the degree to which we can anticipate what kinds of numbers will follow out of the passage of this bill, and we have not gotten an answer from the Conservatives.

In part, it is because the Conservatives are more concerned about how they might be able to develop a positive spin and try to give the appearance that they are doing a lot for our vets. If the government wanted to do something a whole lot more tangible, I would make the humble suggestion that they listen to what the member for Guelph, as the Liberal Party's critic on veterans affairs, has talked about in terms of the career transition services that could be made available. The money is there. We have seen how tax dollars have been squandered. My colleague from Ottawa often refers to the waste that takes place in advertising. The last numbers that I heard were in excess of \$600 million. Imagine, \$600-plus million that is going to pat the Conservative government and this Prime Minister on the back to try to convince Canadians that they are doing a really good job. The Conservatives are not doing the good job that the Conservatives think they are doing.

The government should funnel some of that money to where it really matters. If they say that our veterans are important to us today, my challenge to the government is to then make it a higher priority in a very real sense. They could adopt the bill being proposed by my colleague from Ottawa who wants to depoliticize some of the advertising, and take some of the money that we spend on that advertising and funnel it in to the area of transition services. Let us get some of these retiring members and enhance their skill sets through post-secondary education, quite possibly on-the-job training. There are unlimited ideas out there that would make a significant difference in the lives of our military personnel who are looking at retiring and of their families.

● (2005)

All it takes is strong leadership, and that leadership needs to be coming from the Prime Minister's Office and the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Talk is cheap. What our vets want is action. My colleague from Montreal made reference to the fact that we have veterans today who are complaining more than they ever have. I think we need to stand up and take note of that fact. There is a reason they are doing—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid the member for Winnipeg North has exhausted his time. Perhaps in questions and comments he can raise additional points. Questions and comments.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened, not needing my ear set, to my hon. colleague. I do enjoy his comments most of the time.

I want to draw a comparison. The member talked about the “massive cuts” and so on we have made. In fact, the number pales compared to the cuts they made in 1995. That was then, and there were reasons to do that and that is okay.

However, the real numbers are roughly 20,000 positions and about 12,000 people. It is not tens of thousands of people on the street. Most of those were through attrition over a period of time. Organizations as big as the public service are always hiring. Whether they are downsizing or not, they are always hiring. The number may not be as big as he or anybody would like at this point, but presumably, this stage of our economy and public service are not going to stay this way forever. We are talking about the long term. All of these measures should not be just for today or tomorrow. They should be for the long term.

We do not agree that this is one measure. Again, there is no panacea. There is no silver bullet. This is one measure that over the longer term will benefit more veterans than it might benefit today or tomorrow.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to recognize that what we are really talking about in the life of the government, and this is a conservative estimate, is 30,000 jobs. These are public service jobs. What we are talking about is staff years. The Conservatives can say that these are people who are retiring and the number of people affected is not as high as the actual numbers. However, we are talking about staff years and jobs that have been lost, not to mention the services Canadians receive because of being cut back. These are, in fact, positions.

We cannot have a dramatic reduction of the civil service and then go out and say to retiring military members that we are going to be hiring military personnel at a time when we have these massive cuts to our civil service. There are fewer jobs. There are fewer staff years.

More could be done if the government would follow advice and deal with transitional services. Invest in transitional services. More military personnel would directly benefit if the government made that a higher priority.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the theme my colleague mentioned when he said that talk was cheap.

It is true that talk is cheap. What is not cheap is advertising on television. Here are the facts, and it is not pleasant for the government members to hear them. In the Conservative government's eight years, it has spent \$610 million on advertising. Annually it is spending \$42 million on the economic action plans. It has erected 9,000 billboards across Canada at a cost of \$29.5 million. The Conservative government cannot refute it, and it cannot look their constituents in the eyes and justify this kind of expenditure, not when there are these kinds of needs among our veterans for retraining, for purpose-driven retraining, to go forward in the public and private sectors.

Government Orders

The member for Edmonton Centre says he has the answer in terms of how many jobs have been cut. He does not have the answer. The government will not even give the information to the Parliamentary Budget Officer to confirm whether it is 40,000 or 47,000 jobs lost, and there is a hiring freeze on.

My question for the member is simple. Do we not actually have an obligation to stop this silly, unjustifiable partisan spending and to invest in the things that matter to our veterans to give them a new fresh start?

● (2010)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, it is about priorities. What we have seen is the government talking a lot about the vets, but it has fallen short in terms of results. It can spend hundreds of millions on useless advertising, and the number of veterans who are calling in with issues of concern continues to climb.

I will suggest that the Prime Minister has bad priorities. If the government wants to rectify the problem, all it needs to do is readjust its priorities and make the veterans and retiring military personnel of Canada a higher priority. If the government does that, it will get more support from the vets. Our vets, in essence, will have that much more to look forward to.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the veterans hiring act.

Canadians, regardless of age or gender, have been directly affected and impacted by what our brave men and women in uniform have done for our country throughout our history. Chances are that we know or knew of a family member or friend who is currently serving or who has served in the Canadian Forces. This is definitely the case for me.

My wife's grandfather, Philip Lavoie, for example, fought as a soldier in World War I at Vimy Ridge and was wounded twice during the Great War. My wife's father, Brendan McSherry, served as a medical officer in the reserves. My own father was in the Royal Canadian Air Force for over two decades, and for my part, I served for 20 years in the Canadian army as an officer in the Corps of Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers before I became a member of Parliament.

As yet another way to recognize the service and sacrifice of our veterans as well as their desire to continue serving their country when their military careers are over, our government has brought forward Bill C-27.

The legislation before us is aimed at giving veterans and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces greater opportunities to start new careers. It is also a way for Canada to continue to benefit from their skills, experience, and leadership. However, as we discuss the veterans hiring act, it is important to remember that this is not be the only way we would assist veterans who want to pursue new jobs and rewarding new careers when they transition to civilian life.

With the time I have today, I would like to speak to how these measures would assist our veterans in their transition to civilian life

and the other important ways we are helping veterans find meaningful employment following their military careers.

I think it is helpful to start by reminding this House why post-military careers are so critical to the well-being of Canada's veterans and their families. First and foremost, as each of us knows from our own experiences, the work we do goes a long way in defining who we are as individuals. It greatly influences our sense of self, our level of personal satisfaction, and even how others see us.

Our men and women in uniform, of course, are no different. Their sense of identity is strongly tied to their military careers and experience. Indeed, for many of them, military service to their country is all they have known for the majority of their adult lives. That desire to serve or lead does not end when they are released from the Canadian Armed Forces.

In fact, the average age of those members releasing from the military is dropping steadily. Today the average new veteran is just 37 years old. That is exactly how old I was when I left the Canadian army. Most of these men and women have the drive and desire to find new jobs and start new careers. Their time in the military has provided them with skills that make them an asset to any employer. Their service has taught them how to organize, prioritize, effectively manage staff, and make decisions under pressure.

● (2015)

[*Translation*]

Canadian Armed Forces soldiers and veterans are admired for their leadership, teamwork and the fact that they faithfully and effectively carry out their duties to serve their country, both at home and abroad.

Their skills, training and experience make them good candidates to work in the federal public service. That is why our government has made it a priority to support veterans who are looking for a new job to help them find meaningful work. Thanks to our leadership, veterans will be getting more support as they transition from military to civilian life.

To gain a better understanding of veterans' needs and expectations, our government committed to conducting a series of studies in recent years. This project, titled "Life After Service Study", yielded much-needed results. It gave us a better idea of what is happening with the 7,600 individuals who leave military life each year, including the 1,000 men and women who are released for medical reasons, either injuries or illness. It is important to underscore the fact that there is no such thing as a typical veteran. They are anywhere from 18 to 98 years old.

Some of them served during the Second World War or in Korea, others served in Bosnia or Afghanistan. Some were never deployed.

Just over half of them have more than 20 years of service. However, a large number of them were released with less than two years of military service. Lastly, two-thirds of all veterans are of working age. They are less than 65 years old.

Government Orders

[English]

This diversity means that we should not use a cookie-cutter approach to assisting veterans who need our help and support. However, there are some general conclusions we can reach.

First, employment is important to a successful transition. Nine out of ten new veterans start a second career after their release from the military.

Second, most of these veterans report that the experience, education, and training they gain in the military helps them in their new jobs.

Third, the majority report that their transition to civilian life was relatively easy. However, some veterans report experiencing a difficult transition, particularly those who are medically or involuntarily released from the military.

Our government understands this reality, which is why we have developed a comprehensive veterans transition action plan, an ambitious new strategy that pulls together all our rehabilitation programs, transition services, and employment initiatives. The veterans hiring act is part of this overall strategy, but as I mentioned earlier, it is only one initiative in a larger suite of solutions.

To ensure that Canada's veterans have the support they need to transition with the utmost success, we offer full rehabilitation services to meet the physical, psychological, and vocational needs of our veterans. The goal is straightforward. We want to ensure that a veteran's health and well-being are not barriers to his or her successful transition.

Last fall, the Minister of Veterans Affairs also introduced new measures to make our vocational rehabilitation program more responsible and flexible. As a result, eligible veterans have faster access to more training support. However, these services are designed specifically for our medically released veterans. That is why we also have our employment strategy, which is designed to help all veterans, whether they have a service-related injury or not. This legislation is part of that effort. It would create better access to jobs in our federal public service. We are also creating opportunities for veterans within corporate Canada as well as with public sector employers at other levels of government.

In addition, we are conducting ongoing research into the issues and the challenges facing veterans who want to keep working after their military service ends. For example, what kind of help are veterans seeking, and how are we responding to meet their needs? Our government understands that veterans are looking for good, reliable advice and assistance that meets their specific needs. What we have found is that many veterans need help effectively communicating their military experience and expertise to potential civilian employees. The reality is that more often than not, employees do not understand how their skills and training apply in the civilian workforce, and we need to bridge that gap.

For example, take the work of a military logistics officer. Does the average employer really know what such a person does or did in his or her military career? Do potential employers understand how these veterans were team leaders who learned to get a tough job done in difficult conditions with demanding deadlines? Do potential

employers know that these veterans may have been high-level leaders managing budgets, allocating resources, and inspiring people to work together to achieve a common mission?

We need to bridge that language divide in the same way we need to close the cultural gap between serving in the military and working in civilian life. Our government is spearheading a variety of innovative strategies to do just that.

The veterans hiring act before us today proposes four key initiatives.

First, we want to create a statutory hiring priority in the federal public service for veterans whose medical release is attributable to their service.

- (2020)

Second, we are proposing that the existing two-year priority entitlement for all medically released veterans be extended to five years.

Third, we want still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have at least three years of service to be able to compete for internally advertised federal jobs. This hiring preference would also continue for five years after their release date from the armed forces.

Fourth, we want to give eligible veterans hiring preference when it comes to externally advertised positions in the federal public service. This means that if a veteran is just as qualified as any other candidate applying for a federal job, the preference would be to hire the veteran. We think this sends a powerful message to the private sector that we understand the unique skills, leadership, and professionalism veterans offer, that we are putting veterans first, and that we hope businesses and other levels of government will follow our lead.

That is also the goal of our hire a veteran initiative, which aims to encourage employers to put an emphasis on hiring veterans not just to support our country's former military personnel but also as a way to strengthen their workforces and remind all Canadians of the important contributions and sacrifices veterans have made building our country.

So far, by working in tandem with the Canadian Armed Forces and Canada Company, we have recruited more than 200 employers to participate in the program. We have been working with other partners who are equally determined to think outside the box when it comes to helping veterans with this transition process. That is why we are a supporter and founding member of the Veterans Transition Advisory Council. It is a blue-ribbon panel that reads like a who's who of corporate Canada, whether it is Air Canada, the Royal Bank of Canada, General Electric, TD Waterhouse, or J.P. Morgan Securities, just to name a few.

Our government established this advisory council through Veterans Affairs Canada, in partnership with the not-for-profit organization True Patriot Love Foundation. The council is providing the Minister of Veterans Affairs with advice on how to support veterans in transitioning from the military to successful civilian careers. As a result, the advisory council is coming up with imaginative ideas to overcome systemic barriers and help veterans make a rewarding return to civilian life.

Government Orders

This council also sprang directly from some of our first forays into a veterans employment strategy, including our \$150,000 contribution toward the launch of a Canadian version of the Helmets to Hardhats program. Helmets to Hardhats is an innovative partnership between government, the building trades, and private companies to help veterans find apprenticeships and well-paying jobs in the trades and construction industry. Over the program's first two years, we have seen dozens of employers and more than 1,200 veterans register.

In short, we are doing everything we can to find new ways to help veterans who want to start new careers in their civilian lives. We are trying to tailor these solutions to their individual needs.

Bill C-27 is a great initiative. It is a practical, effective, and honourable initiative, one that would deliver meaningful results to our veterans. Therefore, I urge all members to support this legislation and I encourage the NDP to bring its union bosses onside.

Believe it or not, the Union of National Defence Employees does not think Canada's veterans, who have sacrificed for our country, deserve to be put at the front of the line, ahead of civil servants. I disagree. In recognition of their service, they deserve the support they need to gain meaningful employment.

I recently visited all of the Legions in my riding and took the time to speak with Legion members and veterans. I know that the veterans of the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell support the bill and are encouraged by the leadership that our government is taking in caring for and supporting our veterans.

Our government knows that veterans deserve the support they need to succeed and thrive in the civilian workforce. We will continue to act for veterans and we are committed to achieving these important goals.

• (2025)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to stand up and give the hon. member a bit of a compliment, but then he slants the unions in terms of union bosses. There is no such thing as a union boss. That is the first thing he should understand.

A couple of weeks ago I did a press conference in Halifax, where DND is laying off 30 commissionaires, and every single one of them is a veteran. They are being laid off from the fire service, the watch service they have on the dockyard at the Cape Scott yard in Halifax.

I want to let the member know we support the legislation. We hope to improve it at committee. However, that said, how can the government on the one hand stand up and say it is supporting veterans and wants to hire veterans, when on the other hand the Department of National Defence is laying off 30 veterans from Halifax? It is a simple question. How does it hire veterans when at the same time it is laying them off?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I think that is the importance of this legislation. When veterans are seeking a second career, particularly a career in civilian life, they would be moved to the front of the list, provided that they have the skill set necessary to do the job within the public service.

I think Canadians understand that there is an ebb and flow in terms of how many people actually work for the federal government

at any particular time, and that the government, much like businesses, changes over time in terms of where its resources are.

The key thing about this legislation is that veterans who seek meaningful employment after their military career would receive priority treatment in being chosen for that work, provided that they have the skill set necessary for that job.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am curious. I want to thank the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his comments, but when he goes to his Legion and touts this bill, does he tell them as well, “By the way, we have cut tens of thousands of jobs, and there are not likely to be any opportunities. Oh, and there is a job freeze as well, so it is unlikely that there will be any jobs”? Really, this is just creating a lot of false hope.

Does the hon. member ever look beyond the borders and look to other models? He talked about innovation and new ways of doing things. Did he look beyond the borders and look at these skills translators in the United States, which actually align the skills of the veterans with jobs, not just in the public service but in private industry as well? There are thousands of job opportunities, and they are harmonizing. They are lining them up.

It is not enough to just help somebody create a resumé at \$1,000 a pop from the \$296,000 that has been dedicated to the program. We can juxtaposition that against an increase of \$4 million for advertising for Veterans Affairs.

We have a narcissistic Prime Minister and a narcissistic government that would rather tout itself than truly invest in veterans. Have you told the members of your Legion that?

• (2030)

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

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am surprised to hear this coming from the critic for veterans affairs in the Liberal Party, because in asking that question, he seems to be showing an ignorance or a lack of knowledge about some of the programs that are offered.

In my speech, I spoke about this legislation being an initiative within a suite or a family of solutions to help veterans back into the workforce. The member should know well that we have programs that will fund up to \$75,000 for veterans to develop new skills to help them reintegrate into the workforce. There is no timeline on that. It does not expire. It is that type of program.

I mentioned the Helmets to Hardhats initiative that helps to transition ex-military people into construction jobs. However, when we bring these initiatives forward, when we bring forward funding requests to the House to support our veterans, this member and his party vote against them every single time.

Government Orders

When I talk to my veterans, I tell them about the programs we are offering, and they understand that these programs will benefit existing and retired members of the Canadian Forces.

Let me conclude with the advertising. If veterans want to take advantage of these programs, they need to know about them, and they would not learn about them from the Liberal Party or from the NDP. That is guaranteed. It is a wise investment to inform veterans of the services we are providing for them to help them transition back into civilian life.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and for his service. We both went to Royal Military College. He served a distinguished 20 years and now serves capably in this Parliament.

My colleague had a very interesting number. He reminded the House that the average age of a departing or transitioning veteran is 37, the age he was when he transitioned. I was a few years younger because I did not work as long.

I hear members in the House claiming they are sincere in trying to be as knowledgeable on this topic as possible, but they are also criticizing the use of websites or the use of advertising. People who have worked in this area for a number of years know that government does not do the hand-off between the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada well. People start to think about transition when they are in uniform, when they are not yet veterans, so we need to reach out to them through these forums, including advertising, to let them know what they should be thinking of when they plan their transition.

More importantly, what I love about the ads is that they show employers and Canadians a young veteran in transition. He is doing the tie. He is also a father. The ads break down barriers for our veterans so that they can get hired in the private sector. They are excellent ads, and it is sad that those members do not even understand why they are needed.

I would like to ask the member how he found out about any opportunities that might have been available when he transitioned. He probably was not able to find out, because individuals in uniform were not briefed on this situation.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his service to our country as well. I thank him also for his question, because it is very pertinent.

He is right. When military members decide to retire from serving their country in the Canadian Armed Forces, there is almost too much to think about, yet not enough information to help with decision-making.

The most fundamental piece of information that people leaving the Canadian Forces need to know is what the government will provide to them to help them transition to civilian life.

I am the father of five children. Although I left the military at the age of 37, in no way, shape, or form was I retiring from the workforce. I absolutely needed to transition to civilian life. Every type of benefit that is offered by the government to help veterans do this smoothly and in a positive way needs to be communicated. How

is it communicated? It is done through a variety of mechanisms, including advertising.

I will pick up on one last point that my colleague brought up, which is that is not just veterans who are informed through advertising. Canadians across the country see that veterans who have served their country in uniform are also able to transition into civilian life and they see what the government is doing to help with that transition. That makes Canadians proud of their government and it makes them proud of their veterans. Advertising plays a key role in that.

• (2035)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech given earlier this evening by my hon. colleague from Durham. He spoke about the Canadian Veterans Advocacy group and said that he was quite offended by the work that the group does and that it is not sincere.

I have also been listening to my colleagues on the other side. They are always saying that they are on the side of veterans, except, it seems, when these veterans disagree with them.

I would like to ask my colleague about the government's insincerity toward these veterans: David MacLeod, who was 27 years with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and served in Afghanistan; Mark Campbell, who was severely injured by an IED in Afghanistan and is now involved in the class action lawsuit; Mike Blais, who is a veteran of the Royal Canadian Regiment.

Why is it that when veterans embarrass the government and reveal the incompetence of the minister, they are considered insincere? They are only considered sincere if they tout the line that is being promoted on the television ads that the government wasted this month—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Are they a member of staff? Do they work in Stoffer's office?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am listening to the hon. member for Durham shouting out, but I would like an answer as to why the Conservatives would attack the integrity of these veterans who served our country.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely must reject the premise of the member's question. Members who have served their country need to be respected for their service. That member has to realize as well that every case is unique and that the details of certain cases cannot be discussed in Parliament or with the media or in public. The government is at somewhat of a disadvantage, but it is at a disadvantage because it respects the privacy of veterans and their families.

One of the things I would like to highlight for all veterans who might be watching this debate is this government's commitment to them. For example, the base funding for Veterans Affairs Canada has increased by roughly 30% over the last 10 years. It is at a record level. On top of that, this government added an additional \$5 billion for pensions and for benefits, which is another record amount in terms of funding.

Government Orders

We have been trimming the administrative costs to ensure that 90% of the funding that has been allocated for veterans actually delivers services to veterans themselves. I do not think any Canadian would accept 50¢ on the dollar being delivered to veterans. They would ask, “What happened to all the administrative costs? Why are they so high?” We do find efficiencies, but to the benefit of veterans, to ensure that 90% of funding allocated for veterans actually serves veterans and their families. That is a positive message for veterans.

I hope that the ones watching today hear me say this, because they will not read about this in the media and they certainly will not learn about it from the opposition parties.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was having a nice quiet time in my office today when I was asked to come and speak to this important legislation. I want to point out that we in the NDP will be supporting the legislation, but let us go over a little history of this.

I am probably one of the few members of Parliament in the House who was here in 2004 and 2005 when work on the new veterans charter started. One of the parameters of the new veterans charter was that priority hiring for veterans would be a key aspect of the charter. What happened was that after eight years, DND and DVA were the only two departments hiring. The other departments were simply not. Now the government is forced to bring in legislation to do such a thing.

I already said in my question that the government wants to hire veterans, but on a premise that they have to be qualified. They have to meet the test of whatever it is they applying for. It does not necessarily mean that as veterans they get jobs. It means that as veterans they may apply for a job in the public service.

Let us not forget that 30 veterans were recently released from the Commissionaires out of the Fire Watch Service at Cape Scott, Halifax. Now the government is saying it wants to hire veterans, but DND is saying it is going to lay them off. In addition, many veterans have been laid off because they were last in, first out, with all the cuts the government has made to the public service across the country. Therefore, the Conservatives are saying to all the veterans out there that they should not worry, that if they exit the military on a medical premise of any kind, if they meet the qualifications, they may get a job with the public service. That is “if, if and may”. There is no guarantee that will happen.

However, we hope to improve the legislation because we notice that in all the discussions of the Conservatives over there, they have not once mentioned the RCMP. Why should RCMP veterans who apply for their benefits from DVA be excluded from priority hiring when they become disabled and exit the RCMP? We would like to see RCMP disabled veterans included in the legislation.

By the way, there are a lot of Conservatives over there whom I respect tremendously. Today marks the 17th anniversary of my being elected to the House of Commons. I congratulate all those from the class of 1997. I see there is a Saskatchewan member from the class of 1993, a decent guy.

The hon. member for Durham, whom I respect, served his country very well for 12 years. He said the following, and I am quite offended by this because he is absolutely wrong. I will give him a

chance to apologize either publicly or privately. He said this of Michael Blais of the Canadian Veterans Advocacy, “who works out of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore’s office”. That is a blatant fabrication. It is an outright lie. Because he is—

● (2040)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member may have slipped. We definitely heard some unparliamentary language over there. I wonder if you will be asking the member to retract that or apologize. How we should handle that?

The Deputy Speaker: The use of that terminology in that context is unparliamentary. Therefore, I will ask the member to withdraw it.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I appreciate that, and I will withdraw it. It was an absolute fabrication. In fact, the envelope was so stretched that it was incredible.

This is a disabled veteran from Niagara Falls who runs the Canadian Veterans Advocacy, and what does he do? The disability scooter that he has is paid for the Department of Veterans Affairs. He plugs it in to a socket in my office so he his battery is charged every time he comes up to Ottawa.

I have offered him the opportunity to put it in the hon. member for Durham’s office, who has a much larger office than mine two doors down. However, I do not see the hon. member for Durham offering the same opportunity for a disabled veteran to park his scooter in his office.

That is quite offensive. For one veteran to attack another is simply unconscionable and he should be ashamed of himself. As a person who was born in Holland and whose parents were liberated by the veteran community, I have always thought that every veteran, regardless of when he or she served or how, should be treated with the utmost respect. Just because certain veterans disagree with other veterans who happen to be on the government’s side, the disagreement should not result in slander in the House of Commons.

I invite the hon. member, whenever he wishes, either privately or publicly, to apologize to Mike Blais and the Canadian Veterans Advocacy.

There is another thing going on that is simply unconscionable. We heard the member say that the Canadian Veterans Advocacy actually accepted funding from “unions”. The fact is that it is an Internet veterans group that gets its funding from all kinds of people. One union gave it \$2,000. That was one union, one time, yet the member said “unions”, which basically tried to make the slant that the Canadian Veterans Advocacy was just a union front. If, indeed, it is a union front, long live the union movement. However, the fact is, nothing could be further from the truth.

I only wish the hon. member for Durham, for whom I have great respect, could get his facts straight and understand that when veterans disagree with the government, it does not necessarily mean they disagree with him personally. It just means they disagree with the policies coming from his government.

Government Orders

That is fair. That is why they wore the uniform. That is why they stood on guard for thee. It was to be able to tell Canadians that even though we might disagree on political fronts, we at least had the right to agree to disagree.

Without hesitation, the last couple of months have not been a very good time for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. First, there was the meeting that he blew off and then came to Room 130-S. He completely embarrassed himself, the Government of Canada and all parliamentarians, for that matter, when he literally verbally abused veterans.

Then there were the events of the other day. The reality is that we heard the excuses that he did not hear the woman or that he was late for a vote. It was absolute nonsense. The reality is that I left the room five minutes after the minister and got here six minutes before the minister and still had ten minutes to spare.

He could have stopped and said that he was sorry, that he had to go to a meeting or a vote. He could have given her his card and suggested they meet in the future, but no. Not only did he not do that, but the parliamentary secretary rushed right past her. We can see that in the video.

During her press conference, two members of the minister's staff were watching her speak. The deputy minister walked by. Other staffers walked by. We would think that for one second, one member of the government or the department would have stopped and asked if there was any way that they could help her. However, no, they completely brushed her off.

What an absolute embarrassment. I, as a member of Parliament, was absolutely embarrassed that our government, even though I did not vote for it, treated her in this fashion. That is twice. Those members do not get a third time.

I can assure members not to worry. There will not be a third time, because when the election comes around, this party, the NDP, will be over on that side and we will ensure that veterans get treated with the respect they so rightfully deserve.

● (2045)

For example, every time I ask the minister a question, I give him the question well in advance. Today I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs, who I have great respect for, if he would he you at least meet with this woman at a time that was convenient for both of them for her to discuss her issues about her husband. The answer was that he would take it under consideration. In the House of Commons, the question was not answered. A member of Parliament from the opposition has the courtesy to give a minister the question in advance but does not even get a response.

What are people watching this expected to believe? I was not playing for political points. I was not playing any opportunism. I gave the minister the question in advance, as I always have done for 17 years. All I asked for was a respectful answer and I did not get it. What is Jenifer supposed to think now? Her husband has severe post-traumatic stress disorder and all she has asked for is a little help. Did she get it? No. She got the back of the hand of the Government of Canada, and that is shameful. Every member over there should hang their head in shame for that despicable behaviour. It is unbelievable and it goes on and on.

I have so many files on my desk from veterans across the country who are disappointed with the government.

Having said that, I hope tomorrow will be a very proud day for Canada. The Veterans Affairs committee, which I have been member of for many years, is releasing its report tomorrow. Although I cannot divulge what is in that report, I have to give the parliamentary secretary, the members of the Conservative Party, my colleagues from the Liberals and my hon. NDP colleagues as well, kudos for working together to come up with recommendations that hopefully the government will accept and move on very quickly.

This will be a start. If the government accepts and adopts the recommendations, then the committee has done its work. The Veterans Ombudsman has done his work. The Canadian Veterans Advocacy, the Legion and the vets, all those other groups that have come forward to the government over the last eight years with recommendations to improve the new veterans charter have done their work.

This will require an investment from the government not only financially, but personnel as well. I cannot say if the report is unanimous or not, but I am very proud of it. I am very proud of all the members who serve on that committee. I am very proud of all the witnesses who came before us. We heard some very heartfelt stories.

One story on the public record is about Corporal Mark Fuchko, a double amputee who took over nine months to get the paperwork done for renovations to his home. Brian Forbes of the National Council of Veterans Associations said it very clearly and succinctly: "A double amputee shouldn't have to fill out any forms". Think about that. It should not have taken him nine months to get the help he needed; it should have taken nine minutes. The minute he was a double amputee, the department should have asked him what he needed. It should have said that it would get his house renovated and ensure that he would get everything he needed so he could move forward to a positive life.

If after the report is tabled tomorrow, we can see that kind of action, the committee under the great chair, the member for West Nova, then we will have done something really well. I, and I am sure all members of the committee, will be very proud of that.

However, as I have said before, I have been here for 17 years. I have been on a lot of committees and I have worked on a lot of recommendations. An awful lot of them are still sitting on the shelf. Just because these are recommendations does not necessarily mean the government will adopt them.

● (2050)

However, it will be our job in opposition, and I would hope that of the members on the back bench of the Conservative Party, to encourage their government to listen to these recommendations, to understand what was said, and be able to adopt them in a sincere and expedited manner so that those most seriously disabled and their families will get the help they need, and get it right away. We will wait and see how it turns out in that regard.

Government Orders

Getting back to the bill, it is a noble effort for the government to introduce legislation for the priority hiring of veterans. Again I say that I hope the government will accept the NDP's recommendation in committee to include disabled RCMP members as well. We also have to look at the fact that in many cases there are spouses of veterans who may also want to work in the public service because of their experience. I am not saying that is something we need to adopt, but it is something we should seriously look at. Many spouses of veterans have a lot of experience dealing with disabled members, whether it is psychological or medical. I believe that an awful lot of family members can provide an awful lot of assistance to us as members of Parliament, to senators, or to the Government of Canada. Hopefully, this is something the government will look at when this bill eventually gets to committee.

At the end of the day, the reality is that we need to treat every single member of the military and the RCMP and their families with the utmost respect. Bearing in mind that not every Legion, not every individual member of the military, not every member of the RCMP, or their families, are going to agree with the government of the day. I can tell the Conservatives that as a member from 1997 to 2006, I received just as many complaints when the Liberals were in power about veterans' issues and benefits, access to them, and everything else. The reality is that the complaints have not gone away.

There are new complaints, but there are some similarities. One similarity is access to benefits. When people becomes disabled, either psychologically or medically, they go through what I call the Gordian knot of bureaucracy in order to achieve those benefits in a timely manner. That is one of the biggest problems within the Government of Canada. This is why the hon. member who spoke before talked about reducing bureaucracy, basically saying 1,500 public servants will be laid off by the time the government is done.

It has only barely touched the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. This is my hobby horse that I have been on for many years. If I were sitting in the minister's chair right now, there would be no Veterans Review and Appeal Board and there would be no Bureau of Pensions Advocates. Why? It is because veterans are the only citizens who get a lawyer from the government to fight for a benefit against the government.

There is something called benefit of the doubt, the compassionate clause. We respect our veterans. An entire system is set up that costs millions of dollars to catch the possible 3%, 2%, or even less, who are trying to cheat the system. Every veteran is included in that. The Veterans Review and Appeal Board, in my 17 years, is one of the biggest problems the minister and the Government of Canada has. I hope that they will seriously look at the Veterans Review and Appeal Board and understand very clearly that if a veteran comes forward with a concern of some kind, has a doctor's note that says his or her condition may be related to military service, has a second note from a specialist that qualifies and quantifies the first note and says, yes, there is a high probability this condition may have been caused by military service, that veteran should be entitled to the benefit.

What happens is veterans go through the appeal board and are denied, they go again and are denied, they go again and are denied. It is called the no-go policy. We know it very well. If the board says no long enough, the veterans go away. There is old 3D policy that I have witnessed many times. It is called the delay, deny, and then die

policy. Mr. Art Humphreys of Musquodoboit Harbour had to go through that experience. Get this. He was an 87-year-old veteran who lived in his house for many years. All he asked for, because he could not go down the 13 steps any more, was a lift for his house, so he could go down to his basement to be entertained. It was where his big screen was and his friends would come.

• (2055)

They sent in a 25-year-old VON nurse on contract to DVA, who said, in her opinion, that all the qualities of life he needed were upstairs and that he did not need to go downstairs anymore. He was denied the lift.

I made the argument to the minister of the day and unfortunately on the day of my argument, that veteran passed away. For \$425 and \$30 a month rent, they could not give a World War II veteran a lift. Let us think about that.

Having said that, we will support the legislation. Hopefully our amendments will be brought in. I plead with the government and I plead with the minister to streamline the bureaucratic process to ensure that when a veteran calls in, the only thing that person on the other end of the phone should say is "How can we help you?"

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was an officer at 12 Wing Shearwater 17 years ago when this hon. member was elected. I enjoyed meeting him. I know he has a passion for veterans. I have spoken about his passion for veterans in this House, so his unparliamentary language directed at me is disappointing.

The very concerns I have raised here tonight, I have raised with Mike Blais and Jerry Kovacs directly. They are nice guys. I get along with them. What I have said to them and to any group that wants to advocate is they have to be an independent and sincere voice. They should hold the government's feet to the fire, that is the job of an advocacy organization.

However, they have to maintain that independence. My concern was when I heard that those members worked out of offices in Sackville—Eastern Shore and of the member for Toronto Agincourt at the time, which I said to them was inappropriate. They should also reveal their funding sources and their memberships, and hold an AGM, like any regular group.

I meet with veterans organizations all the time. A lot of them have serious concerns. However, they have to be serious advocates.

My question is for that hon. member, who I know is passionate. He seems to suggest that the organization really just charges a chair in his office. Is the member telling this House today that that group, and Mr. Blais, have never used the phones and the computers in that office, have never had meetings in that office, and do not hold security passes or parking passes for the office of the MP for Sackville—Eastern Shore?

Government Orders

If they do, I think that is highly inappropriate for a group that should be an independent advocate.

However, I am glad the member is here, because he can clarify whether any security passes and all these sorts of things, the trappings of an office, were supplied to that group.

● (2100)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, sometimes when a lob ball is thrown, it is gets batted out of the House.

I can guarantee there are no security passes. Many constituents, including the Legion and the vets, including some Conservative members of Parliament, have been in my office, and they have had to use the phone. Oh, what a shock, that Conservative members of Parliament would be in my office and happen to make a phone call. In fact, they cannot live without their BlackBerrys constantly going off in my office.

The reality is Legion members have been in my office, and they have used the phone. I am a member of the Legion and the ANAVETS, and nine other veterans organizations. Does that mean every single one of them should be tainted by the fact that maybe they have been in my office, but only one of them should get to plug in their chair because he is a disabled veteran?

The reality is I really quite get a kick out of this, to be honest. If that is the extent of the hon. member's question, it is unbelievable. That shows the state of affairs in the Conservative Party of Canada. If that is the type of question we get from an hon. member of Parliament, who I have great respect for, who has served his country with great respect, something has happened to him now that he is a member of Parliament. To ask that type of question, it is really incredible.

I hope the member has a good night's rest and that tomorrow he understands that tomorrow should be a very good day for all of Canada's veterans.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his impassioned speech.

I would like the member to answer a question. If somebody is up in the gallery and has been listening to the debate for the past two or three years, whenever it touches on the issue of our veterans, they will have noticed something unusual.

One is that every time the government gets up and speaks about our veterans, they speak about, in their terms, the glowing work that they have done for our veterans, and in fact how proud our veterans are of the work that the government has done for them. That is on the one hand.

On the other hand, it seems to me that almost every day we are reading, in the newspapers, stories about veterans who feel that the government has let them or their families down. Something is not right here.

There are two totally different perceptions. One, when members on that side of the House get up and read the canned speeches that have been prepared for them and, two, what we read about in the newspaper, where people are really hurting and suffering.

I would like to hear from the member what kind of perception he has. What kind of feedback is the member getting from veterans in his riding?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition critic for veterans affairs, I do not just deal with veterans in my riding. I deal with them right across the country. On any given day, I receive 50 to 60 phone calls, emails, faxes, and letters from veterans, not only in my own riding but right across the country, with concerns and issues.

That is not to say that some veterans are not getting very good service. I can assure members I have spoken with many veterans who are getting very good service from the Department of Veterans Affairs. That is the way it should be.

For the hon. member who asked the question, who by the way I think is one of the finest MPs in the House of Commons, all I want is for every veteran, every RCMP veteran, and their family members to receive the same quality service.

Today, I received a call from a gentleman in the Saint John Regional Hospital. There are 14 veterans' beds that are closed. They are not open. He knows of three veterans who served in World War II but because they did not serve overseas, they do not get access to those long-term care beds.

I just want to say, while I am on my feet, to the minister, for whom I have great respect, I am hoping that eventually we can have that conversation about long-term health care for the modern-day veterans and their families to ensure that they indeed get the same access to services that our World War II and Korean veterans received, as well.

● (2105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. He is very knowledgeable, and I really respect what he has done for veterans. I used to be in the union world—the Conservatives often accuse me of being a union leader—and I worked with him back in the day. We did amazing work to help veterans.

For me, this bill raises questions about veterans' needs and their transition, especially the younger ones who come back after several years, look for a job and have a hard time reintegrating into society in general.

Does this bill meet expectations? Does it provide the financial means to help veterans find decent work that meets their expectations and their needs, as well as those of their families? Will they find work that will help them complete the transition and cope with the health problems, both physical and psychological, that they have developed during their years of service?

I would like my colleague to answer my question and talk some more about this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I will give the government credit. It has moved the yardstick ever so slightly on the helmets to hardhats, for example, which was an American initiative brought into Canada, and there is some progress working on that.

Government Orders

However, let us not forget what the legislation says. The legislation says, for priority hiring, “If you meet the qualifications of the job. If you have psychological or physical problems, you may not be able to”.

We are hoping that with our recommendations tomorrow and with the government looking at an overall view of this, it will look at these veterans who are medically released from the military and understand that in order to place them in a public service role they may need additional training, they may need additional rehabilitation, or something else, in order to fit those needs. They may not meet the needs right away, on a résumé, but with time and training, they be able to do that.

I was recently in the United States for a one-day symposium on what the U.S. government is doing in hiring veterans. The State of Virginia, alone, in two years, hired over 50,000 veterans. One state and that many veterans. The way it did is was quite remarkable and I hope to be able to share that with my government colleagues in the committee when the bill comes to committee.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to support our government's efforts on behalf of our nation's veterans as well as those still serving and their families.

I am not here to fight with anybody or to pick a fight with anyone because I think everybody in this House is motivated to do the right thing for our veterans. We can disagree about measures taken being too much, too little, the wrong way, or whatever. Our government and the opposition in committee, particularly the members for Sackville—Eastern Shore, Guelph, and others, have been sitting very diligently for some time now, and the results will come tomorrow. I think all members in the House will be pleased with what they see. Inevitably, there will be some who say it is not enough. That is just the nature of the beast.

This is a very big story. It is a very long story. It is not a perfect story. It never will be a perfect story. That is why we have to take measures as we find them, one at a time, preferably more at a time if we can, and hopefully tomorrow will be an example of that. However, we have to keep moving forward. That is what the veterans hiring act does. It is not a panacea. It is not a silver bullet. There is no such thing. It gives our veterans, who have obviously sacrificed, who have put themselves in the line on our behalf and on the behalf of others around the world, in Afghanistan, Libya and wherever else, access to jobs in the federal public service. This is enhanced access to rewarding and meaningful jobs that will allow them to continue to lead and serve their country.

There were questions about qualifications. Of course, somebody has to be qualified to do any particular job. Anything else would make no sense at all. This act will help to ensure that veterans have access to job opportunities, by making an amendment to the Public Service Employment Act.

First and foremost, the five-year hiring preference will be extended to those who are medically released for service-related reasons. This will help to give those veterans the highest level of consideration for jobs in the federal public service. This is a long-term picture. It is not about what is going on in the public service now, or any kind of cutbacks, such as we saw in 1995, such as we

have seen more recently in response to economic situations. Governments do what governments have to do. The Liberals did it in 1995, and there was massive criticism then. That is politics. They did what they felt they had to do. This government has done what it felt it had to do, although much less than the previous government did. That is not to say one was good or one was bad. It was different circumstances, with a different reaction by different governments.

This single change in the veterans hiring act demonstrates our understanding that while these men and women may not be able to serve in the Canadian Forces anymore, they still have a lot of things that they can offer to Canada. Whether it is in the public service or other professions, they are still capable of making great contributions in service to their country.

It is the same principle behind our proposal to extend the existing hiring preference for all medically released veterans from two years to five years.

We will take this even further by increasing access to public service jobs for honourably released and still-serving members. It will allow a greater number of veterans and still-serving military to participate in the hiring process for advertised positions in the federal public service. It will give honourably released members, who have at least three years of military service, a preference in advertised external hiring processes for five years from the date of release. This means that they can be appointed if qualified, and obviously it has to be “if qualified”, over other qualified candidates.

In order to ensure that veterans are offered employment opportunities, it will also establish a hiring preference for veterans over other applicants for externally advertised hiring processes. Simply put, if the veteran is equally qualified and has been honourably released with at least three years of service, the veteran will get the job over anyone else.

I believe our veterans and still-serving personnel are ideal candidates for careers in the public service, and many other professions. Their experience has taught them how to organize, prioritize, manage, and make decisions under pressure, all of which are assets in the public service.

After I left the military, it dawned on me more and more that servicemen and women sell themselves short in the military. Whether flying airplanes or loading armaments, fixing electronics or radars, or being a midshipman, whatever they are, they sell themselves short because they focus on the specific skills they have to do that military job.

Government Orders

● (2110)

They very often do not appreciate the transferable nature of those specific skills but, more importantly, the personal qualities they bring from the military to civvy street. These are qualities of integrity, teamwork, leadership, discipline, life experience, and the experience they have dealing with people and incredibly difficult situations, where lives are at stake, the lives of those they are saving.

It can also be a simple quality like showing up on time. One of the things I hear a lot from people on civvy street is that if they could get people who would show up for work on time every day, they would be further ahead. This is a quality of anybody coming out of the military. I often jokingly get criticized for always being early, although it is true that I have been late once or twice. However, it is a habit. In the military, being on time means being five or 10 minutes early.

These are the kinds of qualities that civilian employers value. For anybody in the military who is listening, they should not sell themselves short. They may have a specific MOC in the military, a specific trade, but they can do much more than that, just with the human qualities they have developed in the military and their ability to learn and develop new skills.

I am proud to support these amendments. This is not a panacea. It is not a silver bullet. However, it is one set of measures for one set of conditions, and there are many more that need to be addressed.

As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, there is a tremendous resource here. We have 7,600 people being released from the military every year on average, and about 1,000 medically released, at an average age of 37. When I was released, I was only 47. That may be old by comparison, but it seems young now.

As I said, this is just one measure. There are many other measures and significant investments that our government has delivered, and there is more to be delivered. There will always be more to be delivered.

Since being elected, our government has invested more than \$5 billion in new funding to improve the benefits and services that we provide to veterans and their families. We have committed much more in the 2014 budget in support of Canada's veterans.

The federal budget, delivered this past February, also pledged a further investment in the funeral and burial program, totalling \$108.2 million over the next three years. Specifically, the new funding will expand the program's eligibility criteria to ensure that more modern-day veterans of modest means have access to a dignified funeral and burial. This new money is in addition to the \$65 million that was announced in last year's budget to simplify the program and increase the reimbursement rates from \$3,600 to over \$7,300.

As well, budget 2014 commits the Government of Canada to investing almost \$2.1 million this year to enhance the Veterans Affairs Canada My VAC account. For those who do not know, My VAC account is a web-based tool, not like monster.com, that allows users to conduct business online with their department at any time of day or night. This means that one can complete a variety of transactions with the government when it is important and convenient for one to do so, such as applying online for the full

range of benefits, updating contact information, or tracking the status of a disability program application. Do all of these things need to be made more simple? Yes, they do, and Veterans Affairs is working on that as we speak.

This kind of thing is clearly something that veterans have been waiting for. We already have more than 9,000 registered users on My VAC account, and we expect that number to grow to 25,000 by about 2017.

In short, this investment builds on our efforts to eliminate unnecessary red tape so that veterans can access the programs, services, and benefits they need as quickly and painlessly as possible. I totally agree that over the years we have sometimes made it too difficult to access some of these services and benefits, with too much red tape, too many hoops to jump through, and too many people along the way giving the wrong answer, that being "no".

We have done a number of things. For example, we introduced up front payments for the veterans independence program, or VIP program, for housekeeping and grounds maintenance. We have made changes to simplify reimbursements for travel costs to and from medical appointments. We have done away with having to submit receipt after receipt. We give them funding up front and then let them go about their business.

Last October, the minister announced similarly important and time-saving changes to the vocational rehabilitation program. By making the program more flexible, we are now able to respond faster and more fully to the specific needs of the more than 1,300 veterans who are currently eligible for the \$75,800 in training. We need to further improve that system and streamline access to it, and we are in the process of doing that.

● (2115)

We have also established the veterans bill of rights, something that veterans have been asking for since the 1960s. We created the office of the Veterans Ombudsman to ensure the fair treatment of veterans, their representatives, and their families, in accordance with the veterans bill of rights.

The ombudsman is in a difficult position. He or she is obviously an advocate for veterans and spends a lot of time listening to the issues of veterans, talking to them, trying to make a connection between those issues and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the minister, the parliamentary secretary, the bureaucracy. That person is in a very important but very delicate situation, so it is important that the office be maintained, and obviously it will. It was very important that it was established.

Government Orders

We are also addressing mental health issues that our returning men and women may face, and that is a difficult challenge, as it is for all of our allies. The mental health of Canada's veterans is and has to be a top priority for our government, or any government, particularly those who suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. That is why, in 2007, we doubled the national network of operational stress injury clinics. The innovative personnel support units have sprung up across the country to address the growing number of veterans suffering from PTSD and other mental health conditions.

This weekend, I was in Edmonton. There is an event called "Clara's Big Ride". That is Clara Hughes, the sixth-time Olympic medal winner in both summer and winter games. She is cycling 12,000 kilometres around the country, counterclockwise, to bring attention to mental health, to the stigma, and getting people to talk about it. That is so important. People in the military are like Clara Hughes. They are A-type personalities, and it is very difficult for them to talk about having a problem.

As I told the crowd then, and it applies equally to the military, it is okay to have a problem. That is normal. One in five Canadians has a mental health problem. It is not okay to not do something about it. It is not okay for any government or any organization that cares about veterans to not try to do something about it. That is what we are trying to do.

In fact, the minister just announced a plan, a pilot project, to assess the benefits and risks of psychiatric service dogs to assist in the treatment of PTSD in veterans. It is a two-and-a-half year pilot project to place about 50 veterans with dogs, to the tune of about \$500,000 to cover expenses and new research. Research is extremely important.

Many veterans have called on us to evaluate the benefits of service dogs and other animals, horses, for example, in the treatment of PTSD. I am proud that we are taking steps down that road, and more steps need to be taken.

We continue to work ambitiously to create new employment opportunities for veterans. That is why we have been a proud supporter and financial partner in the Helmets to Hardhats program. That program is providing veterans with opportunities for employment and apprenticeship in the construction industry. That program is relatively new. It will take time for the program to fully develop and reach its full potential.

We heard some criticism that we think the soldiers are only good for turning wrenches or pounding nails. Those jobs are very high tech, very highly skilled, and very highly paid.

That is why we are working with corporate Canada and the Canadian Forces, in partnership with employers across the country, to assist veterans in transitioning into civilian careers, working with companies like 3M, Synovus, Intuit Canada, and many more.

That is why we brought forward the veterans hiring act. It builds on of all these investments and initiatives. It establishes an unprecedented level of commitment to hiring veterans into the federal public service. It delivers real and meaningful new opportunities for Canada's veterans and military personnel who want to start new careers. It is another way that Canada can express its gratitude and respect for these men and women.

As I have said a couple of times, and as others have tried to say, it is only one measure. It is not a panacea. It is not a silver bullet. However, it is one measure. I am pleased to see that the opposition will support this as a step forward. There are many more steps that need to be taken, some larger, some smaller. This is just one, but it is an important one.

It is a good piece of legislation. We will take it to committee. If there are amendments that make sense, I assume it would probably go to the Veterans Affairs committee. I am hoping it does. This is the kind of legislation that I can certainly get my head around in terms of pushing it forward, but also in terms of making meaningful amendments to make it even better.

It is all part, in a small way—and the military will not take over the public service—of getting some of the mental capacity, some of the qualities of individuals, into an area where they can benefit, not just their unit in the military, not just a local organization that they might join afterwards, but in service to the entire country through the public service.

● (2120)

Therefore, it is important that we create these job opportunities for our brave men and women to assist them in transitioning to civilian life.

That said, I am not going to dwell on this. It is a little disappointing that a union has spoken out against the initiative. It does not seem to believe that our veterans should be at the front of the line but should be at the back of the line, behind the civil servants. I understand unions supporting their members. That is what unions do and what they should do. However, I think there is a bit of a breakdown in understanding. If retired veterans become members of the public service through those jobs, then they will be members of that union. My advice to the union is to let it happen. They would be new members for the union, and very qualified members. The union would be supporting veterans along the way. It really is the best of both worlds.

I know that the NDP will vote for the bill, so I will not dwell on that anymore. I know that the NDP will support it and that the Liberals will support it, and that is what everyone in the House should do.

We talked a bit about the veterans affairs committee report that will be tabled tomorrow. We would love to tell the member for Guelph, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, and others about it tonight, because we are justifiably proud of what we have done. Will it answer all the questions to everyone's satisfaction? No, there is probably no way we could possibly do that. Will it take some significant steps forward? I think it will.

Government Orders

Members of the committee, on all sides of the House, worked extremely hard together and extremely collaboratively. We all put water in our wine. We all backed off here and there. Everyone got something that most people will applaud. We will see tomorrow. It will be significant progress. The government has to implement it, and I for one will pledge to do my part as a member of the government to get that done. There will be bumps and grinds along the way. We know that. It does not happen overnight. However, it will set the framework for some significant change, and I think most people will enjoy what we present tomorrow.

I retired 20 years ago now. It seems like yesterday. The new veterans today are more educated than they were even when I retired and are certainly more educated than a lot of folks at the end of the Second World War. They are younger, by and large. There are a lot of twenty-somethings coming back from Afghanistan. They are much more aware of their rights and their power, their power to band together in various advocacy organizations and their power to put pressure on government. That is totally what they should be doing. We should do it on all sides, respectfully, based on facts. It is invigorating.

One of our witnesses, Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, had a wonderful attitude. I know for my colleagues in the House who sat on the committee that it was one of the things we remarked on. He had an IED incident where he lost a good part of one arm. His side was completely opened up. It was many months of surgeries, rehab, and so on, but he had come back. He was starting a very meaningful life for himself and his family, who went through a lot of problems and heartache, but he is coming back. He praised the government programs, admitting that obviously people would like to see more. His point was that government programs can only bring 49%. The other 51% has to come from the veteran. That was a tremendous attitude, and we were all gobsmacked, frankly, by his testimony. He was so positive and so determined that there was no doubt in our minds that there was a young man who was going to succeed in whatever he did because of his attitude.

Attitude goes a long way in all things. Attitude goes a long way in the House when we deal with each other, good or bad. Attitude goes a long way for people in duress or distress and getting them out of that.

We are here to provide the framework to do that through things like the veterans hiring act and other measures we will bring in as time goes by. However, it really is a collaboration, a co-operation, a partnership between us here, veterans, and all the organizations out there committed to doing the right thing, and that is the right thing for our veterans.

• (2125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech even though we do not necessarily agree.

As he said, and as members of both sides of the House have said, we can agree that there is a problem here, even though we disagree on how to solve it. My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore said something to that effect too.

However, I want to look at one specific part of the problem, and I would like my colleague opposite to correct me if I am wrong. Unless I am mistaken, when he talked about the creation of the veterans ombudsman, there was a similar bill. It was Bill C-11, which died on the order paper, and Bill C-27 is the new version.

The government dropped the first version of this bill because it had some problems. In the summer of 2013, the ombudsman pointed some of them out, and in 2012, the Auditor General also conveyed his concerns about all of these programs.

Can my colleague comment on the fact that the ombudsman's recommendations were ignored? Will the committee look at that? Even if we support the bill, more can be done, and we want to do more on this issue.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, this whole issue has a whole lot of moving parts. We are a moving part. The Veterans Ombudsman, Veterans Affairs, and the Auditor General all play a role in issues like this and others that are similarly complex.

We listen to the ombudsman. We have been very active with the ombudsman. The ombudsman does not get everything he recommends sometimes, because sometimes it is, frankly, too tough, for a variety of reasons.

However, I will point out that there were about 250 recommendations. There were about 50 regulatory and legislative recommendations and about 200 recommendations that were administrative. Virtually all of the 200 administrative measures that were recommended were implemented by the government. About eight or 10 of the 50 legislative and regulatory recommendations were implemented as well. There is more to do.

I can not remember, and I could not tell the House anyway, what the connection is between some of the standing recommendations and some of the things we will be proposing tomorrow. However, this is a continuous work in progress. It will always be a work in progress.

The fact that the ombudsman may be frustrated that things did not happen as quickly as he wanted in some areas is natural. I would expect him to be. I would want him to be. I would want him to keep pushing us. I would want him to keep raising more issues and considerations for us to look at. Maybe there is another way of doing it. If we cannot satisfy it this way, maybe we can satisfy it another way.

It is a very important part of the process. We have responded to roughly 210 of 250 recommendations.

Government Orders

• (2130)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague for Edmonton Centre for the thoughtful approach he brought to the speech, for his tone, and for his conciliatory approach to this. I know from my colleague, the member for Guelph, just how facilitative a role he has played at committee and how constructive and positive he has been. In fact, I have constituents who served with him in the air force who speak glowingly and highly of his record and his character.

I would like to pick up on one of the last points he made, which I think is an offer or an appeal for ways we can improve this legislation. We have a way, as my colleague, the member for Guelph, put forward some time ago, to improve this bill. It deals with a few things.

First, in his heart of hearts, I think the member would admit that the \$75,000 program the government is offering is now limited in amount and limited in accessibility.

Second, I think he would also have to admit that there have been tens of thousands of jobs cut. There is a hiring freeze, and not all veterans can meet the requirements to achieve a lot of these public sector jobs.

The opportunity in front of us is this. Would the member countenance amendments at committee so that a skills translator system could be implemented in the bill? It would determine the skills and aptitudes of veterans as they depart. It would line up with both public sector and private sector job opportunities. It would give them more choice, which is something I always believed the Conservative Party believed in. It would give them more choice in terms of moving forward.

Finally, in his heart of hearts, does the member not agree that perhaps the \$4 million being spent on advertising today during hockey playoffs could be better spent and more wisely invested in enhancing these skills and aptitudes so that we can do right by our veterans?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Ottawa.

This bill is just one measure. The member talked about vacancies or a lack of vacancies at the moment in the public service, and that is a legitimate point. This is a long-term program. This is not catering to the situation today; it is catering to 20, 30, 40, and 50 years to forever, whatever forever is.

With respect to amendments, speaking for myself personally, I am prepared to hear any amendment that makes sense that will improve the program and will improve accessibility and so on. I am not as familiar with monster.com as my friend from Guelph, so I would have to Google it to see what it really says. I am personally prepared to listen to anything that would make the bill better and that would make services to veterans better. One of the reasons I came here in the first place was to do that.

However, specifically to the point about advertising, last year we spent \$1.1 billion on health care and re-establishment services. A lot of these programs are demand driven. If we want to drive up the amount of money we spend on that, get 10,000 veterans through the

door to access whatever the program is, and they will get it. It is demand driven. We want those 10,000 veterans, or whatever the number is, to come through the door and say, "I want that service, because I just saw it on television, because I am a hockey fan, because I watch the Stanley Cup playoffs". Veterans love hockey just like most of the rest of Canadians. That is a very good way to get the word out so we can get those veterans through the door to access those programs so we can drive up the amount of money so that it dwarfs the \$4 million spent on that, because we are getting so many more services out to veterans. It is easy to pick on a number to make a point without looking at the whole picture.

• (2135)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate how my colleague talked about this being one piece of the puzzle and that we need a comprehensive plan. He talked about a number of elements of that comprehensive plan. It certainly sounds like we have broad agreement for this particular piece.

Something that really piqued my interest when the member was talking earlier was a recently announced service-dog pilot project we are going to be doing. For our veterans to have benefits from the job opportunities, we need to support that journey back to wellness for those who are suffering with PTSD.

I had the opportunity in my riding to meet someone who had a service dog who was feeling tremendous positive benefits from the support and from the relationship he had with the dog.

I wonder if my colleague could talk a bit more about that program and how that actually might assist the journey of our soldiers back to wellness that we all so want to see.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question about a great program.

The military has some experience with this through Wounded Warriors. I was in Edmonton a little while ago with a young soldier who was being recognized as the 100th soldier to get a service dog. What we are missing is some research-based evidence so we can put some hard empirical data to that to say that this is a long-term program. Here is what we can do, here are the benefits, and here are the risks, and that kind of stuff.

This pilot project with 50 dogs and 50 soldiers and \$500,000 over a two-and-a-half-year period is critical to putting a framework around it so we can ensure that we are getting the maximum benefit and it can continue and become a long-term, established program.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. I would like to inform the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber that he will have only seven or possibly eight minutes before the end of the debate on this bill.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague across the way for his words, particularly that he was open to hearing amendments. My colleagues will absorb that with great hope and great faith, because we have heard the government say many times that it is open to amendments and then those amendments are never accepted or adopted.

As I only have a short time, I am going to jump into the middle of what my remarks were going to be and focus on some of the recommendations from the Veterans Ombudsman, who spoke of the need for dialogue between the Department of Veterans Affairs and National Defence Canada along with organizations such as the Retail Council of Canada to cultivate relationships and develop a better understanding of their needs and the needs of our veterans.

One of the biggest issues that veterans face when transitioning into the workforce is a two-sided issue. On the one hand it is an issue where veterans have a hard time translating their military skill sets, their military abilities, their military CV if I may, into a marketable state that HR departments would understand, and on the other hand, HR departments have a hard time finding a way to translate those skills into a marketable place.

If we are considering amendments, this is one of the areas we could take a look at. We could do two things.

We could open up the accessibility of what the bill wants to cover, because right now it is limited to just the public service and that would shut a lot of doors for many veterans who may have skills that may not fit the purview of the public service but would benefit other private sector places.

We need to look at how we can help our veterans who are so deserving of our thanks and so deserving of a place in their communities, so deserving of a place in our society because they went overseas and put themselves in harm's way to protect. We need to help them adjust back into the workday world and translate their skills into a marketable fashion. On the other hand, we need to look at helping the private sector understand what their skill sets are. This is just one aspect of what the ombudsman suggested in terms of making this legislation stronger.

We need to have something that separates what we call our modern vets from the veterans who are covered by the original agreement, the gentleman's agreement, if I may.

Our sacred obligation to our veterans is an issue in and of itself.

We need to do what we can to make sure that these individuals have maximum opportunity to reinsert themselves back into the workforce, back into their communities, back into Canadian society.

One of the things that makes those who stood and served their country proud is the fact that they contributed something to their communities, either by standing as a soldier representing this country, representing our ideals, or when they come home being able to do what we take for granted, which is taking care of their families, which ensures that they are building a place for themselves in our communities.

● (2140)

This bill is an opportunity for the government, as well as the House, to help those individuals do that. I would like to see this bill opened up in such a way that it can include more veterans. We hear on a daily basis the listing of numbers, how much the government has spent and what it has done, and yet veterans still come to the Hill in what seems to be unprecedented numbers saying that access to the services they require does not exist. Family members looking to help their loved ones are not able to find the help in various ways, to the point of coming to see the ministers and their MPs. This bill is an opportunity to help open up that dialogue, to help begin that conversation.

I was glad to hear a number of colleagues across the way say that this is part of a larger picture, that this is a first step. Often we hear that a bill is the way it should be and it does not need any amendments. One thing we need to consider, and I hope will be considered at committee, is continuing to have dialogue with the private sector, National Defence, and Veterans Affairs to find out how we can help veterans transition more smoothly into the private sector, becoming full and complete contributors to their communities.

● (2145)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:45 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, May 27, 2014, the recorded division stands deferred until Tuesday, June 3, 2014, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Government Orders

* * *

*[English]***TOUGHER PENALTIES FOR CHILD PREDATORS ACT**

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that Bill C-26, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, to enact the High Risk Child Sex Offender Database Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased to rise in this splendid chamber to be with my colleagues, particularly to speak to such an important bill as Bill C-26, the tougher penalties for child predators act.

The bill, as members know, would touch upon three on three important areas: sentencing reform; the Canada Evidence Act, the evidentiary reforms we believe necessary; and enhancing the practical tracking of sex offenders through our public safety department.

The bill would represent another positive, significant initiative that our government has brought forward to address one of the absolute worst forms of crime: the sexual abuse of children.

As a new father, I must say that in addition to the joy that a child brings to one's life, it is certainly also a stark reminder of the vulnerability of young children and the sacred duty that we all share to protect our youth, particularly, children who are subject to sexual abuse.

It is incumbent upon us to continually assess the current adequacy of the law in that regard. How does our criminal law in fact protect our children and ensure that we are effectively and comprehensively addressing these heinous crimes of sexual abuse?

Sadly, children and youth are far too likely to become victims of sexual offences, more so than adults. For instance, in 2011, police reported that cases had actually gone up. Reported rates indicate that children were five times more likely than adults to be victims of sexual assault. In fact, in 2012, police reported incidents of child sex offences had increased by 3%, and that was up over 3% the year before that. These statistics from Justice Canada indicate, clearly, that the current laws have to be examined and improved. That is what we are attempting to do.

The statistics, of course, do not tell the full story. They do not tell, or speak to, or truly reflect the devastating lifelong impact of a sexual offence on a child.

● (2150)

[Translation]

The amendments to the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Sex Offender Information Registration Act set out in the bill would help to ensure that any offenders who have committed sexual offences against children are fully held to account for crimes committed against the most vulnerable members of our society. These amendments would also serve as a deterrent for these heinous crimes.

[English]

The bill would also create a high-risk child sex offender database. Practically speaking, this would assist in protecting society's most vulnerable from those who are known to have offended against them and those who are most likely to do so again: a classic incurable pedophile.

To achieve these important objectives of protection, the bill would maintain several different components. First, maximum and minimum penalties for certain Criminal Code child sexual offences would be increased, building upon the recent reforms that were enacted by the Safe Streets and Communities Act, formerly known as Bill C-10.

The Criminal Code already contains comprehensive provisions protecting children from sexual exploitation, including both general and child-specific sexual offences.

The child sexual offence reforms would ensure that anyone who commits any of these offences against a child faces a mandatory minimum penalty. That means jail time, in all cases, if someone sexually abuses a child.

Yet more can be done. The bill proposes, further, to increase the mandatory minimum penalties and maximum penalties that would apply to child sex offences to better deter and denounce this type of heinous offence. Maximum penalties for breaches of prohibition orders, probation orders, and peace bonds, all of which can be described as supervision orders and aimed at protecting those who are most vulnerable again from an individual who has been released who has arguably already been afforded the opportunity to be back in society, albeit with restrictions.

The intent here is to ensure that when people violate conditions imposed by a court, conditions that were aimed specifically to protect a child, there will be accountability. A stay-away order, for example, from schools, pools, and playgrounds is a classic attempt to keep sex offenders away from children. When those violations of probation occur, there would be a specific offence attached.

These tools would authorize judges to impose conditions on child sex offenders or suspected child sex offenders by prohibiting unsupervised contact with children. Again, that would be a protective order made by a court to hopefully pre-empt any further offence. If those pre-emptive orders were breached, the bill would bring about criminal accountability.

A sentencing judge would have to consider imposing a probation order on an offender convicted of a sexual offence on a child, and probation orders could be imposed on an offender sentenced to two years' imprisonment. A peace bond could also be imposed if there were a reasonable fear that a person would commit a child sex offence.

Government Orders

Strict adherence to the conditions imposed by these supervision orders significantly reduces the risk of reoffending. Many breaches of supervision orders do not involve the commission of a new offence that would warrant a new charge, but any breach of a condition imposed to protect children, we believe, would be a significant indicator of risk to children.

Accordingly, the protection of children and the prevention of sexual offences against them demand significant condemnation of all violations of supervision orders. Importantly, this bill would increase the penalties for breaches of the new probation order proposed by Bill C-13, the protecting Canadians from online crime act, so I would describe this as sister legislation. As the Speaker is aware, this new offence of non-consensual distribution of intimate images very often includes a pre-emptive attempt to stop the spread of the offending material.

We know that in the case of young suicides, it is that devastating feeling of hopelessness that the material on the Internet is being passed around not only in the community but literally around the globe. It has a devastating psychological impact on the individual. This new legislation aims not only to help remove the material but also in some cases to restrict the offender or the accused from having any further contact with that young person, so there is very much a connection between this bill and Bill C-13, I would submit.

This amendment would ensure that penalties for both the new probation order and for child sex offence prohibition orders are consistent. Again, it is important that we have consistency in the legislation.

The bill also proposes sentencing reforms that would clarify and codify the rules regarding the imposition of concurrent and consecutive sentences, something that there has been confusion on in the past. In general, concurrent sentences are imposed and served simultaneously for two or more convictions that arise out of one continuous act or single transaction, often referred to in the courts as the same event or series of events rule.

Conversely, consecutive sentences are imposed and served one on top of the other for multiple convictions for unrelated offences, as they arise out of separate criminal transactions. The concepts of concurrent and consecutive sentences predate Confederation. Amendments over the years have complicated the statement of the rule contained in the Criminal Code to the point that it sometimes offers little guidance to the courts.

To address this deficiency, the proposed amendments would direct courts to consider ordering, where applicable, that sentences of imprisonment be imposed and served consecutively. That is to say that when the court would sentence the offender for multiple offences at the same time, the proposed amendments would direct courts to consider ordering that the terms of imprisonment for offences arising out of separate events or a separate series of events would be served consecutively.

● (2155)

This bill also proposes to codify the approach of the courts when one of the offences was committed either while on judicial interim release—or bail, as it is commonly known—or while the accused was fleeing a police officer. In such cases, in order to discourage

offenders from committing offences with impunity, courts would usually order that the offences be served consecutively to other offences for which the court would sentence the offender.

The purpose of these proposed amendments on consecutive versus concurrent sentencing is to try to bring about a greater sense of consistency and understanding as to when and why consecutive sentences apply to certain circumstances and to certain offenders. In particular, for multiple child sex offences, including child pornography offences, we believe that sentences should not receive a sentencing discount, as it is sometimes described, whereby a court directs that the sentences imposed are served concurrently, meaning that the offender only has to serve the longest sentence that is imposed for a series of convictions.

Put another way, this proposed amendment would require that sentences for child pornography offences and others would be served consecutive to any sentence imposed at the same time when there has been what is called a contact child sex offence or when there have been multiple victims. Sentences imposed at the same time for contact sexual offences committed against one victim would be served consecutively to those imposed for contact sexual offences committed against any other victim.

This gives individual recognition in the criminal system for each of those victims in the sentence that is meted out. These reforms end the sentencing discount that is sometimes afforded to child sex offenders who are sentenced at the same time for multiple charges. In particular, they ensure that the law recognizes the devastating impact that sexual abuse has on each individual life.

The bill sends a clear message to child sex offenders that there will be no more discount and that they will serve jail time for each and every victim, each and every offence. We believe this is a just result, given the seriousness of the type of offence and the fundamental injustices that have occurred when there have been multiple victims.

Another important sentencing reform included in this bill is to ensure that any evidence that an offence was committed while the offender was subject to a conditional sentence order—that is, a sentence that was served in the community or while on parole or while on statutory release—is also considered an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes.

These amendments will ensure that the gravity of committing an offence while subject to one of these more lenient orders is better reflected in the sentence that is then imposed.

● (2200)

[*Translation*]

The bill will also make it possible to ensure that the spouse of the accused can testify in child pornography cases. Under the Canada Evidence Act and common law, unless spouses are irreconcilably separated, for most offences, the spouse of the accused cannot testify for the prosecution even if he or she so desires. One spouse is not competent to testify and cannot be compelled to testify against the other. The spouse of the accused is not compellable.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The Canada Evidence Act contains statutory exceptions to these rules permitting spousal testimony for most child sex offences and offences of violence against young persons, but not for child pornography offences. Again, we hope to bring about a greater sense of consistency when it comes to spouses and their competency and compellability before the courts.

The amendments proposed in this bill add child pornography to the list of exceptions in the Canada Evidence Act, making the spouse of a person accused of any of the child pornography offences competent and compellable to testify for the prosecution. In child pornography cases, as we know well, the evidence of the accused's spouse may be required to prove the guilt of the accused. For example, the spouse's denial of responsibility for child pornography on a shared home computer may be necessary to prove the accused's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Without this amendment, child pornographers may be able to get away with this very disgusting crime, and we must put an end to this legal loophole. I would submit that the current state of the law on this issue is unacceptable. Any form of child pornography we know is taking advantage of and exploiting children.

This bill also includes amendments to the Sex Offender Information Registration Act. These amendments would require registered sex offenders to provide more information regarding their travel abroad and would permit information-sharing on registered sex offenders among officials, those responsible for the national sex offender registry, and the Canada Border Services Agency. All of this reform is aimed to prevent travelling sex offenders from accessing children in foreign jurisdictions and to facilitate holding them to account for their crimes.

My friend the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness will be speaking to this issue. My friend the Minister of Veterans Affairs is a former police officer. I know he shares the desire to break down any barriers to sharing information between agencies to help hold sex offenders accountable. In this day and age, we cannot be seen as a nation that allows those convicted of these heinous crimes in our courts to then go abroad and take advantage of jurisdictions where laws and enforcement may not be as rigorous. We owe a larger duty of care to children in other countries as well. They are equally vulnerable.

Currently, the law as it pertains to registered sex offenders and the reporting of absences of seven days or more for trips within or outside Canada only requires them to report specific designations and addresses for domestic trips. This bill would amend the act to ensure that all registered sex offenders report every address or location at which they expect to stay on a trip for seven days or longer outside Canada, as well as specific travel dates. These amendments would also require registered sex offenders with a child sex offence conviction to report absences of any duration for trips outside Canada and to provide specific dates and locations. These amendments would help facilitate information-sharing with foreign jurisdictions, which I consider to be appropriate.

As well, the bill proposes to authorize national sex offender registry officials to disclose information on registered sex offenders

to Canada Border Services Agency officials, particularly in cases of child sex offenders assessed as high risk, who will be placed on their lookout system. CBSA would also be authorized to collect information about these sex offenders upon return from travel outside Canada and to share this information with the national sex offender registry officials.

Given that the national sex offender registry officials and CBSA officials do not currently have the authority to share information on registered sex offenders, we believe these amendments are critical and practical in ensuring that authorities are aware of the activities of sex offenders who travel outside our country. Without this knowledge, it may be impossible to detect and combat this type of criminality.

Last but certainly not least with respect to the importance of this bill, the bill proposes the creation of a high-risk child sex offender database. It would authorize the RCMP to establish and administer a publicly accessible national database of high-risk child sex offenders who have been the subject of a public notification in a province or territory.

All of this, I would submit, is in keeping with previous efforts that we have made to improve our criminal justice system to protect our most vulnerable, particularly our children. We have made numerous amendments and brought forward some 30 criminal justice initiatives in the last eight years, including taking such practical measures as increasing the age of protection, putting in place legislation to make the reporting of child pornography by Internet service providers mandatory, and strengthening the sentencing and monitoring of dangerous offenders. All of this is in keeping with our efforts to make this country safer and to make our justice system more just.

We have also put in place the necessary resources to set up child advocacy centres in 10 locations across the country. We have launched the getcybersafe.gc.ca website for public awareness. We have joined in the Global Alliance against Child Sex Abuse Online. I am proud to say that all of this furthers the intent of this bill.

• (2205)

The fundamental message is clear. We must do everything in our power to protect children. I know this is something you share as a father, Mr. Speaker, and we all share as parents and those who care for children. Accordingly, I would encourage all members to support this important legislation.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his speech on Bill C-26. Finally, we can debate it.

Government Orders

It always makes me shudder to think that there will be a registry for high-risk offenders. I always wonder what high-risk offenders are doing in our streets. To me it signals that there is a problem if the government thinks that a simple registry will keep people safe.

In addition to that point, which we will surely address in committee, I have another question. Bill C-26 is not designed to establish mandatory minimum penalties or mandatory maximums, it is designed to increase both the minimum and maximum penalties.

I am wondering what statistics or study the people at the justice department used to demonstrate to the minister that existing penalties, both the mandatory minimums and maximums, needed to be increased. What evidence does the minister have?

The government boasts about having changed many laws, and perhaps it deserves to be congratulated for doing so. However, is it not a failure that there has been 6% increase in the past two years even though various bills we have seen in the past year have increased sentences? For example, Bill C-10 comes to mind.

How can the minister think that the RCMP, which has a hard enough time updating criminal records, will be capable of keeping its promise regarding the new registry?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, as I just explained, the intent is to see that information is being shared between agencies, such as the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency, and those tasked specifically with tracking convicted sex offenders and those who are released sometimes on court orders. It is to ensure that the information is being shared among officials so they are aware of the movements and potential proximity or opportunity that a convicted sex offender would have with a child, or if they are at designated locations where they are not supposed to be. This is a practical step. It is something I believe my friend would agree further empowers police in particular to monitor and, when necessary, to intervene.

As far as the necessity to do more, the member quoted the statistics back to me. The fact that we continue to see sex offences against children on the rise in and of itself is certainly the greatest motivation there could possibly be to do more and ensure that there is greater deterrence and denunciation in these types of offences. If that means longer sentences, yes. I very much embrace the idea that we keep offenders who reoffend and commit these horrible, sometimes multiple, acts of sexual offences against multiple children in jail longer. Does that deter the offender? Yes. Does it send a message that society abhors this type of offence? Yes, it does.

When I hear from police that 55% of sexual offences committed in Canada are actually committed against children, I am equally motivated to do more.

• (2210)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on that same theme.

The minister would know well that the Safe Streets and Communities Act increased sentences in several areas. In the bill before us, in no fewer than 20 sections, the sentences that were increased either by mandatory minimums or maximum sentences have been increased again.

We see an increase in the sentences from 2012, while at the same time the statistics indicate that the incidence of crime has gone up. Therefore, if the increases that were put into Bill C-10 have resulted in an increase in crime, have we not learned something?

If those increased sentences did not give the desired result of bringing crime down, why does the minister insist on adopting the exact same strategy?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, it is mind-boggling to suggest that somehow these statistics are going up because sex offenders are getting longer sentences. It really does boggle the mind that the member for Charlottetown would even attempt to make that suggestion and attribute it to a bill that is designed to do a number of things.

Increasing mandatory minimum sentences and maximum sentences are but part of this legislation. I would invite the member to read the whole bill. He pointed to the number of sections. I invite him to read all of those sections to get a full understanding of the intent of the bill.

Clearly, the statistics tell part of the story. The fact that we had more sex offences in Canada cries out for tougher sanctions and more practical steps to put tools in the hands of the police and the court to help protect children. It cries out for innovative solutions that would allow us to put in place a more protective perimeter around children when it comes to their vulnerability.

This is all part of a comprehensive approach taken by the government. I mentioned some 30 justice initiatives, many of which include putting people in jail who offend against children, who sexually abuse children for longer periods of time. This is something that I feel our government is doing in the best interests of children.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour, as the chair of the justice committee, to ask a question of the minister, who has been an excellent Minister of Justice. He has been very available to our committee to discuss a number of issues.

Regarding Bill C-26, if I understand from the discussion and reading the bill, its main focus is to ensure that sexual offences against children receive sentences that are appropriate, that we are increasing the mandatory minimum penalties and the maximum penalties for sexual offences against children. The bill would also impose, for the first time, consecutive sentences for consecutive crimes against children. It also includes child pornography and those who commit offences against children by using child pornography as their vehicle.

Could the minister tell the House why it is important to the general public that we have sentences that match the crime, particularly against children?

• (2215)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burlington, the excellent chair of our justice committee, for his work.

Government Orders

He is getting at a very important point, which is the message that it sends to Canadians. It is a message of consistency, a message of concern and compassion for children and a message that reflects Canadians values. The message is that this type of offence holds a particularly grave place in the minds and hearts of Canadians and that we cannot in any way, shape, or form tolerate sexual abuse against children.

The devastating impact that this can have on the life of an individual has been well chronicled. It is a lifelong sentence for that person.

I recall, as a prosecutor, dealing directly with victims and the parents of young victims. It is soul-destroying, and the parent very often carries the guilt of somehow not having protected that child or having left them in the custody or care of somebody who, it turned out, was abusing them.

It is well chronicled, and we have heard about the impact that it has had on athletes and individuals who were abused by those who should have been entrusted to care for them. They were in positions of trust.

The aim of this bill and the approach that we are taking here is to reflect the seriousness of the offence, have it recognized by the courts, and have a period of incarceration that is appropriate.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, “this is about politics, not public safety”. That was Steve Sullivan, the first federal ombudsman for victims of crime, speaking on Bill C-26.

This bill would not do those things that would make children safer. It would only do those things that have been proven to be ineffective, such as maximum minimum sentences and so on. The current administration has failed to provide the funding support for Circles of Support and Accountability, a proven program that has 70% to 83% reductions in recidivism among those most likely to reoffend.

I challenge the Minister of Justice. If he cares about our children, to fund that program and stop pursuing failed policies.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the member would know that the Department of Justice does much more than just bring forward legislation that toughens penalties. We have many programs in place that are designed specifically at the front end to prevent this type of offence and also to work with offenders and victims.

We are bringing historic legislation in the first Canadian victims bill of rights. We have a very extensive aboriginal justice program that, again, does a great deal to help deter crimes that occur far too often on reserve against aboriginal women and girls.

It does require a comprehensive approach, and that is exactly what the government is doing. Rather than just paying lip service to these offences, the government is treating them seriously and also treating the victims with respect.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House at 10:20 this evening to discuss Bill C-26.

Much pomp and ceremony accompanied the introduction of this bill in February. More than three months have since passed, and we are just now beginning this first hour of debate on a bill that the government declared was of the utmost urgency and importance and would solve pretty much all of the world's problems.

Like most members on this side of the House, I have some concerns. I would like my colleagues opposite to keep an open mind so that we can take a calm look at this bill and ensure that it really will do what they say it will. This bill is called the Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, to enact the High Risk Child Sex Offender Database Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The Conservatives like to call it the tougher penalties for child predators act.

The Conservatives like to portray themselves as heroes by saying they are against child sexual predators. It seems to me that everyone in the House is against child sexual predators.

This bill was introduced with great fanfare. However, after reading it, we realize that the cases used to justify this bill during the many press conferences held by the minister and the Prime Minister are eight years old.

I definitely have a lot of questions. We will certainly have the opportunity to ask the minister questions in committee, but I am going to ask him a few in advance. It would be nice if he shows up in committee with some answers.

Essentially, as the minister said, this bill will increase the existing mandatory minimum sentences. It is not as though we were reinventing the wheel or having a great debate on the merits of having minimum sentences or anything else. Some people are more or less in favour of the idea of mandatory minimum sentences.

Sometimes our colleagues at the end of the House like to say that it is absolutely appalling. However, when we look at some of the changes the Liberals made to legislation over the years, we see that they also introduced mandatory minimum sentencing provisions. They are ones to talk.

The bill would:

...increase maximum penalties for violations of prohibition orders, probation orders and peace bonds; ...clarify and codify the rules regarding the imposition of consecutive and concurrent sentences.

There is a case currently before the Supreme Court about the legality of consecutive sentences. In the short and medium terms, many decisions made here risk being seen in another light. That is why I was saying that it is good to assess the bill calmly in order to do what we really want to do.

The bill also seeks to:

...require courts to impose, in certain cases, consecutive sentences on offenders who commit sexual offences against children; and ensure that a court that imposes a sentence must take into consideration evidence that the offence in question was committed while the offender was subject to a conditional sentence order or released on parole, statutory release or unescorted temporary absence.

What is more:

It amends the Canada Evidence Act to ensure that spouses of the accused are competent and compellable witnesses for the prosecution in child pornography cases. It also amends the Sex Offender Information Registration Act to increase the reporting obligations of sex offenders who travel outside Canada.

The following is new:

It enacts the High Risk Child Sex Offender Database Act to establish a publicly accessible database that contains information—that a police service or other public authority has previously made accessible to the public—with respect to persons who are found guilty of sexual offences against children and who pose a high risk of committing crimes of a sexual nature....[and] it makes consequential amendments to other Acts.

The NDP has always had a zero tolerance policy when it comes to sexual offences against children.

● (2220)

I am saying this a little more enthusiastically than I did in the case of Bill C-10, which was an omnibus bill. The government had lumped in some provisions that applied to sexual predators with a number of other completely unrelated laws. As we did not agree with some of the provisions, we tried to split the bill. The government's petty politics were an attempt to stymie the opposition. The government could thus say that the opposition had voted against provisions to deal with sexual predators.

It seems that it did not work because Bill C-10 is in effect and the tougher mandatory minimum sentences do not seem to have had the desired effect. I would like to hear the minister tell us, in committee, how these new mandatory minimum and maximum sentences will succeed this time when they failed before.

That is one of the serious concerns that I have about this file. Many Conservative bills, whether government bills or backbenchers' bills, do nothing but increase mandatory minimum sentences while claiming to solve the problem of these types of crimes in particular.

Each time we ask the Conservatives why they are making the change. Is it because the sentences are too lenient? Is it because the mandatory minimum penalties they initially put in place were not enough and statistics clearly show that there is a serious problem?

If there is an increase in the number of crimes being committed, is it the penalty that is the problem or is it the services?

Earlier I heard the member talk about the circles program that they cut. This program had a proven track record and it worked. Everything was fine and it had a good success rate. Sometimes, the real problem is with the related services. We need to ensure that these people, who are predators when they are arrested and who are found guilty, serve their sentences and no longer pose a risk when they are released.

The other day I was giving an interview on the radio and I was asked whether I would oppose this bill. I said that I was flabbergasted that they were not offended that the government thinks it can solve the problem of high-risk child sex offenders with a registry.

I do not understand how the government can think that its high-risk child sex offender registry, to be managed by the RCMP commissioner, will solve the problem.

By the way, there is small problem that may also have to be examined in committee, and that is the definition of "high risk".

Government Orders

Under the act, the commissioner seems to have the authority to declare someone to be high risk, but the Conservatives always like to sneak in a few extra little provisions. There is one in this bill that is a bit worrisome to me. It is worth looking at what it says. Clause 11 of the new registry act, under the heading "Regulations", states:

The Governor in Council [meaning cabinet] may make regulations

(a) establishing the criteria for determining whether a person who is found guilty of a sexual offence against a child poses a high risk of committing a crime of a sexual nature; and

(b) prescribing anything that, by this Act, is to be prescribed.

In this bill, they are also providing for a way to change the manner in which regulations are made. We might look at this more thoroughly here at some point and perhaps in committee as well. When I put all these pieces together, it makes me wonder about this bill.

I was looking at some statistics about the various crimes that are mentioned in Bill C-26. Section 151 refers to sexual interference.

Canada is a big country. I think we now have a population of about 34 million. One sexual predator is one too many. We can all agree on that. I would not want anyone to quote me tomorrow as saying that it is okay if we have 100 sexual predators. I am not saying that. What I am saying is that we have to be realistic.

Here are the statistics on sexual interference: 241 people were charged in 2008, 574 in 2009, 818 in 2010, 918 in 2011 and 916 in 2012.

● (2225)

We are seeing progress. However, that is probably the least serious sex crime, at least in comparison to sexually assaulting a child, for example.

There were 56 cases of invitation to sexual touching in 2008, and that rose to 206 cases in 2012. There were 17 cases of sexual exploitation in 2008, but that increased to 49 cases. It was relatively stable between 2010 and 2012. We do not have any statistics about making sexually explicit material available to a child because it is a new offence that was created in 2012. There were 54 cases of luring a child through the use of a computer in 2008, and 127 cases in 2012.

Government Orders

I remind members that these are years under Conservative power. These are the law and order years, when the government is claiming to have solved all kinds of problems. That remains to be seen. The government has been forced to review some offences, saying that it may have been mistaken in 2010 when it set a range of years for a sentence and that perhaps it should have been harsher. This proves what we often hear at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights: offenders do not carry around the Criminal Code when they commit an offence. They do not carry it around thinking that they may have to serve eight years in prison. On the contrary, there are people who are absolutely sick, and we need to focus on getting them off our streets. I am not interested in simply saying that I was harsh and I punished the offender. That is certainly important, but we need to ensure that offenders get the support they need, so that when they are released into society, the public is not left relying on a high-risk child sex offender registry to find out who is in our communities. Programs such as the Circle of Support and Accountability can help these people so that we can provide reasonable assurances to Canadians across the country and so that the public knows that we did our best to limit the potential number of repeat offenders.

There are so many questions. The government often stays silent, especially when it comes to statistics and explanations, aside from their press conferences, where they sell their message.

When I visit my riding of Gatineau, people are happy to know that we are addressing the problem of sexual predators. Everyone agrees with that. There is nothing worse than hurting our children. If someone touches a hair on our child's head, we would obviously be prepared to go to extremes. That is why we must make sure that we do things right.

We do not know if the government got a legal opinion about its registry. In fact, there are some questions about the registry. Information will be circulated and shared. Did anyone think about the possibility of vigilantes? It may not be a big deal to say that a convicted individual lives in Toronto. Toronto is big. However, in a small village, it is a different story. If people know that Mr. So-and-so lives in such-and-such a village, it is easy enough to find out where he lives. We need to take certain precautions and ensure that everything is done properly. No matter how disgusting the crime, I would not want anyone to take justice into their own hands. I would not want our actions to result in a situation like that simply because we did not take the time to fully analyze the issue.

Did the Minister of Justice speak with his provincial counterparts? They are the ones who will feel the impact of this. Consecutive sentences and tougher sentences affect plea bargaining, for both the Crown and the defence. There are not enough crown prosecutors or enough judges in the criminal courts.

• (2230)

That has a serious impact. I asked the minister a question about the RCMP. I did not get a response, but we know that the RCMP is already having a very hard time updating criminal records. That is not insignificant. People are upset when a criminal is found guilty of drinking and driving for the fourth time, but it is because he was never tried for his repeat offences. If the police do not have the resources to keep track of his criminal record, his file is empty.

Even with the toughest laws known to man, and even if the RCMP commissioner is given full authority to create a registry for high-risk offenders, as long as the RCMP does not have the resources it needs to deal with each of those files, there will be problems.

That is why the minister needs to make sure this is bulletproof. Thinking that the bill is charter compliant is not good enough. Thinking that the bill is fine is not good enough. Will the bill pass the test if someone challenges it? Will we end up having to have to start from scratch? The Conservatives might not be too worried about that, but I do not like the idea of starting this kind of trial, especially when the victims have to go through what is probably the most difficult time they will ever have to go through. I always told my clients that there are two kinds of people who like court: lawyers and judges. Nobody else likes the whole business because it is an extremely stressful time, especially if it is a criminal trial.

Sometimes the victim is a person who has been robbed of innocence, someone to whom the most despicable things have been done and who is waiting for the trial and all kinds of things. That person ends up having to start over from scratch because the evidence is thrown out or challenged and the case is appealed.

All that to say that I hope the minister will be open-minded enough to listen to the witnesses in committee. The NDP will support this bill at second reading so it can go to committee because that is where the work gets done. This is the kind of offence that the committee should take its time studying.

However, we have a lot of questions and we think that the government has not been completely forthcoming. It has already introduced many similar bills. Either it dropped the ball and started over without telling us, or it had alarming statistics that would give us no choice but to amend the bill. If that is the case here, only the committee's study will tell us what is really going on.

Since the minister is here tonight, and not one of his parliamentary secretaries, I hope he will listen to our suggestions with an open mind. We do not want to pester the government; we just want to make sure the bill will do what it is supposed to do, which is implement tougher penalties for child predators and keep the public safe once a predator is released. Sooner or later, these people get out of prison.

Then we have to wonder what state these people will be in when they get out of prison. I am not a bleeding heart. I am just a realist. I do not want hardened criminals to be back on our streets. I do not want a repeat of what happened in the Outaouais recently.

Last week, a man got out of prison after serving a sentence for voyeurism and attempted sexual touching. The first thing he did was to get caught by the police again. That is not what we want. We want people to be able to reintegrate into society and to no longer be a danger to the public.

I hope that the minister will be open to our suggestions and examine them properly. We will support the bill at second reading.

Government Orders

• (2235)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the justice critic for the NDP, for taking a constructive approach in encouraging this legislation to go forward. I do not consider her a bleeding heart. I consider her a colleague, a practitioner, somebody who brings her very important perspective to this debate.

I do want to pick up just quickly on a couple of points.

I have not heard what I consider to be practical amendments, at least thus far, that would improve the bill. I have heard some of the blanket criticisms. What we are attempting to do, and what she has rightly said we are all attempting to do here, is to prevent further offences, particularly against children. It would be folly to suggest that the bill would in and of itself prevent these offences in the future. It would send a message of deterrence. It would put in place more practical steps that the police can take, provide more practical tools, but it would be in unison with other steps that have already been taken and will have to be taken in the future.

With respect to her suggestion that somehow this legislation is going to answer all of the questions, that is certainly not the intent.

Public confidence is important. She would know that when it comes to these types of offences, almost 80% of Canadians feel that the courts have been too lenient and that the message of deterrence is not getting out.

My colleague is right when she describes individuals who touch children as sick and that she wants to get them off the street. I would encourage her to look closely at these provisions, because that is exactly the intention. The bill would ensure that those who are able to be rehabilitated are treated. However, some forms of pedophilia are not treatable. We are at least taking every possible step to put perimeters around an individual's movement, track that individual's movement, know where the individual is. As a father, I feel I can say that everyone wants to know if a recently released pedophile is living in the neighbourhood. This legislation would enable that information to flow.

• (2240)

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I never mentioned that I had any amendments at this stage. What I was trying to understand is why, after Bill C-10 and after increasing certain mandatory minimum sentences, the department and the minister felt the need to increase these minimums and maximums yet again. Are we missing some information that would explain whether this upsurge in offences came about after the increase in mandatory minimum sentences and that increasing the sentences did not have the desired effect?

Those are the types of questions that we should be able to address quite calmly in committee, not to destroy the bill, but to ensure that it does what it is supposed to do. That will be our objective in committee to try to address this upsurge.

It is worrisome to hear that offences have increased by 6% over the past two years when we have a law and order government in place.

It is worrisome when the cases mentioned during press conferences date back to a time before the Conservative government came to power.

Is there a disconnect somewhere? Is there something that did not happen that was supposed to? Have we been more concerned about press conferences and less concerned about content? I do not know, but that is what we will find out in committee.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on a couple of things.

The member for Gatineau referenced the roles between provincial and federal jurisdictions. Here we have a bill that would increase minimum sentences. To the extent that these sentences are less than two years, these inmates are serving their time in provincial institutions on the nickel of the provincial government that is involved. I would be interested in hearing the member's views with respect to what consultation, if any, has or should have been done, given the impact on the various provincial treasuries.

I would also invite her to comment on the constitutionality of the various provisions and whether she has any concerns with respect to that. The government has been on a terrible losing streak in the courts with respect to the constitutionality of various pieces of legislation, including crime legislation, and the bill certainly brings into play not just security to the person but also possibly mobility rights.

I would be interested in my colleague's view on those two points.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to consultation, that was one of the questions I asked the minister after his speech.

It will be interesting to see how the provinces react to everything that is thrown at their courts, especially since access to justice is not satisfactory across Canada.

With respect to how justice is perceived, it is a vicious circle. The wheels of justice are turning more and more slowly, and this certainly does not help convince the public that justice is served.

Thus, there is a great deal of work to be done. There is no way to be informed because this government does not provide details about its consultations. In any case, for the government, consulting means talking rather than listening.

With respect to compliance with the charter, every time the Conservative government introduces a bill, we are usually given this assurance. In fact, under section 4.1 of the Department of Justice Act, the government is required to ensure that its bills are charter compliant.

However, in light of the suit launched by Mr. Schmidt, the public servant who says that that is not exactly the order that the justice department is given, and the government's monumental losses of 7-0, 8-0 and 6-1 on criminal justice issues brought before the Supreme Court of Canada in the past year, we certainly have doubts. However, we will verify these doubts in committee.

Government Orders

If the Conservative government did not make sure that its bill was legal and charter compliant, we will do so in committee because this is a serious file that concerns our children. Let us at least have the decency to study the bill in committee.

I do not claim to be the greatest constitutional expert the world has ever known, so I have some questions. I do not have all the answers just yet, but we hope to get them in committee.

● (2245)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very interesting speech.

Every time an act of pedophilia occurs, we are all affected and angered by it. We all agree that we must crack down on and punish these criminals. However, as my colleague was saying, we also need to make sure that these sorts of crimes do not happen again. The hon. minister said that punishment is a way of preventing these things from happening again, but prevention is just as important. The success rate of the circles of support and accountability program is between 70% and 80%. That means 70% to 80% of people who participate in the program do not reoffend.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that. Is this something we should be putting energy and money into?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that excellent question.

Of course, prevention is extremely important. We also have to be realistic about sexual predators and some sexual offences. When I worked as a radio announcer, I did a show following a serious case of pedophilia that received a fair bit of media attention in Quebec.

That day was probably one of the most defining moments of my radio career. During the call-in show, which was mainly about the castration of pedophiles, since experts were considering that issue, I received a call from a pedophile.

He admitted that he had a condition that could not be healed. He had made the decision himself to withdraw from society because he no longer trusted himself in an environment where he would be in contact with children either directly or indirectly. All that I remember was that I was there, with my headphones and microphone, and my producer was begging me not to say anything and to let this man talk. That is what we did and it was enlightening.

We have to act intelligently when it comes to matters of criminal law. It is true that crime does not pay and that we have to punish criminals appropriately. As in labour law, the punishment must fit the crime, but we must not become obsessed with just that. We have to look at the whole picture, and I hope that is what we will do in committee.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-HONDURAS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

BILL C-20—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must advise that an agreement

has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) and 78(2) concerning the proceedings at report stage and third reading of Bill C-20, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, the Agreement on Environmental Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting of the House a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at those stages.

* * *

● (2250)

TOUGHER PENALTIES FOR CHILD PREDATORS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, to enact the High Risk Child Sex Offender Database Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to split my time with the member for Ottawa South.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I felt quite confident that the House would certainly want to hear from the member for Ottawa South, and I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues for that.

Today it is my honour to stand to speak to Bill C-26, and I want to state from the outset that I am reluctant to support the bill. However, we will vote at second reading to send the bill to committee, and will do so in order to provide the government with an opportunity to present what evidence, if any, has emerged since 2012 that has prompted the introduction of even more mandatory minimum sentences.

It was just two years ago that many of these same provisions were contained in Bill C-10. In the two years since the coming into force of Bill C-10, child sex offences, as we heard from the minister, have risen by 6%. To repeat, in the two years since the coming into force of Bill C-10, child sex offences have risen by 6%.

The House will remember that when the Conservatives introduced Bill C-10, in 2011, they spoke at length about how these measures would combat child sex offences. I think we are still in agreement that reducing child sex offences is a priority that we all share. The government has made much of the fact that it imposed mandatory minimum sentences, stating that this would somehow reduce incidents against children.

Again, that legislation, Bill C-10, came into force in 2012. Since the coming into force of that bill, and despite the rhetoric from the Conservatives, it must be accepted, and indeed it was earlier in debate this evening, with obvious concern, that child sex offences have actually risen.

Government Orders

I want to make it clear that I do not for one minute believe that the Conservatives planned or hoped for this result, but I do believe that they need to accept the idea of being smart on crime.

At the justice committee this past March, I raised this issue with the minister. It was the same issue that I raised with him in the question and answer period following his speech this evening. I wanted to know why the government would introduce further flawed legislation for these offences when very clearly the evidence suggested that its previous approach had not worked.

The same question was posed at the justice committee when these statistics were introduced by the minister at committee, as they were again this evening. I asked him where the statistics came from, and at that point he did not know. He indicated he would get back to me, and I guess that happened tonight. We now know that these statistics came from Justice Canada.

I asked the minister at committee, on March 6 of this year, “Do you not agree that the stats that show that child sexual offences have increased in the last two years indicate that the increases that you put in C-10 haven't worked?”

The minister responded, and not exactly in the same fashion as he did this evening, but his response was:

I'd answer that two ways.

First, I would say that C-10 would hardly have had effect in the time period we're looking at. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it indicates to me that we have more to do. It indicates very clearly that we have to take more steps toward prevention, deterrence, and denunciation.

That was, in part, the exchange that I had with the minister this past March at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, a part of which we heard repeated here this evening.

If it were the intent of the government when introducing Bill C-10 to reduce crime as it relates to child sex offences, then it must recognize and accept that its efforts have failed. Some members of the Conservative caucus, including the minister, would argue that not enough time has passed to properly measure the impact of Bill C-10. I assume they believe that with the passage of time, the data will indicate Bill C-10's effectiveness.

If that is the case, why are we here today discussing Bill C-26? Why are we here debating this bill, if, as the minister himself suggested, we need more time to properly assess the impact that Bill C-10 will have in reducing crimes against children? It does not make sense. It has caused many of us on this side of the House to wonder why the government is doing this.

Albert Einstein once said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result”. No one in the House would accuse the Minister of Justice of being Einstein, but the government's behaviour on this issue gives rise to the suspicion that they are playing politics with a very serious issue.

• (2255)

I have said time and again that I find it very troubling that the government would seemingly use sensitive subjects as a potential wedge issue, or worse, to raise money from its base leading up to an election. We have seen this approach to cyberbullying in Bill C-13, presently before the justice committee, where the government is

using real victims of cyberbullying to bring in measures that have absolutely nothing to do with cyberbullying. It is using victims to bring in a law that would allow for the widespread invasion of our privacy.

Suffice it to say, though, that on the matter of crimes committed against children, the House is very united. I want to reiterate that no one in this House is immune from heartache when we hear of any child who has suffered because of the actions of an adult. I know that members on all sides share this view.

The Liberal Party remains steadfastly committed to the protection of the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, our children, against the most predatory of practices: child pornography and sexual offences against children. We support concrete measures aimed at the prevention of sexual offences against children as well as appropriate punitive sanctions against those who commit such heinous acts.

I earlier quoted the justice minister, who had indicated in a response to a question I posed that he believed that we need to do more to combat crimes against children. He indicated that we need to do more in the areas of prevention and deterrence and that prevention and deterrence are important elements in reducing crimes against children. This bill, however, includes no measures to prevent sexual offences against children or measures to ensure the treatment, rehabilitation, or reintegration of sex offenders. Again, why this glaring inconsistency?

By increasing mandatory minimums, the bill would reduce judicial discretion and could result in charter challenges.

We need to know that the laws we are passing will be effective in reducing the incidence of sexual violence against children and will not be merely symbolic expressions. That is why we will seek a detailed study and analysis with stakeholders at committee. Liberals will seek to ensure that the policies adopted in this area reflect the best evidence and the latest research available and will not be based on fear and ideology, or worse, on an effort to raise money from a political base using the Criminal Code and this sensitive issue as a way to exploit the fears of Canadians.

We also want an effective law that addresses these issues and not laws that will be met with endless charter challenges defended at taxpayers' expense.

We have some concerns about charter challenges to the sentencing provisions of the bill and about privacy suits that may arise from the offender database. Moreover, travel restrictions may raise concerns as to the mobility rights of Canadians, as guaranteed by the charter. I raise these issues knowing that the government's record on crime legislation is abysmal. Time and again, we see the courts tossing out its legislation, because it is found to be unconstitutional.

Government Orders

Sexual violence, like other forms of violence, is traumatic and devastating. The minister also suggested in committee that along with prevention and deterrence, we need denunciation of those charged and convicted of crimes against children. No one would disagree with that position, but denunciation does not equal deterrence. We must endeavour to find methods of prevention, as well as punishment, while not overlooking the importance of treatment and rehabilitation and the reintegration of offenders.

Evidence-based criminal law policy is a guiding principle of the Liberal Party of Canada. It is through this perspective that we review and critique all legislation.

While we have supported mandatory minimums in this area in the past, we no longer support them as a matter of policy, given that they are ineffective in achieving their stated objectives and may violate the charter. Indeed, mandatory minimums should be the exception, not the rule. Under the current government, they have become the rule, not the exception, despite the fact that mandatory minimums have no basis in evidence pointing to their effectiveness.

• (2300)

There would not be one member of the Conservative caucus who could rise today in his or her place and point to any independent study that would suggest that mandatory minimums work. Indeed, that challenge was advanced to the minister immediately after his speech.

This is not an issue that should divide the House, because we all want to protect children. We in the Liberal Party want to do it in a way that respects the charter, respects evidence and facts, and respects the overwhelming need to be smart on crime.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I have no problem with what he said.

However—and I mentioned this in my speech—there is the issue of mandatory minimum sentences. He lectured us about how these sentences are ineffective. I may agree with the thinking behind that; however, I would like him to tell us whether the Liberals have done an about-face.

From 1993 to 2003, they added a number of mandatory minimum sentences to the Criminal Code. The Conservatives were not the first to introduce mandatory minimum sentences—it was the Liberals. I am thinking about the offences of sexual assault with a weapon and living off the avails of prostitution. All of these mandatory minimum sentences were imposed by the Liberals.

Does this mean that it was not a good idea at the time and that they will no longer do this? Are they changing? Are there offences for which it these sentences are called for and others for which they are not? I am a bit confused about the Liberals' philosophy on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I believe that my colleague would simply wish for me to repeat part of what I said in my speech, which is that Liberals have supported mandatory minimum sentences in the past. It is no longer a Liberal Party policy. They have been shown to be ineffective. The evidence indicates that they are not effective. We believe that mandatory minimum sentences should be the exception

and not the rule. However, they have become the rule and not the exception. I thought perhaps that was clear enough in my speech. That is certainly where we stand.

My colleague would know as well that the Liberal government of Paul Martin, in 2005, as their first piece of legislation, introduced Bill C-2 on Criminal Code amendments to protect the vulnerable, including strengthening child pornography laws, creating new offences against the sexual exploitation of youth, increasing penalties for child-specific offences, facilitating the testimony of child victims, and other measures.

There is no question that the Liberal Party has been consistent in its stand with respect to the measures necessary to protect the most vulnerable. With respect to mandatory minimums, it is well past time they became the exception and not the rule.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is quite rare that we hear in this place any member of Parliament or an entire political party admitting that they have made a mistake in having supported one policy and have now seen, based on empirical evidence, that the policy has failed.

I would like to ask the hon. member for Charlottetown what kind of evidence it was that finally persuaded—I should not say “finally”—the Liberal Party that mandatory minimum sentences do not work. It is clear that they do not. We are passing many bills that include them in this place. The courts have found them not to be charter compliant. Why are we still passing them?

Specifically to the Liberal Party, what made them change their minds?

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, we believe in evidence-based decision-making and not in decision-based evidence-making, as we see all too often. Therein lies the answer.

What has changed? The overwhelming weight of evidence indicates that mandatory minimums are not an effective tool in reducing the incidence of crime. Indeed, the very fact that we are standing here in this debate and talking about the increase in the incidence of child sexual offences against these stronger penalties is absolutely proof of that. The weight of evidence over the years, as more mandatory minimums have been introduced, has simply become undeniable and overwhelming.

• (2305)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House tonight to speak to Bill C-26, the tougher penalties for child predators act.

It is often said that the test of a just society is how it treats the most vulnerable of its citizens. Among the most vulnerable are those who cannot always speak up for themselves, namely, our children. In that spirit, the Liberal Party remains steadfastly committed to supporting the protection of children and concrete measures aimed at the prevention of sexual offences against children, as well as appropriate punitive sanctions against those who commit such heinous acts.

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Bill C-26 includes no direct measures aimed at preventing sexual offences against children, nor measures to ensure the treatment, rehabilitation, or reintegration of sex offenders. All too often in the debate on these important matters, the opposition is painted as “being soft on crime”. The reality is we need to be a lot smarter on crime. Unfortunately, Bill C-26 just is not a smart bill. In fact, by increasing mandatory minimums, the bill reduces judicial discretion and may result in charter challenges. As parliamentarians, we must ensure that the laws we pass will be effective in reducing the incidence of sexual violence against kids and not merely a symbolic expression likely to be overturned when first implemented.

The last Liberal government made child protection a priority and its first bill, Bill C-2, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Evidence Act, was assented to in 2005. That legislation proposed amendments to the Criminal Code and the Canada Evidence Act to provide further protection for children against abuse and sexual exploitation by broadening the definition of child pornography, prohibiting the advertising of child pornography, increasing maximum sentencing for certain offences related to child pornography, and creating new sexual exploitation offences.

Moreover, the Liberal legislation sought to facilitate testimony by child victims and witnesses by better enabling the use of testimonial aids, including screens, closed-circuit television, and support persons for all child victims and witnesses under the age of 18 years. The reforms also allowed children under 14 to give their evidence if they were able to understand and respond to questions. Such measures were far more concrete in securing the protection of the vulnerable than what we see in Bill C-26. The offences therein captured new behaviour unaddressed by the Criminal Code and also made improvements to the trial process. By contrast, Bill C-26, by and large, only increases penalties that were themselves recently increased, with no evidentiary basis to suggest that the current regime is not working, and without any effort of reducing the incidences of crimes against children.

Perhaps it is worth emphasizing this point another way. Penalties only come into play after an offence has occurred: a child has been victimized, his or her abuser has been apprehended, and the trial process has been completed, with a guilty verdict returned. By addressing only the penalty these criminals receive, we ignore all of the other elements at play. We fail to consider whether the police have adequate resources and tools to apprehend abusers. We fail to address issues at trial that might prevent important evidence from being adduced. In other words, by addressing the end of the process, we ignore the very beginning, which ought to be our goal: reducing incidents in the first place.

Perhaps the biggest concern with Bill C-26 is that the mandatory minimum penalties lack an evidentiary basis. If one goes back to the omnibus crime bill, Bill C-10, one will find that many of these offences had their minimum penalties increased just two short years ago. It begs the question: If these penalties needed to be increased to the lengths in Bill C-26, why did the Conservative government not do so two years ago? Herein lies the problem. With the law amended in 2012, someone imprisoned under the provisions would likely still be serving prison time less than two years later, particularly given the imposition of a mandatory minimum. Thus, we have no idea if Bill C-10's changes were sufficient.

We also have no indication that the changes in Bill C-26 will be beneficial in any way. If anything, we have evidence to the contrary given the constitutional problems of mandatory minimums. Liberals oppose mandatory minimum penalties as a matter of principle and policy. The evidence simply does not support them. Studies show that they are ineffective in deterring behaviour and, indeed, create more problems than they solve.

● (2310)

Indeed, the whole premise that increasing the sentence will somehow cause would-be offenders to change their minds is absurd. When one considers what that entails, it means we seriously think criminals are looking up the Criminal Code online and deciding, based on the number of years indicated in hard-to-read legal provisions, whether they should go forth and do something. This is just not how the world works, and the Conservatives need to wake up to this reality.

It is not only Liberals who oppose mandatory minimums. The former MP for Ottawa West, David Daubney, a Progressive Conservative MP who retired only recently as director of criminal law policy in the Department of Justice after a distinguished career there, was quoted as saying on the way out the door, “The policy is based on fear—fear of criminals and fear of people who are different. I do not think these harsh views are deeply held”. He went on to say at the same time, because he was subject to so much pressure inside the department, that “somebody has to take the risk of talking”.

By imposing mandatory minimums, the government ignores several decades' worth of overwhelming evidence from around the world that longer jail terms do not deter crime and in fact may have the opposite effect: in 1990, a study for the justice department found that:

The evidence shows that long periods served in prison increase the chance that the offender will offend again.

In 1999, research commissioned by the Solicitor General concluded that:

To argue for expanding the use of imprisonment in order to deter criminal behaviour is without any empirical support.

A Massachusetts report from 2004 called mandatory minimums:

...a recipe for recidivism rather than a recipe for effective risk reduction.

Government Orders

Making matters worse, mandatory minimums lead to prison overcrowding. One of the reasons mandatory minimums increase recidivism is that when more people are imprisoned for longer periods of time, prisons become overcrowded and less conducive to rehabilitation.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator has warned the government, documenting an increase in the number of inmates of nearly 7% between March 2010 and March 2012, predicting continued growth in the prison population as the full impact of Conservative policies are felt. The practice of double-bunking is used to accommodate this increase, housing two inmates in a cell designed for one. That practice has grown substantially. In 2004, 6.3% of inmates were double-bunked; by 2012, under the Conservatives, the number had grown to over 17%.

As studies demonstrate repeatedly, mandatory minimums discriminate against aboriginal Canadians and other minorities. The growth of the prison population includes a significant rise in the percentage of aboriginal inmates.

Indeed, mandatory minimums disproportionately impact vulnerable minorities, especially aboriginal Canadians, who have less access to legal counsel and are generally treated more severely by the justice system. For example, aboriginal defendants are often charged with a more serious offence than non-aboriginal defendants who commit the same act. Aboriginal people are already dramatically overrepresented in Canadian prisons, and mandatory minimum sentences exacerbate the problem.

Here is the point: the crime rate among aboriginal Canadians could be reduced much more effectively by education and poverty reduction than by increased incarceration.

Perhaps most importantly, these mandatory minimums are an unjustified attack on judicial discretion. One of the arguments in favour of mandatory minimums is that they remove discretion from judges who are supposedly “soft on crime”; however, there is no evidence, not a shred, to suggest that sentences imposed by judges are unjustifiably light. Serious offenders receive serious sentences already; mandatory minimums serve only to remove discretion from judges in exceptional cases where leniency might be appropriate.

Furthermore, these mandatory minimums do not truly eliminate discussion at all. Rather, they transfer it from judges, whose decisions are public and subject to appeal, to police officers and prosecutors. If a crown attorney feels that the mandatory minimum prescribed by the law would be too severe, he or she might decide to charge for a lesser offence. Such prosecutorial decisions are made behind closed doors, and no appeals process exists to challenge them.

In short, these mandatory minimums waste taxpayer dollars. They invite expensive constitutional challenges on the grounds that they violate section 7, the right to life, liberty and security of the person, or section 9, the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned, or section 12, the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

• (2315)

Already several of these sentences enacted by the Conservatives have been struck down. Other challenges are currently before the

courts. They clog up the court system and require the government to spend millions of taxpayer dollars defending laws that were constitutionally suspect from the outset. This is in the face of the legal responsibility of the minister to ensure that legislation brought to the floor of this House is constitutional.

I will wrap up—

The Speaker: I am afraid the member has been out of time for a few moments now. I did extend him some courtesy to conclude his remarks.

We will move on to questions and comments with the hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found the member's speech very interesting as he is a member of the Liberal Party, which is the party that put almost all of the minimum sentences in the Criminal Code to begin with. Year after year, the Liberals would put minimum sentences. All of a sudden, they are holier than thou, and the whole Liberal Party is against mandatory minimums.

This bill would actually increase some mandatory minimums and maximums on sexual crimes against children. Is the member telling me tonight that the Liberal Party is against minimum sentences for criminals who have sexual intercourse with children, either live or through child pornography? I would like to know the answer from the Liberal Party.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, that gives me an opportunity to go back to the parts of my speech I could not finish.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer found a 40% increase in correction costs between 2002 and 2012, even though they had been in decline since 2006. Also, according to the PBO's report, the provinces are on the hook. The Conservative government was found in contempt for the first time in Commonwealth history for refusing to provide the cost of its crime bills, its law and order agenda.

The reality is that it is important that we base our policies on evidence and the latest research available and not on fear, histrionics, and ideology. We want an effective criminal law to address these issues, and not one that will be greeted with endless charter challenges defended at taxpayer expense.

What it really means is that it would not be tough on crime but it would become tough on taxpayers. That is why so many American states are cancelling their mandatory minimums. At the very least, we would expect the Conservative Party to listen to their Conservative cousins south of the border.

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, and it seems to me that he is trying to discuss issues of law in a sports bar with all the snickering and laughing. I mean, the Conservatives certainly love when they can get their base all worked up with whatever hot buttons they can push.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the issue of victims, because we have a minister who refuses to meet the survivors of the St. Anne's Residential School. We have a minister who walks away from the mothers and daughters of the murdered and missing women, who takes their information and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Get out. What about matrimonial rights of aboriginal women? That's bullshit.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has a few seconds left to finish asking his question. If members have other things to say, there is some time left for questions and comments and I would be happy to give them the floor to do so, but I would ask them to hold off until the member has finished his question.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but could you ask people to stop swearing in the House? I know they are acting like drunks at a sports bar, but when the Minister of the Environment uses the word “bullshit” regarding the issue—

• (2320)

The Speaker: Order. Whatever may have been said certainly should not have been repeated while the member has the floor.

I am going to ask members to come to order. It is late at night, and I sense this might be getting off the rails rather quickly.

Order. If members want to have a conversation, they can do so outside the chamber.

Mr. Mike Wallace: If you don't respect yourself, at least respect this place.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Burlington will not enter the chamber and start hurling heckles out. It is not conducive and certainly does not help the Speaker try to bring the House back to its normal calm.

I would ask the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to very quickly wrap up his question.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I was asking about murdered and missing women and you saw the outburst and the ridicule.

What does my hon. colleague think when the issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women is raised? We see the behaviour of the government with the minister throwing the information of their disappearances on the ground. Why does he think there are two kinds of victims and one kind of victim, aboriginal, does not count?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I cannot divine the reasons that compel this kind of behaviour, either in the House or publicly. I will let Canadians draw their own conclusions about that kind of conduct.

I would go back to the important words that were spoken by the outgoing director of criminal law policy at the Department of Justice after a 22-year career there. He was the most senior adviser on criminal law policy. He could have gone quietly into retirement, but instead they say that he tried to talk some sense back into our country. In an editorial in *The Globe and Mail* he said:

The tough-on-crime route has been tried and failed. The government knows what it knows, doesn't listen to evidence and is reluctant to ask for research to be undertaken.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I consider it a privilege to rise in the House tonight to express my full support for the tougher penalties for child predators act, not just as the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and co-sponsor of this bill, but also as the member of Parliament for Lévis-Bellechasse and Les Etchemins.

I am very proud to represent this region. It includes people in the agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors as well as the insurance world, who, generation after generation, have built their business relationships on trust.

Trust is partly what I want to talk about tonight, not the trust between an insurer and his client, as one would see in my riding, but the trust between a child and an adult that is broken in cases of abuse.

This evening, I saw that everyone in the House supports the principle of this very important bill. This bill would better protect children against people who want to steal their innocence for their own perverse sexual gratification, and it would hold those who commit these heinous crimes accountable for the harm they inflict on society.

Our government is standing up for victims, just as the Minister of Justice is doing tonight by rising to introduce the victims bill of rights, which would implement measures to complement those that we have been putting place since 2006 to protect victims. We want to give them back their voice; their dignity; and the right to information, protection and restitution, as well as the right to participate in the judicial process. We want to put them back at the heart of our justice system.

Last week, our Prime Minister—accompanied by the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who is the Minister of International Development—kicked off a hugely successful summit in Toronto intended to help women around the world, as well as those children who come into this world and are not lucky enough to be born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

The initiative announced by the Prime Minister will ensure that, as Canadians, we are proud to help women around the world who are in need.

• (2325)

[*English*]

We have always been clear that when it comes to violent and sexual crimes, particularly those committed against our children, we make no apologies for our push to impose harsher penalties and longer sentences for the monsters convicted of these horrendous acts.

Government Orders

[Translation]

We will not apologize for imposing tougher, longer sentences on people who attack that which we hold most dear—our children. That is why it is important to make changes to existing laws, so that a convicted sex offender is given a sentence that reflects the severity of his crime. That is why we will be moving forward with this bill, which includes many measures to ensure that child predators are punished, and that we are protecting children here in Canada as well as abroad.

The Minister of Justice talked about the changes he wants to make to the Criminal Code and the Canada Evidence Act, notably to ensure that someone who is found guilty of sexually assaulting several children serves consecutive sentences, and to increase maximum and minimum penalties that apply to offenders convicted of sexual offences against children.

Why should we have minimum sentences for sexual predators? It is a measure that is used when society feels that the crime was abhorrent, unacceptable and intolerable. That is why our government uses minimum sentences with discretion, moderation and, I would say, restraint, for heinous crimes. That is the kind of crime we have, when adults attack our children.

We will increase maximum penalties for offenders who violate the terms of their supervision orders, which is to say, repeat offenders.

[English]

This would ensure that committing a crime while on parole and on unescorted temporary absence, statutory release or while subject to a conditional sentence order would be an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes.

[Translation]

This will ensure that committing a crime while on parole or during an unescorted temporary absence would be considered an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes.

My colleague, the Minister of Justice, also indicated that he wished to amend the Canada Evidence Act to permit spousal testimony in child pornography cases.

I would like to talk about the public safety aspect.

[English]

For my part, I will focus on the proposed changes that would help front line law enforcement keep track of dangerous sex offenders.

Canadians, even members of the opposition, agree that it is critical that law enforcement agencies are aware of the location of high-risk registered sex offenders. That, in fact, is one of the reasons why the national sex offender registry exists in the first place.

[Translation]

The national sex offender registry helps police investigate sex crimes by providing up-to-date information about convicted sex offenders and the identity of all registered sex offenders living or working in a particular geographic area. These sex offenders have been convicted of serious sexual offences, and the courts have ordered that they be identified to police.

This database has been an essential law enforcement tool since 2004. There are currently 33,000 individuals listed in the national sex offender registry. Two-thirds of those, or 22,000 individuals, have been convicted of sex crimes against children. I cannot overstate the importance of this registry because police need to have quick access to that information when they are trying to locate sex offenders or investigate crimes.

● (2330)

[English]

In 2010, our government passed several measures to strengthen the sex offender registry and make it more effective. At that time, we made sure that anyone convicted of a sexual offence would automatically be added to the registry. We also made it mandatory that every convicted sex offender had to provide a DNA sample to the National DNA Data Bank.

[Translation]

At the same time, we also gave police the power to use the registry proactively as a crime-fighting tool, not just an investigative tool.

[English]

This meant that rather than having to wait until after a sexual crime was committed, police officers were able to access the registry to help prevent a crime if they noticed a suspicious person or activity near playgrounds or schools, for example.

[Translation]

I have to say that I have met chiefs of police who have told me that police officers have witnessed suspicious activity around our schools. They get calls and reports. When they respond, they see individuals behaving suspiciously. I think that Canadian families need reassurance. They need to know that our government and Parliament are working to implement measures that will keep our streets safe so that our children can run around without having to worry about someone hurting them.

[English]

These amendments mark a tremendous step forward for the protection of vulnerable people from sex offenders.

[Translation]

That being said, there are other necessary changes to ensure the effectiveness of the registry and to protect children here in Canada and abroad. Indeed, sometimes people here leave the country to abuse children abroad. That is why it is important to provide better information to police services when it comes to the travel records and the location of registered sex offenders, especially those found guilty of sexual offences against children. As we saw, nearly two-thirds of the individuals on the registry, or nearly 22,000 people, committed crimes against children.

Government Orders

Currently, all registered sex offenders have to declare absences of seven days or more for any trip, regardless of whether the trip is taken domestically or internationally. For any trip a registered sex offender plans on taking in Canada, that offender must provide detailed information on the location he intends to visit and the addresses of where he plans to stay. However, under the current law, he is not required to provide that same detailed information on his destination and addresses if he is travelling abroad.

Take, for example, a registered sex offender who lives in Ontario and is planning to go to British Columbia for two weeks. He has to provide the police with the address and contact information of where he plans to stay, but if he leaves for Thailand for two weeks, there are no rules. That person is not required to provide locations or details. Under the legislation we are debating this evening, this practice would end. The sex offender would have to provide travel details for trips outside Canada lasting seven or more days, and provide the precise dates of departure and return. Unfortunately, sexual tourism exists. It is important to address this practice when it affects children.

• (2335)

[*English*]

Indeed, international travel is a key focus of this bill. We are concerned about child sex tourism, namely those who are leaving Canada without the knowledge of Canadian authorities and being convicted of sexual assault in the past.

We believe the current system creates a loophole that could be exploited. As it stands today, child sex offenders can travel outside of Canada for only four, five or six days and therefore not be obliged to report their absence to authorities.

We will close this gap by making it mandatory for any registered sex offender convicted of a sex offence against a child to report any absence of any duration outside of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Whether it is a matter of two days, two hours or two minutes, the duration will no longer be an issue. A child sex offender will have to report any time spent outside Canada.

With these measures in place, we will give the authorities the tools they need to acquire more specific information about where sex offenders live, when they leave, where they stay and when they return. The police will be in a position to follow them and exchange this information with police authorities and law enforcement agencies in the countries where these individuals travel. This will be done to protect children around the world.

We all know that there will always be individuals who try to circumvent the rules and avoid informing the authorities of their plans to travel abroad. That is where another agency will step in; the Canada Border Services Agency will play an important role.

Consider that in 2012 almost 100 million people crossed our borders, either at our ports, airports or departure docks.

[*English*]

While Canada Border Services Agency officers have a number of tools at their disposal to determine the admissibility of each traveller coming into Canada, they do not currently have access to

information found in the national sex offender registry. Furthermore, Border Services Agency officers are not able to collect certain travel information from sex offenders at the port of entry, nor can they regularly provide information to officials at the national sex offender registry. The left hand needs to speak to the right hand. This is also what this bill is all about.

[*Translation*]

If we keep an eye on child sex offenders who travel abroad, it goes without saying that border services officers must have access to this vital information; they must also be able to work more closely with those responsible for the registry in order to share pertinent information. The bill will allow us to do that. We propose to improve information-sharing between these two entities, the Canada Border Services Agency and the national registry, in order to ensure the safety of Canadians and of children in Canada and elsewhere.

When the bill is passed, registered sex offenders will be required to include their passport and driver's licence numbers in the information provided to the national sex offender registry. These are concrete and practical measures. However, they must be covered by legislation and it is the reason why we are introducing them.

Furthermore, those responsible for the registry must be able to provide the Canada Border Services Agency with information about high-risk sex offenders who intend to travel abroad, or other registered sex offenders, in order to help prevent or investigate a sex crime.

If the Canada Border Services Agency is made aware of a registered sex offender, border guards will be able to collect the offender's travel information at the border and share it with those responsible for the registry. The people who maintain the registry will know whether sex offenders are leaving the country and where they are going. These strong measures will allow us to keep children safe from dangerous pedophiles both here at home and abroad.

I would like to talk about a third thing, which Canadians feel very passionate about, and that is the right of victims, children and families to know whether there is a high-risk sex offender living in their neighbourhood. That is perfectly legitimate. We can inform them in a safe way in co-operation with local authorities, and that is what we are proposing to do.

• (2340)

[*English*]

Canadians have the right to know the character of the individuals who are near their children. If a dangerous pedophile is within arm's reach of their child, they have the right to take proper actions and precautions. That is why the bill would enact the high risk child sex offender database act, which would allow our government to create a national public database.

Government Orders

[Translation]

We are going to create a public registry of high-risk sex offenders so that parents can take responsible measures to keep their children safe.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness for his speech.

He spoke about the public registry of high-risk offenders and said that it would allow parents to take the necessary measures. I would like him to elaborate on what he means by that and what measures parents could take once they know who is in the registry.

Since we are lucky enough to have the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in the House at this wonderful hour and we know that the commissioner of the RCMP will have to decide who will be included in the registry, determine the criteria and so on, I am curious to know whether the minister intends to give the RCMP any additional resources. The RCMP is already having a lot of difficulty keeping the criminal records in registries up to date, which is problematic. Individuals who should be being found guilty of reoffending are not because the Crown does not have that information when entering its pleas for sentencing.

Does the government intend to give the RCMP more resources so that it can fulfill its obligations?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. This gives me the opportunity to give an overview of how the future registry will work.

As my colleague knows, the registry already exists. There have been 33,000 names on the list since 2004. It is important to note that the public registry will target high-risk child sex offenders. These offenders are not determined by politicians; they are identified by the appropriate local authorities, such as provincial and municipal police forces. These authorities generally issue a notification. Some already do so.

The only work that is left to be done is to make this information accessible in a national online database. If, for example, a high-risk child sex offender moves from one province to another, the registry will ensure that our children's safety is not at risk and that parents can have access to that information.

That is how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police will play a role in managing and establishing national standards, to ensure the registry works properly. This registry is an important tool for our communities.

● (2345)

[English]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister said earlier that the bill contained measures that would make our streets safer so that our children would be safer, but he has produced no analysis, nor has the Minister of Justice, to substantiate the claim.

I want to go back to the comments made by the former Progressive Conservative member of Parliament who chaired the justice committee and led the Conservative government's sentencing reform team at the Department of Justice when he said that the

policy the government was proposing “is based on fear—fear of criminals and fear of people who are different. I do not think these harsh views are deeply held”.

Furthermore, in the U.S., there is a bipartisan measure in Congress to roll back mandatory minimums, which were created in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. The smarter sentencing act, put forward by Republican Senator Mike Lee from Utah, has already passed the senate judiciary committee and has the support of the U.S. Attorney General, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, and the chairwoman of the United States Sentencing Commission, who highlighted how mandatory sentences backfire in the fight against crime.

Could the minister, or any minister, tell us why we are moving backward in Canada, when the 25 years of experience in the United States shows us that this is clearly the wrong way to go?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Ottawa South for his question.

Facts are stronger than rhetoric. In Canada, since 2006, it is evident that our policies have been working. Crime rates are going down. Whether my colleague likes it or not, their apocalyptic prediction of overcrowded prisons did not come true. The Auditor General's latest report confirms that. Correctional Service Canada is returning hundreds of millions of dollars to the public purse because our prison population is growing at a lower rate than our general population.

However, there are still areas that warrant closer attention. I am talking about people who attack our children, and we will find responsible ways to ensure that our children are safe and that their parents can feel comfortable letting them play outside.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to listen to the Liberal members pose questions about this. They talk about imposing mandatory minimum sentences on child sexual predators as though these perpetrators just made a bad decision one day, just woke up and did not do something right today that they really should have rethought about.

The Liberals talk about our policies being based on fear. They are darned right. I think the average Canadian should be fearful, and is fearful, that somebody would prey on their child for sexual purposes.

The fact that the Liberal Party has no interest in imposing a sanction on that will be its problem, not ours, because this government will take those concrete steps.

I do have a question for the minister on this. The Liberals like to drag out all the statistics on the U.S., but they do not tell the Canadian public that over the last three decades, the States have actually been increasing penalties and increasing sentences on child sexual predators. There are five states in the United States that have the death penalty for child rape. Are the Liberals suggesting we mirror our Conservatives cousins to the south? Is that what they are recommending?

The minister has talked to victims. What do they have to say about that?

Government Orders

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, the member for Yukon is doing outstanding work. I had a chance to visit him. He is a former police officer. He has a long experience in the correctional services. He is a well-respected member and is also an athlete.

That being said, to get back to the core of his question, it is all about the victims. I am proud to stand in a government that is standing up for victims.

I come from Quebec. I sit in the Quebec caucus with members like Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu who has experienced the tragic loss of his daughter. That is why I am so proud to work with the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation that is bringing a voice for victims into our justice system, and that is making sure that when we are making decisions and taking those inmates out of prison, we take into account the concern of the victims.

• (2350)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish the minister had given a more detailed answer earlier when I asked him the question. We know how important it is for parents and communities to know when a dangerous predator is going to be in their midst. Once they know, what do they do? He stopped there. I am curious about what that information would enable victims and parents to do.

The minister talked about the fact that it was not up to politicians to determine the criteria. However, I would like him to comment on clause 11 of the new registry, which states that the Governor in Council can make regulations establishing the criteria. I would like him to adjust his earlier answer. It is not necessarily the RCMP and its commissioner. The Governor in Council is the one who will be able to establish the criteria for determining whether a person is a dangerous predator.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to repeat that the local authorities are the ones who will notify the public about sexual predators. The registry will include high-risk sexual predators.

I think that a mother is in a good position to know what information she would make use of, keeping in mind the need to be careful. We always need to be prudent and remain vigilant, making sure that we take precautions, as was said earlier. We want to avoid hare-brained initiatives. We will create a reliable process so that parents can get the information.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with another member.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-26. We all agree that it is important to protect our children from any and all forms of violence, particularly sexual abuse.

Given that there are mothers, grandmothers, brothers and sisters who are living in families where there is sexual abuse, it is understandable that the government wants to find ways to prevent these sorts of things from happening and pass bills in this regard. That is not my situation. I have been lucky in life, but I have heard the testimony of families where there has been abuse. We are going to support this bill, but we disagree with the fact that, once again, it

refers only to punishment and not necessarily to prevention, training, resources and assistance.

I would like to read a comment that was made by Clayton Ruby, a defence lawyer and author of the textbook *Sentencing*. He said:

The minimums, especially consecutive minimums, don't leave room for considering the individual offender and the nature of the offence. Government doesn't trust the judges. They appoint them, but they don't trust them. It's all about control.

I would like to talk about a particular situation. Today, I spoke with Mr. Michaud, the director of the Centre d'intervention en abus sexuels pour la famille. He talked to me more about the guidance and help we can provide to the family than he did about punishment. First and foremost, there are statistics. He said that 90% of the attackers are known to the child. Often, the victim is torn by the affection he or she might have for the attacker, and it is even worse when that person is the father. The family ends up torn apart in this situation. The longer the sentence, the greater the impact it will have on the family. That has to be taken into consideration. All that to say that training, prevention and methods for helping the family are very important.

Mr. Michaud also said that if we want a program to succeed, then we must truly provide support to the entire family. He said that when the mother learns that one of her children was sexually abused, it is doubly hard and often she feels guilty for the rest of her days. That means that if we do not have the means to help them, then nothing will come of it. People have to look for help. Help is available. It can be found.

Stress levels are going up and needs are becoming greater.

What he would like to have is help in the form of tools to assess the aggressive behaviour or what happened and develop a standard protocol for assessing the risk of reoffending. He says that, in general, without providing statistics, the assessment shows that many people do not reoffend. However, if they are taken out of their environment and the family is placed in a difficult situation, the risk of reoffending is higher. That is what the director of the crisis centre deplored.

For society in general, we have to find the means to help people. We must ensure that all the people and families affected receive some assistance. Naturally, there must be a punishment. These people have to realize how they have hurt their families.

• (2355)

However, I would like to come back to what Mr. Michaud was telling me. Victims often feel guilty. They feel twice as guilty when the family is affected and when they wonder what will happen with regard to means of co the situation.

We therefore need to address the overall problem, not deal with it on a case-by-case basis. We need to ensure that sexual offenders receive harsh sentences. We also need to provide support for victims and their families.

All too often we forget that the family is affected, and I am talking here about the extended family. Often family includes friends and everyone around the victim. We need to help victims speak out against their abusers and cope with this very difficult ordeal.

Adjournment Proceedings

Over the past few years, organizations' budgets have been cut. There is less and less help available in the community. We need to go back to square one.

After all these bills were passed, we saw an increase in delinquency and crime.

I want to ensure that families and organizations get help and that victims feel reassured about everything that is happening in their lives.

• (2400)

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member will have 13 minutes left to conclude her remarks the next time the bill is before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 5, I asked the Minister of Public Safety to explain why he is allowing one of the most successful crime prevention programs in the country, a model other countries have been adopting, namely Circles of Support and Accountability, to be terminated. His answer, in part, was, "This program has the support of the government". There is only one problem. The minister's words ring hollow. The program is, in fact, being terminated next year.

If it was accurate, how does he explain the statement made before the public safety committee on May 15 by a representative of Circles of Support and Accountability? He said:

The funding of a nationwide program, a Canadian innovation in both crime prevention and recidivism reduction, involving ordinary citizens across this country who are invested in risk management within communities and community safety, is over as of March 31, 2015.

CoSA is community-based, and the people who comprise CoSA were described as follows to the public safety committee on May 15:

They're your neighbours. They're often people who belong to a faith community. They're moms and dads...

...[They are] 30-year-old people with new families, with young children, some of them churchgoers, some of them not, and they were saying, "If I don't do this, how can I say to my children that I did anything to protect them in society as much as I possibly could?"

The need for CoSA was best addressed by Andrew McWhinnie, who represented CoSA at the public safety committee on May 15. He said:

If you talk to a room full of people and say, "How about it? Let's provide the support and accountability network for sexual offenders," they'll run you out of the room. And if you go back to your constituencies and say that, you're not going to get re-elected. But if you're talking about the reduction of victimization, about protecting children, about protecting college students, that's what we're about. That will get you elected. And when we talk to people about that, they start to say, "Okay, I get it. I understand it."

We've done some evaluations and asked, "Do you think your community is any safer? Do you feel any better about being in your community, knowing that there is a circle of support there around these guys who are coming out of jail?" People say,

"Yes, a little bit." They still think they should all go to jail and be kept there, and we should throw away the key, but they feel better that there is a circle of support for the people who are coming to the community, whether they like it or not. Because in Canada we don't have civil commitment, and we don't put people away forever—not yet, anyway. So we do have people of that high risk who are coming back to our communities.

We have heard a great deal from the government about crime, and we have seen the government's usual response. We have seen it tonight as well. It is toward punishment, toward incarceration, as if somehow these measures alone will result in a so-called safer society. However, what really makes a safer society is crime prevention programs, like Circles of Accountability and Support.

Therefore, I have to ask. Why is the government terminating the money for this program?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, further to the request from the Minister of Public Safety, Correctional Service Canada has reviewed its decision and restored its full funding to previously existing agreements with the Circles of Support and Accountability, commonly known as CoSA.

When it comes to protecting the safety of our streets, communities and children, the government has adopted more measures than any previous government. Through the 2011 Safe Streets and Communities Act, we have increased the protection of children and youth from sexual predators, ended house arrest, eliminated pardons for serious crimes and have increased offender accountability.

We have talked about other legislation tonight, but we have also recently introduced legislation to strengthen the sex offender registry to prevent sexual exploitation online and to restore balance in the criminal justice system through better protection of the rights of victims.

The government has also acted decisively on measures to prevent crime. We have provided more resources to police officers, crime prevention programs through our national crime prevention strategy and to effectively coordinate in community corrections programs in order to prevent recidivism among offenders released in communities.

The hon. member for Malpeque knows that we are not cancelling effective programs. However, as a responsible government, we are always looking for the right balance to ensure that our citizens are protected from crime and that we, as a government, use our resources efficiently.

That is exactly why we provided additional funding to CoSA in 2009 through the national crime prevention strategy to find out more about the intervention's effectiveness to reduce sexual offences. Through this national demonstration project, we have provided an additional \$7.5 million over five years to develop more CoSA sites that provide support to more sex offenders who have been released into communities. This additional support also enables us to commission, for the first time, a comprehensive, independent evaluation of the impacts of the intervention programs on the participants.

Adjournment Proceedings

In addition to determining whether and to what extent CoSA reduces sexual recidivism, this evaluation will help identify the key elements of successful CoSA practices. Previous data do not provide the same level of detail and confidence that this evaluation will.

Through this additional funding, 250 new participants have entered the program so far, an increase of 137% compared the situation prior to our making this investment. I am pleased to report that 94 have completed the program and 125 are currently enrolled.

CoSA eases the stress and enhances the likelihood of successful community re-entry by providing constant support through the circles to help these offenders develop the positive pro social skills, establish positive social networks and maintain stable housing and employment.

I am convinced that Canadians appreciate that the results of the final evaluation will provide important information to all potential funders regarding the effectiveness of this investment.

It is important to understand that under current sentencing provisions, once offenders have completed their sentences in full, they are no longer under the jurisdiction of Correctional Service Canada. Investments such as these have the potential to provide needed supports that go beyond the programs offered by the CSC when individuals are in custody.

• (2405)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what the parliamentary secretary had to say, but I take issue with a couple of points.

The government is, in fact, cancelling effective programs on the crime prevention side. The parliamentary secretary claims, and this is often the way that the Conservative government works, that the government is restoring funding. Yes, it has restored funding, but the problem is that the funding ends on March 31, 2015. That is just restoring temporary funding and letting a program drop that is in fact

successful and seen as a model around the world in reducing recidivism for serious sexual offences. That kind of program is making streets safer.

I ask the parliamentary secretary again. Will the government restore funding long-term? I am not talking about these halfway measures that it uses to try to let on that it is doing something, when really it is not.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the CoSA sites, which have had agreements for some years now with Correctional Service of Canada, have had their full funding reinstated. That was at the request of the Minister of Public Safety .

In addition, through a five-year agreement under the national crime prevention strategy, Public Safety Canada has been provided with additional funding. The funds include resources for a national evaluation of the CoSA to determine its effectiveness.

Through this new agreement, CoSA sites have been added and more sex offenders have been assisted, in fact increasing the numbers of persons enrolled by 137%. Consideration will be given to the findings of the evaluation that is due in the fall of 2014, which is expected to provide more reliable findings about the impacts of CoSA. Certainly the hon. member can acknowledge that an evaluation of any program that government does is important.

These measures, of course, should not be seen in isolation from the rest of the government's initiatives that are designed to make communities and vulnerable persons safe from crime.

• (2410)

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, May 27, 2014, the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12:10 a.m.)

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