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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 24, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 24, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

VACANCY

MEDICINE HAT—CARDSTON—WARNER

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation in the House of Commons for the electoral district of Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, in the province of Alberta, by reason of the passing of Jim Hillyer.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to subsection 28(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed a warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill the vacancy.

* * *

[*English*]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST CODE

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 15(3) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to lay upon the table the list of all sponsored travel by members for the year 2015, with a supplement as provided by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

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[*Translation*]

OFFICE OF THE TAXPAYERS' OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2014-15 Annual Report of the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman.

•(1010)

AIR CANADA PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-10, an act to amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to provide for certain other measures.

(Motions deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

* * *

[*English*]

COPYRIGHT ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (for the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act (access to copyrighted works or other subject-matter for persons with perceptual disabilities).

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

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES MEMBERS AND VETERANS RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND COMPENSATION ACT

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the spring session, Budapest, Hungary, May 15-18, 2015.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, entitled “Tribute to the Honourable Mauril Bélanger”. The committee adopted this report at the suggestion of the hon. member for Montmagny—L’Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. The committee would like to acknowledge the significant contribution that the Honourable Mauril Bélanger has made to official languages in Canada. During his career as a member of Parliament, as the former minister responsible for official languages, and as the past chair of this committee, Mr. Bélanger not only served and represented the residents of the riding of Ottawa—Vanier with dedication, but he also worked tirelessly and vigorously on behalf of official language minority communities across Canada. The members of the committee would like to pay tribute to the determination, perseverance, and courage that Mr. Bélanger has shown as he continues to champion our official languages with passion and dedication, despite the adversity he now faces on a daily basis. With his strong sense of commitment and enthusiasm, Mr. Bélanger has made, and continues to make, an unforgettable difference for official language minority communities from coast to coast to coast. Therefore, the members of the committee would like to invite organizations representing English and French speaking minority communities in Canada to join them in recognizing Mr. Bélanger’s commitment and in thanking him for his exceptional contribution.

The Speaker: Normally, I should remind the hon. member that he is not permitted to refer to a member of the House of Commons by name, but I think that I will allow it this once given the circumstances.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee advises that, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the Subcommittee on Private Members’ Business met to consider the items on the order of precedence established on Friday, February 26, 2016, and recommended that the items listed herein, which it has determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the report is deemed adopted.

* * *

●(1015)

[English]

RECOGNITION OF CHARLOTTETOWN AS THE BIRTHPLACE OF CONFEDERATION ACT

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-253, an Act to Recognize Charlottetown as the Birthplace of Confederation.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today a private member’s bill entitled “an act to recognize Charlottetown as the birthplace of Confederation”.

I should note that this legislation was previously introduced by my colleague the member for Charlottetown.

The purpose of the legislation is to place in statute the recognition extended by proclamation of the government of the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, in September 1996, namely that Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, be recognized as the birthplace of Confederation.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, the legislation I am tabling today affirms a significant historical event in our nation’s history, and it is a measure I believe all members in this House can support.

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

* * *

[Translation]

EXCISE TAX ACT

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act (baby products).

She said: Mr. Speaker, sales tax should be levied on products that are considered something of a luxury. Unfortunately, that is not at all the case right now. Some products, such as frozen pizzas and maraschino cherries, are zero-rated, but basic baby and breastfeeding products are not.

This bill covers baby bottles, diapers, nursing pads, breast pumps, and breast milk storage bags. These are basic products used for breastfeeding and baby care. I believe they should be zero-rated.

That is why I am introducing a bill to zero-rate some of these products to remove the federal tax. This makes perfect sense. In Quebec, these products are not subject to provincial sales tax. I hope that the House will pass this bill.

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

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-255, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (appeal process for temporary resident visa applicants).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in the House, with thanks to my seconder, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, to introduce this very important bill.

I come from Vancouver Kingsway, one of the most multicultural ridings in the country, where families have settled from all over the world. They still have relatives who live all over the world, and they regularly invite their relatives to come for important family events like weddings, funerals, and births, as well as just simply to visit.

Routine Proceedings

Many of those visitors have to apply for a visitor's visa, a TRV, with which all members of this House would be familiar, and very often these visas are rejected, often incorrectly, and always with very little or inadequate information. There is no appeal of that decision.

The bill would provide applicants who were turned down with an appeal to the immigration appeal division, so they could correct this in a timely manner instead of having to reapply for a new visa, which costs additional money, causes delays, and results in prejudice to people—as they continue to get rejected, they end up losing their chance of getting a visa.

The bill would rectify that and give applicants a chance to correct injustice, and I hope all members of the House support the bill.

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

* * *

• (1020)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-256, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for dues paid to veterans' organizations).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I think I speak for all members of this House when we say that we very much honour and cherish the veterans who have served our country.

Many veterans, to this day, are active members of veterans' organizations like legions, army, air force, and navy clubs, and ex-servicemen's organizations. These are vital places for these men and women to gather.

These organizations also play important roles in our community. They volunteer, they are community sponsors, and very often they are an important source of funds for children's athletic teams.

Of course, these clubs are struggling. Members are aging, they have low incomes, and dues are low for these organizations, resulting in these non-profit organizations struggling today.

The bill would help by making dues paid to these organizations a refundable tax credit, which would allow the veterans' organizations to raise their dues and get the necessary funds they need without harming the members on fixed incomes who have to pay these dues.

I would urge all members of this House to support this very vital and important bill.

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

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FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (sugar content labelling).

He said: Mr. Speaker, as the health critic for the New Democratic Party, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this bill today, with thanks to the hon. member for Windsor West for seconding the bill.

The bill, as stated, would amend the Food and Drugs Act to require that all prepackaged foods prominently display the sugar

content on the front of the product. As all members would know, the current nutritional guide box is on the back of the product, and it does not adequately indicate this important element.

The bill would empower consumers to make healthier choices by providing them with better information.

The prepackaged foods filling grocery aisles across Canada these days have too much sugar in them. This is a major driver of the growing obesity rates among Canadians, particularly young Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, one in five Canadians are now considered obese. The Public Health Agency of Canada states that these rates have doubled since 1981, and of course excess weight causes a number of major health issues, including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, certain types of cancer, and other serious illnesses.

More information means better choices. It means healthier Canadians. I hope all members would support me and vote in favour of this important bill.

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

* * *

SITTING OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties in the House, and I believe if you seek it you should find unanimous consent for the following motion.

That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, immediately after Routine Proceedings concludes today, the Order of Business for the remainder of the sitting day shall be as follows: Government Orders until 11:00 a.m.; Statements by Members from 11:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.; Oral Questions from 11:15 to 12:00 noon; Government Orders from 12:00 noon to 2:30 p.m.; after which the House shall adjourn until Monday, April 11, 2016, at 11:00 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1025)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations presented in the House earlier this week be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

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

The first has to do with genetically modified organisms. The petitioners are concerned about genetically modified organisms and are demanding that the Government of Canada implement a system to help consumers identify these organisms.

[*English*]

INSECTICIDES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition speaks to the issue of the threat to pollinators across Canada. The impact on honey bees of insecticides based on nicotine, known as neonicotinoids, needs to be regulated, and the petitioners ask the government to act.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence to return to motions for a moment.

The Deputy Speaker: We have passed the rubric on motions. Is there unanimous consent of the House that we return to the rubric on motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try again. If the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations presented in the House earlier this week be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 64 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 64—**Mr. Chris Warkentin:**

With regard to the hiring of the current Chief of Staff to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food: (a) what day did she formally begin her position as Chief of Staff and, effectively, start receiving pay; (b) what preparations, policies or protocols has the department developed to ensure she does not participate in any conversations, activities, or decision making that will lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest; (c) what preparations, policies or protocols has the Minister's office undertaken to ensure she does not participate in any conversations, activities, or decision making that will lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest; (d) what departmental briefings has she received since her appointment; and (e) which stakeholders has she met with since she was hired?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The House resumed from March 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to debate Bill C-7.

I would like to start by commending the RCMP on the excellent work it does. We sometimes forget about everything that happens behind the scenes to keep us safe as we go about our day all across the country. These men and women work all year long in all kinds of areas, including commercial crimes, drugs, and investigations, but they work primarily on keeping us safe and secure.

This week's attacks in Brussels were a brutal reminder of how fragile that security is and how privileged we are to have a capable and reliable police force.

I say this from personal experience, since my father worked for the RCMP for 34 years. He was a sergeant in his section, and throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was a witness to what he went through on a daily basis. On many occasions, my father had to leave home to go work for days, weeks, and once even several months at a time, to help keep Canadians safe.

We worried about him and his safety every day. My father was always committed to his work. Even at his office, doing his day-to-day work, his primary concern was the safety of those who worked with him.

Government Orders

It is thanks to my father that I am here today in the House and I can speak to this matter. My life experience has made me the strong political woman I am today, and my father made sure of that. I am extremely proud and I want to acknowledge him here in the House. I want to say a very big thank you to him. I am honoured to be able to talk about his work, his life, and of course, the bargaining rights of all RCMP members.

I would remind the House that Gaétan Delisle, a labour representative with the RCMP C division in Quebec City, led the fight for bargaining rights for RCMP members. Mr. Delisle's career path was never easy. He was even suspended a few times, because he wanted to form an association and secure the right to collective bargaining.

Respecting our men and women in uniform means more than just thanking them for their good work. They also have rights, of course, and those rights must be respected. The right to bargain collectively is one such right, and a very important one at that.

I introduced a bill that promotes these rights. The recognition of workers' right to bargain is important in every sector and in every respect. I know a thing or two about that, considering my union background. Bargaining and workers' right to health and safety were part of my everyday life.

The NDP is of the opinion that RCMP members should have the same rights that are enjoyed by every other police force in Canada, including the right to collective bargaining. Obviously, RCMP members should have the right to the best conditions when it comes to workplace health and safety. We would like to see RCMP members have a real collective bargaining process that goes beyond issues of pay and benefits. When we talk about organizing, people often think it is just to deal with benefits and salaries. However, it is much more than that. There are many issues that can be discussed and brought forward. The members who are doing the work every day can make changes when it comes to health and safety, for example.

Creating a new regime for negotiating collective agreements will help improve labour relations. I believe that it is fair and just for all members of the RCMP, who work hard day and night to keep Canadians safe.

I would like to reiterate the comments made by my colleagues who pointed out in their speeches that the NDP is quite concerned about some of the issues, such as harassment and health and safety, that are excluded from the bill.

• (1030)

The Supreme Court has rightly ruled that the most important aspect of collective bargaining is the employees' freedom to pursue their own work goals within their workplace.

I believe it is important to highlight one part of the Supreme Court ruling, which reads as follows:

First, it is not apparent how an exclusion from a statutorily protected collective bargaining process ensures neutrality, stability or even reliability. The exclusion of RCMP members from the federal public service collective bargaining regime... fostered, rather than inhibited, dissatisfaction and unrest within the RCMP.

Second, it is not established that permitting meaningful collective bargaining for RCMP members will disrupt the stability of the police force or affect the public's

perception of its neutrality. The government offered no persuasive evidence to that effect. Empirical research tends to show the opposite, as does provincial experience with unionized police forces...

There are times when RCMP members have to respond to calls alone, often in remote or northern communities, for example. Their health, their safety, and even their security must be guaranteed as they go out and do their job with such dedication, day in and day out.

We believe that the time has come to allow employees who work on the ground to come to the table, to negotiate as equals and to decide how some of these issues are going to be dealt with. The employees themselves are likely to have some very practical solutions to help the police force operate more effectively. By giving them these rights, we can show that we respect the work they have to do and that we recognize them as human beings.

Uniformed police officers are heroes, regardless of the situation. Underneath those uniforms, however, are human beings. We need to keep that in mind and give them the power to bargain and make changes to ensure their own safety.

This bill provides an opportunity for us to respect the spirit of what collective bargaining should be. We recognize the RCMP's unique role as Canada's national police force, as well as the importance of the rights of our men and women in uniform and of giving them a means to uphold those rights.

This is why we believe the bill should go to committee for further study, so that it can be examined more closely and amended in consideration of RCMP members, the men and women who go to work every day to keep us safe.

Out of respect for them, everyone should vote in favour of this bill at second reading in the House and send it to committee for further study.

We will be looking for arguments from government in support of specific exclusions. In the absence of those arguments, we will be presenting proposals to improve this legislation and make sure that RCMP members get the right to bargain collectively, both in the spirit and the letter of the law.

• (1035)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech and support for this very important bill, and for her words of respect toward RCMP members. We will welcome this debate on the challenges and purpose of this bill in committee.

What does the hon. member think of the unique operational challenges of this national police force? What are the unique aspects of the work done by RCMP members?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Government Orders

As far as daily work is concerned, I will give the example of my father, who investigated fraud or drug-related offences. When police officers had to investigate or conduct surveillance, their safety was an issue every day. That is the nature of the work that RCMP officers do, in addition to keeping us safe. We see them every day on the Hill. They put themselves in harm's way right before our eyes. In more remote areas, they are on the front line. They are the first responders. Often, they are alone when they do their work.

It is therefore very important to take into consideration every aspect of the work that a police officer does for the RCMP. They have the power to make changes and negotiate for their safety.

• (1040)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague worked in a union setting for many years. She saw the benefits of being unionized and negotiating a collective agreement, and thus of negotiating her working conditions. She touched on that a bit, but I would like her to sum up why it is important for the RCMP to be able to negotiate working conditions for someone like her father, for example, or for the many women who work for the RCMP.

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent question.

When I was president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, I had to conduct negotiations. When people think of a union or association, they often think that the negotiations are only about wages and benefits. However, it is about much more than that, because there can be different needs.

More and more women are working for the RCMP. Some types of jobs were designed for women. Take the uniform, for example. It may require modifications. We have to ensure safety and prevent harassment. Even though it is a police force, there can be harassment on both sides, and from within or outside the organization. Negotiations allow the members, the police officers, to have a say and make actual changes.

Who is in the best position to make changes? The workers.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, my colleague just spoke about harassment within the RCMP. There are a number of exclusions in Bill C-7, such as harassment, staffing, deployment, and disciplinary action.

Does my colleague think that these should be included in Bill C-7, or excluded, as is currently the case?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very good question.

I believe that the bill should cover harassment. It is important because it forms part of a whole. The committee will have the opportunity to study the bill, make amendments and include this issue.

The committee could establish all the issues and whether some provisions are in the bill or are to be negotiated. Ensuring public safety is always the top issue. Public safety must never be jeopardized. Clear directives must always be put in place. It will be important to make amendments.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel to resume debate, I should inform him that I will have to interrupt him at 11 o'clock for statements by members. As usual, I will signal that his time is almost up right before 11 o'clock.

[*English*]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity to address how Bill C-7 would lead to a meaningful process of collective bargaining for RCMP members and reservists. The bill, if passed, would allow RCMP members and reservists to choose whether they wish to be represented by a bargaining agent independent of RCMP management.

The key features of the bill include the requirement that the RCMP bargaining agent have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members; the exclusion of officers from representation; and the designation of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board as the administrative tribunal for matters related to the RCMP member bargaining unit, as well as grievances related to a collective agreement.

The exclusion of officers is consistent with existing provisions in the Public Service Labour Relations Act that exclude public service executives from representation.

The bill also provides for binding arbitration as the means to solve impasses, in light of the essential nature of the work performed by the RCMP. As is standard in federal labour relations, the bill would require that to be certified as a bargaining agent, an employee organization would need the support of a majority of RCMP members in a single, national bargaining unit.

The labour relations regime that the bill would create marks the beginning of a new era in the history of the RCMP. Allow me take a few moments to explain the process by which the bill was developed.

In the summer of 2015, the Treasury Board Secretariat engaged an independent consultant to survey regular members of the RCMP. The purpose of these consultations was to canvas RCMP regular members for their views on potential elements of a labour relations framework that would allow them to choose their representatives and bargain collectively. The process consisted of a survey and town hall meetings. More than 9,000 regular members completed the survey and more than 650 participated in town hall meetings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who took part for helping us define what a labour relations system for RCMP members would look like. The consultation report was valuable in assisting the government to create a legislative framework that would be in line with the Supreme Court ruling and also take into account the views of those it affects. Bill C-7 provides for independent binding arbitration as the dispute resolution process for bargaining impasses. This means that, consistent with other police forces across the country, the members of the RCMP bargaining unit would not be permitted to strike.

Government Orders

The bill also would provide for a single, national bargaining unit composed solely of RCMP members appointed to a rank and reservists. Also, the RCMP bargaining agent, should one be certified, would have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members.

The government also consulted with those jurisdictions that have RCMP police service agreements. This was in addition to the regular meetings that take place between the government and those jurisdictions to discuss issues related to the quality and cost of those services.

• (1045)

We have taken a fair and reasonable approach to examining this complex matter, and now, with the amendments proposed by Bill C-7, RCMP members and reservists would have statutory collective bargaining rights, as other Canadians do.

Our government recognizes that collective bargaining and Canadians' fundamental freedoms are vital to a healthy democracy in which people can move forward together.

This week's budget reaffirmed the government's commitment to bargain in good faith with the public service. This commitment to collective bargaining is further demonstrated in Bill C-7.

It is time that RCMP members have the opportunity to decide whether to exercise these rights.

As we know, the timelines associated with the Supreme Court of Canada's decisions are tight. It is critical that the government enact a new labour relations regime for RCMP members by May 16, 2016, when the court's declaration of unconstitutionality comes into effect.

Nonetheless, the Government of Canada will continue to work with Parliament and its committees to have the legislative process in an open and engaging manner. I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that all parties in the House support fair relations and fair labour relations for the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for our country every day.

Finally, this day, March 24, marks the anniversary of one of the happiest days in my life, the birth of the first of my two daughters, Arielle Di Iorio.

[*Translation*]

Happy birthday, Arielle.

• (1050)

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated, the NDP certainly support the bill at second reading. However, we also have some serious questions about what this new labour relations model would mean for how serious allegations of sexual harassment are addressed, a very serious issue that we know is out there. We are concerned that the right kind of processes are not in place to address the very serious allegations that women in the RCMP have come forward with. We certainly have not seen the kind of leadership that we need to see on this front.

How does the government propose to deal with these very serious allegations?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. That question and issues related to alleged sexual harassment are completely separate from the subject we are talking about today.

We have to keep the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in mind. Parliament is a democracy subject to the charter, so we have to act on and in accordance with that ruling. That means we have to pass a bill, and the purpose of this bill is to provide a legislative framework for labour relations.

Issues and problems related to proven or alleged harassment, which can differ from case to case, should be debated separately.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member's constituents voted for him, they did so by secret ballot in exercising their democratic right. Moreover, when unions choose a leader, they do it by secret ballot. When unions make decisions on whether or not to go on strike, they do it by secret ballot.

I find it very unusual that the Liberal government basically said in Bill C-525 and the current bill that secret ballots do not matter, even though these ballots do matter in many provinces. How can it justify taking such a profoundly personal decision on behalf of our RCMP officers and not giving them the respect and the right of a secret ballot?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which I think is very valid.

We have to keep in mind the basic labour relations principles that govern our society. In this case, the government is acting on behalf of the men and women who serve our country and our people every day. The government is giving them the option of a system similar to that available to any other group in our society. The system is based on voluntary participation. Members will have to decide of their own volition whether they want to belong to an association or not. Of course, there will be a threshold to approve the application for certification.

A specialized tribunal will have to address the issue that my hon. colleague raised. Representations will be made on behalf of the employer and the association. The tribunal's rules will of course govern whether members can intervene as individuals.

Statements by Members

•(1055)

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given that the last two major reviews of federal-private sector labour legislation have found that the card check system is an effective way of gauging employee support, given that holding a secret ballot representation is typically more time-consuming and costly than card checks, and given that the board has the option of adding a vote if it is not satisfied with the card check, could the member discuss why the board having a choice of what to apply in terms of a certification method is better than a one-size-fits-all situation, no matter what the current situation may be?

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, an important element of the member's question regarding the card check system is that it is one of the options that exists. What is very important is the role of tribunal. There is a specialized tribunal that is best suited to make this determination.

Obviously there are two systems. One would be to have a vote and the other would be to have card checks. As the hon. member points out, there is the possibility of also harmonizing both. It is not either/or. It could be a situation where initially there would be a card check and at some point the tribunal would decide that there would be a vote. There are not mutually exclusive options.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must compliment my colleague on recognizing his daughter's birthday today. Our families are very important to us.

One of the things we need to highlight is the fact that RCMP officers and reservists were extensively canvassed for their opinions. There were three conclusions. One was that there was a need for a union which had overwhelming support; second was that there be a single national bargaining unit; and third was that there be binding arbitration as opposed to a strike position.

Could the member comment on how important it is that we listen to what the RCMP officers themselves are saying?

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, the issue is so crucial. These men and women put their lives on the line every day and give great service to our country. Therefore, we have to start with the people who know best, and they are the individuals who perform the work every day.

My hon. colleague from the NDP pointed out earlier the service her father rendered to our country. Every day these people render a service. They are the ones who are the specialists to determine what they need and what would suit those needs and their vision.

What we should never lose sight of is the fact that we also have to take into consideration the interests of Canadians and the country. There is more than one constituent. Yes, the employees are one, yes, the employer is one, but Canadians are also one. Also, let us not forget the country.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel will have two minutes remaining for the period for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[Translation]***CANADIAN FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY**

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Acadians strongly condemned the hateful, francophobic statements that were posted on the CBC website.

The CBC was pressured into changing its ways. Some time ago, we asked the House to condemn the derogatory comments made about Quebecers in the energy east file, but the House refused to do so. These types of hateful comments about francophones are becoming increasingly common in English media in Quebec and Canada.

Everyone here is opposed to misogyny, homophobia, bullying, Islamophobia, and discrimination against indigenous peoples. However, there is another form of discrimination that is happening and that is francophobia. The Bloc Québécois expects members of the House to speak out just as loudly against that type of discrimination.

Quebeckers, like members of any other francophone or Acadian community, should not be bullied just because they want to live and flourish in French.

* * *

•(1100)

*[English]***WORLD JUNIOR CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mary Fay is welcomed back home to the village of Chester, Nova Scotia as a world champion.

The 17-year-old curler skipped her Canadian team to victory at the World Junior Curling Championships in Denmark earlier this month. Mary and her Nova Scotia teammates, Kristin Clarke of Halifax, Karlee Burgess of Truro, Janique LeBlanc of Fall River, and fifth, Sarah Daniels, along with their coach Andrew Atherton were undefeated in round robin play where they faced off against teams from around the world. Mary was also recognized with a sports woman award for the tournament.

I also want to recognize the outpouring of support and pride for this extraordinary team of young women in communities across Nova Scotia.

Finally, I want to offer congratulations from the House to the Canadian men's junior team that won bronze at the world championships.

Congratulations to all once again. They have done us proud.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you and many others in the House know, I have known Canadian teacher, Neil Bantleman and his family for a long time. In fact, I just met with his brother Guy a few moments ago.

Neil is well known in Calgary as a respected teacher, there for many years. Sadly, Neil continues to be held in an Indonesian prison, in deplorable conditions, and forced to live like a caged animal. He has to sleep on the floor, and endures constant hunger, discomfort, and threat of disease. He is a victim of a flawed Indonesian justice system, but our own Canadian government has failed him too. It has failed to bring this Canadian back home or warn other Canadians of the risks of visiting that country.

Guy wants his brother home. The entire Bantleman family wants Neil home. Unfortunately, all the government has done, and is prepared to do, is talk. When are we going to see action?

Many Canadians are asking, "When are we going to see Neil come home to Canada?"

* * *

NOWRUZ

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to acknowledge Nowruz, the spring equinox, celebrated by 300 million people around the world and hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

A 3,000-year-old tradition, Nowruz is a much cherished historic holiday for Persians, Afghans, Turks, Kurds, and many others with cultural roots in western and central Asia.

This joyous holiday, celebrated for several millennia, is a festive occasion that brings together people of different cultures and languages to mark renewal. The holiday celebrates the significance of family, community, and new beginnings.

Speaking of new beginnings, last night I had the honour to join the Minister of Democratic Institutions and the member of Parliament for Richmond Hill to convene the first-ever Nowruz reception on Parliament Hill.

Many members of the House and hundreds of guests joined us around the Haft-Seen to celebrate the arrival of spring and the dawn of a new year. We were particularly honoured to have the right hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs join us to mark this historic first celebration of Nowruz on Parliament Hill.

* * *

VIMY RIDGE DAY

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to recognize Vimy Ridge Day which is observed April 9 each year. The year 2016 is the 99th anniversary of a battle that served to define our nation and people as fierce defenders of justice and peace.

Many lives were lost that day, sons, husbands and fathers who vanished on the battlefields of France beneath the guns of war. My great uncle George Mount was among those who never returned after Vimy Ridge 99 years ago.

It was an honour to visit Canada's monument in France and find his name carved in the stone among all those who lost their lives. The memorial stands as a humbling reminder of the fallen soldiers who paid for that service to Canada with their lives.

Statements by Members

We must remember those at Vimy and those who have served since. We owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans because they and their families continue to make sacrifices for our security here at home and around the world.

* * *

● (1105)

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have Algonquin College in my riding. It is a leading global educational institution with over 20,000 full-time students. As just one among the many innovative programs, the Algonquin College Construction Research Centre is a hub of local applied research and innovation.

[Translation]

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit the centre, which was created through federal government funding. The centre allows students to make practical use of leading-edge tools and technologies and to work closely with leaders in the local construction industry and the private sector in order to introduce technologies on the market. For the first time in the world, an entire architectural model was created with a 3D printer.

[English]

I am very proud to have this state-of-the-art program in my riding and I want to congratulate Algonquin College for its work in supporting students' creativity.

* * *

EASTER

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, around the world those of the Christian faith will celebrate Easter. Western civilization, our parliamentary institutions, human rights, the Canadian Constitution, common law, criminal law, and *le Code civil* all have deep roots in Christianity.

Our traditions and cultures have evolved over time from the promise of a coming Messiah in the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. We are promised everlasting life when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. The struggles of our daily lives and the sacrifices that we make pale in comparison to the sacrifice of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He died on the cross at Calvary to pay for our sins and then rose from the grave to give us hope for our resurrection and eternal life.

This weekend we celebrate the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, but even more we celebrate his victory over death.

* * *

SCOTTISH COMMUNITY IN QUEBEC

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to talk about a very important part of my riding's history, the Scottish community.

Statements by Members

Scottish immigrants first settled in Quebec over 400 years ago, making them one of the founding peoples of Quebec and Montreal. In honour of the contributions the Scottish community has made to the economic, social, and cultural development of Montreal and Quebec, as well as the friendship forged between Scottish communities and Québécois communities, the Quebec national assembly has formally declared April 6 Tartan Day.

Verdun is also home to the annual highland games, a cultural celebration that started in 1978, jointly organized by the St. Andrew's Society and the Sons of Scotland.

[*Translation*]

I am proud of my constituents' dedication to upholding the shared traditions and heritage of the peoples of Quebec and Scotland. I invite you to wear your tartan on April 6 and join me in Verdun for the 39th Montreal Highland Games on July 31.

* * *

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by wishing my daughter Phoebe a happy birthday. She turns 11 today. I also rise today to talk about Greek Independence Day, an important event in my riding.

[*English*]

Tomorrow, March 25, marks the 195th anniversary of the Greek War of Independence. In my community of Toronto—Danforth, Greek Canadians make up a large portion of the residents and business owners. The Danforth has a proud history and continues to be a major focal point for Greek Canadians from Toronto and across Canada. That is why next weekend Greek Canadians will be celebrating Greece's Independence Day and their contributions to Canada over the years. I am happy to join the Greek community of Toronto in its tremendous parade.

[*Translation*]

Toronto City Hall will fly the Greek flag on Tuesday, March 29, in honour of this important date for the Greek community.

* * *

•(1110)

[*English*]

FRANK KINSELLA

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am honouring Frank Kinsella, a former mayor of Leeds and the Thousand Islands township in my riding of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. He died March 9 at age 75.

He was a councillor and then mayor in the 1960s in Black River-Matheson township in northern Ontario. Following 12 years as director of education for the local school board in my riding, he served one term as a councillor in Gananoque and then as councillor and mayor in the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands. Past president of Rotary Clubs in both Brockville and Gananoque, he helped launch Probus Clubs in both communities and worked on polio eradication initiatives in India.

I had the pleasure to work with Mr. Kinsella on several projects and I had many discussions with him on how best to help the community, his favourite subject. He knew how to bring people and resources together to get positive results for everyone.

I offer the condolences of the House to his wife, Mary Lou; his five children, Kurt, Davi, Grant, Mary, and Anthony; and his five grandchildren.

Mayor Frank, my friend, rest in peace.

* * *

FESTIVAL OF HOLI

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the Hindu festival of Holi, known as the festival of colours or the festival of sharing love. This ancient festival is celebrated by Hindu Canadians. It originated in India but is also celebrated in many parts of South Asia, such as Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

This holiday represents the unofficial start of spring and symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. It is celebrated by throwing coloured powders at one another. It is furthermore an opportunity to gather with family and friends to celebrate the importance of love and forgiveness.

Tonight I will be hosting an event at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building to celebrate this joyous occasion. Several hundred people are expected to attend. I have sent invitations to all the members of this House and sincerely hope to see many of them there.

* * *

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to share with the House how angry I am. The terrorist attacks in Brussels this week make me angry. The killing of unsuspecting, innocent civilians makes me angry. Listening to terrorists pretend to speak in the name of my faith makes me angry. The willingness of some humans to inflict carnage on their fellow humans makes me angry.

However, I also want to say that reading many touching stories of humanity and compassion in the aftermath of such horrific attacks offers me comfort. Hearing many people from different backgrounds rally together and vow to confront such acts offers me comfort. Watching many resist the temptation to succumb to anger and instead offer resolute, thoughtful, and firm responses offers me comfort.

Today we need to open our hearts and extend our hands to Brussels and victims of terrorism everywhere and reassure them that we stand with them.

*Statements by Members***JIM HILLYER**

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize my seatmate, colleague, and friend Jim Hillyer. Ironically, or I guess appropriately, this was Jim's speaking spot when we traded. He wanted to get back to his treatment and to his kids. Ironically, this was his spot.

My wife and I got to be friends with Jim and Livi shortly after they arrived here in 2011, and we arrived as well. We were on trips together. We got to know each other and soon became friends. We both had four children and had a lot of common interests. He was a man of deep conviction and purpose. From daily conversations to Monday night MP hockey, where we knew him as the sniper, he will be missed.

I say today for Livi and his children Nation, Asia, Taylor, and London that we are here for them.

Finally, to Jim from all of us: may you rest in peace, old friend.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1115)

The Speaker: I thank the member for that.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

* * *

JIM HILLYER

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we all mourn the loss of a dear colleague and friend, the hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner. Fellow Albertans in this House know that Jim was a dedicated and dynamic representative for our province who would always stand up for his constituents, for Albertans, and indeed for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Jim served on seven different committees at different points during his short time here in the Parliament of Canada. For the whole of his five-year term during the 41st Parliament, Jim was a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are still building on the work he did there.

[*English*]

Those who knew him know that Jim was a fighter. Although he had to abandon a nomination for provincial election because he was diagnosed with leukemia, his absence from public life was temporary. Jim left only to come back later, this time as a member of Parliament for Lethbridge. Last fall, electors in his new riding of Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner also decided to place their confidence in him.

A dedicated volunteer, a community leader, a loving father of four, Jim Hillyer will be sorely missed by colleagues on both sides of the aisle. To his wife Livi and his four children I would like to offer my deepest condolences.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

STEWARDSHIP GROUPS IN SOUTH OKANAGAN—WEST KOOTENAY

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am fortunate to represent the riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay, a riding full of magnificent mountains and deep valleys. Each of those watersheds has a group of hard-working citizens, almost all of them volunteers, who have dedicated themselves to the task of stewarding the natural world they live in.

These stewardship groups work to protect their watersheds, to maintain the incredible biodiversity found in both the mountains and the valleys, and to ensure that activities in their region are truly sustainable.

Whether they are trying to keep invasive plants out of their grasslands or alien mussels out of their lakes, protecting a spectacular migration of toads, or informing landowners of best practices on living with endangered species, these groups work tirelessly to keep their valleys healthy and rich in natural diversity.

From the Arrow Lakes and Slocan Valley, Christina Lake and the Kettle River, to the deserts of the South Okanagan, I salute the valuable work of stewardship groups in my riding and across Canada.

* * *

AUTISM AWARENESS

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, April 2 marks World Autism Awareness Day and 18 years since my son Jaden was diagnosed.

Life with Jaden has not exactly been as we planned. He has never made the honour role or attended university or heard his name called at the NHL draft. In no way is this a disappointment. Those were simply not the right plans for Jaden.

To measure his value by IQ or income or goals and assists would be to completely misunderstand who he is. Jaden has a truly rare and beautiful nature, an immeasurable blend of honesty, authenticity, innocence and genuine love. It is an indescribable joy to witness him grow up with a childlike vulnerability and sense of wonder that the rest of us, sadly, lose over time.

Life with Jaden may not be what we had planned, but we do not celebrate any less; we just celebrate different things. It is a lesson learned through experience and one I would not trade for the world.

The Speaker: It is good to have Jaden here today.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Oral Questions

•(1120)

PURPLE DAY

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in this place and help promote awareness of epilepsy by recognizing Purple Day this coming Saturday, March 26.

Thousands of people across Canada will wear purple as they celebrate our nation's leadership in epilepsy awareness.

I am proud to remind this House that it was my very good friend and yours, Mr. Speaker, Cassidy Megan, a young Nova Scotian who founded Purple Day in 2008 at the age of nine to raise international awareness about epilepsy. Canada is now a world leader in this cause, thanks to caring citizens like Cassidy.

I thank my colleagues, many of whom are all too familiar with epilepsy, for their generous support and for wearing purple in the House today.

May we please take a moment to share that pride with our constituents by using the hashtag #purpleday2016.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this budget is a betrayal of the middle class. Families are being asked to return their universal child care cheques, moms and dads are no longer able to claim a tax credit for putting their kids in soccer or dance class, and the tax credit for textbooks or education is gone. Why are middle-class families being stuck with the bill to pay for this Liberal spending spree?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the budget we put forward for Canadians. We are particularly proud that we have been able to live up to our promises to middle-class Canadians. We started on January 1, by reducing taxes for nine million Canadians and putting more money into their pockets each and every paycheque. More importantly, our approach with the Canada child benefit improves the lives of nine out of ten families with children. They will have, on average, \$2,300 more per year, including the measures that were taken for families mentioned by the member opposite.

We are very proud of what we have done for families and we know that this is an important first step in helping Canadian families to deal with their challenges.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget confirms that the Liberals cannot manage the economy. They told Canadians in the last election that they would run a modest deficit of \$10 billion. Now they are borrowing three times what they promised, along with tax increases on the middle class. That is not what Canadians voted for. How can Canadians trust the current government to grow our economy and create jobs when it cannot even keep a simple promise to Canadians?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of low growth, Canadians elected a new government.

They asked us to do two things: to help the middle class, and to grow the economy. We are so proud to start down the path of growing the economy. We are making investments in infrastructure. We are developing an innovation agenda that can make a real difference for this generation and future generations of Canadians so that they will have a better future for themselves and their families.

The Speaker: Order, please. As we know, members will sometimes hear things here they may not like or agree with. However, I know we all have the capacity to be professional, listen quietly, show respect, and wait for our turn to have a chance.

Now it is the turn of the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claimed that his promise to balance the budget in four years was set in stone. However, because of this year's Liberal borrowing, each family across Canada now owes about \$3,000 more. With no plan to balance the budget again, that number will only continue to grow. He is already forcing families to stop claiming a tax credit for putting their kids into hockey or art. Which taxes does he plan to increase this year, next year, and the year after that to pay for his spending spree?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question because it gives me another opportunity to say how proud we are of our budget, a budget that is helping middle-class Canadians across this country. We started by helping nine million Canadians with tax reductions. More importantly, we are moving forward on helping nine out of ten Canadian families with children, with an average of \$2,300 more per year. This will help them to lead better lives and deal with the challenges they face in raising their children.

•(1125)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Tuesday's budget confirmed our fears. They announced a \$10-billion deficit but delivered a \$30-billion one.

[English]

Canada is back to chronic deficits.

[Translation]

Here is what the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec had to say: "The lack of a plan to balance the budget is worrisome and undermines the government's fiscal strength."

Can the minister confirm that he has given up on the idea of balancing the budget?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our budget. A few months ago, Canadians asked us for two things. They wanted us to make things better for the middle class and grow the economy.

We started with our programs to grow the economy. That is our fiscal plan. It is very important to invest now because interest rates are very low and we can take steps that will make things better for future generations. That is our plan. That is the plans Canadians asked for.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals announced that they would incur a \$10-billion deficit because of major investments in infrastructure. This week's budget indicates that the operating deficit for the upcoming year will total \$30 billion, but there will be only \$2.9 billion in new money for infrastructure.

Can the minister explain why, in light of recurring expenditures, he is only allocating \$2.9 billion for new infrastructure after making such big promises?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our investments are important for future generations. It is very important to invest in infrastructure.

We are going to start with a few funds: \$11.9 billion over the next decade, plus \$2 billion over the next three years for universities and colleges, and an additional \$3.4 billion for federal infrastructure. These investments are very important for boosting our growth.

* * *

[English]

AIR CANADA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Air Canada came to Parliament looking for public investment, the answer was yes. However, Parliament set down in law a very specific condition: maintenance work had to be done in Canada. The courts have repeatedly ruled that Air Canada broke the law. Thousands of Canadian workers lost their jobs.

Today, instead of upholding the rule of law, instead of enforcing this legislation, the government is retroactively changing the law to let the scofflaw Air Canada off the hook. Do they not understand that the foundation of democracy is that the law has to apply equally, even to the well-connected?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation has evolved, of course, enormously since 2012. We are delighted that Air Canada has decided to make an investment in purchasing Bombardier aircraft. Not only that, it will be doing the maintenance of those aircraft in Quebec over the next 20 years, as well as participating in setting up a centre of excellence, not only in Quebec but also in Manitoba. It also has an agreement with the Government of Manitoba to create 150 jobs there.

This is good news for the aerospace industry. The member across should be delighted for Canada.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): No, Mr. Speaker, we are not delighted with a Liberal government that believes that the rich and well-connected can get off without obeying the law. No we are not.

The Liberals have gone so far as to change the law retroactively. It is Orwellian. It says that the provisions are deemed never to have come into force and are therefore repealed. They broke the law. Those thousands of workers lost good-paying jobs. Thousands of Canadian families were thrown out in the streets.

How can they live with themselves by letting the rich, the powerful, the well-connected off the hook, to whom the law no longer applies?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a law that was put in place 28 years ago. The world has evolved. Air Canada is a company that must compete on a level playing field across Canada with other competitors, and also internationally.

As a result of the decision by the Quebec government and Manitoba government not to litigate any further against Air Canada, we felt this was an appropriate time to clarify the law and modernize it so that Air Canada can compete with the rest of the world.

* * *

● (1130)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the law did not need to be clarified. It needed to be enforced and respected.

Let us look at another recent example of where those in need are not respected by the Liberals.

The courts ruled that first nations children are victims of racial discrimination and yet the Liberals are refusing to provide equitable funding for first nations child welfare, as specifically required by the courts. Why is the Liberal government failing to respect that court decision?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud that we will be making an investment of \$634.8 million in child welfare for first nations children.

We will respect the tribunal that understands that this system needs to be reformed. We will work with the leadership of first nations, and with provinces and territories to change the system so that first nations children get to stay with their families and in their communities, and we will work with Dr. Blackstock at the same time.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no less an authority than Cindy Blackstock, who brought this case forward, has confirmed that the Liberal government is failing to live up to the court-ordered investment in first nations child welfare. The minister knows that.

Oral Questions

Let us also look at what the Liberals are up to today. There are 1,685 public service jobs on the chopping block. The Liberals' explanation is that "We are not going to outsource everything". That is supposed to reassure people.

Was firing thousands of workers what the Liberals really meant by repairing the broken relationship with the public service?

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to an enterprise-wide solution. The report that was tabled and reported on was from 2014. We have no intention of following through on that strategy.

We have just committed in this budget to over \$384 million for Shared Services Canada. We are committed to Shared Services Canada and to making sure that Canadians and clients get the services they need.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no such thing as free money, and small business owners are going to pay the price.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business called it a "brutal budget for small businesses" that is filled with broken promises and higher taxes. Small businesses are the job creators in this country, but clearly the Prime Minister still thinks that most small businesses are just rich tax dodgers.

Why is the Prime Minister killing jobs by punishing small businesses with higher taxes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we are so concerned to be helping Canadians across this country.

We know that our budget is an important budget for small and medium-sized businesses. We know that when the owners of small and medium-sized business wake up in the morning, what they care about is a strong and robust economy. They need that to make their business work. We know that they care about customers and clients who can buy their goods and services. Therefore, helping the middle class helps those people who can actually buy goods and services from small and medium-sized businesses.

We know that we have made a real difference for those businesses with our budget.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no jobs plan in this budget. It is a plan for massive spending on Liberal interests, and the Minister of Finance has no plans to pay it back.

The Liberals talk about economic growth, but this budget is pure smoke and mirrors. Why is the Minister of Finance burdening Canadians with \$100 billion in new debt, and why do job creators have to pay for it?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians asked us to do two things in the last election. They asked us to help the middle class, and they asked us to grow the economy.

We have started out by helping the middle class. We are putting more money in the pockets of people who faced a generation of not getting enough money in their paycheques.

More importantly, we are moving forward with a plan to make a real difference for the next generation of Canadians, a more innovative and prosperous economy that will help our children and grandchildren to lead better lives.

● (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister said something interesting. He just said that their plan will make a real difference for future generations.

In fact, future generations will be stuck paying for your poor decisions and your mismanagement of public funds. That is what you are giving future generations.

The Speaker: I certainly hope the hon. member is not suggesting that I am mismanaging anything. As the member knows, he must address the chair, and not other members directly.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be more careful, since I have far too much respect for you.

However, the problem is that the government decided to eliminate some tax credits that are extremely important to families. It got rid of the tax credits for arts, fitness, and school supplies.

Why is this government hurting families so much? Why does this government want our grandchildren to foot the bill, since they will be the ones paying for the government's poor judgment?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our budget, because it really is for the middle class. Now we have a Canada child benefit.

With this new benefit, nine out of 10 families with children will be better off. On average, those families will have an extra \$2,300 a year to buy things that are important to them. That is very important. We are proud of our budget.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, living beyond our means and sending the bill to our grandchildren is nothing to be proud of. There is absolutely nothing to be proud of here.

If we look at Quebec City, there is nothing to create wealth or jobs, nothing for expanding the National Optics Institute, nothing for the Institut nordique du Québec, and nothing for the Port of Québec. The mayor of Quebec City has said that he is very concerned.

All of this shows that this government has no plan to create jobs or wealth. Why is it leaving our job and wealth creators high and dry? Why is it abandoning small businesses?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is most important to the next generation is that our economy grow.

Oral Questions

We have made significant investments in our budget to start growing our economy. For example, we have proposed a fund for universities to improve research opportunities and infrastructure for future generations. We have also helped students, who are our future innovators.

Canada will see greater growth in the future as a result of this budget.

[*English*]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a question that the hon. finance minister keeps rather obviously avoiding and debating, which is why he and the Prime Minister chose to violate—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: We seem to have a problem with sound and translation. We will just wait a moment until that is under way.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): I normally do not have a problem with sound, Mr. Speaker.

My question for the Minister of Finance is why he keeps evading this very key question. He says that the Liberal Party made two commitments to voters in the last election. He has completely forgotten the central engagement for fiscal responsibility for balanced budgets in this term for \$25 billion in debt. Instead, he has delivered \$119 billion in debt and counting.

The Prime Minister said that budgets balance themselves, that there is an absolute commitment to balance the budget. Why did the finance minister so utterly violate that fundamental commitment to Canadian voters?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying it is nice to get a question from the hon. member for the first time. I appreciate it. I want to remind him that he was part of a government that left us with a deficit of \$150 billion of additional debt.

We are now turning to how we can grow the economy for the next generation of Canadians. We are making investments that can make a real difference in this country for the future, investments in infrastructure and innovation, so that the children of today and their children will have a better future for Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I know it is rare because as I was saying earlier, sometimes we hear things we are not in agreement with or do not like too much. I know we have the capacity to restrain ourselves, and I know we are all anxious to hear the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

• (1140)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have seen a lot of things in this place, but never a finance minister who so blatantly contradicts his own department, which said this week that the government was left a \$4-billion surplus for the first three quarters of this year.

[*Translation*]

The key question is this: why did this government break its solemn election promise to balance the budget during its term and keep the new debt below \$25 billion? The Liberals are increasing the federal debt by \$120 billion right out of the gate. Why is this government—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the way to deal with an economy that had low growth and the way to deal with demographic challenges is to make investments in the future. We know that by making investments in the future, we can have a better fiscal situation for our children and our grandchildren. That is exactly what Canadians asked us to do, and that is exactly what we have started now. We know that the investments we are making this year and next year will help us to grow the economy, and that is exactly the right thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals missed a good opportunity to use their budget to reduce economic inequalities.

The government went back on its word and is maintaining a tax loophole for stock options that benefits the well-off. In the meantime, seasonal workers who need employment insurance get nothing.

Why did the Minister of Finance choose to help millionaires at the expense of workers in need?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our budget. We started with major tax measures for the middle class. We also want an innovative economy. We listened to people who have innovative companies and we decided to make investments that can help our economy become more innovative in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually, I do not think he listens to the seasonal workers who come to Canada.

Budgets are about choices. The Liberals chose tax breaks for wealthy CEOs over helping Canadians. During the campaign, Liberals made a big deal about the importance of immediate spending on infrastructure. However, Tuesday's budget turned out to be a shell game: no stable practicable funding, and many investments are delayed for years. Over \$3.4 billion is missing from the first two years alone.

Why are they backtracking from their signature promise of immediate investments in infrastructure?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to get that question because it gives me the chance to acknowledge the leadership of the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. Under his leadership, we have created the largest infrastructure program in Canada's history. There is an extra \$60 billion for green and social infrastructure and public transit. Why? Because it is good for the economy, good for job creation, and good for Canada.

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the Liberal broken promises are good news. I want to thank the government for heeding my advice to abandon its plan to double taxation on stock options.

Yet, another broken promise will kill jobs by targeting small business with an additional \$1 billion in taxation.

Why has the budget betrayed the middle class by breaking promises to the tune of a billion dollars to our small business job creators?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have decided to maintain the small business tax rate where it is, at 10.5%. We have decided to focus on how we can grow the economy so that small and medium-sized businesses can have a successful opportunity to grow their businesses. We have decided to help the middle class so they can buy the goods and services from small businesses that small businesses want to sell, and that middle-class Canadians need.

This is a budget that will make a huge difference for businesses across this country in a positive way.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses are middle class, as Stats Canada data demonstrates. The average full-time, self-employed person in Canada earned about \$40,000 a year, which is not enough to qualify for the Liberals' so-called middle-class tax plan but apparently enough to pay higher taxes because of this billion-dollar broken promise.

The Liberal government promises that the rate would be 9%; instead, it is 10.5%.

Why has the Liberal government betrayed the middle class with this billion-dollar broken promise to small businesses?

● (1145)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague of a few details in the budget that make us proud that we are supporting small businesses.

We know they are strong and vibrant part of our economy. Our government is making very important investments which will directly help small businesses, like the \$11.9 billion in infrastructure spending. We want to make sure that goods and services and clients can get to these businesses. We are spending \$500 million in

broadband in rural and remote areas that is going to have an impact on small businesses, \$15 million for the industrial research program, another \$4 million for the Canadian technology acceleration initiative, and \$800 million for—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Richmond Centre.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals broke their promise to business owners by suspending the tax cut to small businesses.

On December 11, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism stood in this House and stated:

I will be working closely with the Minister of Finance to ensure that our commitment to lower the tax burden on small businesses is fulfilled.

Why did the minister decide to flip-flop and lobby her own government for higher taxes?

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague of the list of items that I just read off to help small businesses.

We do understand the impact to small business. We understand that they represent 90% and contribute over 40% of our GDP. That is why we are working hard with them to ensure they can avail of all the programs and initiatives that we announced in our budget that we are proud of. We will work with small and medium-sized businesses from coast to coast to coast to ensure they get the support they need going forward.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals misled Canadian small businesses. They said one thing and did the other.

Conservatives believe that the best way to help small businesses is trade, training, and tax cuts. Instead, the Liberals are killing small businesses with taxes, taxes, and more taxes.

When will the Liberals stop raising taxes on job creators?

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague of another initiative we had in our budget that we are very proud of, which was the increased marketing money for Destination Canada, increasing it by \$50 million.

We know that most of these tourism industries are small and medium-sized businesses. What that \$50 million is going to do is bring more customers to them, driving across our new roads and bridges too, I might add.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: The investment in Destination Canada is going to have a huge impact from coast to coast to coast in our tourism industries.

The Speaker: I am starting to get the impression that members may have been into the Easter chocolate a bit early. Maybe they could try to calm down a little and listen carefully to the questions and answers.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all experts and stakeholders agree that we need to start making strategic investments in home care now. We have seniors being kept in hospital beds simply because we do not have the resources to care for them in our communities.

During the last campaign, the Liberals told Canadians they would invest \$3 billion over four years in home care. What does the Liberal budget commit? Absolutely nothing.

Why are Liberals abandoning their promise to invest in home care when this money is so badly needed?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand with my colleagues on this side of the House, proud of the budget that we presented this week, proud of the fact that the Canada health transfer is the largest in Canadian history, in the amount of \$36 billion.

I have committed, as this House knows, to working with my counterparts in the provinces and territories. We are working every day toward a new long-term agreement that will include a number of initiatives, including a \$3-billion investment in home care. We look forward to announcing that once the agreement has been undertaken.

* * *

• (1150)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there they go, a lofty campaign promise on health, another Liberal promise broken.

The budget was also very disappointing for farmers in the agricultural sector. There is nothing for farmers who face significant losses under CETA. Let us compare it to Liberal promises.

The budget slashed research funding, cut new CFIA investments, and dropped any mention of the value added investment fund. The agricultural sector is a pillar of the economy in many regions of our country, including southwestern Ontario.

Why did Liberals break their promise to our nation's farmers?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's question gives me a chance to indicate that our government took essential steps to help grow the middle class, revitalize the economy, and put money in people's pockets.

We also announced \$500 million for rural broadband Internet, which is vitally important.

I think the House must realize that we farmers live in rural areas. We farmers are business people. We farmers have business to conduct.

Oral Questions

THE BUDGET

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, Canadians voted for a plan to ensure that those who need the help the most are able to receive it. Instead of helping the wealthiest, Canadians chose a progressive plan that will give the most help to those who really need it, and help to the middle class.

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development update the House on the latest developments regarding the monthly tax-free Canada child benefit?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted and so proud to be part of a team that will be implementing the most significant social policy innovation in a generation.

This new Canada child benefit will be simpler, non-taxable, and will benefit nine families out of ten. It will take 300 children out of poverty. It will mean up to \$6,400 per child under six, and \$5,400 for other children.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister began his budget speech acknowledging the terrible attack in Belgium, which shows the risks that countries like Canada face from global terror. He then went on to announce billions in new spending: \$12 million for lawyers to sue the federal government, \$85 million for union managers, \$675 million for the CBC, but how much for front-line public safety agencies keeping us safe? It was zero.

When will the Liberal government make the safety of Canadians a priority?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin by noting that, since 2010, Conservative investment in the RCMP fell by \$245 million. We are in the process of repairing the damage that was done by the previous administration. Program integrity support for the RCMP will ensure funding sufficiency while overall support for the force is reassessed by Treasury Board. We are investing \$128 million over two years to improve the physical infrastructure for law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and we are investing \$60 million in forensic labs.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the fine speeches that government members have been making on the international stage, there are no clear commitments regarding the fight against terrorism in the most recent budget. It is unbelievable. Only \$8 million of the billions of dollars in spending announced by the government has been allocated to fighting terrorism, despite the fact that our security agencies have clearly indicated that they lack the resources they need.

What does the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness intend to do to fight terrorism and make that fight a priority for this government?

• (1155)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the most important initiatives is to deal with counter-radicalization, something that the previous government absolutely failed to do. We made a commitment in the campaign, and we began the funding for it in this budget, to establish a Canadian office for community outreach and counter-radicalization and to work with all of our partners across this country and around the world to make sure we can head off these tragedies before they happen.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal budget is an attack on our armed forces. The Liberals slashed \$3.7 billion from the defence budget, and they are killing military procurement for five years. Our armed forces cannot afford another dark era of Liberal neglect. The Liberals have put us on the sidelines in the war against terrorism.

Why will the Liberal government not support our troops?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only attack on our troops was the \$3 billion that were cut by the previous government, starting in 2012. We have re-profiled our money for when our major acquisitions will be needed. We have increased the operational budget by \$360 million, and we added another \$200 million for military infrastructure, \$50 million of which will go to military family housing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs refused to recognize that Canada is at war against the Islamic State. However, many of our allies are not afraid to call this conflict what it is: a war.

Is it because of that ideology that this government has indefinitely postponed the \$3.7-billion investment in equipment that our armed forces need to go to war against the Islamic State?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a quote by General Vance, our Chief of the Defence Staff. He said:

[English]

We are a lawful party to an armed conflict against a non-state actor—that's the legal terminology...

[Translation]

The so-called Islamic State wants to be recognized as a state, but it is not and never will be a state. That is why we are engaged in an armed conflict, and we are going to win the fight against this terrorist group.

* * *

*[English]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's EI numbers show just how hard cities like Regina and Edmonton have been hit. For weeks, the Liberals have been pledging help for Alberta and Saskatchewan. Yet, despite Liberal promises, the budget's only concession for regions hit by the collapse of oil and gas has been an extension of EI benefits; except, this measure excluded Edmonton, Regina, and southern Saskatchewan, where oil workers are being laid off.

Why does the budget's EI extension exclude Saskatchewan's oil patch?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be standing in the House today to talk about the significant investments we are putting in to those workers who, unfortunately, have been hit by layoffs across the country.

Not only are we reducing waiting periods for benefits, but we are improving service quality. We have ended the negative 2012 changes. We have eliminated the punitive measures to youth, women, and new immigrants, and we have helped those regions of Canada—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jonquière.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are planning to implement an unfair two-tiered employment insurance system. The benefit period will be extended by five weeks in 12 regions of the country, but none of the regions of Quebec will benefit. There is nothing for the Gaspé or for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean in particular.

The people there need help too. The government is going to divert \$7 billion from the employment insurance fund and, to top it all off, it is going to exclude seasonal workers and workers in Quebec.

Is the minister not ashamed of this measure?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say we are very proud to help every region of Canada, including the areas of Quebec and seasonal workers, by reducing the deductible, the waiting period, by improving the quality of our service, by eliminating the 2012 negative changes, and by helping young people, new immigrants, and women from coast to coast to coast.

Oral Questions

●(1200)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is losing its competitive edge to the U.S. when it comes to exporting our oil, and now we are losing it on LNG also. In fact, the Ambassador of Japan said if the approval of the environmental assessment is delayed further, Canada may run the risk of missing the chance to export LNG to the growing Asia market for a long time.

The Liberals have no plan for jobs. Why do they not get out of the way and let the private sector in Alberta and B.C. create jobs?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we understand that the economy and the environment go together.

We are committed to ensuring that the energy sector remains a source of jobs and prosperity, but we also remain committed to ensuring that we do proper environmental assessment, a system that was gutted under the previous government.

I would like to point out that last Friday we approved an LNG project called Woodfibre that they might like to look at, but with PNW, they produced additional information and we will do a proper review and ensure that developments are done in a sustainable manner.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every chance the Liberals get, they delay crucial energy infrastructure projects. They call for moratoriums on oil sands and tankers. They suck up to anti-Canadian energy lobby groups, and they add extra red tape and uncertainty at the very worst time.

In 2012, the current Minister of Justice said:

The country's reputation is at stake with approval of these projects like Site C, like the Enbridge pipeline.

How can Canadians trust the Liberals to support energy development and the hundreds of thousands jobs it provides when senior members of their cabinet are such vocal opponents?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I repeated previously, our government believes that the economy and the environment go together, and that is the only way we will get our resources to market.

Last Friday we approved a project because we believe that it met high environmental standards and it made sense for the economy. We are reviewing other projects to ensure that they do the same.

We will get projects to market when they are done in a sustainable way, unlike the previous government.

* * *

THE SENATE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not know whether all seven new senators, including Mr. Pratte and Mr. Harder, were on the final lists submitted by the advisory board to the Prime Minister.

If Mr. Pratte was on the list, the Quebec board has broken its requirements to only nominate qualified persons.

If any of the seven was not on the lists, then the Prime Minister has broken his promise to rely upon independent advice.

If there was any communication between the Prime Minister and the advisory board to smooth out these wrinkles, then talk of the advisory board being independent is a farce.

One of these three scenarios is what actually happened. Which one is it?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the individuals who have been appointed to the Senate. They are all outstanding Canadians of the highest merit. I am confident that they will serve the best interests of Canadians. They also represent the diversity of our great nation.

This is an opportunity to express deepest gratitude to the individuals on the independent advisory board for reviewing the applications. We look forward to opening the process to all Canadians in the very near future.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for his incredible achievement in bringing in 25,000 refugees by February 29. I am particularly proud of his commitment to bring in an additional 10,000 refugees by the end of this year.

I would like to ask the minister about housing for the new arrivals, and how the minister has progressed in helping government-assisted refugees move into permanent housing.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the House that, while three weeks ago the proportion of refugees in permanent housing stood at 52%, as of yesterday the proportion of the Syrian refugees in permanent housing had increased to 78%. While I have always said that there would be bumps along the way, this is clearly strong progress, and I am confident that every single one of these refugees will be in permanent housing before the end of June.

* * *

●(1205)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budgets are demonstrations of governments' priorities, and farm families are convinced that they are not a Liberal priority. Even after borrowing billions of dollars, farmers and farm families were left out in the cold.

However, there was one suggestion for farm families in the budget. The suggestion was that farmers should become solar and wind power producers so that they would have good jobs. Farming is a good job. It is an honourable job.

Oral Questions

I wonder when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food will stand in this House and start defending honourable, hard-working farm families.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question, but the problem is he is dead wrong.

The fact is that our government took essential steps to grow the middle class and revitalize the economy. The \$5 million for broadband is vital for rural areas. We farmers live in rural areas. We farmers do business. We also put over \$38 million in CFIA—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is way too much noise today. It is unnecessary; it is inappropriate. Let us show a little respect for each other and for this place.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has the floor.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated, the broadband is so important, and so also is millions of dollars going into CFIA and millions of dollars into research. Research is so valuable in agriculture. As well, the gag order is lifted from the scientists.

* * *

[Translation]

YOUTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our farmers deserve much better than that.

On another subject, the Liberals made big election promises to Canada's youth during the campaign: hundreds of millions of dollars for a youth employment strategy and millions of dollars for a youth service program.

Unfortunately, there is \$365 million less in the budget than promised for the next two years. Youth organizations are calling for more long-term investments in preventive measures and to improve job security.

Why has the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister for Youth so cynically abandoned Canada's youth?

[English]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to answer the question posed by my hon. colleague from Salaberry—Suroît.

One thing I can say is that we are incredibly proud of what we are doing as a government for our youth. Keep in mind that the previous government did not have a minister of youth. Keep in mind that the previous government did not take the needs of our youth seriously, and because of that we saw that, for 10 years, the unemployment rate for young people in this country stayed stagnant at roughly the same amount.

We are taking this seriously. We are investing and ensuring that we are providing opportunities for young people, to create jobs and give them opportunities to go to university and make sure they have a better future.

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two international lakes in my riding: Lake Memphremagog and Lake Champlain. They are governed by the International Boundary Waters Treaty. These two lakes are extremely important to my constituents, because they provide their drinking water. Almost 250,000 people drink this water.

How does the government plan to improve the water quality of these lakes? Will it bring this issue to the International Joint Commission and engage in dialogue with our U.S. counterparts?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this question was posed by the member for Brome—Missisquoi, who is a tireless champion for Lake Champlain and Lake Memphremagog. He knows how important these lakes are to the entire region, and he is aware of their extreme beauty. That is why I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for the recent budget's investment of \$7.5 million over five years in the most advanced scientific research. This will yield the best solutions for saving these lakes and making them clear, clean, and safe for people, in co-operation with our U.S. allies.

* * *

● (1210)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, may the wind blow and may the sun shine; this is the Liberal Party's vision for agriculture. In light of the budget speech, Canadian farmers are very worried, considering the scant attention that the Liberal government is paying to the agricultural sector.

The importance of agriculture to the Liberal caucus seems to be reflected in the minister's lack of influence.

Why did the budget not include any commitments regarding the compensation promised to farmers as a result of the trade agreement with the EU and the trans-Pacific partnership?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague that this government supports supply management and understands the importance of compensation.

In this budget, we were able to ensure that the middle class grew, that we revitalized the economy and put more money in the pockets of people. We also put broadband in so my hon. colleague's farmers would be able to talk on a cellphone. We farmers do business, and we deserve the right to talk on a cellphone.

The Speaker: Order, please. Whether we are talking on a cellphone or in this House, we always want to hear.

The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

Government Orders

[Translation]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1988, the federal government appeased the Air Canada workers who were worried about its privatization by including a requirement in the legislation for the company to keep maintenance centres in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg. For years now, Air Canada has been breaking the law with impunity, and the government has let the company get away with it.

Now the Minister of Transport is introducing a bill to relieve Air Canada of that obligation. How can the minister break his promise to the Aveos workers and turn his back on Quebec's aerospace industry? Is that the Liberal government's idea of law and order?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the world has changed a great deal since then. That piece of legislation is 28 years old and needs to be modernized. The fact that Quebec and Manitoba decided to drop their lawsuits against Air Canada gives us an opportunity to clarify the legislation and bring it up to date, so that Air Canada, which of course has to compete nationally and internationally, can be better positioned to decide for itself where to have its maintenance done.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the 2012 omnibus budget bill, the infamous Bill C-38, repealed environmental assessment and put in place a bogus, weak Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012, so-called, which has allowed the National Energy Board to make a mockery of real EA. I was shocked to find in this budget, at page 166, four years of funding specifically referenced to keeping the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 alive.

Does the Minister of Environment and Climate Change intend to entrench Bill C-38, or do the right thing and get rid of it?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her tireless advocacy on behalf of environmental issues.

I was thrilled with the budget. It was the greenest budget ever. It sends a clear signal that we are moving to a low carbon economy. We are going to create very good, clean jobs, and we are going to provide a more sustainable future for all our children.

I want to reassure the member opposite that we are committed to a review of our environmental assessment process. The amount of money that was provided for CEAA is intended to allow for that and also to support, in consultation with—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will now call upon the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for the usual Thursday question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just before I ask the Thursday question, I wonder if I could find

unanimous consent to table the January “Fiscal Monitor”, which yet again shows a Conservative surplus.

The Speaker: This request sounds familiar. Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

● (1215)

Mr. Andrew Scheer: In that case, Mr. Speaker, I will move on to the Thursday question.

I wonder if the government House leader would update the House as to the business of the chamber after we return from our Easter break and constituency work.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if colleagues are so inclined, I could perhaps table at the end of my answer to the Thursday question, this very incisive weekly business today. However, I will leave that to your judgment, Mr. Speaker.

Today, the House is debating Bill C-7, the RCMP labour relations act. I hope we will conclude second reading at the end of the day today.

As my friend noted, the House will adjourn for the Easter break and allow members to return to work in their constituencies.

When we return on April 11, the House will complete the four days of debate on the budget, April 11, 12, 13, and 14. I know colleagues will want to speak to the budget. Those will be designated as days to debate the budget.

[Translation]

I want to take this opportunity to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and Kelly a happy Easter. I also wish our colleagues and their families a happy Easter and a good break.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel had two minutes left for questions and comments. Are there any questions or comments?

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

*Government Orders***Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member could comment on why we have Bill C-7 on the Supreme Court of Canada's decision before us today. Does he want to provide some thoughts as to why it is important to pass the bill as soon as possible?

[Translation]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I will give a little background. About 15 years ago, the Supreme Court validated the existing regime, to an extent. A more recent Supreme Court ruling overturned that decision, in light of the changes that took place since the original ruling. As a result, the existing regime is no longer valid and the government was given a deadline.

A new government came in after the last election. We came in and we took over the existing files. We therefore had to request a six-month extension. In its wisdom, the Supreme Court decided to give us another four months instead.

That is why we must have final legislation before March 16, 2016. The key point is that we must have a new collective bargaining regime. It is up to Parliament to choose a model for this regime.

We are proposing a regime that is modelled on the existing regime for other members of the civil service, other government employees.

We will obviously have to make some adjustments to reflect the unique nature of their work, to reflect how they operate, and to reflect their responsibilities.

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

I will be sharing my time with the member for the great riding of Foothills.

As a former member of the RCMP, I was proud to serve with Canada's national police force. I recall the first day that I joined the force and I recall my last day. All of my 35 years within that organization were great.

Like many thousands of other members from the 1960s and 1970s who joined Canada's traditional world-famous redcoats, I can attest that I did not join up for the \$4,800 a year but for the pride in serving our great country in Canada's police force.

We went where the force wanted us to go, from sea to sea to sea. We were all proud to serve, and we gave much to the force in long hours with no overtime.

We got the job done with basic equipment by doing the job with pride. In those days, some of our cars did not have radios. We were notified by a light that was turned on over the community that we

had to return to the detachment, and we did so because that was our job.

Things needed to change with the rapidly changing times of the 1970s. Better equipment, better communications, better working conditions, and better compensation were the issues facing us. This was accomplished by a unique program that came about in 1974. The RCMP senior command listened and made changes. One big change was the division staff relations representation system, known to the membership as the DSRR.

The DSRR's work moved our force to the forefront. We remained one of the top 10 police forces in Canada in relation to compensation and working conditions through the efforts and great work of the RCMP DSRR system. We needed to have a say with respect to promotions, discipline, and grievances, and the DSRR program protected and served our members through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s up to this present day.

Today it appears to have lost some of its effectiveness in promoting working conditions, compensation, and so forth, for reasons I do not want to go into. Last year I was shocked when I examined the 2015 RCMP review of the force in comparison to other police forces in Canada. When I proudly served, we were always rated among the top five police forces in Canada. Last year the RCMP was ranked below 50 other police forces in Canada with respect to pay, compensation, limited-duration postings, etc.

Canada's internationally acclaimed police force should not be at the bottom of the pile. It should be at the top. My personal feeling is that the DSRR program worked well at one time and could work well again if all of the departments within government would work together for the betterment of our men and women in uniform. This also applies to the military, firefighters, and first responders. Our men and women in uniform protect Canadians from harm's way. They often risk their lives in serving their communities, their provinces, and their country.

Personally, I believe that the RCMP, Canada's international police force, should not be unionized. There are so many situations that might complicate how this great organization performs its policing roles in the future, and I could go on for quite some time explaining what I foresee as future problems. However, I want to switch hats for a moment.

I was formerly mayor of a northern British Columbia city. For most cities, the cost of policing is one of their biggest budgetary items. I would like to provide a comparison of policing costs, and I will use British Columbia as an example.

The first example is with respect to RCMP communities. For communities with a population of under 5,000, the province pays 70% and the federal government pays 30%. For communities with a population between 5,000 and 15,000, the municipality pays 70% and the federal government still pays 30%. For communities with a population of over 15,000, the municipality now pays 90% and the federal government pays 10%.

Government Orders

•(1225)

Second, a comparison done several years ago showed that unionized municipal police forces in 12 communities in B.C. had 2,262 police officers looking after roughly 1.2 million people, at a cost of \$348 million. RCMP contract services in B.C. at the same time in 28 communities with a population of more than 15,000 had 2,692 police officers looking after 2,109,601 people, at a cost of \$369,652,000, or \$22 million more for doing twice the work.

In my opinion, if the RCMP is unionized, the cost to communities across Canada contracted to the RCMP for policing services will increase dramatically.

Our Conservative Party respects the Supreme Court decision that the RCMP officers are entitled to bargain collectively. However, I cannot support any legislation that denies employees, especially RCMP members, the right to vote in a secret ballot on whether to unionize. The court's first and fundamental tenet of the charter right is employees' choice, and that is not reflected in this bill.

We do not use a show of hands or a public petition in our democratic elections, nor should we do in the workplace. The RCMP risk their lives every day. The least we can do is to give them the democratic right to vote, free of all intimidation, on whether to unionize.

We support this legislation going to committee, where we will ask the government to amend it to explicitly allow RCMP members the right to vote by secret ballot on whether or not to unionize. The RCMP's collective rights under paragraph 2(b) of the charter can be exercised by their employee choice at the first instance, saying whether they want an association or not, and that vote should be conducted in a way that conforms with our democratic principles, namely, by secret ballot.

Bill C-7 would bring certain parts of the workplace relationship outside of the bill, certain elements through the grievance process, and certain elements of the workplace would not be subject to the collective bargaining relationship. That is important, due to the unique role, chain of command structure, and heritage of the RCMP as a police force.

I urge the minister to work alongside the commissioner of the RCMP to ensure the bargaining and the well-being of our people, in safeguarding the employees' wellness in uniform and afterwards.

In closing, I want to remind my colleagues that RCMP members risk their lives every day. The least we can do is to give them the democratic right to vote on whether or not to unionize, free of all intimidation.

•(1230)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yellowhead for his service on behalf of Canada.

I would like to point out that the Public Service Labour Relations Act has a number of sections that prohibit intimidation. I agree with him that a vote by RCMP members for or against unionization must be free of intimidation. In fact, that is required by law in section 186.1 of the act, and sections 187, 188, and 189. The law requires that be no intimidation by the employer or the union or any person.

Once this law is passed it will allow the board to select the appropriate method, whether it be a card check or mandatory vote or secret ballot. Why would the member require a one-size-fits-all approach that would not be suitable for all situations, rather than giving the board the flexibility to put forward the method that makes sense in the situation?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I did not quite get that whole question, but I will answer it in the best way I can.

There is no unanimous agreement within the RCMP on unionization. There is a group within the organization that wants to go that way; there is a group within the organization that wants to remain basically the way it is today. The DSSR system was a great negotiating tool for the RCMP. It worked extremely well until government started to intervene with the democratic process of enabling the DSSR reps to represent the members in the field in the appropriate ways.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my seatmate on behalf of the residents of Canada for his years of service in the RCMP. I owe him a great deal of respect for serving this great country for that many years.

I would ask the member to explain again why this vote should be done by secret ballot. We have recently heard comments by other members of how their parents were intimidated by the card-showing process, which is why this should be done through a secret ballot.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to serve and will keep serving. I will try to make 50 years. I will see if I can do it.

There is dissension within the RCMP, and I hate to see it. It breaks my heart. However, there are two factions, and one faction of members wants to unionize, because they think they can make things a lot better for themselves and force the hand of management in the RCMP.

There was a DSSR program that I feel worked extremely well at one time. It was the envy of a lot of police forces, because government paid RCMP members to represent us. We voted for those people, and they represented us. They argued for us, worked on discipline matters, internal matters, promotional matters, and worked very effectively at one time on our pay. When they were very effective and government listened to them, we were at the top level of Canadian police forces. We did not say that we had to be number one; we just wanted to be at the top and be fair. However, things have gone downhill drastically.

Therefore, I support the bill if it will help my members in the field. I do not want to see an organization that I was so proud to serve for 35 years stay at the bottom. I want it up there and my members to be happy. When they are happy, they will serve their communities in a much better way than they do today.

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Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it truly is an honour to follow my respected colleague from Yellowhead. I thank him for sharing his time with me. I have a lot of respect for his 35 years of service with the RCMP, protecting the communities of Canada. We are truly blessed to have him as a member of our caucus.

I want to talk a bit about some of the history. I am very blessed to have a deep RCMP and North West Mounted Police history in my riding. Fort Macleod was founded in 1874. It is now a world-renowned museum of the North West Mounted Police in western Canada. Downtown Fort Macleod is now a provincial historic site, as well as the museum.

There is also the Alberta Provincial Police Building in Crowsnest Pass, which was founded in 1918. I am proud to say that the Conservative government last year contributed \$100,000 to the refurbishing of that police building to protect its history. I am sure many people in the House would like to know that Corporal Stephen Lawson was killed in front of that building in the early 1900s. One of the accomplices in the shooting was Florence Lassandro. She was convicted of that murder and was the first and only woman ever hanged in Alberta's history. That is a bit of Alberta's history.

Today I want to speak to Bill C-7 and say how disappointed I am. On this side of the House, I think many of us are. We continue to have to challenge the Liberal government on the importance of accountability and transparency when it comes to unions, and specifically the importance of a secret ballot.

Members of the RCMP are out there each and every day protecting our rights, freedoms, and democracy. Why we would miss this opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with them and protect their democratic rights when we have the chance to do so? It is disappointing that we are missing this opportunity by putting forward Bill C-7, which does not include the right to a secret ballot. I ask the Liberal government to send the bill back in order to add the provision of a secret ballot for RCMP members when they are faced with the question of certifying or not certifying as a union. Simply put, that is the right thing to do.

Members of the RCMP have the democratic right to a free and fair secret ballot vote when certifying or decertifying as a union. Every one of us in the House was elected by way of secret ballot. Every member of a provincial or municipal government was elected by way of secret ballot. It only makes sense that we would be sharing that democratic right, not a privilege but a democratic right, to a secret ballot at all levels, including unions.

A secret ballot is the cornerstone of our democracy and at the heart of Canadian values. However, the Liberals have shown again, with the combination of Bill C-7 and Bill C-4, that they see the right of secret ballot as being somehow obsolete. In many cases, they do not feel it is democratic at all, which I find to be extremely disappointing and concerning.

This is about balance and creating a fair environment in which workers are the ones making the choice they feel is best suited to their needs. The Supreme Court decision speaks to allowing the RCMP the right to associate for the purpose of collective bargaining. I think all of us in the House agree and support that decision. However, we also believe this is an opportunity to vote by way of a

secret ballot, and it should be a privilege and democratic right that the RCMP have this opportunity.

Our specific intent has always been to preserve the democratic rights of Canadian workers through increasing public confidence in unions, but to have that confidence, unions must operate in a transparent and accountable way without any chance of undue influence or coercion. Our democratic system was designed with a secret ballot as its keystone, specifically to maintain the integrity of the vote and to allow citizens to cast their ballot in privacy.

The jobs minister has made it very clear that she does not believe in the integrity of a secret ballot. In fact, she has said that the card-check system is a much more democratic way to certify or decertify a union. Recently in committee meetings, she was asked why she would repeal Bill C-525, which gave employees the democratic right to a secret ballot to decertify or certify a union. I will read this quote, because her answer was very clear on where she and the Liberal Government stood in terms of democracy. She said:

The card-check system is a perfectly democratic way of gauging support as it ensures that an absolute majority of employees support the union, not just those who come out and vote.

• (1235)

Our jobs minister is saying in committee that a card check system is a much more democratic way to decide if a majority of people support whatever that issue is, over a secret ballot; that somehow when people actually show up to vote for something, they are not legitimate.

I went around door-knocking in my riding, as I know most of the members of this House did as well in their ridings as we went through the election period. If I went up to ask those people for their vote right then, and I wanted them to sign a piece of paper that would tell me that they voted for me while I was standing there, how often do you feel that person would be telling the truth?

• (1240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I am giving the member a signal to speak through the Speaker, but not directly to the other member.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, how often do members think those residents would be telling the person at the front door the truth? How would we feel here about it? When there is a card check system vote and they are asking people in a union shop, for example, to raise their hand while everyone else is standing there looking at them, how is that fair and democratic? Compare that to the opportunity for a secret ballot where, with their own conscience, we would know people are making a decision they feel is right for them, with no coercion, no intimidation, and no one influencing their decision.

On that fact, after an election most of us in this House go and speak to our residents. We have all had the discussion at the coffee table or the dinner table about who they are going to vote for the next day. No one wants to tell. They are very reluctant to tell. That is something very private, something we need to hold to ourselves; and we should respect that decision and the foundation and importance of that secret ballot.

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I have heard that story over and over again from people in residences. Canadians expect privacy when they are casting their ballots, and that is something we should embrace.

Voting is a very personal action. People cherish the privacy of marking their ballot in secret without intimidation, influence, or coercion. Why would we not make the same basic right for the men and women who put their lives on the line every single day when they put on their uniform to go to work? What could possibly be easier and more straightforward than a secret ballot? There is absolutely nothing more simple: one person, one vote. That is how it should be. Open, transparent results ensure confidence that a true decision was made whether certifying or decertifying a union.

The Liberal Party campaigned on accountability and transparency. By their keeping secret ballots out of this legislation, it is again obvious that the Liberals have no intention of keeping those election promises. Accountability and transparency seem to have gone the way of commitments to a \$10 billion deficit, balanced budgets, and dinosaurs. That seems to be all in the same viewpoint of election promises broken time and again.

At the federal level, the previous Conservative government introduced extensive reforms to ensure Canadians have trust in their political institutions. That included legislation like Bill C-525, which ensures union members have the right to a secret ballot. That legislation recognized the right to peaceful association—a right that extends to all workers in Canada, whether they should wish to have a union represent them or not. That is a right that should be passed on to the RCMP as well, if its members choose to form a union. This choice is theirs and theirs alone to make.

The previous card check system for federally regulated industries required 50% plus one to sign a union membership card. It is very clear, despite what my colleague on the other side of the floor would like to say, that this is open to abuse. It has been open to abuse, and certainly there are many stories where employees have been pressured to sign a union card against their will. I know the member rattled off different laws that were in place, but just because a law is written down, I am certain all of us can agree that does not mean it is followed. I am sure we all understand that there are many opportunities where card check systems in place definitely open the door to intimidation and coercion.

To wrap it up, the message I want to get to here is very clear. Members of the RCMP each and every day put their lives on the line to protect our rights, our freedoms, and our democracy. We have one chance here. We are at the root opportunity here in dealing with collective bargaining with the RCMP. This is an opportunity for us here to stand up with our RCMP officers and stand up to protect their democratic rights, and the Liberals will not do it.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for Yellowhead for his service in the RCMP and protecting Canadians for, I believe, 32 years. That is very impressive.

I appreciate the comments by the hon. member and the fact that at committee there has to be serious discussion about a secret ballot versus the card system. It should be subject to a very legitimate debate.

I want to ask the hon. member a different question. The NDP has voiced concern about some of the limitations in the bill with respect to some areas that the collective bargaining negotiations cannot touch, such as harassment. What is the Conservative position on those limitations and does he agree with the limitations in the current bill?

• (1245)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. We do support the outline of Bill C-7, but we are encouraging the Liberal government to take this back to committee and have a fulsome discussion on the merits of a secret ballot over the card check system. I am very relieved to hear from a member of the Liberal government that they are willing to have that discussion. I hope he will follow through on that commitment to have a legitimate discussion on why we should have a secret ballot over the card check system. I think most of us on this side would support Bill C-7 if that were part of the discussion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Foothills spoke a lot about justice, or fairness. However, he only spoke about fairness in the context of a secret ballot.

Does the member not think that it would be fair if the people who work on the ground and who have to take each day as it comes were able to negotiate all their work conditions, such as those regarding deployment or even harassment?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I missed the beginning of the member's question, but I believe she asked if someone in the field would have the same opportunities. Absolutely, that is part of a collective bargaining process, to have the opportunity to discuss various issues between employees and their union. However, the question we face first before we get to that point is whether they want to certify or decertify and even be in a union. The keystone of that is the opportunity to have a secret ballot in making that decision.

Those other issues will be discussed as part of the collective bargaining agreement, but we cannot get there until there is first trust that the decision made to form a union in the first place is legitimate and that the majority of the members want to be in that union.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we Google "RCMP intimidation", the search results include harassment claims, an RCMP culture of bullying, harassment, Insite, and the RCMP's biggest crisis.

Considering that there are all of these issues outstanding with regard to RCMP intimidation and harassment, does the member somehow think there will not be similar issues with a card system, if the government just waves a memo? Does the member believe the intimidation or harassment that seems to be so endemic in the force right now will magically disappear with the wave of a memo, or is it better served by a secret ballot?

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Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, my colleague brings up a good point. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that there has never been any influence or coercion, or strong-arming of members of a business or a company when it comes to forming a union.

What we really need to focus on is ensuring that the RCMP members do not just have the privilege, but that it is their right to have a democratic secret ballot. If the secret ballot is part of this legislation, we will not have to worry about harassment, coercion, and undue influence on their making that decision, because we will have that ballot as part of the decision-making process. That is absolutely key to ensuring that if they do want to unionize, the decision they make on whatever their conscience tells them is best for them.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this debate. I will be splitting my time with the member for Cariboo—Prince George.

On a slightly different vein, I know this has been a tough week for many of us here. I want to express my personal condolences to the Hillyer and Ford families. I also express my best wishes to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt. I understand there are some health issues that have re-emerged. I really have enjoyed debating with him in the House thus far, and I look forward to him having a full recovery and continuing to contribute to this place.

Bill C-7 is about the RCMP. It is about collective bargaining in the context of the RCMP.

Before I get into some substantive arguments about the specific issue of secret ballots, which has been the focus of the back and forth by the folks in disagreement, I want to review some of the ground on our perspective of the bill.

The bill acknowledges and respects a recent Supreme Court decision, which says the RCMP is entitled to bargain collectively. For the most part, Bill C-7 is a fairly reasonable response to the court ruling and we support this legislation going to committee. That is the basic underlying groundwork here.

However, we feel very strongly that the legislation needs to protect the right of RCMP members to vote via a secret ballot for unionization. That is an important right and it is respected by Canadians in the vast majority of contexts. Working men and women in the RCMP and in other environments need to have their right to vote in a secret ballot.

Notably, as well, wage disputes will continue to be resolved through binding arbitration. There will be no striking of police officers, obviously, and that is an important point to clarify.

In the context of discussing the RCMP, I want to briefly salute the very good work done in my own constituency by the RCMP. In my riding of Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, and certainly in Alberta, we do not have provincial police forces, so we are served directly by the RCMP. We greatly appreciate the incredible work the RCMP does, not only in direct policing but also in very positive engagement with the community.

In some of the past work I have done with different not-for-profit organizations, it has been great to have the engagement of the

RCMP. For example, I was involved with the Rotary Club of Sherwood Park. We would regularly have members of the RCMP come and update us on some of the issues and challenges in our community. We had a very positive working relationship that was facilitated by that connection.

Because of the immense respect we on this side of the House have, and I think all members have, for members of the RCMP, it is important that this legislation protect their right to make decisions about collective bargaining through a secret ballot. We are at less than 10 government bills so far. Two of them deal with union certification and neither of them protect a right to a secret ballot. In fact, one of them, which we have already debated in this place, explicitly eliminated the protection of the right to secret ballot. It is clear how the government sees the issue of the secret ballot.

I said before in the House, I would have thought this issue would have been resolved. We are again having this 19th century debate about why secret ballots are actually important, again, something I think many people would have thought was settled.

It is important to identify why a secret ballot is important and I want to set out what I see as four key motivating arguments for the secret ballot. First, they protect the right to privacy. Second, they ensure protection against reprisals. Third, they ensure protection against corruption. Fourth, they facilitate a necessary process of deliberation that allows voters to most effectively express what is in their own interests.

First is the issue of a right to privacy. A public ballot does not respect an individual's right to privacy. It requires individuals to write or declare publicly their political convictions. There was a time when this is how elections happened, when people had to declare publicly for who they were voting for, and there were all kinds of problems with that. One of them was that their basic right to have their privacy protected in terms of their deeply held political convictions was not respected. The reason we would see the importance of a right to privacy in this context is that a person's opinions are, in a meaningful way, his or her own property. My opinions are my opinions, not just in the sense that I hold them, but that they are mine to dispose of, to share or not to share as I would wish.

• (1250)

Laws and systems of administration or certification that do not allow individuals to keep their opinions to themselves or dispose of them as they wish are violations of their privacy. They are, in a sense, violations of their ownership of their own opinions.

This also has negative practical consequences as well. In addition to violating the basic privacy rights of members of the RCMP, in this case, not having a secret ballot, having a public ballot, always creates the risk of reprisal. This is very much the early history of the movement to the secret ballot.

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Secret ballots were introduced in the 19th century in the U.K., for example, around the time of the Great Reform Act, and as the franchise was extended, as more people were being allowed to vote, there was a recognition, especially for those who were more economically disadvantaged and therefore dependent on the employ of those who were wealthier, that people were vulnerable to political pressure or reprisals in the context of a public ballot.

The history is that the secret ballot was very much brought in to protect the rights of people, of working men and women, to be able to express themselves politically without fear of reprisal.

It is perverse, ironic, and quite unfortunate that it is precisely in the environment of union certification, when we are talking again about the basic political rights of working men and women, that the government is clearly not respecting the importance of the secret ballot.

There is, of course, always the possibility that, in a public ballot, someone would face some kind of reprisal, a negative social or other response from colleagues, if they were not doing or voting the way that this other person wished them to.

The third argument in favour of the secret ballot is that it provides protection against corruption. Before there were secret ballots, there was the real risk of people being paid to vote in a certain way, and that is a possibility when we have a public ballot. It is obviously not a possibility when there is a secret ballot, as there is no way to effectively buy a vote because we do not know if the vote is then actually provided as paid for.

That was another argument that was important in the initial evolution of the secret ballot and to some extent remains important now, that there is no possibility of there being inducements when there is a secret ballot.

Finally, secret ballots ensure there is a process of deliberation that happens before a vote; so a vote date is set, there is an opportunity for both sides of an argument to present their opinions, for there to be a conversation, and then for a conclusion to arise. I think most people accept the importance of this process of deliberation. That is why we have an election campaign. That is why we have a period of debate before an election takes place.

The advantages of this for working men and women in the context of certification are very clear. Someone might come up to me and say, "Why not sign this card?" and present one side of the argument to me. I might say, "Sure, that sounds like a good idea", but I might feel differently if I were presented with counter-arguments. Having that process of deliberation ensures that people have time to think through an act according to their interests.

I think these are some key reasons why a secret ballot is important in this context and in all contexts.

Here are the principal arguments we hear against the secret ballot, specifically in the context of certification. People on the other side say that a secret ballot remains an option here, but it is just not required. All these arguments about the importance of a secret ballot indicate why a secret ballot should be guaranteed. People should have the certainty of knowing that their privacy will be protected.

If we said that, in the next general election, there would be secret ballots in some ridings but not in others, I think we would say that was insufficient, that there should be a guarantee of respect for individuals' privacy when they cast their ballots.

Certainly the possibility of employer intimidation and an imbalance in the workplace is raised from time to time. Certainly, though, there is no serious possibility of intimidation against individual voters who keep their perspectives quiet and vote in a secret ballot.

There is always the risk of intimidation against organizers of a certification drive, and I would acknowledge that; but of course the possibility of intimidation in that case exists regardless of whether or not there is a secret ballot, because for somebody who is organizing, whether it is in the context of a card check or in the context of a secret ballot, there is still the possibility of intimidation there.

Further, we are dealing with the government. The likelihood of the government exerting employer-type intimidation is very unlikely.

● (1255)

For these reasons, we see the value of the bill, and we support it going to the committee. However, we hope the government will also see the value of the secret ballot.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his thoughtful comments. Indeed, the bill should go to committee. It will be examining all of these issues in great detail. Our government is open to those discussions and hearing from the witnesses. As we discussed in the debate previously, this can be thoroughly canvassed at committee.

The member talked about legitimacy of a process of certification. Our government is absolutely committed to supporting the dedicated members of the RCMP. That is what this bill is about. With respect to certification, there is a board that is responsible for the democratic process. As for legitimacy, if it has any concerns about any method, it can then apply a secret ballot. It has that responsibility.

The secret ballot has its pros and cons, as the member mentioned, and so does card check, as the member mentioned. The board has the power and responsibility to ensure a proper democratic process. Why would the member argue for a one-size-fits-all approach, when clearly that is not necessary and we have a board that has options to have the best approach for the situation?

● (1300)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, there are certainly areas of agreement when it comes to the bill.

Where I would disagree is when she says there are pros and cons to secret ballots. I have not heard any cons to secret ballots. This is the system we use for democratic elections everywhere, in every other context.

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She says there is a board that would make these determinations. I think I alluded to this in my speech, that the counter argument from the other side is that there is always the option of a secret ballot. There could or could not be a secret ballot. It is up to the discretion of the board in this case.

With great respect for the board, protecting people's rights should mean a guarantee that their rights will be respected. It should be a guarantee that their right to privacy will be respected. It is very clear that protecting someone's right to privacy is right in every case. That does not mean we should use the pejorative one-size-fits-all solution type of description. Let us just say that everyone has the same right to have their privacy protected in all contexts. This means that RCMP officers, all Canadian working men and women, should have a guarantee that they will have a secret ballot and will be able to express their opinions privately if they wish.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his eloquent remarks. He is a fellow new MP, and, of course, was not part of the previous Conservative government. However, he has often come forward in the House as an ardent defender of that government's record.

Therefore, my question is, if the Conservative position is to support collective bargaining rights for members of the RCMP, subject to a secret ballot certification process, why did the previous Conservative government not extend collective bargaining rights to members of the RCMP when the Canada Labour Code at that time did include a secret ballot certification process?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, especially as we are in budget week, I am reminded of the fact that I am a very ardent defender of the record of our government when it comes to budget policy and other areas.

Specifically with respect to the member's question, there is perhaps some debate about the kind of process that should exist when it comes to collective bargaining in the RCMP. However, what we have said very clearly in the House is that now we have a Supreme Court decision, so it is the responsibility of the government to respond to and implement that decision. That is what Bill C-7 does. It is important to have legislation that responds to that, but that does it in the right way.

We have made the argument about the importance of the secret ballot. The member and I have debated the secret ballot point before. I know the NDP and Liberals disagree, but we feel very strongly that working men and women should have the right to a secret ballot respected in all cases.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure today to rise in the House to debate Bill C-7.

I will start by thanking the RCMP members in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George, and I thank as well my hon. colleague from Yellowhead for his 35 years of service.

I would like it to be on the record that I was an RCMP brat. My stepfather served in the RCMP, which meant that I saw many of the small communities from the tip to the tail of British Columbia.

Our RCMP members are moms, dads, sisters, and brothers. They are volunteers in their communities. They coach minor sports, work with charities, and contribute to the health and wellness of our communities, and not just when they have the uniform on, but every day.

The men and women of the force put their uniforms on and go to work every day knowing full well that they will experience human tragedy. They know full well that their lives may be placed in danger just so that we and our families can sleep well at night. They are our silent sentinels.

The legend of the Mountie is well known: always getting their man, Dudley Do-Right, and my favourite superhero, Captain Canuck, who by day is a mild-mannered RCMP officer and by night fights evildoers.

The red serge and the campaign hat are representatives of our proud country. Core values of integrity, honesty, professionalism, respect, and accountability were exemplified by the first 150 recruits to our force back in 1873 and are now carried by the 28,461 current members of the force.

As I said earlier, my stepfather was in the RCMP. He told me long ago that it was not because of the great wage at the time but because of the pride and respect associated with the force.

The musical ride is internationally recognized. I have travelled with Mounties from coast to coast and overseas in representing Canada, and I can say that the lineups to get photos with the Mounties were always the longest at every event.

However, today our forces, all 28,461, are at capacity. There is a 30% disparity with their unionized counterparts. They are facing increasingly challenging times.

An average citizen may expect or experience one to two traumatic events in a lifetime, whereas a police officer may experience 600 to 900 traumatic events over the course of his or her career. A recent study shows that over the course of a 20-year career, a member of our police forces will face over 900 traumatic incidents.

Over 30% of our police officers suffer from PTSD. We need to break the stigma. We need to give our men and women the confidence that they can come forward and report issues, whether it be harassment or PTSD. We need to give them the confidence that they can ask for help. As well, we need to give the organization, management, and families the resources for training so that we do not unnecessarily lose another life.

We are here to talk about Bill C-7 and about a secret ballot. We are here to talk about allowing those who put their lives in danger every day the democratic right to a secret ballot without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Regardless of what labour policy reads, as my hon. colleague from across the way has said, fear and intimidation happen. Whether it is in our RCMP force, police forces, firefighters, or regular everyday workforces, fear and intimidation of some sort does happen. Harassment and intimidation take place.

Government Orders

•(1305)

Our Conservative stance is that we support the Supreme Court decision and stand with our men and women on the front line. However, we believe those who risk their lives every day deserve the democratic right to vote free of intimidation and reprisal.

Over the last couple of days, I have been accused of being against unions and our front-line members. This could not be further from the truth. Over my time, I have belonged to five unions. I believe they have a right to exist in today's work environment. I also believe that my bill, Bill C-211, calling for a national framework to deal with PTSD for our first responders, RCMP members, veterans, corrections officers, and firefighters, speaks for itself and to my belief and stance in support of those who put their lives in danger every day.

Communities in my riding are facing increased policing costs. They are struggling to be able to fund our police forces appropriately. Whether it is overtime due to illness, injury, or lack of resources, meaning members, we are struggling.

Just in my community of Williams Lake, to the south of Prince George, we have an ongoing issue with gang violence. Just last night, I was meeting with Minister of Public Safety on this issue. Just one tactic to combat this issue that we face, asking for three additional officers, would mean a tax hike of 2% on an economy that is already stressed, on a mayor, on a council, and a town facing challenging times already, and gripped with fear of the increasingly violent activities of these gangs.

We need to give appropriate resources for our police forces, for our front-line members, for our management. We need to be able to give them the opportunity to vote free of fear of reprisal. Amending Bill C-7 to allow for the democratic right to a vote is the right thing to do. The responsible thing to do is to consult with the municipalities that ultimately bear the costs of policing, so that the resources necessary to fulfill the agreements that are there, either for unionized forces or under negotiation, are in place. Giving the resources for our communities, giving the resources for our management and our police force, is the right thing to do.

However, we face challenging times. We have a government that does not believe that giving a democratic vote or voice to those who put their lives in danger is the right thing to do.

I will not be supporting this bill, but I do hope that it can get to committee so the government can do the right thing.

•(1310)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very disappointed to hear that the member for Cariboo—Prince George has already made up his mind that he will not support Bill C-7, when it has not even been at committee to be reviewed.

That is very surprising, considering his very eloquent remarks on the rich tapestry and history of the RCMP and his deep regard for the force. Our government is respecting the Supreme Court ruling that respects the right to be represented in bargaining by members and reservists of the RCMP. That is exactly what this bill is all about.

The member's concerns are actually about another bill, Bill C-4, which rolls back changes that were made without any consultation in

Bill C-525, which force a one-size-fits-all bargaining system on the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

Why would the member want to have that when he wants a vote free of reprisal? That is exactly the purpose of the board. They have the tools to ensure that. They have options for how to implement a vote. They have laws that support freedom from any intimidation. They have penalties and orders they can impose. They review a vote, whether it is done by card check or mandatory vote or secret ballot.

Why would the member want a one-size-fits-all approach, prejudge this very important legislation, and be prepared to vote against legislation that is all about respecting the members of the RCMP?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, we trust our men and women of the RCMP to make life and death decisions every day. We trust that through their training and their courage they will run toward danger when others run in opposite directions. Therefore, I have a hard time understanding why we would not trust that they are capable of having a secret ballot vote and voting in favour or against a union.

•(1315)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed you mentioned Williams Lake. That was my first posting, and it was a busy community back—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I want remind the hon. member to place his questions through the Chair, not directly to the other members.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. The member has a number of large communities in the Prince George area. In his travels throughout his riding, has he spoken to the community leaders regarding any concerns they might have with respect to the impact to the physical costs if the RCMP were to unionize?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I met with our mayors, councils, and our regional leaders as late as Saturday of last week, not specifically with respect to unionization but to the rising costs and concerns of policing and being able to staff adequately. I have spoken with the RCMP leadership and front-line staff who are taxed to capacity and are concerned.

As members of the House, we have a duty to allow people the freedom of choice in their workplace environment because the democratic right to vote by secret ballot is inherent. We should accept that and respect it. There are 28,461 members, and allowing a single board to make a decision for all of them is unacceptable.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise here today to discuss Bill C-7, which would give RCMP members, at long last, the right to collective bargaining. Many speakers before me have talked about how the RCMP is an important and even iconic police force, underlying how critical this discussion is.

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As a member from British Columbia, I am grateful for the dedicated work of the RCMP in protecting citizens across most of our province, and indeed across the country. Over the past months, I have met with members from RCMP detachments across my riding to discuss local issues and this issue of collective bargaining.

I also recently attended a public information meeting organized by the RCMP in Oliver, B.C., to discuss public safety, and I was impressed by the respectful and meaningful discussions that community members had with local RCMP members. We need to retain and nurture that mutual respect between the community and the RCMP.

I heard the member for Yellowhead lament that the RCMP had slipped in its rankings across the country. We would all like to see that ranking improve. While I thank him for that service and respect his thoughts on collective bargaining, I think that Bill C-7 will be a step in the right direction for that new and better future for the RCMP.

I am pleased to support the bill at second reading, a bill that gives RCMP members the same rights that are enjoyed by all other police forces in Canada. As we have heard, the bill is the government response to a Supreme Court ruling that struck down laws that have prohibited RCMP members from bargaining collectively. Given the court-imposed deadline, the NDP will support the bill, but we are looking for some important amendments at committee.

The Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada advocates for workplace issues on behalf of its members. In a recent press release, that association stated that “this bill is flawed by removing vital matters from the bargaining table such as disciplinary measures and allocation of resources”.

It is critical that the new collective bargaining regime that RCMP members will work under will include more than the ability to negotiate pay and benefits. Workplace safety, staffing, harassment, and discipline issues are often more important for a properly functioning organization than pay alone. I am reminded of the decade-long dispute between the British Columbia government and the BC Teachers' Federation, which revolved primarily around issues of class size.

We have all heard numerous reports of harassment in the RCMP workplaces over the past number of years. I cannot see how excluding procedures to deal with harassment in collective bargaining will improve the workplace conditions experienced by RCMP members. These are very serious situations and must be dealt with promptly and fairly. The procedure for doing that would be best created under a collective bargaining system.

While for most of my life I have lived in areas where the RCMP provides public safety services, I have also lived in Vancouver and Newfoundland for considerable periods. I can honestly say that the police forces there function very well under a collective bargaining regime. I have to ask how submitting discipline procedures or concerns about workplace safety to a collective bargaining process would undermine the neutrality or stability of the RCMP.

We were reminded of how important workplace safety issues are only yesterday, when a young man died on a work site here in downtown Ottawa. While policing safety issues are clearly different,

they are nonetheless critical to the lives of RCMP members across the country, particularly in more rural areas where RCMP members often work alone. Why are staffing measures explicitly excluded from the collective bargaining system offered to the RCMP in the bill?

Since collective bargaining agreements would go to arbitration if agreements cannot be made directly, RCMP management should be able to make arguments to the arbitrator if they feel demands by members would create situations that would undermine the reliability of the RCMP in any way.

The Supreme Court decision stated that limits on collective bargaining would be acceptable if they were reasonable and justified. However, other police forces all include workplace safety and discipline issues in their collective bargaining agreements, so it is a mystery why they would not be acceptable and appropriate for collective bargaining within the RCMP.

• (1320)

To conclude, I would just reiterate my position that I support this bill. I recognize that it was perhaps prepared hurriedly to meet the Supreme Court deadline of May 16; so I hope the government will consider important changes to this bill in committee to ensure that, namely, issues of staffing, deployment, harassment, and discipline are included in the collective bargaining system for the RCMP that would be created by this bill.

I would like to finish by wishing everybody here in this House a happy Easter and safe travels home to their families.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would start off by indicating how fabulous it is that members of this House talked, in many of their comments, about the importance of the members of the RCMP and the institution they represent. We just commend them on everything they do for Canadians as a whole. No doubt a number of them have been following this debate.

Having said that, it is important that we recognize it was a Supreme Court of Canada ruling that demonstrated that the right to organize was essential for our RCMP, and this legislation would respond to that. Some of the details in the legislation are in direct response to extensive canvassing of the membership. More than 9,000 RCMP officers, from what I understand, were involved in very tangible ways to try to develop good legislation.

We look forward to the bill ultimately going to the committee stage, and we would invite opposition members, and in fact all members of the House, to continue to share their thoughts at the committee stage, because we want to never say never about trying to improve legislation. I appreciate the comments.

As a general question, would the member like to add anything else to his speech?

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Mr. Richard Cannings: No, Mr. Speaker, I do not think I need to add anything to that. I do sense a real coming together within this House in that most people, although not everyone, who have debated this issue have come up with the idea that collective bargaining would be good for the RCMP. The only difference I hear is from the Conservative side that says there are issues around card check systems or how votes would be held.

In the NDP, we are mostly concerned with the exclusions that the bill has in terms of things like workplace safety, discipline, staffing, and issues like that. I think we are pretty much all on the same page, and I hope we can work out these other differences when we go to committee.

• (1325)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for an excellent speech and, frankly, the government for introducing legislation that is long overdue.

The right to collectively bargain in Canada is a constitutional right, and it has been a disgrace that the Canadian government has actively attempted to frustrate this, particularly the previous Conservative government that made it so difficult for our men and women in uniform, who simply want to sit down with their employer and collectively bargain the terms and conditions.

I want to point out for this House that I believe the RCMP is the only police force in the country that has been prohibited from unionizing and collectively bargaining if its members choose. It would be a welcome step to have the RCMP able to do this.

Could my friend elaborate at all on these exclusions that are in the Liberal bill? Does he think those exclusions are justified or necessary? In other words, why is it necessary to take certain matters off the table and not let those be part of the normal collective bargaining process?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, it is a mystery to me why these have been excluded. They are essential parts of most collective bargaining agreements across the country, even in all the other police forces. I do not understand why we would not have issues around harassment, workplace safety, or staffing levels included in a collective bargaining agreement. I do not understand those exclusions.

As I said, if the collective bargaining goes to an arbitrator and the RCMP management feels we should not be discussing these certain areas, management can make a pitch to the arbitrator and make arguments, and that arbitrator can decide whether those issues are important. It is just not justified at all to exclude them directly in the bill.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the right of police forces across Canada to bargain collectively, at their discretion, as the member noted. Bill C-7 would

grant that right to RCMP members and would address the January 16, 2015, Supreme Court ruling on RCMP labour relations. If this bill does not pass before the extended deadline of May 17, the RCMP will be covered directly by the PSLRA.

Other changes are always possible in the future, but I want to know if the member is satisfied that we have met our Supreme Court obligation and will, in fact, be improving the situation.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, I am not a lawyer, certainly not of the Supreme Court level, so I do not want to make pronouncements as to whether this bill meets those needs or not. I assume it must at some level because the bill has come to the House. However, the issues that I and the NDP feel are lacking in the bill must be discussed in committee, namely, the exclusions for the issues I mentioned previously.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments. Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

• (1330)

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Mr. Speaker, may I wish you and yours a joyous Easter, as well as all members of the House.

I believe if you seek it, you would find consent to see the clock as 2:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to order made earlier today the House stands adjourned until Monday, April 11 at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

Happy Easter to all.

(The House adjourned at 1:30 p.m.)

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