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Friday, February 5, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 5, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Employees' Voting Rights Act was a common sense bill.

[*English*]

I will be sharing my time with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

[*Translation*]

The main principle of the bill was that all federally regulated workers should have the right to a free secret ballot vote when deciding to certify or decertify a union.

[*English*]

The card check system that had apparently been in place for federally regulated industries required 50% plus one of workers' union membership cards for union certification. This system was open to co-workers and other interested parties potentially pressuring employees into signing union cards. Rather than an automatic certification of a union process, the previous bill required a 50% plus one majority of votes cast in a secret ballot to support certification at a meeting for certification or decertification.

The principle behind this is similar to what we all undergo here in a general election.

[*Translation*]

Just as the secret ballot of a general election represents the voice of each elector, a secret ballot on certification would allow employees to freely express their wishes.

[*English*]

Many Canadians do not want to reveal who they voted for in a general election. I am sure that members experienced that as often as I did when they were going door to door in the last federal election. Some people are quite free in expressing how they are going to vote, but many would rather keep that to themselves.

Workers should be provided that same level of comfort in expressing their views, choosing to either express them publicly or to have the privacy of a secret ballot vote in the workplace, a place where they spend by far the majority of their time. They should be made to feel welcome and comfortable, no matter what their choice, in all circumstances.

[*Translation*]

The bill ensured that there was a framework in place to allow those workers to express their personal position.

[*English*]

One other change in the previous bill was the proposal to set the threshold of employee support required to trigger certification or decertification at 40%. It was amended to 40% so that the trigger was the same either way, which it had not been prior to this legislation. It would be the same for certification or decertification, the same to get in and the same to get out.

[*Translation*]

This number is more reflective of international conventions and the majority of provincial statutes. In fact, five provinces currently have this threshold or higher. I believe this approach is fair and creates a level playing field for both supporters and opponents in situations where the question of certification or decertification is at stake.

[*English*]

As I said before, the creation of the new legislation was about making sure that workers are able to express themselves as they deem fit in their workplaces, allowing both those who are opponents or partisans supporting accreditation or decertification to express their views.

As I have said, it makes sense to me that we use a system for the democratic rights of workers, but it apparently also makes eminent sense to workers. Polling data on unionized and non-unionized employees across the country shows overwhelming support for a secret ballot vote on questions of certification and decertification. This seems fair to me.

Government Orders

•(1010)

[*Translation*]

Poll after poll indicates that, since 2003, support across Canada for secret ballot voting has rated between 83% and 89%, with some of the highest results coming from unionized or formerly unionized employees.

[*English*]

Clearly, Canadians believe that we should take important steps to secure this fundamental right for employees in federally regulated workplaces.

As Canadians, we have taken great pride in our democratic processes. The secret ballot is the hallmark of our modern democracy here in Canada. It is a system we support so strongly that Canadians have not only shed blood for our country to maintain its democracy but have actually spent significant amounts of time in other countries to help them achieve that same degree of freedom and democracy.

I ask how it could be undemocratic, as has been mentioned in the House by other members, to provide workers with a secret ballot vote. We know that PSAC has stated at committee that it uses a secret ballot vote itself for internal elections as well as for collective bargaining agreement ratification. Every member in the House was elected by a secret ballot vote.

As Justice Richards' stated in his ruling in the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, "The secret ballot, after all, is a hallmark of modern democracy".

Due to this basic principle, this basic value that I think all Canadians hold dear, I would encourage all members in the House to vote against the current bill being considered and maintain the bill of the MP from Red Deer—Lacombe. It is a common sense bill that makes the certification and decertification process for unions a democratic one in which all workers have a voice and can express that voice in the way they deem appropriate, in a comfortable manner, in their own workplaces.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite clearly, Bill C-377 is counterproductive to a positive working relationship between employers and employees. It creates unnecessary red tape for labour organizations and labour trusts. Legislation is already in place to ensure that unions are financially accountable to their members. Therefore, I am wondering what the real reason was for the government at the time bringing forward this unfair legislation that brings extra red tape.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, just so we are clear, the bill that was brought forward was a private member's bill. It was not government legislation. I think all Canadians agree, though, and I am sure the member would agree, that with regard to the bill I was speaking to, another private member's bill, Bill C-525, a democratic, transparent process is what is most appropriate.

For me, particularly as I spoke today about Bill C-525, making sure that we have a secret ballot vote is essential. It is a cornerstone and a principle of our Canadian democracy that we should all be defending.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very active in the debate surrounding Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which were a direct attack on how unions operate.

When we debated the issue, the Conservative government of the day argued that it had the right to interfere in this matter because union dues were tax deductible and therefore some degree of accountability was needed. I also recall that professional associations, which also collect dues that are tax deductible, were not included in the bill.

It was therefore abundantly clear to me that this was a direct attack on how unions operate, particularly regarding the issue of unions having to show their accounting records. Obviously, this gives negotiators on the management side an advantage, since they would then be familiar with the financial position of the unions with which they are negotiating.

Why will the Conservative members not just admit that those two bills were a deliberate attack on unions in order to undermine their ability to stand up to the government, which was extremely harmful over the past four years?

•(1015)

[*English*]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, what I have spoken about today is the democratic process. Bill C-525, which is a private member's bill that I hope the House considers, is a cornerstone of Canadian democracy. Our intention here, and I think it was the intention of both private members who brought forward their legislation, and I would encourage people to speak to those individuals about their private member's bills, was to make sure that there was transparency as well as democracy being exercised.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing we did as a Conservative government when we came to power back in 2006 was introduce a transparency act. The first thing the Liberals did, or the second, perhaps we will give them that, was introduce this legislation to repeal a bill, whose importance the member and other speakers have done such a marvellous job of helping Canadians understand, rather than talking about the economic conditions in the west, the pipelines issue, dairy farmers' concerns with TPP, refugees, the Armed Forces, and so many other issues.

Why did the Liberal government choose to target this legislation as its first act when it came to power?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I too have concerns. I represent a riding with a significant number of dairy farmers. Today they are asking why the current government is not focused on the TPP. A number of individuals in my riding are involved in the agriculture community, whether they are farmers or people getting that produce to market. Why did the current government not mention agriculture in its throne speech? Why is it that we are focused on something that takes a system that was created to make people equivalent, where certification and decertification are both at 40%, an in and out equivalent, and there is a secret ballot vote, which they now would like to reverse?

Government Orders

I would ask the government on the opposite side when it will take care of farmers. When will it take care of the economy? We have some serious issues that have to be addressed in this country right now.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to follow my esteemed colleague regarding the Liberals' intent to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Both of these bills were about transparency. As my colleague talked about earlier, the first bills we introduced as a government were about increasing transparency, and one of the first acts of the Liberal government is to introduce bills to reduce transparency.

Bill C-377 had an important purpose. The purpose was to extend the principle of public disclosure to a group of institutions that enjoy substantial public benefit: labour organizations. This is key. Public disclosure would increase the confidence of Canadians that unions spend their money wisely and effectively.

Regarding Bill C-525, which dealt with the issue of voting rights, it replaced a system called "card check". The card check system allows for a workplace to be unionized without allowing all employees to express their opinions. In fact, the unionization of a workplace could occur without a significant portion of the bargaining unit having been made aware of it.

Again, both of these bills dealt with improving transparency. In our strong view, Canadian union workers have the right to know how their mandatory union dues are spent. That is why our government passed Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Repealing these laws sends a very clear message: the Liberal government cares more about thanking union bosses, who did everything in their power to help them get elected, rather than the thousands of hard-working union members whose dues were spent without consultation. Union leaders need to be held accountable and tell their members and the public how their tax-advantaged income is spent.

The Conservative Party will continue to support union transparency and stand up for union workers. As I have said in a couple of my other speeches, it is becoming quite clear that the only party that cares about Canadian workers and workers' families is the Conservative Party of Canada.

Even some labour organizations are very strongly in favour of our bill. The Christian Labour Association, Dick Heinen, the executive director, in February 2014, said:

Now fundamentally, CLAC believes in competition in the labour relations environment in Canada. We think that workers should have the right and be free to make their own choices when it comes to which union represents them or whether they want to be represented by a union at all.

As well, John Farrell, executive director of the Federally Regulated Employers, Transportation and Communications, in his testimony to the Senate committee, said:

FETCO members prefer a secret ballot vote to a card-check system for the purpose of determining if a union is to become a certified bargaining agent for employees. A secret ballot vote is the essence of a true democratic choice and is entirely consistent with Canadian democratic principles. It allows each and every employee to express their true wishes without undue influence or disclosure of how they cast their ballot. This is the mechanism that is used for the electoral process in Canada, and it is the fairest process.

It is no coincidence that the public sector union bosses worked hard to get the Liberal government elected, and now, quite frankly, it is payback time. The first thing that the Liberal government is doing is repealing these two very important bills, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

In addition, the President of the Treasury Board made a point of announcing that he is restoring the sick leave benefit to the public sector. That is a cost of \$900 million a year. That is \$900 million that is not available for health care, the environment, agriculture, and infrastructure. However, again we can see it is definitely payback time. Now we have a government that is beholden to public sector union bosses.

Quite interestingly, what I am seeing in the House and in government is a merging of the ideology of the Liberals and the NDP. We have the champagne socialists riding with the limousine Liberals. Quite frankly, the NDP has not changed. It is still the party of bad ideas and toxic policies. What is changing is the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is moving very quickly to the left, and their alliance with public sector union bosses against the interest of Canadians in general is proof of that.

● (1020)

I actually would like to call up a committee on the status of endangered wildlife in Canada so that we can list a species called the "blue Liberal", which is now in danger. They are the Liberals who actually cared about business. They were the prominent blue Liberals who were talking in favour of pipelines, economic development, and free trade. However, they are being completely ignored. I think the Species at Risk Act needs to look at the blue Liberal.

Given that it is payback time, let us imagine what is going on in the negotiation room between the government and the public sector unions. Do members not think for a minute that the public sector unions do not point their finger at the relevant Liberal negotiators and say, "Look, we got you elected and you better deliver"? The Liberal Party is bargaining with the same group that helped bring it into power.

The President of the Treasury Board is making a sham trying to talk tough, but we know what will really go on behind closed doors. These negotiations are fundamentally flawed. There is another word I could use, but it is quite unparliamentary. The negotiations will be all about how much they can fleece the taxpayer.

Unfortunately, the public sector unions have become an entity unto themselves. We see the evolution of public sector unions as powerful political entities that in some cases can determine who forms a government. The public sector unions will always remind the Liberals who got them elected, and the public interest itself will be left behind.

This is bad for democracy and it is bad for our country. The public service is supposed to be neutral and carry out the wishes of the duly elected government of the day, but the trends I am seeing make me very uneasy.

Government Orders

Again, I want to reiterate that as this session evolves and the legislation evolves, it is becoming quite clear that the Conservative Party of Canada is the only party that stands up for the workers of Canada. We defend the natural resource industries. We defend the oil sands. We encourage the growth of pipelines. We are the only people who care about working families in this country.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members can think back to April and May of last year when the Liberal Party of Canada came out with its strong policy position on how best to rebalance the rights of workers and employers in Canada, certainly at the federal level, which was long before the real rigour of the campaign had started. It was a clear policy, and it earned the support of Canadians. It was a policy that got to the heart of what Canadians wanted vis-à-vis the balance of workers and employer rights at the federal level, and people swarmed to it. It was not a situation where the Liberal Party of Canada was cowing to the desires of unions. The Liberals put forward a policy that spoke to what Canadians wanted, desired, and had earned.

• (1025)

[Translation]

I would like the member to answer this question: why does he think that Canadians made a mistake? Canadians voted in the Liberal Party, and now we are implementing our platform.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the public sector unions are so adept at determining, in many cases, who forms the government, and that they worked very hard for the Liberal Party in the last election campaigns, tells me that our bills provided the true rebalancing between the rights of Canadians citizens at large, Canadian society, and the democratic rights of voters.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Nepawa suggests that the tax deductibility of union dues is some sort of special privilege. However, we afford exactly the same tax treatment to all employment expenses.

Let us imagine that the deduction of dues had something to do with Bill C-377. I wonder if the hon. member could explain to us why this legislation was only imposed on trade unions and not applied to medical associations, bar associations, and other professional associations whose dues are also tax deductible.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question because he has given me the opportunity to point out that union membership is forced. A person has no choice in certain workplaces whether to join the union or not. One has to pay the union dues.

Professional associations are regulatory bodies that deal with the technical capabilities of the individual members involved. They are technical and scientific organizations, where members have to have the skill sets to practise the professions of law, medicine, or so on. Unions are very different. Not only are union dues tax deductible, members are forced to pay those union dues or they will not be able to have that job. This is the difference.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all union-related legislation brought forward by the Conservatives was based on false premises and constituted attacks on the union movement.

What is a union? Unions ensure a better distribution of wealth and better working conditions. Pay equity, something we talked about at length this week, has been achieved in all unionized jobs in Quebec. It still remains to be achieved in all jobs.

Let us look at the Nordic countries. Over 70% of workers there are unionized, and those countries have the lowest poverty rates and the largest middle class.

The middle class is an endangered species in this country. What do the Conservatives have against the middle class?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a fundamental mistake in assuming that this party is anti-union. We are not. I come from a proud union family. My father was a union organizer in the 1930s when people had to be really tough to organize unions. Unions absolutely have their place, to ensure workers' rights in terms of compensation and so on.

In this particular case, we are dealing with the special privileges that are allocated to unions by law. As for the transparency legislation, both bills we had were eminently fair, to ensure the rights of citizens and also to ensure that unions operate as they should.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

I am honoured to give my maiden speech on Bill C-4, a bill that would re-establish a productive balance between unions and employers. I represent the riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, where many proud union brothers and sisters reside, work, and prosper together. The building trades, teachers, electricians, labourers, police, steelworkers, carpenters, and many others work to build this prosperous and peaceful city through their ingenuity and stubborn belief in hard work that should be rewarded with fair wages, safe working conditions, and equality of opportunity.

These are the values that I grew up with. Unions were a big part of my life and my family's life for the last two generations. I am the daughter of a proud steelworker. My father, Phil Tassi, was a millwright at Dofasco. It was through his hard work and passionate commitment that my family prospered and that I, with my brothers and sister, were able to build lives founded on security and stability. In fact, my sister, my brothers, my mother, and I all worked in the steel industry.

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While Dofasco was never unionized, it benefited from what other unions in Hamilton attained. The hard-won achievements of unionized labour set an example for my father's employer to give its workers comparable rights, safety, and wages. This is but one very personal example of how unions directly and indirectly have improved the lives of Hamiltonians.

When conditions are at their best, unions, employers, and government work together to build safe, prosperous, and stable communities. It is this balance that Bill C-4 seeks to re-establish. This bill sets right what was skewed by Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Hamilton is a city whose history is closely connected to the labour movement. It was in Hamilton that the movement for the nine-hour workday in Canada was started. It was in Hamilton in 1920 that Katie McVicar and Mary McNab, who were shoe workers and members of the Knights of Labour, fought for the rights of women to join the labour force and to be respected.

It was in Hamilton in 1935 that steelworkers organized a strike. Their employer did not accede to their demands. However, a greater victory was achieved. The union expanded to include all workers, regardless of skill or nationality. That was progress. These are the footings of the middle class in Hamilton: strong, built of cement, steel and hard work, wrought by the hands of people who believed in themselves and in one another.

Unions have been creating conditions where individual workers can be resourceful, innovative, and contribute to an employer's intellectual capital. That is good for workers and for business.

The Prime Minister has made a commitment to restore a fair and balanced approach to labour relations in this country. This will be a welcome relief from the previous government's approach, where labour and employers were pushed apart by legislation aimed at dividing and separating, rather than creating a healthy balance between worker and employer.

One only needs to look to Hamilton to see how a city can be built up through labour success and ravaged when industry declines. Even former Conservative Senator Hugh Segal criticized Bill C-377. He stated:

This will actually worsen labour relations in Canada, slow economic development, and upend the balance between free collective bargaining, capital investment and return, which are vital to a strong and free mixed-market economy. As a Conservative, I oppose the upending of this balance.

There is no need for Bill C-377. We already have legislation in place to ensure that unions are financially accountable to their members. All of this is referred to in the Canada Labour Code. The needless red tape created by Bill C-377 creates an unfair playing field, where unions could be disadvantaged during collective bargaining. We believe in fairness for both parties during collective bargaining and feel that tilting the game in favour of one party is an affront to the ancient principles of fairness upon which Canadian democracy is founded.

●(1030)

The introduction of Bill C-377 in the House of Commons was an affront to Hamilton's working people. It was a bill designed to solve a problem that did not exist. No one I know in Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas has ever told me they are clamouring for the far-

reaching and personal information this legislation was designed to uncover.

Why was the last government interested in the private, personal information of union members? The Income Tax Act protects taxpayers from revealing their personal financial information. Yet, Bill C-377 reversed those protections and will force the disclosure of people's personal information to the general public. That is one of the reasons we are repealing this unnecessary and mean-spirited bill.

Unions have an important role to play. This repeal would allow the unions to continue to focus on finding their members work in this challenging economy, rather than focusing on mountains of unnecessary filings to the CRA.

Unions are democratic organizations and they are accountable to their members. If members do not like what unions are doing with their money, those members can vote their leaders out.

In fact, Bill C-377 requires that labour organizations disclose information that no other organization is required to disclose. That is not fair treatment.

There has been some discussion in the House about how other countries in the world require disclosure. Let us consider some of the facts.

I believe one example of France was raised. However, in that country, not only do the unions report but the employers report, too. In the United States, legislation similar to Bill C-377 has existed for a number of years, but one could argue that it has done little to further the cause of transparency and accountability.

Having discussed Bill C-377, I will briefly consider the ramifications of Bill C-525.

Both the Federally Regulated Employers—Transportation and Communications and the Canadian Labour Council have argued that Bill C-525 establishes a dangerous precedent for labour relations law reform in Canada.

Traditionally, in Canada, any amendments to labour relations law have been arrived at through tripartite consultation between employer, labour, and government. This tripartite consultation has been considered essential by stakeholders to the maintenance of a labour-employer balance. Bill C-525 was introduced as a private member's bill, and private members' bills are outside the traditional tripartite process.

The tripartite process encourages balance between labour and employers. However, the previous government chose to use a back door to pass its legislation instead. This demonstrates a clear and utter disregard by the previous government for Canada's democratic tradition in labour relations law.

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Bill C-525 is also an anti-union bill. More specifically, by requiring a secret ballot vote, Bill C-525 adds an unnecessary layer to the process of union formation. Bill C-525 makes it more difficult for employees to unionize and easier for a bargaining agent to be decertified.

As I have already said, organized labour has provided stability and security to workers. To impede unionization is to hold workers back by making them fearful of being thrown into precarious working conditions. This makes people focus on the short term. It makes them anxious and tentative, rather than open and confident.

Hamilton and Canada were built by proud, confident workers. I came to Ottawa to represent a city that grew out of the fires of industry, through hard work, sacrifice, and care for each other. When Hamilton was most productive, it was because of labour, employers, and government working to create a safe, stable, and prosperous city, where people could innovate and create from a place of relative security. This collaboration depends on a balance between labour and employers, which was upset by the ideology of an anti-union agenda of the previous government.

Bill C-4 would be a positive step toward righting the balance between labour and employers.

• (1035)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has obviously spent quite a bit of time thinking about this issue. I am hoping that she might be able to help me understand this debate a bit better. I have found much of the debate in the House on this issue to be very confusing, because I keep hearing from the other parties that somehow a secret ballot is an unfair way for workers to decide if they want to join a union or not be part of one.

A secret ballot is typically thought of as the most sacrosanct and fair way for every person to be able to express their will and their conscience freely, without threat of intimidation.

Would someone please explain to me how it is somehow fair to take away the secret ballot as the means of choice for joining a union?

• (1040)

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, this is about process. The secret ballot is an extra layer in the process that makes it harder for unions to unionize. It creates an extra layer and puts people in situations where they will feel undue pressure and uncomfortable with the choice they want to make about unionization.

The government believes in the opinions of Canadians. The government wants to restore the rights of Canadians. The government wants people to be able to vote with an unfettered discretion, because we believe in the Canadian vote. We want to hear their opinions and to have them set the balance and tone they need in their working environments.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent speech, standing up in support of those in the labour movement and recognizing the history of labour and its contributions.

Under the guise of transparency, Bill C-377 puts an onerous reporting burden on unions while raising privacy concerns for

Canada's Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart. The Canadian Bar Association wrote a letter to the Conservatives pointing out how the bill tramples privacy and constitutional rights. Even the Christian Labour Association of Canada, CLAC, has called on the government to withdraw and redraft the bill because it violates privacy laws and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Why does the member think the previous government and the Conservatives in the House today feel they do not need to respect the transparency that already exists for unions, and why they continue to push on this particular bill?

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear that the previous government implemented the bill because it is anti-union. There is no other organization similar to unions that has this obligation to report. Why was this bill set up in the first place?

It causes financial strain; it causes unnecessary red tape. It puts those who are in bargaining situations at a disadvantage, because now employers have the books and can see what money the unions have.

I agree completely with my colleague that the bill is completely unfair. I am happy that within less than 100 days of our mandate I am standing in the House to support a bill that repeals this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my hon. colleague from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for her maiden speech. I used to live in the Hamilton riding, and I am very impressed with what she had to say.

[*English*]

The member joins a long list of wonderful Hamilton women in Parliament, and I congratulate her.

I wonder if the member could comment on the tone that is being set with this legislation. We seem to be hearing some bombastic comments about the labour movement from the official opposition. Could the member please comment?

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the tone this is setting.

During the election campaign, I had a number of people come to me to express their concerns about this bill. They felt that it was undemocratic, that it stripped people of their rights, and that it set up working conditions that were not ideal.

Now we are working to restore the trust and confidence in people, and to bring all parties together: employers, employees, and government.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about a very important bill, a bill I invite all members of the House to support in order to restore a clear and balanced approach to labour relations in Canada.

Government Orders

Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge that both my parents were union members. It is through the labour movement and through their fight for fair wages, fair benefits, and safe working conditions that my family and our family prospered in Canada. We owe it to a strong middle class.

If passed, Bill C-4 would repeal the legislative changes made by Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, both of which have undermined labour unions and labour relations in our country. Let me tell members how.

I will start with Bill C-377.

Bill C-377 amended the Income Tax Act to require all labour organizations and labour trusts across Canada to provide very detailed financial and other information to the Minister of National Revenue. This information would then be made available to the public on the Canada Revenue Agency's website. If labour organizations do not comply with these rules, they would face hefty fines.

At first glance, these new reporting requirements might seem like a good thing; sharing financial information promotes transparency and accountability. I am sure members of the House would agree that is a worthy goal. I do. However, and there is a big however, if we examine the bill further, we will find that in fact it discriminates against labour unions.

First, Bill C-377 discriminates against unions because it places onerous, unfair public reporting obligations on them that do not apply to other organizations, such as professional associations that benefit from similar treatment under the Income Tax Act.

Why is this onerous task imposed on unions alone? Why tip the scales? Perhaps these financial reporting requirements would be justified if similar requirements did not already exist elsewhere, but they do.

Unions already are required to disclose financial information to their members under the Canada Labour Code and many provincial labour relations statutes. This includes British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and the beautiful province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In addition to Bill C-377 discriminating against unions, it is also unnecessary. It creates an extra administrative burden, just another layer of red tape. The Liberal Party of Canada does not like red tape.

There is another reason that the bill is inherently unfair to labour unions. Simply put, it creates an imbalance between unions and employers during the collective bargaining process. How exactly? By giving employers access to key union information, without employers being required to share similar information. This makes for a very uneven playing field during the collective bargaining process.

For example, employers would know how much money the union had in a strike fund for a possible work stoppage and how long they could stay out if it came to a strike. This clearly undermines the union's most important negotiating lever.

I would like to move on to Bill C-525, which Bill C-4 would also repeal.

Bill C-525 changed the way that unions were certified and decertified under the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Public Service Labour Relations Act. It replaced what is known as a card check system with a mandatory vote system.

For decades, and I emphasize decades, prior to Bill C-525 coming into force, if a union demonstrated that a majority of workers had signed union cards, the union could be certified as the bargaining agent for those workers. A vote was only required if less than a majority signed, but there was still enough to indicate a strong interest. Under the Canada Labour Code, it was 35% of workers. Bill C-525 changed that to require that unions show at least 40% membership support before holding a secret ballot vote and to require a vote even where more than 50% of workers had signed a union membership card.

More important, Bill C-525 also makes it easier for unions to be decertified. It lowers the threshold to trigger a decertification vote from majority support to 40%.

Overall, as stakeholders such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees have pointed out, the card check model is faster, more efficient and more likely to be free of employer interference than the new method.

In short, Bill C-525 makes it harder for employees to unionize and makes it easier for a union to be decertified. It tips the scales in an unbalanced manner.

• (1045)

Bill C-525 made significant changes to a system that worked. There was a democratic and fair system in place for employees for decades to express their support for a union. A card check system relies on majority support, a key democratic principle.

The bottom line is that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 upset the delicate balance between the rights of employers and the rights of employees. The bill put before the House, Bill C-4, seeks to repeal the legislative changes made by these two bills. It seeks to restore the rights of labour organizations in our proud country.

Unifor's national president, Jerry Dias, welcomes Bill C-4. He said, "we have simply been given back rights that were taken from us". Why are these rights so important? Because the rights of labour unions and the workers they represent are also the rights of Canadians. Who are those Canadians? They are carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and cleaners, the people we encounter every day. They are Canadians who are working hard to put money in their banks and to save for their children's future.

As elected officials, we have a responsibility to protect those rights. Labour unions advocate for decent wages and safe working environments. They play an essential role in maintaining positive labour relations between employers and employees. Sound labour relations protect the rights of Canadian workers and help the middle class grow and prosper.

Statements by Members

Let us not allow Bills C-377 and C-525 to continue to diminish and weaken Canada's labour movement. I urge the members of the House to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 and lend their support for Bill C-4, which would restore a fair and balanced approach to labour relations in Canada.

•(1050)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members will recall that Bill C-377 was around for a long time. It was sponsored by one of our colleagues, Jeff Watson. Jeff worked tirelessly to bring it to fruition and make it law. I once asked Jeff why he was working so hard for this. He used to be a very enthusiastic union member in the auto industry. He said that he was doing it for his colleagues who were on the line, his fellow union members.

I used to be in the PSAC union. I understand guys on the line, the people doing the actual work. They wanted Bill C-377. As I said, Bill C-377 was around for a long while. In my own personal experience, I had two people come to see me about Bill C-377 and tell me we should not endorse it. I also had 33 people come to me and say that we needed Bill C-377. They said that they needed it for their organizers.

How could that member and that party go against the rank and file of our great labour movement?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I find it a bit ironic that in yesterday's opposition day we had the members of the Conservative Party speak to the strength of our middle class in Canada. I think one of the strengths that underpins our middle class is our labour movement.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: So are you against it?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I am not against it, sir. The labour movement in Canada is very strong. We are supporting it. We want to bring balance back to the collective bargaining process.

The Speaker: I remind my colleagues to address the Chair at all times.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address something that was just brought forward. First, they are not just guys that work on the line. Unionized workers across Canada are health care workers and public sector workers, men and women supporting their families with well-paying jobs.

I come from a unionized workplace. Having been there for 20 years, I know the workplace about which the previous member spoke. He would be hard pressed to find one person in that workplace say that he or she supports that regressive legislation.

As a union member, transparency is important to me and it is available to me at all points in time. The way union members direct their funds is actually by the direction of the members. Although we contribute dues, we determine the direction of those dues at every level.

After his excellent speech, why does my colleague feel that this is so important to the labour movement and to the rank and file, the working people of Canada?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, we need a fair and balanced approach restored in the collective bargaining process in Canada. Workers' rights and views need to be represented at the bargaining table in a fair and balanced manner. That is what the bill aims to achieve.

In a democracy, unions and the formation of unions is a fundamental right and we fully support that within the bill.

Bill C-377 was punitive to unions. It ignored the employer bargaining units. It did not look at them at all. It was a poke at unions to be frank. The right thing to do is to repeal it, and that is what we will do.

•(1055)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a former union member. We were not always given the statistics as to where our dues went or where the money went that was collected from my paycheque.

The government claims to want accountability. Why then would it want to remove an accountability bill? Would the member please explain to the House and all Canadians why he is against accountability?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, union financial disclosure is already addressed in the Canada Labour Code and in many provincial statutes. Bill C-377 was an onerous bill that provided extra red tape to unions and did nothing to further the employee and employer bargaining process.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

DON VALLEY NORTH

Mr. Geng Tan (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I address you for the first time as a first-generation immigrant, as a member of Parliament, and most importantly, as a Canadian.

I thank the people of Don Valley North for electing me to improve things locally, including transit, health care for seniors, and jobs for youth. I thank my many supporters, my campaign team, and my family, especially my secret weapon, my nine-year-old son Connor Tan, who campaigned with me door-to-door across a diverse and vibrant riding. "You can do it, Dad", he said. "Yes, we can do it, Connor", I smiled. We did it; we won.

And so I say this to my hon. colleagues: We can do it. We can make things better for the people of Don Valley North, and for all Canadians.

* * *

CHARITABLE GIVING

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Kelly and Jo-Ann Panteluk and their children Riley, Mary, and Elly. Last year they financed the construction of the high-tech running track for the Saskatchewan Summer Games in Estevan this July 2016. They have sponsored teams in minor softball, baseball, and hockey.

Statements by Members

With the reality of the downturn in the economy in Saskatchewan, often times donations are placed on the back burner. However, this family makes an impact to Saskatchewan as a whole. On January 12, 2016, the Panteluks made a \$450,000 donation to the Children's Hospital Foundation of Saskatchewan on top of a \$50,000 hospital donation made earlier to the Child Life Zone, a new multi-disciplinary room that will provide space for children at risk to genetic, neuromotor, and metabolic disorders.

The Panteluks are a humble family. They do this out of the goodness of their hearts. They give back to their community, their province, and their country.

I am thankful to Kelly and Jo-Ann.

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LAKESHORE MOMS

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute and recognize an organization in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. There is a saying that many may be familiar with in this House: “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” I now have evidence to prove this.

Lakeshore Moms is a group of mothers who host a variety of activities including play dates, walks, and seminars. Their efforts to bring neighbourhood families together is a testament to the community spirit in my riding.

Recently, this group directed its considerable resources and networks in support of the Syrian refugee crisis. It created a committee called the Lakeshore Syrian Connection. When it began, its goal was to raise \$30,000 to sponsor a Syrian family. Underestimating its abilities and the considerable support behind it, in a very short time since it has started it has already raised \$60,000. All of this fundraising was done through a series of community events, including public skating, raffles, and a comedy night this coming weekend.

I am very proud that this group, like many others in my community, has undertaken this initiative to help the unfortunate. Therefore, as they say, the hand that rocks the cradle truly does rule the world.

* * *

[*Translation*]

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF SAINT-MATHIEU-DE-RIOUX

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, next week in my riding we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of beautiful Saint-Mathieu-de-Rieux in the RCM of Les Basques.

Saint-Mathieu-de-Rieux is a little gem in the riding that I have the honour of representing. Lake Saint Mathieu is magnificent and one of Quebec's best-kept secrets. The Lower St. Lawrence KOA is the only five-star campground in eastern Quebec.

Saint-Mathieu-de-Rieux is equally lively in the winter. The Mont Saint Mathieu ski hill is one of the most modern and most visited hills in the region. The municipality even has a vineyard, the Domaine du lac.

In fact, despite the economic challenges facing the region, Saint-Mathieu-de-Rieux is one of the rare municipalities whose population is growing and rejuvenating.

On Saturday, February 13, I will be attending the opening night of this special year of celebration. Throughout the year, 36 events will be held, including dinners, dances, exhibits, guided tours, and a parade.

It is my pleasure to invite all my colleagues to experience the hospitality of the people of Saint-Mathieu-de-Rieux during this very special year.

* * *

● (1100)

FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone is invited to the Festival du Voyageur being held in St. Boniface from February 12 to 21.

For 10 days, we will celebrate our *joie de vivre* as only we know how. The 47th edition of the festival will continue the tradition of bringing together the French, Métis, aboriginal, English and Scottish cultures to pay tribute to our heritage.

[*English*]

The Festival du Voyageur is a true representation of the diversity of our first settlers, a diversity that continues to make Canada the envy of the world.

[*Translation*]

Everyone is welcome in St. Boniface. The taffy is ready for the snow, the drink we call caribou is cold, the pea soup is delicious, the instruments are tuned, and the snow sculptures are carved.

[*English*]

From February 12 to 21, people are invited to come and experience the real *joie de vivre* in St. Boniface.

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CARIBOO—PRINCE GEORGE

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the premier of British Columbia was in town this week with representatives from key industries, such as forestry, tourism, construction, and LNG.

Forestry is one of the cornerstone industries in the province of British Columbia. Half of the jobs in my riding are dependent on the forestry industry. We currently stand without a softwood lumber agreement. Our province continues to wait for clarity on key resource projects, projects that will create thousands of well-paying jobs.

Once again, I repeat, high-speed transit does nothing for constituents in my riding. It will not fix the skyrocketing unemployment rates in western Canada. It will not put food on the table.

I ask my colleagues from across the floor, rather than telling those hardest hit to hang in there, who is going to stand up for Canadians, such as those in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George?

*Statements by Members***EVERYDAY POLITICAL CITIZENSHIP AWARD**

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize an individual in my riding of Nepean, Heather Rose, who on Wednesday received the Everyday Political Citizenship Award from Samara Canada. The award celebrates positive political role models and builds a culture of positive politics in Canada. Heather was nominated for starting the Ontario Special Needs Roadmap for School. This helpful guide links all of the autism and special needs services available to parents in the province of Ontario.

Having a child with special needs can be challenging, and Heather, along with her colleague Kim Peterson, made it their mission to simplify the lists of services available.

I wish to thank Heather and Kim for helping parents across the province of Ontario.

* * *

[Translation]

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we talked about the importance of pay equity this week. In keeping with that theme, I am rising to draw attention to a success story in my province of British Columbia.

The British Columbia Maritime Employers Association, a water-front organization, represents a vital industry. It employs thousands of people and is a driving force of our economy. Today, I would like to acknowledge the incredible work that the BCMEA does in the fight for pay equity.

[English]

For the third year in a row, the B.C. Maritime Employers Association has earned the designation of employment equity leader by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, in the water transportation industry.

Between 2011 and 2015, Women on the Waterfront has been a concerted effort to increase the proportion of women in its workforce, traditionally very male dominated, by almost 50%. Also, the Human Rights Commission has stated that the B.C. Maritime Employers Association continues to exceed expectations with respect to employing indigenous peoples.

* * *

• (1105)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 11, the Minister of Finance announced changes to the rules on insured mortgages to address what he has since called pockets of concern in the housing market, by which we presume he is referring to Toronto and especially Vancouver. However, the CIBC chief economist has pointed out that these changes will have almost no effect on Canada's hottest markets. Instead, it will pour cold water on markets like Calgary, Victoria, Edmonton, and Hamilton, making it harder for some families to buy a home.

His report says that the largest impact will be on Calgary, “not exactly a city that needs additional cooling”.

The report also doubts that these changes will meet the minister's stated objectives.

The government wants Canadians to save while it borrows billions of dollars, breaks its election promise of a limited \$10-billion deficit, damages the Calgary housing market, and fails to address its own concerns about the Canadian housing market.

* * *

EDMONTON OILERS

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Edmonton Oilers on becoming the first NHL team to take to the ice using pride tape. The pride tape campaign asks participants to use rainbow-coloured hockey tape to promote inclusiveness for LGBTQ athletes.

[Translation]

The Edmonton Oilers and I hope that other teams will join the initiative to help make the National Hockey League the most welcoming sports league for LGBTQ athletes.

[English]

I am proud that this initiative was launched in my home city of Edmonton, a city that proudly supports diversity and human rights. I look forward to seeing more teams join the Edmonton Oilers in supporting LGBTQ youth with pride tape.

Success in sport is about the love of one's game, not whom one loves. In my city and in our country, every young person should feel welcome to lace up their skates with pride and get in the game.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House the remarkable achievements and contributions of the Canadian Forces around the world over the last few months.

Over the last two weeks, I have had the honour of being at the Ottawa airport to welcome home members of the Canadian Forces from Operation Unifier from Ukraine and Operation Provision, taking care of the Syrian refugees. I can tell members that they have made a huge difference in many lives around the world. Their families made sacrifices; they gave their members of the Canadian Forces to serve all of us and to serve people around the world.

*Statements by Members***ELGIN RED MCCONNELL**

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday of this week, we buried Elgin “Red” McConnell of Hamiota, Manitoba. Father, grandfather, and beloved husband to Ruth, Red McConnell was a farmer and in many ways epitomized great Canadians. He recognized and lived by the mantra that life is not measured by words or things, but rather by actions and kind deeds. Red was a good farmer, a progressive farmer, and a man who was proud to be a farmer. Red was not someone who sought awards or recognition. Instead, he was a community pillar, and willing to do his part to make his community grow, thrive, and prosper.

It is farmers and people like Red McConnell of Hamiota, Manitoba who make Canada stronger and Canadians the respected people we are.

Today, I am pleased to recognize and honour Red McConnell. He was a credit to his community, province, and country.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week we commemorate the 26th National Suicide Prevention Week, and I would like to highlight the work being done by those who are dedicated to this cause. These individuals give their hearts and souls, under difficult conditions, and deserve all of our admiration and respect. They are brave, determined, compassionate, and selfless.

I also want us to remember the parents, friends, and family members who have watched a loved one suffer and those who, most unfortunately, have had a loved one take their own life. I would also spare a thought for those who are suffering and who have lost hope. I want to tell them that even if they do not see it, someone, somewhere, cares about them. There are resources available to help them.

Dear colleagues, let us work together to combat hopelessness and isolation, and to eliminate the taboos that may weigh on people's minds when they are distraught. Together we can make a difference.

* * *

● (1110)

[*English*]

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have been born and raised in Transcona, a part of Winnipeg that got its start as a rail town in 1912. It is the site of the repair shops for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The CN shops in my riding continue to be a significant employer.

The rail lines run through my riding with many crossings at Ravenhurst Street, Bournais Drive, Molson Street, Talbot Avenue, Munroe Avenue, and many more. That is why rail safety is such an important issue in my riding.

We have heard lately about a lack of regulation around the use of remote controlled train technology and concerns around the fatigue management policies of our railways.

I rise today to urge the government to undertake a wide-ranging study on the many safety issues that face Canadian rail today, and issue a report to Canadians that explains the risks to them and offers concrete solutions that do not simply rely on industry self-regulation and self-enforcement.

In a highly competitive industry like transportation, there is often pressure to cut corners. People need to know that their regulators are not subject to those pressures.

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in January 2015, Constable David Wynn was shot and killed outside of a St. Albert casino in the line of duty. This incident was completely preventable. His killer was out on bail at the time, notwithstanding that he had 50 prior criminal convictions, 38 outstanding charges, and several failures to appear. Yet none of that was brought to the attention of the judge at the bail application hearing.

With that in mind, that is why I am pleased to join Senator Bob Runciman in sponsoring Bill S-217, which would require the crown to lead evidence of prior criminal convictions, outstanding charges, and failures to appear at bail application hearings. While Constable Wynn can never be returned, together we can honour his legacy by passing this much-needed legislation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GÉRALD LANIEL

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today it is my sad duty to report to my colleagues that a former federal MP has died. Gérald Laniel represented the people of Beauharnois—Salaberry from 1962 to 1984. He passed away on February 2 in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield.

His career was admirable. During his 22 years of service to his constituents, he served as parliamentary secretary to the minister of Industry and Commerce, deputy speaker of the House of Commons and chair of the International Association of French-Speaking Parliamentarians.

On behalf of the House, I extend my condolences to Mr. Laniel's loved ones, including his beloved Louise, his children, Normand, Marie-Andrée, Michel, Christian, and Jean-François, and his 14 grandchildren.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the new Liberal plan to fight ISIS, there are sure a lot of people hearing about it. It is too bad, though, that this group does not include anyone in this House.

Yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told the House that he shared the plan in a meeting in Rome. Overnight, details of the plan were actually revealed all over the media.

The government claims to be transparent and open in a new reality. Why is it, then, that no one in this House has been informed of this plan, not even the rookie new Minister of National Defence?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the plan will be released in due course.

In the meantime, it is important to see that this plan will be comprehensive. It will be integrated. It will be sustained. It will be a plan that will bring together all the Canadian Forces military, humanitarian, and diplomatic missions. It will be done in concordance with our allies, the coalition, to be sure that Canada will be more effective than ever in its fight against this awful terrorist group, ISIL.

[Translation]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government would have us believe that if we want to offer training and humanitarian assistance, Canada cannot take part in air combat missions, but that is not true. For the past year, the Canadian Forces have been engaged in all three: training, an air mission, and humanitarian assistance. They are doing an excellent job.

Why does the government want to impose artificial limits on Canada's fight against terrorism?

• (1115)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, clearly stated, we made the decision to make a significant contribution to the coalition to destroy the Islamic State, but we will do so in an integrated and comprehensive manner. As soon as the plan is ready, Canadians will support it.

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2014, UNRWA schools and hospitals were used by Hamas terrorists to store rockets. In fact, their staff even gave Hamas these same rockets back. That is just one of the reasons why the Conservatives proudly defunded UNRWA.

As part of a plan to fight ISIS, the government is proudly providing \$15 million to this organization. By including this funding as part of an anti-ISIS plan, is the Liberal government saying that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a root cause of the rise of ISIS? Does the minister believe that this is actually the case? Yes or no.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of speculation here and there about what the plan will be.

The plan will be there to fight the terrorist group. The plan will be there to support our allies, including Israel. The plan will be there to support all of these populations in the fight against terrorism that count on Canada and our allies. This plan will be more effective than ever.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Minister of National Defence was unable to tell us about the plan to fight the Islamic State. We found out why. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was in Rome to present the plan to the international coalition, and the defence minister was not even in the loop.

Why is the Prime Minister hiding his plan from Canadians and from his own defence minister?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are the ones who are not in the loop. They are the ones who do not understand.

The Minister of National Defence is a great defence minister. He has proven that in the past and he will again. It was an honour for me to work with him and the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie on this plan. We worked hand in hand with our allies, and because of that we will be able to fight this heinous terrorist group more effectively than ever before.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you are saying that the Minister of National Defence is a great minister, but we can see that you are the one who is actually coming up with the plan.

First the minister told us that the terrorist threat is due to climate change, and now we have learned that the government's plan will impact the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When we are dealing with a terrorist threat, we need to attack the terrorists, not look for some obscure explanation as to why that threat exists. When will the government do that?

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles that he must direct his comments through the Chair, but that when he says “you”, he is actually talking to me.

Also, the interpretation was not working, but it is fixed now. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's impatience. It is completely understandable to want a plan that is even better than the one Canada had before. That is what he is going to get. He will be impressed and so will Canadians. Perhaps he will not admit it for political reasons, but he will be secretly impressed.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals promised to renew long-term social housing agreements. If those agreements are not renewed, 365,000 social housing units will be in jeopardy. This year alone, if nothing is done, 24,000 households will lose their housing subsidy. The well-being of thousands of people is left hanging in the balance.

Oral Questions

When will the minister sign new agreements and reassure these low-income families?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I know she works very hard advocating for social housing.

During the election campaign, our party promised to invest heavily in social infrastructure, including not just affordable housing, but also social housing. We know there is a pressing need to build new social housing and renovate existing social housing.

• (1120)

[English]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are facing a crisis situation in affordable housing. Canadians want action, not vague assurances with no clear commitments.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians risk losing their homes if the funding of the long-term agreements is not renewed. People are waiting 10 years for social housing.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has identified housing as one of the most important issues facing cities of all sizes. Will the government sign new long-term agreements and start the money flowing for affordable housing immediately?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the hon. member for the question.

We have been quite clear, as my colleague sitting next to me can attest, that we will make a massive \$20-billion investment in social infrastructure over 10 years. This includes affordable housing and social housing. In my riding, I know that there is a list of 23,000 families who are waiting for social housing. There is a pressing need.

During the election campaign, we promised we would address this issue, and that is what we will do.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, empty rhetoric is not going to address this urgent need that the minister referred to.

[English]

Housing is not the only challenge that municipalities are facing. After years of downloading costs under the previous government, communities are facing crumbling bridges, roads, and water systems. The mayors are here in Ottawa and they are asking for help.

Now is the time for action, not more rhetoric and empty platitudes. There is \$9 billion that has been promised but not spent. Will the government remove all of the Conservative restrictions on funding and finally get these investments into our communities and get us some action?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with my colleague that we need to invest in all types of infrastructure, including social infrastructure, public transit, and including the upgrading of the old drainage systems.

That is why I had such a productive meeting with mayors from across the country yesterday. I am engaging with my provincial counterparts because we understand the importance of building infrastructure to create jobs to build strong, sustainable communities.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us move on to another difficult subject. The Lac-Mégantic disaster, which took place on that fateful day, July 6, 2013, and took the lives of 47 people, remains embedded in our collective consciousness.

More than two years later, the community is still reliving the disaster, as two out of three residents have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The residents need relief and, above all, they do not want any more trains to run through downtown Lac-Mégantic.

Will the minister commit today to building a bypass, yes or no?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to visit Lac-Mégantic last Saturday. I truly understand that the residents are having a hard time. They went through a terrible tragedy, and we know that the reconstruction will take time. We will be there to help them rebuild their lives, their community, and their town. A study on the possibility of bypassing the town is currently being conducted. We will wait for the results before making a decision.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. There is no need for talking points. I am just seeking some technical clarification for members of the House.

How does the finance department come up with the numbers posted in the monthly “Fiscal Monitor”?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): I will use my speaking points just as my colleague did, Mr. Speaker.

The only people who believe that the previous Conservatives left behind a surplus are the Conservatives themselves. Canadians know better.

Make no mistake, the Government of Canada will post a deficit for the period 2015-16, and that deficit rests squarely on the shoulders of the previous government as a result of its action or inaction. That is a fact. The previous Liberal government left behind a \$13 billion—

Oral Questions

● (1125)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer either means that the Liberals either do not know how the finance department does its financial reporting, or they do not want Canadians to know. In either case it is very troubling.

The finance minister has inaccurately and repeatedly stated “We inherited a deficit”, but his own department said it inherited a \$1 billion surplus.

Canadians know that the Liberals inherited a surplus. Liberals in the House yesterday confirmed that we left them a surplus. Why is the finance minister the only one in Canada who does not know?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that it is only my hon. colleagues who believe that. The previous Liberal government left behind a \$13 billion surplus in 2006. The Conservative government squandered that surplus and accumulated \$150 billion of additional debt.

We have a plan to grow the economy in this country, invest in our communities, invest in our middle class, invest in infrastructure. That is what we were elected upon and that is what we are going to deliver.

* * *

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the offer to purchase Great Lakes Power by recently privatized Hydro One has Ontario electricity consumers, who already pay the highest rates in North America, worried that rates will go up even higher. If allowed, one company would control 98% of the total transmission in Ontario.

What plans does the FedNor minister have to conduct open public consultations and public hearings as part of the Competition Act review of this transaction?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, any transaction like that is subject to the Competition Act. [Translation]

The act gives the Competition Bureau the mandate to examine all transactions. The member knows very well that the process is extremely rigorous and that the Competition Bureau conducts its reviews at arm's length.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Hydro One will continue to gouge customers, especially seniors, while Brookfield, the parent company of Great Lakes Power, rakes in record profits on the backs of those on fixed incomes.

Will the FedNor minister commit today to launch an inquiry into Ontario electricity rates before more companies like Algoma Steel have to file for bankruptcy protection and even more jobs in Ontario are lost?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will allow the Competition Bureau to do its work. It does its work independently of government and will do its work in a rigorous manner. We will wait for those results.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is an energy-rich nation, yet eastern Canadian refineries import 86% of their oil from countries like Saudi Arabia, a regime where people are sentenced to beheading for political dissent, where women are not legally able to drive; and Nigeria, where rampant corruption has led to targeted oil bombings and irreversible environmental devastation.

Why does the minister not get behind energy east, world-leading Canadian oil, and Canadian jobs?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 21st century the only way to get big projects like pipelines built is to do them responsibly and sustainably. That is the hard lesson we learned from the failed approach of the members opposite, who for 10 years were unable to deliver for the province of Alberta and unable to get resources—

Mr. Ron Liepert: Turn it over, the right answer is on the other side.

The Speaker: Order, please.

I know the member for Calgary Signal Hill is enjoying this today, but we all have to restrain ourselves if we want to hear the answer to the question.

The Minister of Transport has the floor.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, to finish off, we firmly believe that a clean environment and a strong economy go hand in hand. That is the job of government in getting our resources to international markets. Only by engaging Canadians and conducting deeper consultations with indigenous people are we going to get there.

* * *

● (1130)

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Alberta lost nearly 22,000 full-time jobs last month. Meanwhile, the anti-energy Prime Minister spent the last two days there posing for photo ops without actually meeting workers in the field. He should come to Lakeland.

When asked if his government would support the energy east pipeline if it passes through the NEB process, he would not give a straight answer. We have heard enough empty promises and meaningless platitudes.

Why is the Prime Minister always finding new ways to say no to good-paying, blue-collar Canadian jobs?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the only party in the House that has failed Albertans is the Conservative Party. It coasted through 10 years of high oil prices and just could not deliver.

We are going to deliver, but we are going to do it by taking into account the fact that we can develop our economy while being respectful of our environment. That is the approach we are taking, an intelligent, scientifically based approach. That is the proper approach for this government to take.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on page 71 of their platform, the Liberals promised that if they became the government, they would “end Canada's combat mission in Iraq”.

Unfortunately, not only has the government failed to end the bombing missions, it has refused to tell the House what its plan is and whether it is actually planning to extend the military mission.

Canadians deserve answers and Canadians deserve to have their say.

Will the government commit now to hold a debate and vote on our military's future role in Iraq and Syria, yes or no?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to remind the hon. member that there was an election. In the election, the Prime Minister's position was very clear. The position of the former prime minister was very clear, and Canadians made a very clear choice. The very clear choice was to give this government a mandate to refashion that mission, which all of the ministers and the Prime Minister are engaged in while refashioning the mission into one that is acceptable to Canadians. That will be produced in due course.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative-initiated bombing mission against ISIL is coming to an end in just a few weeks.

However, the current government has still not announced its plan for the future, and it is sending conflicting messages. It is not even able to answer a simple, fundamental question, which I want to ask the Minister of National Defence.

Will the new mission be subject to a debate and vote in the House, as it should be, yes or no?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would love to talk to my colleague about the plan once it is made public.

As Canadians, we will be proud of our country's role in bravely combatting terrorism, with a plan that will be integrated and will bring together all the elements needed to be successful. It will involve the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of International Development, the Prime Minister, and myself, since I will try to do my part.

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning the jobs report was released. It does not look good for anyone under the Liberal government. Twenty-two thousand full-time jobs were lost in Alberta in January alone. Our unemployment rate in Alberta has reached 7.4%, the first time since 1988 that it has been higher than the Canadian average.

Things are only going to get worse. It is predicted that Alberta's unemployment rate will exceed 8% by the end of 2016. The Liberals' no-energy program is killing Alberta.

When will the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour finally come up with a strategy that will help Alberta's unemployed get back to work?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members of the House know, we have been working on modernizing the EI system to try to respond to those very people who are losing their jobs because of this crisis in the natural resources sector. The best opportunity for the unemployed is actually—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It is Friday and we are looking forward to getting home. Let us listen up so we can get through this. Let us all pay attention and show respect for each other.

The hon. Minister of Employment has the floor.

● (1135)

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, I could not hear myself think because it was so noisy on the other side.

The best opportunity that we have to take care of unemployed people is a robust economy, and that is exactly what we are going to do with the infrastructure investments that will be rolling out very soon.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, January through March is the peak season in the oil patch, but instead of working hard to provide for their families, western Canadians are now contemplating what they are going to do when their EI benefits run out. Yesterday, the Prime Minister refused to commit to anything until his anti-energy budget comes down, but the crisis is now and action is needed immediately.

I have to ask, is the Prime Minister simply refusing to acknowledge there is a need or is he just absolutely unaware of it?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. Our Prime Minister is very much aware of it. That is why he was in Alberta for two days this week. He is also aware that there are challenges in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador. When he met with the Premier of Alberta, he undertook to fast-track \$700 million worth of infrastructure. That is showing understanding.

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He also said that Alberta would be eligible for the fiscal stabilization fund that is available when a province goes through a particular difficulty due to the lowering of the oil price. So we do care and we are taking action right now.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the deputy critic for rural affairs, I am concerned with the direction the government is going in. Instead of standing up and supporting all Canadians, the government is pitting rural communities against urban centres. It is signalling that infrastructure funds are to be spent entirely in big cities. Rural Canada is the backbone of our nation. The energy used to heat our homes, the wood used to build our houses, and the food we all eat is produced in rural Canada.

Will the infrastructure minister please explain why his priorities seem to leave rural Canada in the cold?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we are going to live up to the commitment that we made to all Canadians, regardless of where they live. We have committed to invest in public transit, we have committed to invest \$20 billion in social infrastructure, and we have committed to invest \$20 billion in green infrastructure. All communities are going to benefit from those investments, regardless of where they are situated.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will see if the government can live up to this commitment.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister promised that we would have a slight budget deficit over the next couple of years to fund infrastructure, but then by the end of the mandate in 2019, the budget would be balanced. However, standing in the House the other day, the Minister of Finance said the government would work towards “a balanced budget by the end of our mandate”.

I ask the Minister of Finance, is this another in the string of broken promises of the government?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous government left us with a \$150 billion in additional debt for our country.

We will continue to invest and grow our economy, but we will follow three key principles. That is what we said during the campaign and that is what we will do. We will continue to have a debt-to-GDP ratio on a downward track, we will be fiscally prudent in how we invest our money, and we will get back to a balanced budget by the end of our term. That is what we said and that is what we are going to do.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised to restore good faith with Canada's public servants. While the Liberals have brought real change to the

rhetoric of government, we are waiting for real change in the actions of government. The new government promised to repeal the Conservatives' sick leave legislation, but then it showed up this week at the bargaining table and put the exact same Conservative offer on the table.

We are wondering this. When are the Liberals going to bring a deal to the table that reflects their promises in the election?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is working hard to re-establish a culture of respect for Canada's fine public service. We will negotiate in good faith with our public service and we will respect the independence of those negotiations. Unlike the Conservatives, we will not toxify those negotiations by attacking the public service on a continual basis gratuitously.

There is an opportunity to modernize sick leave benefits in a way that is fair to members of the public service in a time when we have inherited a tough fiscal situation from the previous government.

* * *

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's news reports on employment are not good. The unemployment rate is up, and 1.3 million Canadians are unemployed.

What is the government doing? It is stalling on its election promises and telling people that many of those promises will have to wait. The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour herself said that most of the changes to EI would be made in 2017.

Albertans who are out of work and all Canadians need help now. Canadians elected this government thinking that it would do things differently.

When will this government get to work on reassuring Canadians and following through on its commitments?

[*English*]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working since the day we were elected on fulfilling the promises we made. We want a system of EI that is going to be there when people need it and where they need it. We promised to lower premiums, cut benefit wait times from two weeks to one week, and improve flexibility for Canadians. Those are all measures that we are working on diligently and we will be rolling out as soon as possible.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our nation's audiovisual and arts and culture promotion sectors are important to our economy.

[English]

Yesterday the Minister of Canadian Heritage signed an audiovisual coproduction treaty with the Ambassador of Ireland to Canada.

[Translation]

Can the minister explain how that will benefit Canada's audiovisual industry?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I am very proud to announce on behalf of the government that we signed our first audiovisual coproduction treaty with Ireland yesterday, and there is more good news.

Two films, *Room* and *Brooklyn*, have been nominated for Oscars. Both are Canada-Ireland coproductions.

The new Canada-Ireland audiovisual coproduction treaty will really enable us to adapt to new technology and, eventually, to broaden our trade and cultural relationship with Ireland.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government wants to eliminate mandatory minimums for repeat and violent offenders. Now the Minister of Public Safety has said that the government wants to make it easier to hand out pardons to convicted criminals. Therefore, are there any criminals out there that the government does not want to go easy on?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we believe that mandatory minimums should be the exception and not the rule. That is the reason we are conducting a complete and comprehensive review of the changes to sentencing and the changes to parole that were brought in under the previous government.

The most serious offences should have the most serious sentences, however, it is not a one-size-fits-all. A comprehensive review of the Criminal Code is necessary, and that is what we are undertaking.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety characterized changes brought in by the previous Conservative government to prevent child sexual predators from ever receiving a pardon as ideological.

Will anyone on the government side stand and tell the victims of child sexual abuse what is ideological about ensuring that those who commit the most heinous crimes against children will never again be able to walk our streets and communities in anonymity?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the

criminal justice system in the country is about more than retribution. There are other elements that are important in sentencing.

The most serious crimes should attract the most serious sentences. There is a place for mandatory minimums in our criminal justice system, but it is not everywhere. That is the reason why we are undertaking a comprehensive review. We are going to ensure that the hands of judges are not tied and that mandatory minimums are there for the most serious offences like the ones to which the member just referred.

* * *

● (1145)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government seems completely unable to protect Canadians. The Chinese government wants to cut a free trade deal with us. While we welcome investment and trade, we expect our partners to respect the basic standards of justice and law.

Kevin Garratt and his wife have been confined and harassed by Chinese security officials for over a year. Now Kevin is facing phony espionage charges. What is the government doing to secure Kevin and Julia Garratt's release? Will the Liberals put the Chinese government on notice that this treatment is completely unacceptable?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a very serious situation. We are horrified by it. We have communicated how much we disagree with the situation of Mr. Garratt and his wife to the Chinese authorities. We will continue to do so. It is something that this government does not accept at all.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not only faith groups across Canada that have expressed support for the important work of the Office of Religious Freedom. When Michael Ignatieff was asked about the office, even he said:

...[this] is the kind of thing that ought to have the support of all sides in politics... all Canadians believe in the importance of both defending religious freedom at home but also defending religious freedom abroad.

He also said that the defence of religious freedom was unconditional.

In spite of all of these voices, why is the government so determined to destroy the mandate of the Office of Religious Freedom?

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, several people have already asked that question. I will answer it again, but my answer will be the same.

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Of course we must protect religious freedom, and that is what we are going to do. Our goal is to improve on the work that was done, not repudiate it. We believe that rights are never defended as well as when we defend them together in an integrated, united, and interdependent way. That is how we will approach this.

* * *

[English]

PARKS CANADA

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP supports giving all Canadians the opportunity to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage. We welcome the promise of free admission to our national parks in 2017. However, user fees are also a major source of revenue, and Canadians are worried about the serious funding crisis facing our national parks.

The Conservatives cut staffing, slashed Parks Canada's budget, and put the ecology and infrastructure of our parks at risk. Will the minister restore the Conservative cuts to Parks Canada and offset this revenue shortfall?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm that we are committed to significant spending in terms of our national parks and our historic sites. That is part of my mandate. We will ensure we have the funds necessary to continue to meet the mandate.

* * *

[Translation]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, human trafficking is a very real phenomenon in my riding.

In 2015, 33 minor female runaways were sexually exploited in Laval alone. We need prevention, but a lot of resources on the ground as well.

However, something we could do right now and right here is implement Maria Mourani's bill, which was passed in the House of Commons last year. The bill would severely punish anyone who exploits our young women.

Can the government tell us if it will quickly set a date for implementing the bill?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her concern and work on the issue of violence against women and girls.

Preventing and addressing violence against women and girls is a priority for this government. We are working with a range of key stakeholders to address this issue, including the launch of a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, developing a federal gender-violence strategy, and enhancing Canada's network of shelters and transition homes.

We are confident that this range of actions will reduce violence and end this scourge against our society.

● (1150)

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Leader of the Government in the House of Commons wrote intimidating letters to members of the IRB, letters interfering and urging these well-respected judges to step down.

There are no indications that these humble public servants have not been doing their jobs effectively. Why did the Prime Minister and the Liberal House leader feel that they had the right to interfere by pressuring them to leave their positions?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, the scandal is not on this side of the House; the scandal is on that side of the House. The facts are clear. The previous government made serious appointments that took effect after the Conservatives lost the election. It is time they look in the mirror, and they will see where the scandal resides.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all week the Liberal House leader has not been able to defend his political interference. Judicial independence is paramount, and he does not have the right to use his position to intimidate judges. These judges and tribunal members make decisions about cases between the government and Canadians.

Can this government explain why, after only three months, the ethics rules have already been thrown out the window?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, and I will repeat it once again for members, at the end of the day, there were questionable appointments that were made by the former Conservative government.

Canadians understand that the former prime minister stepped outside the box in making those appointments. Quite frankly, the Conservatives are the ones who should be ashamed of themselves for their behaviour.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship confirmed the positions of members of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. The minister accepted that these appointments had been made on merit.

Will the government House leader take note of his colleague's actions and finally stop his unwarranted witch hunt, or will he simply continue his political interference?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times, the appointment process must be respected. We know very well that many appointments were made by the previous prime minister very shortly before the election, and those appointments are now taking effect. That is not how things should be done. The new government should have the latitude to make its own appointments.

TAXATION

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to protecting the integrity of Canada's tax system by focusing on the fight against tax evasion and international tax avoidance.

Can the Minister of National Revenue inform the members of this House of any new steps that have been taken to honour that commitment?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for this important question.

I am pleased to announce that yesterday I signed a joint declaration with Switzerland expressing the intent of the two countries to engage in the automatic exchange of financial account information. The information received will improve Canada's ability to detect and address cases of tax evasion, ensure tax compliance, and protect the integrity of Canada's tax system.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, forestry is one of the largest employers in my riding, with lumber mills in West Kelowna, Princeton, and Merritt. These businesses and their employees all support free trade. Now the Forest Products Association of Canada has come out in favour of the trans-Pacific partnership and supports its ratification.

The TPP is great for British Columbia. When will the federal Liberals realize they have hit peak consultation, get off the fence, and support jobs in British Columbia?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we began consultations from the time we were elected. The important date is ratification. We will look at this treaty carefully. We will look at this treaty through Parliament and through parliamentary committees. We will continue to consult Canadians until we know we have the evidence necessary to make the right decision that will benefit not just the forestry industry, obviously, but all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

•(1155)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the 11-week campaign, many constituents in Brampton East were excited about the Canada child benefit. Indeed, they appreciated that it was a targeted tax-free benefit that was simple and easy to understand, and that millionaires would no longer be receiving it.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please update the House on his commitment for Canadians all across the nation to receive the Canada child benefit?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his good question. In budget 2016, our

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government will introduce the Canada child benefit, a tax-free, monthly benefit for families with children.

The CCB will ensure that the maximum help is provided to those families who need it most. We anticipate that payments could start flowing in July of this year. At that point, nine families out of 10 will be better off with our plan. That plan is going to help lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. It will help families in Brampton and in my riding—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton

* * *

SCIENCE

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government claims that it wants to consult broadly with Canadians and that it wants to be fact and science based in its approach. Why then, in the 107 days the Liberals have been in office, has there been zero consultation with the science critics on the climate change initiatives, the pipeline environmental review process changes, and the input for science spending for the upcoming budget?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a science-based and evidence-based approach is fundamental to what we do. Very shortly after we formed the government, the Prime Minister hosted our scientists to talk exactly about climate change, which the party opposite does not seem to like to do. We brought our scientists forward. They talked about science. All of our policies are based on science and evidence.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the American authorities are dragging their feet on certifying Bombardier's C Series jets. Until they do, no money is coming in, and that company and its suppliers are running out of cash. The aerospace industry is to Quebec what the automotive industry is to Ontario. It is a cutting-edge industry, an industry of the future.

Why is the government so eager to free up money for Alberta and so slow to do so for the pride of Quebec's economy?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has initiated discussions with Bombardier and the Government of Quebec to take stock of the company's priorities.

We believe that any federal investment in that company must be supported by a solid business plan. However, we recognize that the aerospace sector is a very important industry that relies heavily on exports and employs over 180,000 Canadians. It is very important—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm.

Points of Order

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question was clear. When will this government intervene?

The aerospace industry accounts for 40,000 jobs in 200 high-tech companies in Quebec. It has been nearly a year since Bombardier indicated that it might need a line of credit to tide it over until it receives its certification.

The question is simple. When will the government stand up for Quebec's economy? When will it take action on this issue?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I told my hon. colleague opposite, we know how important the aerospace industry is and we know that Bombardier is one of Canada's leading companies.

We have entered into discussions with the company and with the Government of Quebec, and we are going to make a decision in due course.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and the municipalities are footing the bill for infrastructure when Ottawa is the one with more fiscal flexibility.

For a long time now, the larger cities in Quebec have been calling on the federal government to pay its fair share for infrastructure. Today, the Prime Minister showed them a menu, but then once again gave them an empty plate.

Knowing that there is a desperate need for infrastructure in Quebec, particularly in Montreal East, will the government commit to covering 50% of the total spending—

• (1200)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that we are working very hard on the matter of Quebec infrastructure.

My colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, has met with the premier of Quebec. During the election campaign, we announced that we were going to make major investments in infrastructure across Canada in the next 10 years.

We made that promise. We know that doing so will stimulate the economy, which is good for Quebec and for Canada. We are going to keep our promise.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. This will conclude question period for today.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is rising on a point of order.

POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises from the debate on Bill C-4 that occurred prior to question period.

The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas delivered her speech. The first question posed to her was by the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Immediately after posing the question, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa proceeded to leave the chamber and to heckle the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas as he left the chamber from his seat as well as in the corridor.

I am a new member. I understand that the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa is not. I would appreciate some clarification as to whether this kind of behaviour is appropriate, and if not, I would ask the chair to politely intervene.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for the question. He will know, of course, that as Speaker, I and all the presiding officers listen carefully and try to discourage heckling. Today in question period there was a little bit more than I would like, but it was not bad today. We have had a pretty good week on the whole, and I appreciate that from hon. members. Let us try to keep that up.

When members ask a question, they are not required to remain in the chamber. When they go out into the lobby, they can hear the response. I did not hear the member heckling at that point, or I might have brought it to his attention. I might have raised it.

I discourage members from doing that. I would point out that members do not have to be in the chamber and can hear what is said if they are out in the lobby.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the other member's intervention. We should all feel that this is a place where we can stand up and ask for a ruling from you or any of your officers.

However, I would just point out that it is against our standing orders to allow a member to point out the absence of any other member. Perhaps we could all benefit from reviewing the standing orders and take advantage of the table officers, something I did in my first session. I invite the member to do the same.

The Speaker: That is in fact something I should have pointed out, and I thank the hon. member for pointing that out.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to clarify an earlier answer I gave to the House, that our plan is to cut the waiting times for benefits from two weeks to one week—

The Speaker: This sounds like debate. I appreciate the clarification, but I think it is debate and not a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 42nd general election held on October 19, 2015.

[Translation]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[English]

I am going to encourage the member for Cape Breton—Canso to take his conversation outside or have a seat. That is great, he can have a seat. I know he will enjoy listening to the President of the Treasury Board in a moment.

* * *

• (1205)

[Translation]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2015 ACT, NO. 1

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-5, An Act to repeal Division 20 of Part 3 of the Economic Action Plan 2015 Act, No. 1.

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

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition that over 100,000 Canadians have signed. The petition sadly highlights the fact that 22-year-old Cassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired driving, called Families for Justice, believes that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient.

The petitioners are calling for new mandatory minimum sentencing for people who have been convicted of vehicular homicide.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Kootenay—Columbia concerning proportional representation. There are over 700 signatures from Nelson, Cranbrook, Salmo, Golden, and Creston.

An important point is that this petition is for true proportional representation, not for the preferential ballot, which is really just a second past the post system of voting.

I look forward to hearing from the government at some point on this important question.

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Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of fair electoral representation from Fair Vote Canada.

The petitioners prepared this petition to express their point of view on democratic reform.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have numerous constituents who are concerned about visitor visas and how visitor visas are being issued. It is an issue which I believe many Canadians, from coast to coast to coast, understand and can appreciate. It deals with how visitor visas are being approved.

The petitioners are asking for special consideration to be given to those who have families, so that they can attend funerals, graduations, and important family events here in Canada. It is with pleasure that I table this petition today.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-4. Every time I speak in this place, as each of us does, I remind myself that I do so as the representative of the constituents of Mégantic—L'Érable.

As a newly elected member, I could easily get swept away by our magnificent nation's capital and its surroundings. It was with my constituents in mind that I prepared this speech.

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If my colleagues do not mind, I would like to take this opportunity to point out that yesterday, the Eastern Townships public health department released its report on the health of the people of Lac-Mégantic, following the tragedy in that town. This report revealed that residents are still struggling and still need the support of members of the House. I think that all parliamentarians here would publicly agree to support the people of Lac-Mégantic, who have suffered as a result of this tragedy. I urge the government to work with all parliamentarians to help everyone get through this tragedy, which was, of course, a very difficult experience for the people of Lac-Mégantic. We will have to use the necessary resources, and we will all work together, across party lines, in a non-partisan and non-political manner, to ensure that the people of Lac-Mégantic get the services they need.

I want to start by saying that my speech on Bill C-4 is in no way an attack on unions or union leaders, and is certainly not an attack on the unionized workers who work hard to earn a living and support their families.

What I would like to talk about today is in fact the thousands of workers who have no corporate or partisan interests. They are happy in their jobs. They like being properly represented by their unions, and when they go home at night, they are just as happy to be with their families and forget about work until the next morning. That is the daily life of most workers, those whose voices we do not hear, those whom we tend to take for granted.

Here in the House and at the various levels of government, whether local, provincial, or federal, many people claim that they speak for those silent workers. Lobby groups and unions all claim that they speak on behalf of all of their members and in their place. It is easy to do so, because those individuals do not hear us. They do not attend meetings with the decision-makers and, at the risk of disappointing members, when they go home tonight, they probably will not read today's *Hansard*.

Why? Because they are busy. They work hard to earn their paycheques and take care of their families and their homes. They are also busy paying the bills. They expect us, their MPs, to do our work like they do theirs. They expect us to take care of business in our ridings and in our country, to manage their money as though it were our own, and to build a better future for Canada. That is what those thousands of workers expect from us.

They expect that from their union too. They expect their union representatives to deal with their working conditions and employer-employee relations and to be there when problems crop up. Like us, union representatives are elected. Like us, they do their best to represent their members, as we do for our constituents.

I would like to take a moment to thank the unions that have helped build the country we have now by improving the lives of all workers.

• (1210)

Bill C-4 repeals two statutes, the purpose of which was quite clear, namely to allow union members to vote for union certification by secret ballot without worrying about the pressure and corporate interests of the big unions.

We have all heard the questionable stories about people being pressured to sign union membership cards by three or four people

who are not necessarily well intentioned. Often those people are not even co-workers.

I cannot see how a worker is supposed to refuse to sign when those three or four people threaten to stay at his apartment, home, or the restaurant where he is eating, until they get what they want.

The legislation gave that worker a way out by ensuring that his final decision would be made by secret ballot. In other words, when faced with two or three individuals insisting that they would not leave his home until he signs the card, he could always say yes, knowing that he had a way out.

That person would be able to vote by secret ballot, to make an informed decision, free from pressure from either the unions or those three or four people who wanted to force the person to sign the membership card.

With this bill, those three or four individuals would not have stuck around at the worker's front door long, trying to get a signature. That is the truth. I have to wonder why certain unions still use such methods to represent workers. Are they truly trying to defend the interests of their members or future members? Or are they simply acting in their corporate interest, to grow their own organization and to get the associated union dues?

What is really at stake with this old method is workers' money. Unfortunately, some unions are prepared to do anything to get the workers' money and do not care about what is good for them.

As the saying goes, the union wants what is good for you and wants your goods as well. That is the truth. Why are the Liberals, in one of their very first actions in government, going after Canadian workers and this democratic safeguard? I would truly like to understand.

Setting partisanship aside, how can this Liberal government, which from the beginning of the session has been spouting democratic principles, sabotage at the first opportunity a law that finally gave a voice to workers who work hard and want to avoid problems?

This law gave them a way out, a means to finally have their say, without fear of reprisal, on whether they want to be part of a union or not.

I listened to the comments of the members opposite, and since the beginning of the debate on this bill, I have not heard a clear answer. I heard the arguments of my colleague, who has done a fine job since the start.

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•(1215)

He has a lot of experience as an opposition member. He highlighted the benefits of these two bills. I listened to the answers the minister gave him, but, unfortunately, I still do not understand.

I must therefore come to the conclusion that Bill C-4 has only one goal, namely to allow the unions to perpetuate their old ways of doing things. We tried to correct the situation in the interest of workers.

Why is the Liberal government doing this? You can find the answers if you look hard enough. If the other side does not provide the answers, you have to look a little harder and go back in time. You try to think about what happened before that could explain why the Liberal government absolutely wants to let the unions go back to their old ways. I think that I found part of the answer when I considered all that was said in the last federal election.

Last year, well before the election campaign began, the major unions ran a huge campaign against the Conservative Party using millions of dollars given to them by workers to represent them and negotiate their working conditions. The cat is out of the bag.

Here are a few examples of what was said in the union propaganda that was given to all unionized workers in my riding over the past year. Some of the key phrases were “the Conservative government's track record” and “what you need to know to vote for a better quality of life”. Those statements were then explained.

That is electioneering, and it was paid for with public funds. All Canadians paid for those documents through tax credits, and they were handed out to all unionized workers so that they could take a stand.

There was other fine rhetoric included in these pamphlets, such as “contempt for Parliament” and “actively anti-union”. On one page, the unions claimed to understand workers' values better than did the workers themselves. It read, “your values and vision for the future”. The unions were telling workers what to think. That is what they told unionized workers using Canadian taxpayers' money.

Later on, the unions told workers what they needed to know to vote for their safety and the safety of their loved ones. They said that transportation was less safe. They used the Lac-Mégantic tragedy to oppose what we had done. It is absolutely unbelievable.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, some people want to use tragedies to score political points and advance their cause. As we saw recently in the Quebec City region, people are talking about Lac-Mégantic just to promote themselves. We do not want that. I just wanted to mention that as an aside.

Here are some other excerpts: “many reasons to vote against Harper”, “the Conservative track record”, “what you need to know before voting”, and so on.

•(1220)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would like to inform the member that, when speaking in the House, he must not refer to another member by name.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, you are right, and I am sorry.

Let me get back to that question: “Why do we have to dump the Conservatives?” I found some quotes, and here is one of the best ones:

Get involved! Take the time to help make change happen! We are looking for volunteers in various ridings. Our goal is to talk to as many people as possible to tell them to vote for a change in government.

They were even offering training on how to vote. It is democratic, but I am skeptical about the reasons and motivations underlying our unions' big democratic push. That message was sent to all union members.

Here is another good quote I found when I listened to the debates and read some accounts of our debates.

In response to my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, who asked the minister to explain how it could be undemocratic to have a secret-ballot vote for unionization, this is what the minister said:

...it is undemocratic because the process used by the previous government did not include consultation. They did not go out into our community and apparently did not even consult with employers.

If I follow the minister's logic and understand what she said, Bill C-4 must be undemocratic.

When is the minister going to come to my riding, Mégantic—L'Érable, to consult the workers there? It is unbelievable. When is she going to come and consult the businesses in my region? Will she commit, here and now in the House, to visiting every riding in Canada to ask each and every worker their opinion on Bill C-4?

I invite the minister to come to my riding and I invite all of my colleagues across the aisle to do the same. I will arrange quite a visit for them.

Not only will the minister be able to consult each and every worker, explain her position, and hear the workers' opinions, but at the same time, she will also discover a very vibrant region full of motivated entrepreneurs and hard-working people.

However, she will also meet workers who do not agree with her on Bill C-4 and who cannot afford to make the trip here to the nation's capital to make the government hear what they have to say. Most of all, she will meet people who have absolutely no desire to come and listen to what we say here, because they are too busy earning a living and taking care of their families.

Between us, without mentioning anyone by name, since the vote was held by secret ballot, I will share a little secret with the House. I know that it will stay within these walls. When the minister comes to my riding, she will also meet unionized workers who voted for the Conservative Party. Indeed, she will.

A number of unionized workers voted for the Conservative Party and chose to support the party despite the millions of dollars that the big union bosses decided to spend to fight the big bad Conservatives, who asked them to be accountable to the workers.

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She will hear that they are not at all pleased with how their boss spent their union dues during the election campaign. These people feel cheated because their money was used to fight their own democratic convictions. They are angry because their money was not used to defend their working conditions, but to promote a partisan political ideology that they do not share.

What 86% of unionized workers want is for their hard-earned money to be used properly and not for campaigning for or against a party.

Unions are the only organizations to receive so much public money without having to be transparent. Why is the Liberal government against that?

For all these reasons, I will be voting against Bill C-4.

•(1225)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothsay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have to say in all transparency that I am absolutely shocked by the comments made by members opposite today in debate on this legislation.

My riding is Saint John—Rothsay and it has a deep and historic labour movement, a very strong labour history. I had the pleasure two weeks ago to visit the Frank & Ella Hatheway labour exhibit and was given a tour by George Vair and Chuck Hickey.

The party opposite's agenda over the last 10 years has been nothing short of degrading and demoralizing union workers and its own union workers in the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I have many friends in that union. Over 10 years they have been demoralized and degraded.

Let us be clear. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were designed for one reason and that was to weaken unions.

•(1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I will ask myself a question since no one else has asked me one.

Do I think that unions are the only organizations that should be publicly accountable? The answer is no. We would not want a charitable organization to invest in the stock market, for example, and then give half of what it makes to its directors as bonuses. We do not want that. Why does that not happen? That does not happen because these organizations are publicly accountable. It would be embarrassing for them to do so. I answered my question.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to make some comments and ask a question.

I heard comments about things such as perpetuating the old union ways. My question is this. Why are the unions always characterized as being crooked? Why this negative image of unions?

I was the treasurer of my union for 19 years. I had to bring my ledgers to every general meeting and show them to everyone. At the meeting we would talk about our expenses all together. Everything was open and transparent. Why are people saying that all unions are bands of crooks and that everything they do is bad? I do not understand that logic.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I truly do not remember saying in my speech that unions are crooks. I think that perhaps the member misinterpreted what I was saying. I did not say that at all.

I spoke about the unions' old ways of doing things. We received complaints about that, and some workers approached our party to ask if it was possible to put an end to those methods in order to improve democracy in unions. Not all unions were doing things that way. I was the vice-president of my union, and we also had very good methods and ways of doing things.

I therefore do not see any reason for calling these people names, as the NDP just did, just because I said that people want to change the old ways of doing things.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I myself was a union member, a CAW worker, a union steward at one time many years ago.

Unifor has its resort on the lake in my riding. It built a million-dollar wind turbine on its property. These are the types of things that need to be uncovered. Locals keep the books and do a great job. The workers who pay their dues are great, hard-working people.

We need to shine the light on the excesses of the national executives. I wonder what my colleague's thoughts are on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, that is exactly right. We hope that people will speak out against all such action taken by the major unions, perhaps with good intentions, but not with the intention of using workers' funds appropriately.

Why do workers give money to their unions? It is so that the union will represent them, get them better working conditions, resolve disputes with their employer, and help to improve their lot. Those are the reasons why people pay union dues. There are no other reasons.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague has been talking about transparency and democracy. I think we have a two-tiered system. Let me explain. During a vote on union certification, as he is proposing, the union would have to collect more than 50% of the votes of all the employees in question. All of the employees who do not vote will be deemed to have voted against unionization.

Let us now talk about our democracy. With this type of rule, no member in this House would have been elected in the last election or any other election, since no one here received more than 50% of the total votes in their riding.

I have a question for my colleague. Are there two different types of transparency? Is there one sort of transparency and democracy for unions and another one for parliamentarians?

•(1235)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague for her question.

I must say that some of our colleagues in the House did receive 50% plus one of the votes in their riding. Some of them managed to do so, but it is true that this is not the case for everyone in the House. I do want to congratulate those members on their excellent results. We are proud of their results and what they managed to accomplish in their ridings as they proudly represented unionized workers in their ridings. These people work hard and believe that the Conservative Party's decisions were good ones.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the reason we are debating this bill today is because the former Conservative government introduced two private members' bills through the back door of the private member's hour without working or consulting with unions, businesses, or the many different stakeholders, and it changed the law through that back door. If the Conservatives believed it was necessary, they did not have the political courage to do it in the form of a government bill.

Lo and behold, as the new government we recognize that we have to rectify a past mistake of the Conservative government. There are many past mistakes, and this is one that we are rectifying today.

My question to the member is this. Why does he believe that his former government used the back door to change labour laws through private member's legislation that should be based on the consensus of the different stakeholders?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I am a bit disappointed by my colleague's comments. The reason is quite simple. Why is he belittling the work that members do in the House? That is unbelievable. All members have the right to introduce bills. In the past, we allowed our members to speak and introduce bills. That is part of the democratic process.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech and his answers with rapt attention. I participated in the debates on Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which are now law.

Many of the aspects of these bills that we discussed and voted on were clearly designed not to address a specific problem but to undermine unions' ability to do their work. One of those aspects is the mandatory disclosure of expenses in excess of \$5,000, initially, and salaries over \$100,000.

I would like to know why the government of the day, which is now in opposition, wanted to create that kind of bureaucracy to monitor small expenses, which are transparent for all unions anyway.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, why is my colleague opposed to people knowing those things? This is about public money. Do unionized workers have the right to know what is being done with their money or do they not? We think they do.

[English]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fredericton.

I am proud to stand today to speak in support of Bill C-4. The war on organized labour is over. This legislation would reverse the

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legacy of the previous government, which rushed through two anti-union measures, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, just prior to the last election. Those measures put in place redundant reporting requirements and made it harder to certify and easier to decertify a union. With Bill C-4, our government would repeal both of these punitive pieces of legislation.

The reasons we are doing this are threefold. The old combination of legislation under Bills C-377 and C-525 was unnecessary, impeded collective bargaining, and was ideologically driven.

Argument number one is that the old legislation is unnecessary. No one asked for Bills C-377 and C-525. Employees did not ask for them, unions did not ask for them, and even employers were not clamouring for this legislation. These bills constituted a solution to a problem that did not even exist. The only champions of Bills C-377 and C-525 were the members of the previous government. The ostensible reason they asserted was that they were trying to promote increased financial transparency and accountability for unions and to inject democratic principles into their processes. This rationale was defective then, and it remains defective now. First, to the idea that unions are not transparent and that members do not get to see the financial statements or expenditures, this information was and has always been made available to union members. Unions are member-based organizations that release information to their members, information that is confidential.

● (1240)

[Translation]

My colleagues across the way keep harping on about how unions are undemocratic organizations. Once again, that is incorrect.

Unions meet regularly, and all members are welcome to participate. At meetings, members are empowered to hold their leaders accountable. Discussions and debate take place during the meetings, differences of opinion are aired, and solutions are put forward. Taken together, those aspects are features of a democratic system.

Unions also hold membership votes. Decisions are made by the members themselves. The members are the ones who make decisions and issue instructions. Leaders are elected by union members and can be removed from their positions. That is another key principle of a democratic system.

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[English]

I say this with some experience. I am the product of an organized workplace. For the past 12 years, before being elected, I served as a civil servant with the Ontario public service, practising law as a crown attorney. I have first-hand knowledge of the transparency and accountability parameters by which unions abide.

Yet another argument offered by the previous government in support of the old package of legislation was that it represented a modest increase in the financial disclosure obligations for unions. Again, this is incorrect. The reporting requirement in old Bill C-377 calls for at least 24 detailed statements to be submitted by unions of any size, from the smallest groups to the largest national bodies. The collection and managing of these submissions would cost the government millions of dollars, \$11 million to start the oversight mechanism and \$2 million every year thereafter. Those are not my figures. They come from the Canada Revenue Agency and the parliamentary budget officer. Just so we are clear, under Bills C-377 and C-525, the previous Conservative government increased the size and scope of government and government regulation, adding to the amount of red tape and, more important, adding to the amount that Canadian taxpayers would be required to shell out for such additional bureaucracy. The irony is palpable.

Argument number two is that the old legislation impeded collective bargaining. As I said at the outset, Bill C-525 made it harder to certify and easier to decertify a union. With the new Bill C-4, we would repeal those provisions. Our government recognizes that certification of a union is an important part of the collective bargaining process.

As I mentioned, I spent 12 years as a crown attorney specializing in the area of constitutional law. Section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of association. That has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include “the right to a meaningful process of collective bargaining”. Why is collective bargaining so important as to warrant constitutional protection? The Supreme Court has explained that, in paragraph 58 of a decision called MPAO.

The Supreme Court said:

The guarantee functions to protect individuals against more powerful entities. By banding together in the pursuit of common goals, individuals are able to prevent more powerful entities from thwarting their legitimate goals and desires. In this way, the guarantee of freedom of association empowers vulnerable groups and helps them work to right imbalances in society. It protects marginalized groups and makes possible a more equal society.

Collective bargaining is important because it helps to promote fairness and equality. We get that and we are not going to waste more taxpayer dollars litigating these types of cases in the courts. On that point, I would simply note that the charter challenge launched by the Alberta Union of Public Employees against the old Bill C-377 was suspended immediately upon our government's announcement that we would be repealing the government's punitive legislation.

However, it is not just me who understands the utility of collective bargaining as a vehicle for addressing inequality, it is also my constituents in Parkdale—High Park. It is people like Mr. Hassan Yussuff, the President of the Canadian Labour Congress, who is my neighbour in Roncesvalles Village and a tireless advocate for

workers' rights. It is people like Wyatt Bilger, a hard-working carpenter and resident of my riding and a member of Carpenters Union Local 27. It is people like the countless artists, filmmakers, performers, and television producers in my riding who contribute so much culturally to our community, who are also proud members of ACTRA, the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists. It is people like the hard-working tradespeople and manufacturing employees in Parkdale—High Park who are members of LiUNA, Unifor, and the CAW.

All of these individuals and groups appreciate what this newly elected government recognizes, that workplaces that include collective bargaining are a net positive, not a net negative for our communities.

Argument number three is that the old legislation was ideologically driven. There was no rationale whatsoever that informed the passage of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 other than rigid, anti-union sentiment. To illustrate this point, let us look no further than the rushed passage of the bills through Parliament. Bill C-377 was one of the four bills to get to the Senate just before the writ was issued for the last election. It was expedited to the Senate and was made into law. But one of the four bills that received support from all parties in this chamber was left to die on the Senate order paper in place of passing Bill C-377.

What I am talking about is Bill C-279 that had been introduced as private members' legislation by my NDP colleague, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. Bill C-279 was going to amend the Canada Human Rights Act to include gender identity as a prohibited ground of discrimination. All parties supported and passed that private member's bill in the House in the 41st Parliament. However, instead of championing that bill in the Senate, the previous Conservative government decided to promote the passage of Bill C-377. Conservatives chose to attack organized labour rather than back Bill C-279, which would have protected the rights and freedoms of gender and gender variant Canadians who deserve the same treatment and rights as every other Canadian.

Not only did the Conservatives attack unions, they told trans and gender variant Canadians that their rights were not a priority. Thankfully that was yet another mistake of the Conservatives that our government has pledged to rectify. The commitment to amend the Canada Human Rights Act to add gender identity as a prohibited ground for discrimination is in the mandate letter for the Attorney General of Canada.

We have seen this ideological pattern before in terms of the old war on the environment, the war on the civil service, and the war on evidence-based policy. We have taken stands to reverse all of those previous battles. Now with Bill C-4, our government brings to an end the war on organized labour.

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The role of this government, of any government, is to create jobs, but it is not just about creating any jobs, it is about creating good quality, secure, well-paying jobs. We recognize that unions help to do this. They ensure fair compensation for workers, promote safety for individuals, and protect workers' job security and their well-being.

A secure worker is a more productive worker and productive workers are good for the economy. We understand this. The previous government did not. As I said, the war on organized labour is over. Unions are not the enemy of progress, they are a partner in that progress. Our government is committed to working with them, not against them, to further the economic development of this country.

For these reasons, I urge members in the House to vote in favour of Bill C-4.

•(1245)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, first, I want to thank my colleague for his good speech. I really appreciate the fact that he worked hard on that and it was clear. I do not agree, but it was clear.

There was one point that I strongly disagree with. At the beginning of his speech he said clearly that in this part of the House we always say that unions are undemocratic. I never say that. If so, please give me the time, the date, and the place where we said that. If not, please retract it.

[*Translation*]

Here is what I think: our bills always meant to strengthen union democracy by giving more authority and ensuring greater transparency, and above all, by making sure that secret ballots would give unassailable authority to decisions made by unions and union members.

How can any member duly elected to the House of Commons, elected by secret ballot, be against secret ballot voting?

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I will respond to both questions.

First, the only inference that can be drawn by tactically deciding to promote this legislation, which was a private member's bill, on the eve of an election call is that it was ideologically motivated and democracy, or lack thereof, within the union processes was at the heart of the motivations of the Conservatives.

With regard to the second point, we have heard a lot during the course of the debate, even today, about the voting processes within the unions. I find it a bit ironic, to say the least, that members opposite are championing this point while, at the same time, completely sacrificing other important interests, such as the privacy interests of individuals involved in the unions.

According to the Conservatives' legislation, which we are taking off the books, there would be things like whether someone was entering a substance abuse program or what kind of prescription medication a person or his or her spouse was using that would be made public pursuant to the reporting requirements. This is a blatant attack on individuals' rights and on unions, and that is why we seek to oppose it.

•(1250)

[*Translation*]

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

In response to the question I just heard, clearly, we do not need to talk specifically about an attack on unions. However, the inference is there. Obviously, it has been implied, not only in this debate but also in the debate that took place in the previous Parliament on Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

When you look at the contents of the debates here in the House and the discussions that took place in the relevant committees, it is clear that the legislation was not meant to unshackle the workers, but rather to attack unions' ability to properly represent them.

The provisions in the bills, which later became law, not only undermined unions' ability to do their jobs properly, but also created a very specific and massive bureaucracy to manage minor situations, which is very surprising from a government that always claimed to prefer less bureaucracy.

How will repealing those bills, which is what Bill C-4 proposes, affect the bureaucracy that was proposed by the Conservative government of the day?

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: As I mentioned in my original comments, Madam Speaker, the financial impact on increasing the size of the bureaucracy would have been extremely significant. The numbers that I provided in my original speech were provided by the CRA and the parliamentary budget officer. It would cost approximately \$11 million to start up the oversight and \$2 million thereafter.

We have made a decision that this kind of overlay, that this kind of bureaucracy, is unnecessary: first, because we are not ideologically opposed to organized labour; and second, and most important, that these kinds of accountability and transparency mechanisms already exist under the Canada Labour Code and under provincial legislation that is applicable. It is redundant and unnecessary legislation. That is why we are prioritizing it and getting rid of it.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague identified the fact that constitutional experts had said the legislation went against the Constitution. Privacy experts have said it exposes millions of Canadians and their privacy. Also, seven out of ten provinces have spoken against it.

Would my colleague agree that this was a solution for a problem that did not exist? There were ulterior motives. This was about trying to find something to solve a problem that did not exist.

Mr. Arif Virani: Yes, Madam Speaker.

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Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is repealing two laws that have changed the way unions operate.

Bill C-377 has created unnecessary red tape and has put organized labour at a disadvantage in the collective bargaining process.

Bill C-525 makes it more difficult for employees to unionize and easier for a bargaining agent to be decertified.

[*Translation*]

The measures the government is taking in Bill C-4, are part of a plan designed to ensure that Canada's labour laws best serve employees and employers.

This new bill is part of the government's plan to strengthen the middle class in our great country and to fully recognize the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers.

•(1255)

[*English*]

This government started with a tax break for hard-working Canadians. In the riding I represent, that is a tax break for hard-working nurses, teachers, soldiers, and many other public servants.

We will follow that tax break with the new Canada child benefit, a monthly tax-free, income-tested benefit that would lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, a benefit that will help nine out of ten Canadian families.

We will also support our veterans by restoring the option of the lifelong pension and by caring for their physical and mental health, and that of their families. It is the sacred obligation of the government to unconditionally support those who have unconditionally served for our safety and freedom.

The government will rebuild its relationship with indigenous Canadians on a nation-to-nation basis, a relationship based upon mutual respect, recognition of rights, and understanding of traditional knowledge.

[*Translation*]

This bill is also about respect and fairness, national economic prosperity, and supporting the middle class, which is made up of those dedicated workers who contribute to the growth of our communities and our economy.

It is clear that the previous government did not believe in fairness or the importance of unions and the role they play. Its actions were motivated by a desire to undermine the union movement.

[*English*]

Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were counterproductive to a positive working relationship between employees and employers. Furthermore, it was not a widespread request of the business community. It was unnecessary and caused difficulties for unions.

The two anti-labour bills, which this bill seeks to reverse and reset, were direct attacks on unions by the previous Conservative government. They undermined the right for workers in federally

regulated sectors to form a union, and imposed unnecessary and onerous reporting burdens on all unions.

[*Translation*]

The current government is taking a different route, which consists in listening to the union groups, communities, and legal experts who sounded the alarm about these bills that likely violate charter rights. A number of constitutional experts felt that Bill C-377 was likely unconstitutional.

Privacy experts said that the bill would compromise the private information of millions of Canadians. The bill also discriminates against unions. It does not take into account other types of organizations, such as professional associations. What is more, seven provinces are against the bill because they feel it encroaches on their jurisdiction.

[*English*]

As my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has so eloquently stated, Bill C-525 was simply a solution looking for a problem.

Simply put, in over 10 years and after thousands of rulings by the Industrial Relations Board, there were merely two judgments against unions for questionable practices during union organizing.

That is why the government has taken significant steps to rebuild labour relations after a decade of acrimony between unions and the Conservatives. It is why the government has introduced legislation to repeal these two anti-labour bills.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour every day of representing the riding of Fredericton, which is home to many dedicated workers who have been unfavourably and unfairly affected by Bills C-377 and C-525, which are mean-spirited.

Educated, professional, proud public servants, many of whom are taking care of our aging population, live in the riding.

[*English*]

We are home to university scientists and researchers, themselves fostering creative approaches and solutions to the existential challenges we face as a society, as well as making new discoveries to the way we view the world and how we provide economic opportunity, social well-being, and environmental sustainability to our community.

We are also home to almost 1,000 civilian employees at Base Gagetown, employees who, amidst all the coming and going of our men and women in uniform, keep the lights on, the roads safe, and the buildings operational at Canada's largest military training base.

The economic and fiscal contribution of these professional public servants is enormous. Base Gagetown alone contributes upward of \$600 million annually to the New Brunswick economy.

Government Orders

The base, the largest federal government asset and largest contributor to our socio-economic vibrancy in the riding, would simply not remain operational without the diligence and hard work of civilian employees, the support of their families, and, in fact, the support of the entire town of Oromocto, Canada's model town, which sprung up just over a half century ago to provide service and a home for the base.

Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were not mere attacks on the civilian workforce at Base Gagetown. They were seen as an attack on the community of Oromocto. As I knocked on doors last winter, spring, summer, and fall, clear across the Oromocto community, I heard time and time again how the community felt largely betrayed by the former government and how it felt it was time for a positive change.

On October 19, the people of Oromocto spoke clearly and they spoke for that real change.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

As the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has said many times, we promised to repeal these bills because they are detrimental to labour relations. In Oromocto, labour relations have had a negative impact on the morale of the community.

Unions have a major role to play in protecting workers' rights and growing the middle class. The former government trampled on many basic labour rights that were hard won by the unions. That made it more difficult for workers to enjoy freedom of association, bargain collectively in good faith and work in a safe environment.

The government plans on restoring fair and balanced labour legislation that recognizes the important role unions play in Canada and respects their major contribution to the growth and prosperity of the middle class.

[*English*]

This begins with repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, legislation that diminishes and weakens Canada's labour movement. This side of the floor knows that the bill may face a stiff test in the Senate. It is, however, sad to hear members opposite say that they will direct the Senate to kill the bill and continue to disadvantage the organized labour movement in Canada.

I believe the Senate exists to study and recommend improvements and enhancements to legislation. I hope the upper chamber will serve to do just that and will work collaboratively with all parliamentarians in the House.

Canadians elected a government that would ensure evidence-based decision-making. On balance, there was very little evidence to support the passing of these two bills. Canadians elected a government that work hard to reinstitute fairness in decision-making. Over and above balance, there was nothing fair in these bills.

This government promised to stand up for Canadians, and this is exactly what we have set out to do, and Bill C-4 would do that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a former union member. I

was one of the people who stumped for Bill C-377, saying it was a needed thing for union accountability in Canada. It strikes me as very interesting that people like me, as a former union member, would not be supportive of such legislation. I absolutely support it and want to see it continue in Canada.

I do not see anything wrong with accountability in the union and labour movements. A lot of former and current members are supportive of the same. What does the member opposite have against union accountability?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that accountability is paramount in all our actions. That is why we are undertaking to repeal the bills. We are holding ourselves accountable to the commitment we made to Canadians in the election to reintroduce fairness into Canada's Parliament and the way we work hard for people in our community. We heard this was greatly lacking and that it had developed over the previous 10 years. We were elected to reset that.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech honouring members in his community who are members of unions.

The NDP, of course, is pleased that the federal government has tabled legislation to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. I would also like to say that we noticed Bill C-377 would have cost a tremendous amount to taxpayers to implement, as well as to keep the database going.

In my community, many union members put money into their communities through United Way programs, non-profit organizations. Bill C-377 would have tied up the funds that union members happily put into their communities to keep them thriving when government programs are lacking.

Could the member across please speak to the ways that the union members in his community contribute as well?

• (1305)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Madam Speaker, not only is it the financial contribution that organized labour adds to communities, but physical support, support for charities, for community building endeavours, for those less fortunate in our communities. It is, by and large, the labour movement that is always leading or very much active in all sorts of different activities that take place, throughout Fredericton, New Maryland, Oromocto, clear across the Grand Lake region, which I have the honour of representing.

Quite frankly, I look forward to continued partnering with union members, organized labour, and with all constituents in the riding I represent, to ensure that we keep building a healthy and safe community.

Government Orders

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my parents were union members. My dad was a local union president. From an early age, I knew that unions played an important role in growing strong middle-class jobs like my parents', promoting strong jobs and middle-class work that the people of St. Catharines and all of Niagara rely on.

With regard to Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, the sole purpose seems to be ideologically punitive. There were no demands from unions or industry for these bills.

Could the hon. members please advise how the government intends to restore a positive relationship with unions with the current bill before the House?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Madam Speaker, this is about restoring and resetting the relationship with the labour movement across the country, as we are set to do with many other stakeholder groups in communities who have been left hung out to dry by the previous government.

At the end of the day, we need to ensure that we are fair in our deliberations, that we listen, that we come with evidence to support the decisions we are making, but that we be open to considering alternative views from what we may initially think is the case.

I expect that being consultative, being collaborative, and listening well will serve every member in this House in good stead in their communities if they undertake to operate in such a manner.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Essex.

I am pleased to rise in the House to debate Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act. First of all, I would like to indicate that I will be supporting this bill. The NDP strongly opposed the previous Conservative government's attempt to limit the rights of unions and change the rules governing labour relations.

This bill reflects one of the promises made by the NDP during the election campaign. Although I support this bill, I must mention how much work still needs to be done with regard to workers' rights and their working conditions.

The bill restores and respects workers' rights. Like thousands of other people in my riding of Jonquière, I am very proud to have been a part of the labour movement. I was the president of my local chapter for eight years, and I managed it well.

Since we started debating Bill C-4, I cannot help but feel a twinge of sadness about many of the comments I have heard here in the House. For eight years, I was directly accountable to my members at meetings and even at my workplace. I had to deal with some very sensitive issues with my members and defend both long-time and new employees.

At union meetings we had a duty to present our financial statements to members. The same goes for all locals, in all unions. The members themselves must decide whether they agree with the spending their union is doing within their own organization. We

must be transparent and accountable to our members. That is enshrined in all of our laws, and all unions must comply.

Over those eight years, I did so and we even implemented an audit system, which also exists in all unions. Our union has an officer to look over all the books and statements. I must say that when there is an anomaly, for example, if an invoice is missing or if an expenditure was left out or made by mistake, we are set straight and we are always accountable to this movement and our members.

Unions and their members do not need a government telling them what to do because they already have their regulations. They already have their own rules, rules that the members voted on either in meetings or in committees that are themselves elected by the members. Transparency is already part of the process, and leaders are accountable to union members every step of the way.

If a worker finds fault with the union's internal processes or the representatives, there is a great organization to handle that: the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the CIRB. The board is there for those people. It is impartial, and it exists to protect workers who feel their rights have been violated. There is even a complaints process. We do not need laws like the ones the Conservatives brought in to dictate how unions should be organized.

The union movement is very happy about Bill C-4, which would repeal the previous government's unfair bills C-377 and C-525. The New Democrats opposed those bills at every stage in the process because they were useless and irresponsible legislative measures that made a mockery of the very ideas of equality and fairness in negotiations between the parties and that undermined people's basic right to free collective bargaining.

• (1310)

It was a partisan assault on the men and women who go to work every day to provide for their families. Those same people voted to elect representatives to the House of Commons to defend their interests.

I was very disappointed that the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent reiterated his support for his party's bills, when he was not even a member for the party at that time.

Blaming the unions for his party's defeat is a little like blaming the groundhog for a longer winter. Ultimately, the workers spoke, and the Conservatives did not have their support, essentially because the Conservatives trampled all over workers' rights.

I would like to provide some direction for my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, since he seems to have lost his way somewhere between Quebec City and Ottawa.

The World Bank found that a high rate of unionization led to greater income equality, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity, and a quicker response to economic downturns. I think our economy could use a good boost right about now.

The Conservatives put all their eggs in one basket and we are seeing the consequences of that today. Unfortunately, people often forget what the union movement has done for workers: minimum wage, paid overtime, occupational safety standards, parental and maternity leave, paid vacation, and protection from discrimination and sexual harassment.

Just yesterday, we voted for a motion on pay equity moved by the NDP. I thank all the parties who supported the motion. I am still scratching my head about the fact that the Conservatives refused to support our motion, and especially that their leader refused to support our motion, considering that until recently she was the minister of status of women.

Bill C-4 is an excellent first step. However, there is still a lot of work to be done to fix past mistakes, such as the attack on sick leave introduced in the omnibus Bill C-59.

We also have to take a look at what we can improve, beyond the repairs that need to be made because of the Conservatives' bad decisions. It is high time that we modernized some of the outdated provisions of the Canada Labour Code.

It has been almost 60 years since the Canada Labour Code was overhauled. I join with my colleague from Saskatoon West in highlighting the importance of following up on the recommendations of the report released after the 2006 review of the Canada Labour Code.

That follow-up is already overdue. A good number of those recommendations and the vital updates would benefit many workers. For example, take the issues of workplace safety and preventive withdrawal for pregnant women. In Quebec, under the CSST regulations, once women are 26 weeks pregnant they are entitled to preventive withdrawal for their protection and that of their foetus. There is no such provision in the Canada Labour Code. Thus, we still have far to go. We must do more to improve working conditions for our women, our future mothers, and for all workers. Every worker deserves to be protected.

Some workers have a very hard time putting food on the table every day. Therefore, we urge the government to restore the federal minimum wage, to pass anti-scab legislation and to fight for greater pay equity.

I am pleased to have had this time and the opportunity to debate this bill, because the rights of workers across Canada have been violated by the Conservatives' actions.

Unions have many procedures, bylaws and rules. Consequently, this whole movement is already well established.

• (1315)

I see that my time is up, but I could talk a long time about this subject.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech and welcome her to the House. I wish her the very best as she starts her new career.

Government Orders

The member had some very good points in her speech. However, so that she is aware as we debate, the rationale the Conservative government used at the time to put forward these two pieces of legislation, the reason the member for Red Deer—Lacombe cited for putting forward Bill C-525, was that it was to address the mountain of grievances against big union bosses and their strong-arm tactics to organize labour sites.

When the president of the Canada Industrial Relations Board appeared before committee, I asked specifically about this mountain of grievances. In over 10 years, she had dealt with 4,000 grievances. The number of grievances against the big union bosses was two in 10 years. Would the member see that as a mountain of grievances? Does she believe that would be justification enough to go forward with this punitive anti-union legislation?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. That is a very good question.

People always have a tendency to exaggerate when it comes to unions. We are therefore wondering whether the Conservatives were exaggerating when they spoke about union fat cats who cheat and who do not support all areas of policy. There is reason to wonder.

As I was saying in my speech, members already have access to a complaint process. If they feel wronged, they can lodge a complaint through an independent committee, which will consider the matter.

That is why we are in favour of Bill C-4. We support all workers.

• (1320)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

She spoke a great deal about the Conservatives in her speech. We were defeated in the last election, but I would like to remind her that the NDP was unable to hold on to the role of official opposition. In my opinion, they too were judged harshly because of their statements and their relationship with the party in power.

How does it violate workers' rights to simply ask for accountability to the House, to Canadians, and to unionized workers?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Madam Speaker, the unions themselves have to be accountable to their members. Members pay union dues and union locals already have well-established rules. It is an obligation.

Every union has to be accountable to its members, and if those members are not satisfied, then they have recourse to a challenge process and an independent committee. This process works and the government does not need to be involved.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, some of the things we hear here are enough to make your hair stand on end.

My colleague mentioned a review committee. As I mentioned earlier, I was a union treasurer for 19 years, and our union had a review committee. I was also part of my union's review committee. We audited the books, and there was transparency at many levels.

Government Orders

Could my colleague share her experience with respect to bookkeeping?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

It is true that we have to keep detailed financial records, provide supporting documentation, and produce financial statements. This is similar to what happens in an organization or a company. I always compared my local or my union to a small business, because we are accountable to our members.

Every month, we produced financial statements and kept the books. During union meetings, we had to propose and distribute the financial statements. When there is a call for spending that is higher than normal, depending on the bylaws, we must submit proposals and present reports, and the members approve each expenditure.

The process is the same at every level. We are always transparent and accountable to our members.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act, and the Income Tax Act. This bill represents an important effort to reverse the anti-union and anti-worker legislation that was ushered through Parliament by the previous Conservative government.

The NDP worked tirelessly to oppose Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 at every step of the way, so it should come as no surprise that our party is in full support of repealing these bills.

While I welcome the changes tabled by the government as a good first step, there is so much more to do for workers' rights and conditions. New Democrats are calling on the government to reinstate a federal minimum wage, to adopt anti-scab legislation, and to implement proactive pay equity legislation, as per the NDP motion passed in this place just a few days ago. The NDP is also calling on the government to restore good-faith bargaining with our public service workers by repealing Division 20 of Bill C-59, related to sick days.

After a decade of Conservative darkness, I am encouraged to see the Liberal government taking the first steps to restore some of the rights of working people that were under attack under the previous government.

As the member of Parliament for Essex, I am determined to be a strong voice for working people both in my home riding and across Canada. The struggle of working people in Canada for unionization and their gains have benefited all Canadians. The fight of unions for a fair workplace for all workers in our country began with the fight in 1872 to have a shorter workday, but it has included changes to maternity and parental leave, the right to a safe workplace, and more.

My riding has proud union members working in auto manufacturing, health care, long-term care, education, municipalities, trades, retail, and the public sector. The benefits of being a unionized worker include a legally binding contract that guarantees working conditions, job security, paid holidays, wages, benefits, health and safety, and more.

On average, unionized workers earn \$5 more per hour than non-unionized workers. For women, the difference is \$6.65 an hour. Higher wages negotiated by unions inject an additional \$786 million into the Canadian economy each week.

Unions also provide great support for communities. In my riding of Essex, unionized workers give generously and selflessly to the United Way and other non-profit organizations, which has made a vast difference in the lives of people in all of our communities, not just in the lives of union members. Gaps that exist due to government cuts and program reductions are picked up by caring union members who continue to dig deep into their pockets, even when they are suffering in their own industries.

I spent much of the last year knocking on doors and talking with people from every community in my riding of Essex. Their stories and struggles were the struggles of all hard-working Canadians: high unemployment through no fault of their own, and in our region, one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada, with many still ineligible for EI.

Workers are struggling to make ends meet. Our communities are filled with the working poor, who are left no choice but to work in minimum-wage jobs and part-time or casual jobs, often piecing together two or three different jobs just to make ends meet. Sadly, this is a growing reality across Canada. Statistics tell us that 60% of all new Canadian jobs are considered precarious, part-time, temporary, contract-based, freelance, and self-employed positions. These workers are taxi drivers, contract teachers, office cleaners, and clerks. They often have no workplace pension, no job benefits, and no job security.

As parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to work together and advocate for solutions that will improve the lives of all Canadians. Instead, in the previous Parliament, the Conservatives pushed through legislation, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, designed to weaken unions and make it more difficult for Canadians in federally regulated workplaces to join a union.

These two bills moved through Parliament as private member's bills, although it was crystal clear that these were government-led initiatives. Even now, the Conservatives are threatening to use their power in the Senate to block legislation that would restore labour rights. Canadians are fed up with the unelected, unaccountable, under-investigation Senate. There is no place in our democracy for these senators to upend the work done by Canadians' representatives here in this place.

Government Orders

• (1325)

Bill C-377 was an unnecessary, discriminatory law designed to impose onerous and absurdly detailed reporting requirements on unions. Guised as a move to improve transparency, those who actually know how union locals operate also know that Bill C-377 had absolutely nothing to do with transparency. As a union member, I know the direction of the union members' funds and how they are determined, in fact, by the membership. Transparency between union members and their elected governing executives is never an issue. Members are always able to access the financial disclosure of their allocation of dues. Not a penny is spent that is not reported to the membership.

Reporting requirements in Bill C-377 would bog down unions in so much red tape that it would severely interfere with their ability to serve their membership. According to the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, this bill went against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by violating Canadians' right to the freedom of association and privacy rights of those who work for a union.

Bill C-377 would also cost millions of dollars to implement. The parliamentary budget officer estimated it would cost more than \$2.4 million allocated by the Canada Revenue Agency. In fact, it was estimated that it would cost the CRA approximately \$21 million to establish the electronic database over the first two years, and approximately \$2.1 million in each subsequent year. Repealing the contents of Bill C-377 would save millions of dollars for both the government and the unions, and, as I previously mentioned, would continue the critical support that unionized workers provide for their communities where government gaps exist.

Bill C-4, the government bill before us today, also seeks to repeal Bill C-525, another bill introduced by a Conservative backbencher and ushered through by a Conservative government intent on attacking the labour movement. Bill C-525 fundamentally changed the process for certifying or decertifying a union under federal jurisdiction, essentially making it harder to certify a union and easier to decertify. It should come as no surprise that workers would want to unionize. As I outlined earlier, unionized jobs tend to have higher wages, better benefits, and better working conditions than non-unionized jobs. Bill C-525 would impact all federally regulated workers seeking to certify or decertify as a union. Workers under this jurisdiction include the energy sector, airline sector, telecommunications, rail, and postal workers.

For these federally regulated workers, to certify as a unionized workforce it was previously the case that a union was automatically certified if more than 50% of employees sign a card indicating they wish to be a member of a union. It is called the "card check system". If between 35% and 50% of employees sign a card, a vote is triggered to ask employees if they wish to be unionized. Bill C-525 changed all this by outlawing the card check model and replacing it with a two-step process. First, the card-signing process where the percentage of signed cards required to trigger a vote increased from 35% to 40%. The second step included a government supervised vote. These changes were fundamentally unfair and put workers wanting to unionize at a serious disadvantage.

Bills C-377 and C-525 were not in the best interests of workers. Instead, they were designed to further attack and erode the labour

movement in Canada. New Democrats will always stand for the interests of working Canadians. I am proud of how our party provided strong and effective leadership in opposing these bills in the House, at committee, and in the media. Today's legislation to repeal Bills C-377 and C-525 is a step in the right direction. I am also proud of our successful NDP motion this week calling for immediate action on pay equity. Let us also move forward on restoring and enhancing collective bargaining rights as well as fairer working conditions for all Canadians.

• (1330)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her speech. I, like her, am proud to rise and support Bill C-4. In my estimation, the previous bills, Bill C-525 and Bill C-377, were clearly attacks on the labour movement. I have heard a lot of speeches here this morning and this afternoon, and it is clear that the opposition members are coming from a place of extremism. Whether attacking, as in this case, the labour movement or, in other instances the indigenous organizations, non-profits, or charities, it is clearly a place that does not appreciate the balance of government.

I wonder if the hon. member could offer her comments on my impressions.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Speaker, I would agree that we have definitely heard some things in the House over the last few days of debate on this bill that have really made it clear that the Conservatives in the previous government were anti-worker, anti-union, and really tried to impose legislation that would break unions across this country.

I am proud to stand with my counterparts across the aisle and down the aisle in support of repealing both of these really regressive, terrible, anti-worker pieces of legislation.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am personally insulted by some of the inclinations shown here that this is an attack on transparency and accountability.

I spent thirty and a half years as a union member. In fact, I was a union president. One of the things our members often talked about was the issue of accountability and transparency. It is the cornerstone of democracy. It is the cornerstone of democracy in this House and in this country. It is also the cornerstone of democracy within the labour movement.

What does the hon. member have against another layer of accountability and transparency within the labour movement? My members did not have a problem with it. I do not understand why she would.

Government Orders

● (1335)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Speaker, I would be curious to find out if the membership that the MP was formerly in charge of as a president still feels that way today. Would they like the public to have access to all of their books, to the tune of the millions of dollars it would cost the taxpayers?

Unions are transparent to their membership. That is what is required inside a union. We do not have a responsibility to provide that information, just as other organizations do not either, as was mentioned earlier in regard to the bar association.

This attack on unions, and it is an attack on unions because no other associations or organizations were mentioned when this bill was brought forward, is undemocratic at its very roots.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives' comments are that this is all about accountability, openness, and transparency.

We made an amendment to the bill, that we should go beyond organized labour to the employers' groups, chambers of commerce, bar associations, and anyone who gets a tax deduction. We wanted to open it up, because if it is good for organized labour, then it would be good for everyone. We put forward that amendment to the bill, and the Conservatives voted against it.

I want the member to know that we stand with the NDP. We recognize that those two pieces of legislation were nothing but a deliberate attack on organized labour. Could my colleague comment on that?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Speaker, I thank the member across for the support. It is not just a matter of the NDP and the Liberals opposing this piece. There was widespread opposition from many groups, including constitutional and privacy experts, the provinces, Conservative and Liberal senators, Canada's Privacy Commissioner, the Canadian Bar Association, the NHL Players' Association, and the insurance and mutual fund industry, amongst others.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Madam Speaker, I am here today to ask for the support of the House for Bill C-4, which would repeal the legislative amendments enacted by Bills C-377 and C-525 of the previous Parliament.

I am proud to call York Centre home to a large number of businesses and manufacturers. I have met people and heard stories from businesses that started in their garages and have grown into international brands. These range from storefronts to factories, many of which are local success stories that now have national, and even international, reach.

Not so coincidentally, York Centre is also home to a large number of unions and unionized workers. These are employees across a broad spectrum, from construction and the skilled trades, to factory workers, administrative employees, teachers, and public servants. It is no coincidence that my riding is home to so many thriving businesses and labour organizations. Both go together and have to work together for our economy to thrive.

As we have stated before, our government believes that fair and balanced labour relations are absolutely essential for the prosperity of Canadian workers and our country's economic growth. Both employers and unions play critical roles in ensuring that workers receive decent wages and are treated fairly, in safe and healthy work environments.

It is our labour laws that help ensure there is a balance between the rights of unions and the rights of employers. However, in the previous Parliament, a number of pieces of legislation were passed that changed our labour relations system. Bills C-377 and C-525, private members' bills supported by the previous government, upset the delicate balance between unions and employers.

Under Bill C-377, labour organizations and labour trusts are required to provide the Canada Revenue Agency with details of their assets, liabilities, income and expenditures, as well as salaries paid to their officers, directors, and other specified employees. They are also required to provide information on the time spent by officers on political lobbying and non-labour relations activities. This information is then to be made publicly available on the CRA's website.

This creates unnecessary red tape for unions. Under the Canada Labour Code, unions in federally regulated workplaces, as well as employers' organizations, are already required to provide their financial statements to their own members, free and on demand. It is worth noting that eight provinces have similar financial disclosure requirements.

Why should unions be subject to these onerous and redundant reporting requirements, requirements that do not apply to other organizations that also benefit from similar status under the Income Tax Act, such as professional organizations?

Then there is the issue of this information being publicly available. Publishing this information on the CRA's website means that employers will have access to key union information, including how much they have set aside in a strike fund. It is not difficult to see how this puts the unions at a serious disadvantage during the collective bargaining process.

Essentially, Bill C-377 imbalances the system. This brings me to Bill C-525, which also tilts the scales in favour of employers.

● (1340)

Prior to Bill C-525, federally regulated private sector workers who wanted to organize could do so in a relatively simple and straightforward manner. If a majority of employees signed a union card, they could go to the Canada Industrial Relations Board, show it the signed union cards, and the CIRB could certify them as the bargaining agent for those workers. If less than a majority of employees signed union cards, but at least 35% did, a certification vote could be held. The card check system worked well for many years, so why was it replaced by a system that many stakeholders, such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, feel is less efficient and more vulnerable to employer interference?

Government Orders

Under Bill C-525, unions are required to show at least 40% membership support before holding a secret ballot vote, making it more difficult to get the right to vote. In addition, even when the majority of workers have clearly demonstrated their support by signing union membership cards, a secret ballot vote must be held before they can be certified as a bargaining agent.

The card check system, which is based on obtaining majority support, is no less democratic than a mandatory vote system. It has also proven to be an efficient and effective way to gauge employee wishes. According to the National Union of Public and General Employees, this two-stage process essentially forces those in favour of a union to vote twice. By slowing the process, the employer has the opportunity to intimidate, harass, and unethically induce employees to vote no. Not all employers would attempt to prevent unions from organizing. However, there are examples of those who have.

The bottom line is that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 put unions at a disadvantage and make it more difficult for Canadian workers to unionize in the first place.

Why would we want to make life more difficult for unions and the workers they represent? We recognize the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadians. As Canadian Labour Congress president Hassan Yussuff stated, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were “nothing more than an attempt to undermine unions’ ability to do important work like protecting jobs, promoting health and safety in the workplace, and advocating on behalf of all Canadian workers”.

The federal labour relations system used to be respected and supported by both labour and employers as a result of genuine and proven consultative and consensual processes that had been followed for decades with respect to amending the Labour Code. As I mentioned earlier, the prosperity of Canadian workers and the Canadian economy relies on those same fair and balanced labour relations. Repealing the legislative amendments made by Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 will help restore that balance.

I sincerely hope that all of my colleagues in the House will support Bill C-4 so we can achieve this.

• (1345)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for York Centre spoke very eloquently about the balance between labour and employers. A cornerstone of that balance is that in the rare instances where the collective bargaining process breaks down, there is economic pressure on both sides. In a strike or lockout, the employees do not receive their salaries and the employer has to do without their labour. That balance is disrupted if the employer can just bring in replacement workers. Therefore, anti-scab legislation is a very important component of preserving that important balance between labour and management.

I wonder if the member for York Centre could clearly commit to saying that the new Liberal government will introduce and pass anti-scab legislation.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Madam Speaker, the bill on the table today, Bill C-4, deals in particular with Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 and speaks to a fair and balanced relationship between both sides, which

is crucial when it comes to collective bargaining. That is the issue on the floor of the House today, that is the commitment that our government has made, and that is the commitment that we will be upholding when we vote on this bill next week.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, I heard two different Liberal members today talk about the fact that a secret ballot would mean an extra level of red tape in order for unions to certify. Does he believe democracy is just red tape?

Also, if the Liberals are concerned about privacy, if that is the one thing they are camping on, why would they not simply amend the legislation to deal with any privacy issues they feel is a concern and allow workers the capability of a secret ballot and the ability to see the books when they want to see them?

Mr. Michael Levitt: Madam Speaker, the process used by the previous government to bring in Bill C-525 was undemocratic. The Conservatives did not go out into the community, a community like York Centre, to consult with organizations and employers to determine what the implications of such an act would be. The bill was rammed through in a process not supported by either side, management or labour. It unbalanced the delicate scales in the labour relations process. That is why the government is committed to standing up for the rights of workers and ensuring that Bill C-4 repeals those two bills.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we often talk about social trust, in other words, the good faith relationship between the members of a society to advance that society. In the context of labour law, there is a good faith relationship between the employer and the employees to advance the common interests of the business. Does my colleague see the bill introduced and passed by the previous government as a negation of social trust?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Levitt: Madam Speaker, during the year and a half that I met and engaged with my constituents in York Centre, on many occasions I had the opportunity to discuss with members of organized labour and employers the issue that the hon. member speaks about, the trust and working relationship that is essential in our economy to ensure the labour relations process moves forward and is built on a foundation of trust. That is what these two bills that we seek to negate do.

As our government has said, we will stand all the way through to repeal them using Bill C-4.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and address important issues facing the chamber.

I look at the bill before us as a bill that would right a wrong. The previous government made a mistake when it brought in a private member's bill through the back door, legislation that was to make a political statement which was to the detriment of the union movement in Canada. However, it goes far beyond just the union movement, as it affects every aspect of our economy, which is something I will take a bit of time to highlight.

Government Orders

In my former years as a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, I had the opportunity to be engaged in a number of different debates regarding unions and labour legislation. In fact, in 1988, we had our most controversial days inside the Manitoba legislature, and it was surrounding labour legislation.

Some might recall the use of the tool called the “final offer selection”. It was brought in by a New Democratic government. When the New Democratic government fell, it was replaced with a Conservative government, and one of the first things on its agenda was to get rid of the final offer selection tool.

I recall very vividly how much resistance there was to that. When we went into committee, there was well over 100 people, from all different sectors of society, who wanted to contribute. We met for hours and hours, sometimes until three or four o'clock in the morning on several evenings. That was my baptism to the whole issue of labour relations. Through that, I got a better appreciation of the importance of getting it right, which is something the previous government failed to do.

If the Conservatives recognized the importance of labour relations, they would never have attempted to introduce, through the back door of the House of Commons, through a private member's bill, labour legislation that was inappropriate. The government had a choice back then, and it chose confrontation with organized labour in Canada.

I truly believe that the Conservatives do not understand or appreciate the valuable work that unions not only do today but have done in the past, and the important role they will have into the future. This is something that we in the Liberal Party have always respected. We understand and value the contributions that unions make and will make.

When we take a look at Bill C-4, members should be aware that it is here because of two private members' bills, as has been talked about extensively here today. We heard government members say how wonderful those private members' bills were. We heard New Democrats say that they were bad bills. We also heard government members point out why those two pieces of legislation should never have seen the light of day.

To give a different perspective, if the previous Conservative government truly wanted to change labour legislation of that nature, it should have brought the bills in the form of government legislation, much like we see here, with the new Prime Minister and minister responsible for the labour act. That is what should have happened, but it did not happen that way.

Members asked what the result was of the bills being put forward in that sort of format. There is an obligation on ministers to consult and work with the many different stakeholder groups out there. However, the opportunity to be consulted, and for the minister at that time to conduct consultations and work with the different stakeholders, which I would suggest is their responsibility, was never done. It was never done because it was introduced through private members' legislation and there were limits.

Members will have more debate on the legislation before us than we did on one of those bills that went through second reading, third reading, and ultimately passage. It is because there are severe

limitations when proposed legislation is brought in through a private member's bill. The process in terms of going to committee is also changed.

● (1355)

Even if somehow, in some sort of twisted way, the government wanted to bring it in through government legislation, I suspect there is a very good chance that it would not have passed. There is no doubt in my mind, they never would have reached consensus.

The former government should have taken this seriously. However, it did not. It was more concerned about scoring political points than improving harmony or consensus within Canada's labour movement, industry as a whole, and our economy. The Conservatives were more interested in being able to tell whoever their stakeholders and vested interest groups were that they were hitting hard on the unions. They were doing it in an unfair fashion, and they had no qualms about doing that.

I sat on the opposition bench as those votes proceeded. It was quite disappointing. We in the Liberal Party understand how important it is that we have, promote, and encourage labour harmony. That is what governments should be doing, not trying to cause divisive mechanisms or change the system to make it more lopsided. That is not what the government should be doing. We should be trying to encourage that harmony and consensus. That is something we would see with Bill C-4.

The only group of people who will oppose this piece of legislation will be led by the Conservative Party in most part. However, let us recognize that the real reason we have the legislation before us today is because it was a commitment.

My colleague from the Atlantic region, our critic at the time, enunciated just why the private member's bill that was being proposed was fundamentally flawed. He was right. It was and is fundamentally flawed. That is why it needs to be changed. That is why the leader of the third party back then, today's Prime Minister, made a commitment to rectify the wrong. That is what Bill C-4 would do.

I hear a lot about labour legislation coming from the New Democratic Party, and I would caution members. In one of the committees, the Ontario minister of labour made a presentation. She indicated that the private members' bills, if passed, would have the federal government overstepping its constitutional boundaries and stepping into an area of provincial jurisdiction. I am grateful my New Democratic friends are supporting the bill. I applaud them. However, they need to keep in mind that there is some legislation that might be better seen at the provincial level. We have to respect that jurisdictional issue, or at the very least, have that discussion with our provincial counterparts.

Government Orders

For example, the anti-scab legislation was talked about a lot in Manitoba during the late 70s and early 80s. It was not passed through the Manitoba legislature. Instead, the government of Howard Pawley made the decision to bring in the final offer selection, which I made reference to earlier. My understanding is that the only government that has ever brought in anti-scab legislation in a true form, from what I recall, was a Liberal administration in Quebec. It might have changed in recent years. I do not know. We see many different labour laws brought up at the provincial level.

What we have today is part of an election commitment, but when there are labour changes, we need to work with the stakeholders. That is what I would like to recommend when people look at this, especially the Conservatives. They should consider the way that labour and industry as a whole, the economy, was affected by introducing bills through the back door, which absolutely no one, outside of someone who belonged to the Conservative Party and happened to be a member of the House of Commons, was actually calling for. Bill C-4 is a bill that every member in the House should be supporting.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I commend the hon. member. This is not the first time he has risen to speak in the House, to say the least. I greatly appreciate his eloquence.

However, given that he is an experienced politician, I am disappointed in one thing in particular. He keeps talking about the back door. Here in the House there is no back door. There is a large door that the 338 duly elected members walk through every day. We are all members of the House of Commons. No one gets in here through any other door. We all enter through the same door.

[English]

Is the member saying that those who were elected during the last government who were not ministers could not propose bills? Does it mean that those guys are not as good as ministers? What is he doing? He is a government MP, but he is not a minister. Does that mean he is a backdoor guy? I do not think so.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, all doors that lead to the House of Commons are good doors, but I must advise the member there are back doors in this building too. The former government often used the back door of private members' bills to pass what should have been government legislation. I, for one, believe in private members' hour and private member's bills and have participated in many discussions on private member's bills, but I do not support a government that consistently uses private members' hour as a way to get through what should be government bills. In some of those cases, the Conservative government used private members' hour to complete its legislative agenda. That happened on a few occasions.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP is in favour of repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-535. I just have a comment for my colleague.

We know that Quebec has provincial anti-scab legislation. However, this is about federal workers governed by the Canada Labour Code.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, I think the New Democratic Party has made a wise decision in supporting Bill C-4, and I also believe that the Bloc is supporting it. I have not heard from the Green Party, but I suspect there is a very good likelihood that it too will be supporting it. The only party that has not seen fit to support this legislation is the Conservative Party. Nonetheless, I appreciate the support we are receiving.

Having said that, the member raises the issue of anti-scab legislation. I would like to think that provinces of all political stripes have had the opportunity to introduce such legislation. Every province has advisory boards on labour set up where there is both management and labour present. If it is meant to be, hopefully it will be. Nonetheless, we need to have a proactive minister responsible for labour who keeps all options open and is open to listening to what the provinces and the many different stakeholders have to say.

• (1405)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North for a very passionate, balanced speech. It is clear to me that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were clear attacks on the labour movement. I am proud to stand with the hon. member to support Bill C-4, but I come back to the point that has been made many times this morning and the last time we debated this bill, that the previous bills were a solution to a problem that did not exist.

Could the member speak to the origins of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is a good question. If I were to speculate, I would say they came from somewhere within the Conservative mini-caucus or somewhere out of the Conservative Party.

There were flaws in the legislation. The Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, stated at the Senate committee hearings on Bill C-377 that the bill had significant privacy intrusions and that the bill was highly disproportionate. Serious concerns were there. The legislation was never called for by anyone outside of the Conservative caucus, as best I can tell.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to debate on Bill C-4.

A lot of the things that have been discussed and debated today are of great concern to me, and I think many Canadians. We talked about things like a secret ballot being unnecessary red tape and going against the foundation of our democracy. I find it unbelievable that many of our Liberal and NDP colleagues have made such comments today. It is the secret ballot, the way we elect almost every political official in our country, federal, provincial, and municipal, and they find it to be unnecessary red tape.

Government Orders

I would like to ask them how they think they came into this House today. Would they prefer that there not be a secret ballot, or no ballot whatsoever? I question their frame of mind when they are talking about a secret ballot being undemocratic.

It is also quite ironic that the first piece of legislation from the new government, a government that campaigned quite passionately about openness, transparency and accountability, is a bill that will absolutely gut transparency and accountability in legislation that we put forward for unions. I find that to be incredibly ironic, and I would say another broken promise by the new Liberal government.

Equally as frustrating for me as a member of Parliament from Alberta is that I have to question the motives of the government and why they would be bringing this piece of legislation forward right now. I am getting calls every day, from welders, waitresses, pipefitters, rig hands. They ask me when the government will come up with some kind of strategy that will help them get back to work. When will the government announce some sort of plan that will help their families as they try to make ends meet? They could potentially lose their jobs, or they have already lost their jobs. Where is the priority of the government when thousands of Albertans have been laid off?

The labour study was released today, and 22,000 full-time jobs were lost in Alberta in January alone. Alberta's unemployment rate went to 7.4%, which is the first time since 1988 that it has been higher than the Canadian average. We have heard predictions that Alberta's unemployment rate will exceed 8% by the end of 2016, the highest it has been since the Liberal Party put through the national energy program.

With thousands of workers, not only from Alberta, but Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, losing their jobs due to the downturn in the energy sector, the priority of the government is to reward the union bosses who helped get it elected instead of talking to Canadian families who have lost their jobs. I have to tell these families that in my discussions and debates in the House of Commons that Alberta is obviously not a priority. Canada's economy is certainly not a priority. The families who have lost their jobs are not a priority. However, what is a priority is rewarding those big union bosses who helped get the Liberals elected. I find that to be extremely frustrating.

The Liberal plan to repeal this legislation, a piece of legislation that was intended to ensure transparency and accountability for union leaders, I find very irresponsible. Despite what the minister would have us believe, repealing this piece of legislation and bringing forward Bill C-4 is an attack on Canadian workers.

The Minister of Employment said she believes that repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 will restore balance to unions. The only balance that Bill C-4 will bring is tipping the balance away from union workers back to the union leadership.

I would like to point out that the overwhelming majority of union members are in favour of this type of legislation, the type of legislation that we put forward in Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. In a Leger poll, 86% of union members supported this kind of legislation. In a similar poll, 84% of all Canadians supported this type of legislation that brings accountability and transparency to unions.

They want to be able to vote via a secret ballot on union leadership or union business, and they want to know how their union dues are being spent. I do not think that is too much to ask.

Canadians support transparency and accountability. Union members support transparency and accountability, and yet the Liberal government does not. This is a disturbing trend. It seems to be a sort of theme for the new Liberal government.

One of the first things the Minister of Indigenous Affairs did when she got her cabinet post was announce that she will ignore the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, where residents in first nations communities have the opportunity to see the finances of their leadership made public.

• (1410)

The first piece of legislation by the new employment minister is a bill that would gut transparency and accountability by unions. Do members see a recurring theme here? I do.

I heard today from a Liberal member, in her speech, that a secret ballot is in some way additional red tape that goes against the very foundation of our democracy. I just cannot believe that asking union members to vote in a secret ballot somehow puts them out, that we are asking them to do too much. Those members really need to rethink the stance they are taking. Without any credible rationale, or really any legitimate discussion with union members, the Liberal government is gutting two significant pieces of legislation that were a victory for union members.

The motive for Bill C-4 is really quite simple. This is an opportunity to repay union leadership that helped get the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, an NDP MLA in Manitoba, elected.

Last week, we heard that the Liberal Party was found guilty of accepting illegal union donations during a campaign event. The Prime Minister's own campaign team specifically asked the union to have members be props at a campaign event. His campaign team knew that they would be paid \$100 each.

That was not the only campaign event he had. He had another campaign event with the Carpenters' District Council in Vaughan and another with the International Union of Operating Engineers in Oakville. This has been a cozy relationship with the unions, and I would be curious to know if there were illegal donations made at those two campaign events as well.

Since the election, the Prime Minister has met with the Teamsters three times, the engineers' union three times, and even the American Federation of Labour, the largest union in the United States. He has made meeting with the unions a top priority. He has met with close to a dozen of them. Yet during that time, we have lost thousands of jobs in the energy sector, with more to come. How many times has he met with people in the oil and gas sector? How many times has he met with stakeholders in the oil and gas industry? He has met with them once, and it was yesterday in Calgary. It shows us where the priorities of the Liberal government seem to lie right now.

The Liberal Party campaigned on accountability and transparency. It is obvious that it has no intentions of keeping that campaign promise. Canadians deserve better.

At the federal level, the previous Conservative government introduced extensive reforms to ensure that Canadians have trust in their political institutions. The first piece of legislation we brought in as a Conservative government was the Federal Accountability Act, something that we are very proud of on this side of the House. It brought accountability and transparency to Canadians. It did not gut it.

The Federal Accountability Act reformed the financing of political parties. It reduced opportunities to influence politicians with contributions by banning contributions from unions and corporations, and it levelled the playing field among individual contributors.

We also introduced Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which made unions more transparent and accountable to both unions and Canadians. The specific intent of these bills was to preserve the democratic rights of Canadian workers and increase public confidence that unions spend their money wisely and effectively. With the passage of this legislation, the public was empowered to gauge the effectiveness, financial integrity, and health of their labour unions.

Some opponents today described Bill C-377 as anti-union. They said that union money should not be scrutinized by Canadians, let alone by their own union members. This is simply not true. These unions are subsidized by the Canadian taxpayer, and they are subsidized by a very significant amount. The federal government offers generous tax benefits to workers' organizations and a tax exemption on profits earned on investments, income from employers, and the profits generated by training centres. Despite receiving these substantial tax benefits, these organizations in the past were not required to disclose publicly how they used these tax advantages.

To put this in the same context, for the federal government, including me, and I am sure all of my colleagues in this room, every dime we spend is open to the public. It is on my website. People can check it out right now. Provinces, municipalities, and charities are asked to make these types of financial records public. The only ones who are not are unions.

It is frustrating that unions that should be accountable to their members and that receive generous tax breaks with taxpayer dollars do not feel that they should have the same obligation to disclose their finances to the public.

● (1415)

In most cases the money is deducted from the payroll whether the employee wishes to be part of that union or not. The money is then subject to tax exemptions that keep \$500 million out of the Canadian treasury each year.

I think, and it is obvious from the polls we have done, that most Canadians believe these dollars and what is being done with them should be made public. Bill C-377 is about that disclosure, and it was a positive step forward for unions and Canadian workers. It ensured that union members and Canadians could have access to the knowledge on how union money was being spent, how their membership dues were being spent, as well as the investment in taxes and dollars that resulted from these dues.

Government Orders

Bill C-377 simply imposed transparency and accountability on unions, nothing more. It required labour organizations to file public information a return with the Canadian Revenue Agency on an annual basis. We heard that today. They said that they were doing that in seven provinces. All of a sudden they are saying that now that we are asking them to do it across the country, it is some sort of unbearable burden. If they are already doing it in many cases, it is not that hard to make a second copy and give it to the CRA.

The disclosure requirements would include financial statements, including the amount paid for political and lobbying activities, and the salaries paid to executives and staff. Nothing more.

In addition, the bill requires the CRA to display this information on a website for the public to see. Far from targeting unions, Bill C-377 does nothing more than impose the same obligations that registered charities across Canada now face. I am a Rotarian and I have been one for many years. We do our financial audits. We do our year-end audits and ensure it is available for the public to see. We certainly do not consider that to be some incredible burden.

If charities across Canada can somehow manage to do this, unions that receive a half a billion dollars a year through taxpayer subsidies can manage to do this as well. Their members want them to do these things.

If the Minister of Employment believes that transparency and accountability is so devastating to Canadian unions, why do so many other countries have similar legislation, and their unions have thrived? The United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, even France, socialist France, asked their unions to have similar legislation and to put their financial documents forward to the public. Even some Canadian labour organizations already do this. If their head office is in the United States, they have to make their financials public as well.

Some people have said that this creates an unfair burden on unions. This type of legislation has been in the United States for decades and has not impacted their collective bargaining in any way. The fact is that this bill does not regulate the activities of trade unions, how they participate in collective bargaining or in any way how they spend their funds.

The bill does not violate their Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It has stood up to constitutional challenge. For example, former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Michel Bastarache released his opinion on Bill C-377, and said that it was constitutional and would be upheld in the court he sat on. This shows, a former Supreme Court justice has said that these pieces of legislation that we put forward are not unconstitutional.

The bills simply provide greater transparency and accountability, ironically, two things the Liberal government campaigned on but do not seem too eager to follow up on.

Government Orders

As I touched on earlier, a survey conducted by the Leger firm in 2013 showed that of the 1,400 Canadians it polled, 83% said they wanted to see this type of legislation to be adopted by unions, and 84% of current union members also agreed. A Nanos poll done in 2011 showed similar results. Therefore, this has not changed. For some reason, the Liberal Party wants us to think that between 2013 and 2016 there has been an incredible earthquake of change in position of union members.

When the Minister of Employment brought forward C-4, did she actually consult with union members before she brought this forward? If 84% of union members in 2013 supported the type of legislation that we put forward with Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, what has changed in three years? What has changed in three years that now the Liberal government believes the union membership has been crying for it to repeal this type of legislation.

I am certain there has been an outcry, but my bet is it is from the union leadership, not the union members who the Liberals failed to consult before bringing this forward.

Earlier this week I asked the Minister of Employment if she had actually consulted with union members before bringing this type of legislation forward. Her answer was a no answer. She could not answer. I think the fact is that the Liberals did not. What she said was that she had spoken to 22,000 residents in her constituency during the election campaign.

• (1420)

I would like to ask her this. Did she say to them that her bill would be in favour of less democracy? Did she ask them if they were okay with the government's stomping on the very foundation of our democracy and getting rid of secret ballots? Does she think her Manitoba riding spoke for the rest of Canada? I would be interested in seeing what her answer is on something like that.

It is in the public interest that the financial information of workers' organizations be disclosed because of the tax breaks they receive. It is a benefit of the union workers because they exercise their democratic right through a secret ballot. It is also the benefit of a government to consult with Canadians, as we did when we drafted this type of legislation. For example, Dan Kelly, president and CEO of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said he supported Bill C-377. He said that almost all unionized workplaces are forced to pay union dues. Therefore, unions should be required to publicly disclose how they use those funds. He also stated that public financial disclosure for unions would enhance transparency and accountability with regard to trade union activities. He was not the only one. We had lawyers, union members, and professors all come and speak to the committee and Senate committee in support of this legislation.

Canadian labour laws are in place to protect the rights of workers, to ensure that they have a fair and productive workplace and can work in an environment where they feel they can speak with their conscience. This is about balance and it creates a fair environment in which workers are the ones making the choice so they feel it is better suited to their needs. It is a Liberal government that is attempting to repeal legislation that created accountability, transparency, and fairness for workers. The Liberals plan to go back to a system that was broken and balanced unfairly. This is not what Canadians want.

The Liberal Minister of Employment said that the government was repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 in favour of creating a balanced network. This is exactly what our previous legislation did. The main principle of that legislation was that all federally regulated workers should have the democratic right to a free and fair secret ballot, especially when they are voting to certify or decertify their union. The legislation recognized the right to peaceful association is one that extends to all workers in Canada, should they wish to have a union represent them or not. The choice is theirs to make, and it should be theirs to make by way of a secret ballot. The choice should not belong to their union leadership. The system was open to abuse, where co-workers could be coerced or intimidated into voting for a union. It is not unreasonable, nor should it be unreasonable, to ask to have a secret ballot. It is consistent with every democratic system we have in this country. It is a basic right afforded to all voters, and should be reasonably extended to workers who are voicing their opinion on whether they want to be in a union. The only way to achieve this is through a secret ballot.

It seems that the Liberals' goal and mandate here is to change every voting system that we have across this country. It is absolutely clear that the Liberal government has no respect for Canadians' right to vote. They want to get rid of the secret ballot here in the House. They want unions to go back to the card check system. They also do not believe that Canadians have the right to vote in a referendum when we are talking about possibly changing the very system of how we select our government. Piece by piece, the current Liberal government is intent on dismantling our democracy.

During the spring of last year, I had an opportunity to meet with representatives of a union at a gas plant in southern Alberta. It had about 80 members. I wanted to ask them how they felt about the legislation we had put forward. They were honest. They said they were being pressured by their union leadership in eastern Canada to vote against the Conservatives because of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. I asked them whom they supported and how they were going to vote. They said they were voting Conservative and supported the bills and information contained therein, that they wanted to see the financial records of their union leadership and to have the freedom of conscience to be able to vote in a secret ballot.

Right now, as we put forward Bill C-4, I want the Minister of Employment to come forward and be honest with Canadians. The reason she is putting forward Bill C-4 is that it is a way to repay the union leadership who helped get her elected. It is not a bill that is in the best interests of Canadians.

• (1425)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before we go to questions and comments, I want to let the member know that we do not have enough time for the full 10 minutes of questions. However, the next time the matter is before the House he will be able to answer those questions and comments. We have time for a brief question and a brief comment.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Government Orders

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech. He quoted some polls with respect to the support for Bill C-525 and Bill C-377 at the time. I want to comment on the behaviour of the previous government.

In the budget, \$900 million was announced before there were even negotiations. Was that in the spirit of the unions or in the spirit of management imposing a solution? I want him to comment on his past government's behaviour on its ability to negotiate with the union leadership.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. If the member for Foothills could answer quickly, he will

then have nine minutes left at the next sitting of the House when we debate this.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I question whether that question has anything to do with Bill C-4. I think the Liberals are trying to avoid the fact that the vast majority of union members support the type of legislation we have in place.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 16 at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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