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Monday, May 7, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 7, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)
[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS BY MEMBER FOR WINNIPEG SOUTH CENTRE

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake on Thursday, May 3. The member for Selkirk—Interlake alleges that just prior to the vote on Wednesday, May 2, I crossed the floor and made threatening comments to him and that he felt intimidated.

First, I acknowledge crossing the floor on the said day and approaching the hon. member in order to voice my displeasure with respect to what appeared in a ten percenter sent to my riding. Yes, I was angry, and yes, I was upset. However, I in no way intended to threaten the hon. member and I am sorry to hear that he felt intimidated by my comments.

My demeanour is not usually interpreted as intimidating, but if the hon. member felt that I was either threatening or intimidating I apologize to him, as it was certainly not my intention to do either.

Once again, I apologize to the member. It was not my intention to make him feel overcome with fear. I am sorry if he felt threatened and I am sorry if he felt intimidated.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her important intervention in this matter. I will look at the two interventions now and come back to the House, if necessary, with a decision in respect of this.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PEARSON PEACEKEEPING CENTRE

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should fully fund the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to assure that it continues to operate in Nova Scotia.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to speak on an issue that is extremely important not only for Canada, but for Canada's international reputation, for our allies—the people who work with us on peacekeeping missions abroad—and for the people who work for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Nova Scotia, Ottawa and Montreal. The centre, which has been in existence since 1994, is doing an outstanding job and continuing to evolve. However, staff never know from one year to the next where the centre's funding will come from or how it will keep on providing good services.

My motion asks the government to provide ongoing funding for the Pearson Centre so that it has the financial stability necessary to reassure everyone we work with in this area that the centre will continue to operate in Canada and abroad in the coming years. The motion also aims to guarantee to the people of Nova Scotia and the Kespuwick Industrial Park that the Pearson Centre will continue to be there, providing jobs and services. The centre is in dire straits at present. Not only is the government refusing to provide ongoing funding, limiting its commitment to the next three years and indicating that they will be the final years of funding, but it is also refusing to honour past funding agreements for operations in Nova Scotia.

Often, the government refuses to support regional operations, and officials find all sorts of reasons why it is very hard to operate in the regions and preferable to do so in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver—and they even find reasons not to operate in Vancouver. The government prefers to operate in the major cities in central Canada. I encourage the government and invite the members of this House to look at this issue and consider what the role of the Government of Canada is, if it is not to promote regional development.

[*English*]

The situation we now find ourselves in with the Pearson centre is troubling. It is very troubling for our allies, but is also troubling for all the Canadians working in peacekeeping operations and especially the people working in Kespuwick Park in Cornwallis or in Deep Brook, Nova Scotia.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was established in 1994. At that time, we saw the closure of CFB Cornwallis, the major employer in that area. There was some restructuring within the military. There were some cutbacks at the federal level because we had a huge deficit at the time. For my part of the country, the loss of 700 jobs in that area was very difficult.

Private Members' Business

A group of volunteers and civic leaders got together and formed the Cornwallis Park Development Agency. They received some funding from the federal government through various departments, a lot of it through ACOA but a lot through DND and the external affairs department, to see how we could turn the negative story of a base closure into a positive economic story for western Nova Scotia. It has been a tremendous success because a lot of players have come together. One of the things the federal government did was create the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and establish its operations out of the former CFB Greenwood.

Ken Ozmon, president of St. Mary's University at the time, was chairman of the board. A lot of good people went to work there. They offered courses internationally. They brought together people from the military, non-governmental organizations, policing outfits and the Red Cross and things like that and trained them in peacekeeping operations. Nationals from many countries were brought there and they looked at how to apply the three Ds principle of peacekeeping and peacemaking: defence, diplomacy and development.

Also, extramural activities were started by the staff of Pearson, with organized training sessions in other countries, in over 30 countries and in three languages. Those courses were offered out of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre where training sessions were held.

The first level of funding was supposed to be for five years. Then it was to be self-supporting from the sale of services. That did not quite happen, so we had to come in again with some new funding, which we did. We refunded the project and the Pearson centre made some changes. It moved the marketing officers at the beginning in Montreal and Ottawa and established a presence on the campus of Carleton University.

Then, in the dying days of the last government, we came to an agreement in working with the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre, which was established on the base. Its purpose was to use the hospitality facilities on the base to create a conference centre whereby it could sell rooms to and organize conference training sessions for the general Canadian public and internationals alongside what the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was doing.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre reached a deal, financed by the federal government through ACOA and DND, and I believe there was some funding from the external affairs department, whereby the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre purchased the facilities of the Pearson centre and upgraded them and then was to sell the services to the Pearson centre. It is a marvellous deal. The facilities would be operated more efficiently and used for more purposes, such as international schools and all sorts of things.

Then what the federal government did to ensure the success of the story was guarantee the purchase of services and the purchase of seats from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Everybody wins in this story. The Annapolis Basin Conference Centre becomes self-financing and has better facilities, while the Pearson centre concentrates on what it does best, which is programming, and we keep those valuable jobs in the area, jobs that can support other things. That base also has the Acadia cadet camp, Camp Acadia, which we financed for the long term, and these same people sell services, so it was a very good deal.

Now we learn that the government has withdrawn from that. My motion intends to re-establish that relationship.

I want to take the House back to Kespuwick Park and what CF Cornwallis Base became. What were the other things that we were able to establish there? They include the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre, which I mentioned, Camp Acadia, which I mentioned, and also the military museum. I was at the museum on the weekend for the Battle of the Atlantic ceremonies and the rededication of the stained glass windows honouring the 24 Canadian vessels lost in the Battle of the Atlantic.

•(1110)

We also have, of course, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, and Discovery Toys, with 80 jobs, manufacturing out of homes and selling internationally. There is also Acadian Seaplants, a local company but international in perspective, doing high end research and development, funded from its own resources but participating in the Atlantic investment partnership program. There is a fibreglass business doing very complex structures and shapes and providing many jobs.

There was also Shaw Wood, which unfortunately had to close after I believe five years of operation selling solely to the Ikea market, leaving behind a very good facility for which we hope we can find an entrepreneur to take over where Shaw Wood left off. There is the Convergys Call Centre. I should have checked on the number of jobs there, but I believe it is over 600, and it is still looking for employees. There also are quite a few smaller businesses and public institutions.

The success story is quite good for that park. There are more jobs in that park now than there were when the military was operating. Also, all the residential facilities have been turned into retirement homes and summer residences, thus adding to the economy.

As well, the federal government, through ACOA, participated in funding the LIFEPLEX Wellness Centre that is operating there now. It has very good health facilities, with a swimming pool, running track, weight rooms, exercise rooms and physio facilities. It is a very good project. We funded phase one of it. However, the president of its board thought he was smarter than the federal government and thought he should do both phases before he had the full funding, so the municipality had to step in and take over the debt left behind by the president of that organization.

Luckily, the municipality did that and the population now has access to it, but it was a huge debt. However, this is not unknown to that gentleman. He was minister of finance for Nova Scotia where I believe he left behind an \$8.5 million debt. He will be running for the Conservatives in the next federal election and trying to continue his great tradition.

Thus, that part has been a very good success story, and an anchorstone within that park is Pearson. As I mentioned, there is the relationship with the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre. When we look at the synergy created there, we see that it means over 100 jobs for rural Canada, for western Nova Scotia.

Private Members' Business

Bureaucrats will tell us that they would prefer to be doing that training in Ottawa because people find it difficult to get to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Let me tell members something. The people we are training there are going to be serving in Afghanistan. They are going to be serving in Haiti. They are going to be serving in Darfur. They are going to be serving in hot spots all over the world, so I have difficulty in understanding why they cannot take a one and one-half hour flight and a two and one-half hour ride in an air conditioned van to get to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. That concept escapes me, but I am not a highly educated civil servant.

I believe the role of government is to ensure that we give potential to the regions. When we look at what the volunteers have done there and at what the personnel of Pearson Peacekeeping Centre have built there over the last 13 years, we can see that it is very regrettable that the federal government now would withdraw from it. It is not acceptable. I certainly hope that I will have support from all parties for this motion to reinstitute full funding for Pearson, including its activities in western Nova Scotia.

Let us look at what the current government has been doing to rural Canada and to Nova Scotia in particular. I do not have to remind anybody of the Atlantic accord. I think we see seven editorials a day calling the government pure and outright liars in having failed Nova Scotians on the accord.

The withdrawal of the Coast Guard is not unrelated. Right after the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans got in trouble in his home province because of the Atlantic accord due to the fact that the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador agreement was broken just like the Canada-Nova Scotia agreement, two icebreaking vessels were moved from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland.

The argument is that this is more economical, more efficient and a better business plan. It so happens that the icebreakers were sent to two different ports and, lo and behold, the two ports are represented by two Conservative members. Coincidence or economics? I would say politics. My belief is that the Coast Guard is out there to protect mariners, not save seats for ministers.

• (1115)

There are research vessels, DFO and the port of Digby. It is the same story. The member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley made accusations, serious allegations, and he had a right to do that because we all have concerns about how the money was being used by the organization that removed the port of Digby. Everybody had serious concerns. Everybody made some enquiries that ended up at arbitration.

The arbitrator reported during the last election that while the Maritime Harbour Society had not done anything counter to the agreement, had not done anything illegal, the agreement itself was very weak. It was terrible. It had a loophole so big that we could drive a truck through it, to paraphrase the report. That agreement was written by Transport Canada.

For 16 months now Transport Canada has had that report. The Conservatives, when they were in opposition, were saying how we should come to the assistance of Digby, and I agreed with them then and I agree with them now. But 16 months later the port of Digby has not been remediated, the government has not taken ownership. It

is not under DFO as it should be and the facilities are not being repaired. That is not acceptable.

We could look at small craft harbours generally and the reduction of funding. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans who was on the fisheries committee as an opposition member spoke of increasing funding and is now presiding over the reduction of funding. For the port of Digby this is serious. It is like Pearson and I want this government to act.

We had people last week, in the storm, leaning over a wharf, untrained for that type of thing, having to strap the bumpers so that they would not fall on their vessel. The minister must act. This motion speaks to Cornwallis and to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. I ask for the support of all members in this House.

• (1120)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for bringing this motion before the House today and I am very anxious to have a chance to speak on it briefly as well.

The member represents the area in which this very important institution, originally called the Pearson Peacekeeping training centre, now reduced to Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, was established. I wonder if he could give us just a thumbnail sketch around the trend of the funding for that centre.

He already referred to the fact that what was bled off initially was the marketing part of the program to Montreal and then further parts of the program to Carleton and so on. However, I wonder if he could give us a picture about the federal government's support for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre from its earlier inception to the present because it seems to be a process of erosion that has happened.

I know that the member has focused on the economic impacts of this for the community, which are extremely important. However, there is also the fundamentally important aspect of this twinning of the economic needs and the tremendous need in the world for meaningful commitment to peacekeeping training both here in Canada for our own troops and for others, as many as 30 different countries, who avail themselves of those training programs. I wonder if he could just outline what that trend line has looked like.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the governance of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and its relationship to government is a fundamental question that has yet to be outlined and answered properly, and established in the right way.

It was established as a non-profit organization, selling its services to the Government of Canada. That causes a lot of trouble because three departmental clients fund its operations. A lot of the contracts it needs are sole-sourced type contracts to DND or to External Affairs through CIDA. Because it is not a related government department this creates problems. The government has had no problems with the defence industries.

Private Members' Business

The board of directors is made up of bureaucrats. The decision that should be taken by government in consultation with Pearson is whether or not it should be a stand-alone body or whether it should be part of either CIDA, National Defence or DFAIT. There would be arguments raised that it should be integrated within the government.

As for the financing, the original financing was for five years. Since that original financing on the operational side, the previous government has always maintained or increased the funding and created partnerships with the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre and other government departments that would buy services from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to ensure that it would be viable in the future.

This is the first time where we see such a drastic cut and even a terminator clause within the contract. They are saying that the funding is for three years only for part of its operations and then it will be done.

• (1125)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his motion and for standing up for his community.

He mentioned the Coast Guard situation. He is a former Minister of Fisheries responsible for the Coast Guard. I noted with interest that the strategic business plan for the next number of years for the Coast Guard, dated April 1, had no mention of the move of icebreakers from Dartmouth to Newfoundland. Does the member have any thoughts as to why that might not have been in the business plan?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, there is only one reason why one would not find that type of an activity or a major restructuring in the business plan: it is because it is not business as usual. It is purely political in order to save the electoral future of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and maybe two members from Newfoundland. It makes no business sense whatsoever, so it would have no place of course in any business plan.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today in the House and speak about a Canadian organization which has developed a domestic and international reputation as the centre of excellence in international affairs, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre.

I listened to the member for West Nova, but I am not quite sure what he was speaking about. I think it was partially about the things that he participated in and now, as a member of the official opposition, wished he had not participated in. I am talking about allowing the ferry from St. John's to Digby to be divested to a private organization. I am talking about the wharf in Digby being divested to a private organization. I am talking about a continual lessening of funding dollars for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre under the previous government.

I am not sure if the member said anything of relevance about the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, but he did say a number of things about a lot of other issues that he was directly involved in, such as the icebreakers that were scheduled under a previous Liberal government in 1999 being moved to Newfoundland in 2008-09 also alluded to by the member from Dartmouth. I really question how he can rewrite history because the member represented that area when

the cuts were made. Now all of a sudden he takes history out of context. It is really mind boggling.

Let me get back to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Created in 1994, the centre has built a global reputation in research, training and capacity building for peacekeeping. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was born in the tumultuous period in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War. The war in the Balkans was raging and increasing demands were being made on peacekeepers. The increasing demands were not just in the numbers of peacekeeping troops required, but also in the complexity of the peacekeeping challenge.

Peacekeeping was no longer a matter of observing a ceasefire across no man's land. It now required the involvement of soldiers, police officers, and an array of civilian officials such as diplomats, corrections officers, judges and lawyers, and human rights and elections monitors to stabilize and reconstruct war-torn societies. Modern conflict resolution also now involves addressing humanitarian issues and failed civil societies through the intervention of international and non-governmental organizations.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre led the way in developing the now internationally accepted integrated multi-disciplinary approach to conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.

Let me give the House a sample of the impressive international reach and scope of the work of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. NATO is a huge player in international peace operations. It contributes troops and expertise to the peace operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as to the international security assistance force in Afghanistan where Canada is significantly involved. NATO gets its peace operations training from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre.

The Pearson exercise training unit in Nova Scotia regularly trains two NATO rapid deployment corps headquarters, the German-Netherlands corps and the NATO rapid deployment corps-Turkey. These are big, well resourced organizations and it is a testament to the professionalism of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre team that they source their peace operations training from this Canadian organization.

The European Union is playing an increasingly important role in contributing to peace operations, for example, in the Balkans and in Africa. The EU has contracted the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to conduct the certification exercise for the deployment of the EU battle group headquarters, which is on standby for deployment to Darfur.

In July the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre has been contracted to conduct validation exercises for the doctrine supporting an initiative to eliminate child soldiers. This event will be conducted in Ghana, Africa, a continent where children have been the tragic victims of armed conflict due to child recruiting.

Private Members' Business

•(1130)

In February, the Pearson Centre, with federal government assistance, conducted a conference in Brasilia on developing an integrated approach to the critical Haiti peace operation called MINUSTAH. Brazil was a major contributor of troops to MINUSTAH and Canada has some 80 to 100 Canadian police officers serving, as well as corrections officers to bring stability to that troubled country.

The Pearson Centre took the initiative to partner with Brazil and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs to bring together government ministers and officials, UN headquarters officers and MINUSTAH officials.

All concerned expressed their satisfaction with the outcomes. Most noteworthy was the statement by the Haitian minister that in his experience it was a useful opportunity for the Haitian government to interact with MINUSTAH officials and other stakeholders to discuss the country's future.

I also want to say a word about the scope of the impact that the Pearson Centre has within Canada, something in which the hon. member for West Nova might actually be interested.

It is of note that as we speak the Pearson Centre is conducting a round table on United Nations peacekeeping doctrine, which is drawing to Ottawa UN officials, peacekeeping petitioners, government officials from foreign affairs, national defence, CIDA and other departments, as well as academics and eminent Canadians in the peacekeeping world. Doctrine development is an important dimension of UN peacekeeping reform.

In March of this year, at the Canadian War Museum, and again with federal government assistance, the Pearson Centre conducted a model mission of a typical UN peace operation. The event served to introduce some 130 university students from across Canada to the complexities of the processes and the diversity of the players in modern UN peace operations.

Eminent Canadian peacekeeper, General Lewis MacKenzie, was the lead participant. The event was highly successful and the centre is considering repeating the event to reach even more students.

I trust that in the last few minutes I have been able to give members some idea of why I am honoured to speak on the subject of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. It is an exciting and innovative Canadian institution that is doing important work and is directly relevant to Canada's foreign policy priorities. Its work resonates with Canadians who are interested in Canada's place in the world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to speak proudly about this motion that our colleague defended proudly, of course, although he had less to say about some of this centre's benefits, which I will address.

The Pearson centre was created at a time when the world was changing. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, or after the collapse of the Soviet empire, there was a need to train not only soldiers, but also all the people who could work on what we called peacekeeping missions. This need grew.

So the needs of the community affected by the closing of the Cornwallis base, along with the needs of Canadian foreign policy, led to the creation of the Canadian Pearson Centre at that time. In Cornwallis, there was a military base, some parts of which had to be rebuilt, renovated and transformed because they were most certainly no longer adequate for receiving soldiers, officers and people from all over the world, from the 55 countries with which Canada has international agreements.

So we agree that the centre was created at a time and for a purpose that was and that is extremely important.

It has been said repeatedly here today that peacekeeping missions are no longer the same, that the preparation of our soldiers must be more rigorous, or in any case, must prepare them to play a part in more dangerous situations. We can acknowledge this fact, but it does not mean that peacekeeping missions are not essential. I think the opposite is true, since they are in a process of transformation. People from the centre who have acquired experience and helped train many soldiers, officers and other personnel in various capacities know this. They have contributed to this transformation or can contribute to it.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre therefore fits perfectly into this desire to maintain peace, as we are doing at this time in many countries around the world that truly need it. As we all know, there is also a need in many other countries.

When the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre was established in Cornwallis, and when it later expanded with two more offices in Montreal and Ottawa, the Bloc Québécois was thrilled and gave its support.

I would remind the House that the centre has always had funding problems and that, originally, it was supposed to become self-financing. We looked for centres of that nature, centres that are self-financing, but found none.

I would like to point out that, just two years after the centre was established, the Auditor General told the government of the day that it should give some thought to the centre's ability to self-finance. Indeed, the tremendous constraints imposed on the centre must be considered, as well as the fact that the preparation of officers and soldiers for peacekeeping missions in many countries around the world can be very costly and can require more funding than initially anticipated. This is why it is so difficult to plan the budgets, which can be sizeable.

•(1135)

The Bloc Québécois was pleased last March when the Conservative government—to the relief of many—decided to allocate \$13.8 million over three years, from March 2007 to March 2010, to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre.

This amount is for basic infrastructure: salaries, leases, hydro, etc. However, it is not for funding programs. In other words, if the Department of National Defence, for example, does not award the contract of some \$2 million budgeted for officer training, the Pearson Centre will not be able to provide this training, even though it is fully equipped to do so. There is a good chance it would have to close its doors.

Private Members' Business

Some officials, some people in the military think that these sessions could be given in the Ottawa area instead. I understand the hon. member for West Nova when he says he does not understand why we could not continue to send to this centre, which is rather exceptional for its concentration and its simulation facilities, everyone—officers, soldiers or others—who needs training. Why not continue to send them to Cornwallis? I have not been there, but I am told it is quite nice.

We have to realize what is at stake. The basic infrastructure of the Pearson Centre is not at stake, but the programs are. It seems they are at stake not just for Cornwallis, but also for Montreal and possibly for Ottawa. It is extremely important for us and for all those, like the Bloc Québécois, who believe in the need for this centre, to know whether this withdrawal from program funding will occur elsewhere as well. This would be the beginning of a slow death for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. We do not want to let the Cornwallis base die in its new capacity. Nor do we want this highly important, Montreal-based expertise to disappear. Furthermore, a number of professors from Montreal and elsewhere have contributed to training sessions in Africa. They are the ones who go to the foreign countries. This training and these programs are also extremely important.

I want to thank the hon. member for presenting this motion in this House. The members from the Bloc Québécois want to assure him of our support.

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to comment further on the motion introduced by my colleague, the member for West Nova.

The previous speaker really hit the nail on the head in recognizing that the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre at Cornwallis in Deep Brook was a very important institution in the first instance.

There is a major concern which is widely shared not just by Canadians but by others who used to respect Canada as a meaningful peacekeeper and peace builder in the world as to whether Canada is seriously committed to that role any more. It is not a pretty picture what people draw about Canada in many parts of the world today. Those who watch closely see some of the contradictions in Canada's position, in that we bow to the peace altar, but what we actually do is a contradiction to what really needs to be done.

As this debate goes on in this place, the NPT PrepCom meetings are happening this week in Vienna. Canada will take part, as it has done again and again, in discussions about how we are going to prevent the world from annihilation through nuclear proliferation. Canada will say it is very much in support of the NPT. As a signator of the non-proliferation treaty, it commits us to serious abolition of nuclear weapons. However, at the same time Canada will be there waving the flag of NATO.

NATO and many countries in NATO are serious violators of the provisions of the NPT. By association and by being part of the NATO family, we become partners, and hypocrites really, in the exercise of saying we are serious about maintaining peace and literally the survival of the human race, but we are also signators to the many violations taking place among our partners in NATO.

It is sad but true that the previous Liberal government and now the current Conservative government have been quite prepared for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to be on life support since its inception. It was a brilliant, creative response to the closure of the Cornwallis base in the first instance to understand the desperate need for leadership in peacekeeping and peace building in the world today. We must recognize that the wiping out of 700 jobs is devastating to that economy. It was seen as a partnership and a coming together of interlocking needs to put forward this proposal.

I have to commend the original authors of that, who, in collaboration with the community, joined community needs with the government's responsibilities to put this forward. Erika Simpson and Peter Langille were very instrumental in this in the first instance.

What is sad is that the Auditor General within a year or two had already commented that the centre's long term viability was going to be very much in question. This was from a pure economic point of view. The previous Liberal government moved further and further away from taking any real responsibility not just for the economic viability of that centre, but for the integrity and the comprehensiveness of the peacekeeping and peace building mission that drove the vision in the first place.

Part of the backdrop that has unfolded has been sort of a Greek tragedy in a way for Canada and the world. Canada has been a major contributor to peacekeeping in the world. Canada used to be in the top 10 year after year, but Canada has now so eroded our commitment as participants in peacekeeping that we are now, I think, 57th among nations contributing to peacekeeping in the world.

• (1145)

Some people may say they have already heard the messages from Rick Hillier, from the finance minister and, I think by implication, from the Prime Minister that peacekeeping is not that important in the world anymore. Both of the previous speakers quite correctly pointed out that the original notion of peacekeeping as just maintaining a truce between two parties to an agreement has very much expanded into a broader notion of peace building in all of its complexity. The world has never been more desperate for leadership in this area.

It is a source of pride to Canadians, and if I may say so, particularly Canadian women, that the new head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission is a Canadian woman. She has had a distinguished career in public service with CIDA, with United Nations development programs, and ultimately in a tremendous demonstration and example of a meaningful, complex peace building process in Burundi.

We know there is more and more need for this. Why? Because most conflicts today cannot be solved by military means. There is a desperate need for a security element in peace building. What is absolutely clear, and we have heard it from our own Prime Minister, our own defence minister, and from Rick Hillier, the chief of the defence staff, is that in Afghanistan it is acknowledged that there is no military solution. What is needed is a comprehensive peace building process.

Private Members' Business

The reality is that the world is desperate for this kind of leadership. What did the previous Liberal government do? It started dismembering it, like a slow process of amputation. Fortunately the human body can sometimes survive amputations. We bring massive medical know-how to bear and the human body sometimes is able to respond to this kind of trauma. But the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Nova Scotia has not been surviving the systematic dismembering that has been happening, and the withdrawal of government support on anything but a commercial basis, and now the withdrawal of the needed economic support to have assured its long term viability.

I hope, at the very least in this minority government that maybe we could see some leadership. I hope that all parties could come together to say that we have to recommit to peacekeeping and to complex, comprehensive peace building in a serious way. There will be no solution to Afghanistan until we do that.

If I may, I would like to make a challenge to my colleagues from Nova Scotia, several of whom are in the House for this debate. At the very least I would hope across party lines that we could recognize that Nova Scotia could continue to be a leader in terms of peacekeeping and peace building, but it is going to require pulling together to make that happen.

In conclusion, it is a commentary on Canada's hypocrisy in the world today that we say on the one hand that we are really committed to the NPT, and on the other hand we say that we can be partners in NATO which is violating member countries' obligations left, right and centre.

Let us tackle this as a comprehensive issue, one of the great questions of our time. Let us do it perhaps by looking at some creative partnerships between the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and the Pugwash Peace Exchange, which is now celebrating its 50th anniversary. The synergy between those two could put us on the map as meaning what we say about Canada being committed to peace building and peacekeeping in today's world.

• (1150)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion presented by my colleague from West Nova. As we all know, he is a very dedicated member of Parliament committed to his region and is a valuable member of the Liberal caucus. He is respected by all members. He was also an excellent minister for ACOA and the fisheries in the previous Liberal government.

It is unfortunate that he has had to present this motion today. As other speakers have indicated, at a time when peacekeeping and international diplomacy are so necessary, the government seems to be in the process of phasing out the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia.

The Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Centre, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, was established in 1994 with a goal to be a world leader in peacekeeping. It is appropriately named after Prime Minister Pearson. Among Lester Pearson's many achievements were the introduction of student loans, universal health care in Canada, the Canadian pension fund and the Canadian flag. His efforts in defusing the Suez Canal crisis stand out as a crowning achievement and earned him the Nobel Prize.

He placed Canada on the map as an important middle power, a power that sought peaceful solutions to difficult and complex issues in the world. In subsequent years, Canada became known as a nation of peacekeepers, a distinction that is reflective of Canadian values.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre located in Cornwallis seeks to continue his legacy. The centre teaches and trains those who serve in conflict zones around the world. They bring together military, civilian and police personnel for the purpose of learning to resolve conflict through peace and security.

For the people of Cornwallis the establishment of this centre followed a painful closure of CFB Cornwallis in the early 1990s. I am familiar with that from the closure of Shearwater, which is very near Dartmouth and closed at around the same time. It took some innovation and creativity for local people to spur the economic activity that followed those difficult times.

Now we have the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre. We have Acadian Seaplants, a huge international success story, operated by Louis Deveau and now his son J.P. Deveau, with an office and plant in Cornwallis, plants around rural Nova Scotia and an office in my own constituency of Dartmouth. They have leveraged Canadian knowledge in a previously underexploited resource and are doing very well. We also have the Lifeplex.

At this point in time when we have a successful entity, why is this happening? It is not a financial crisis. Is the government in deficit? No. The Liberals solved the \$42 billion financial crisis left by the last Conservative government. Why in an era of surpluses does the government continue to cut back on important areas like the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre? Unfortunately, it is a pattern with the government and it is a pattern that is not good for the province of Nova Scotia. Would this centre be closed if it were named after Preston Manning, one wonders. I doubt it.

The lack of support for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is another assault on Nova Scotia. I do not want to go through the Atlantic accords. My colleague mentioned them and has been through them, but there are changing stories on the Atlantic accords. First, we were told not to worry, that the accords were still there, and then no, they are not there, but it is actually a better deal. Then we were told it is not really a better deal but we would get a choice of two deals. Now the government is negotiating to save face in some way.

There are lots of things needed in Nova Scotia. The Atlantic gateway is very important. Again it should not be a choice of that or the Atlantic accord. They should both be judged on their merits. One should not be penalized for the other.

Private Members' Business

Most recently there was the moving of two Coast Guard vessels, two icebreakers, from Dartmouth in my riding to Newfoundland. Conveniently, one ship straddles one riding held by two Conservative members and the other ship has gone to another constituency held by a Conservative. My colleague from South Shore—St. Margaret's said that this had been in the planning since 1997 and asked who was upset about it. A number of people are.

In fact, Mr. Stewart Klebert went public. He happens to be the commanding officer of one of the icebreakers. In a letter to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, he said among other things:

The recent announcement that both the CCGS Terry Fox and the CCGS Louis S. St-Laurent will be transferred to Newfoundland Region has hit this region like a ton of bricks. It was completely unexpected and the justification for this move is supported by extremely weak rationale. I would venture to say that there has been no impact study for the vessel, the people or the region—

Another letter that showed up in *The Chronicle Herald* is from David Marsh, a retired superintendent of the Coast Guard, who said among other things:

This move would not show any enhancement in coast guard operations...when operating icebreakers, the fuel saving is minimal when considering transit in open waters as compared to icebreaking activities.

He closed by saying:

I would ask the minister to reconsider his decision to redeploy [the icebreakers]... considering the "facts" are flawed and the damage is...irreparable.

• (1155)

Somebody else was caught by surprise, too. Although the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's said everybody was surprised, the following week he said, "When I first heard that the boats were going I had some concerns". He did not know about it either, and he is the chair of the fisheries committee. However, he is not the only one who did not know. The workers and the union did not know. Even regional management of the Coast Guard was not considered.

On April 1, a draft business plan for the next three years for the Coast Guard was put forward. There was no mention of the redeployment. Even today, when I was coming here this morning, I noticed in the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald* a letter from an L.G. Meisner, captain Coast Guard, retired, Lunenburg. He says, among other things:

This move is a disaster on a purely operational basis and only the next federal polls will determine if it was an acceptable political one.

It is a pattern. Nova Scotia has not done well under the government. Is Nova Scotia being penalized? I do not know.

The member for South Shore—St. Margaret's is a good enough guy. The member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley is a great guy, but he is a little out of step with the government. I do not think they have even been considered. The federal minister responsible should be standing up for Nova Scotia on the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre as well as the Coast Guard and the abject betrayal of the Atlantic accord.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, in the riding of the very hon. member for West Nova, provides a valuable service to Canadian peacekeepers at a time in our history when we need to enhance and ensure that our image as peacekeepers is real and maintained around the world. When we are doing work that could be enhanced by the work of people who could be trained

in Cornwallis, it is a shame, it is unconscionable and it is unacceptable. I urge all members of the House to support my colleague and this motion today.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is recognized internationally as a leading centre of excellence in its field. Since its beginnings, the PPC has trained over 10,000 foreign military, police and civilians from 140 countries and has delivered courses in 31 countries. Pearson graduates can be found in key posts around the world.

I will focus my comments today on the outstanding work the Pearson Centre is doing in Africa, in support of the Prime Minister's commitment with his G-8 colleagues at St. Petersburg to enhance global capacity for peace operations with a focus on that continent.

The Pearson Centre engagement in Africa began with the CIDA funded Programme de développement des capacités en maintien de la paix et sécurité launched at the Summit of la Francophonie in Moncton in 1999. Through this initiative, programs and curricula were developed that strengthened the capacity of thousands of Francophone African military officers, civilian police and civilians to take part in peace operations.

There is an established and urgent need for well-trained, French speaking personnel to work in major peace missions around the world in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire. The Pearson Centre's history of training assistance in Africa, as well as its bilingual ability to provide training assistance in both French and English, enables it to effectively respond to this requirement.

The Pearson Centre is also working to expand the training capacity of regional training institutions in Africa such as the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Ghana as well as at l'École de Maintien de la Paix in Mali that play an important role in building African capacity to manage conflict and face future crises. Within the space of a few years and with the support provided by the Pearson Centre, the Kofi Annan centre has emerged as a state of the art and internationally recognized training facility.

The Pearson Centre is also a key partner of Mali's École de Maintien de la Paix, EMP, where it provides, with federal government assistance, about one-third of the school's instructional program. Since the EMP early beginnings, upwards of 1,400 African officers have been trained with the support of the Pearson Centre. Officers leave the school with a greatly enhanced knowledge of modern multidisciplinary peace operations, thus increasing their ability and those of the forces in which they serve to contribute effectively to peace operations in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Another area where the Pearson Centre is having a tremendous impact in Africa is in helping to meet the growing demand for civilian police, or CIVPOL, in peace operations.

International police peacekeeping is an essential component of Canada's engagement in building a more secure world through stabilizing failed and fragile states.

Over time, not only the number of UN police has substantially increased, but as with other elements of peacekeeping missions, mission mandates have evolved significantly from simple monitoring activities to active engagement in implementing the rule of law such as executive policing in places like Kosovo and East Timor, to direct participation in assisting post-conflict stabilization, peace building and security sector reform such as in Haiti.

It is estimated by the United Nations that there will be a need for up to 29,610 trained civilian police over the next five years due to the current surge in peacekeeping. The Pearson Centre is making tremendous headway in addressing this challenge.

Through the West African police project, or WAPP, the Pearson Centre is strengthening the capacity of six west African countries, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone as well as the Economic Community of West African States to provide civilian police to peace operations. Since the project began in 2005, CIVPOL deployments from these countries have more than doubled.

Supporting greater integration of women into peace operations is called for by United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. Such results, to Canada's credit, are being noticed internationally. The United Nations and others have called for the expansion of the Pearson Centre programming in Africa.

The Pearson Centre serves Canadian foreign policy interests through its training and capacity building assistance in Africa. It further serves to demonstrate Canada's commitment to integrated multi-disciplinary international peace operations. It is for this reason that successive governments have provided the Pearson Centre with core funding since its creation in 1994, as well as specific program funding assistance ever since.

I will address the remarks of the hon. member for Halifax for just a moment. She and her colleagues of the New Democratic Party will never understand the concept of peace through strength.

I point out for her that the NATO family, which she is so quick to denigrate and so happy to denigrate every chance she gets, was responsible for keeping the nuclear annihilation, of which she fears rightly, at bay throughout world war three, which, as we call it, was the Cold War. We won that war. We won it without firing a shot. We won it by peace through strength. There were a lot of losses suffered, many of whom were friends of mine. We did not fire a shot and it was done by peace through strength.

• (1200)

Despite the prevalence of inhumanity and terrorism, there are still opportunities for Pearsonian style peacekeeping. There are still sacrifices to be made.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge today the loss yesterday of Corporal Benoit Chevalier, the Canadian peacekeeper who was lost in the Sinai, with eight French peacekeepers, in the crash of an aircraft.

“At the going down of the sun and in the morning...We will remember them”.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired

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and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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• (1205)

[*English*]

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

The House resumed from April 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we last considered Bill C-43, there were six minutes left for questions and comments to the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. I think he is ready to respond to a question from the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was not so much a question that the hon. member was putting forth as it was a comment. We had been engaged in a discussion much more heated than is normal between the hon. member and myself because we normally get on very well together. It was over the record of Mr. Broadbent, the former member for Ottawa Centre. I think the member misinterpreted me as being inappropriately disrespectful of Mr. Broadbent.

While I think it was a misinterpretation, I have no doubt that it was a sincere misinterpretation based on a legitimate desire to protect the reputation of a remarkable parliamentarian.

Therefore, I want to take the opportunity to say that while I had not intended to be disrespectful, if that misinterpretation was made, I understand it. However, I want to be clear that I was not being disrespectful. I have a very high regard for Mr. Broadbent, who disagrees with me on a number of issues, including some issues relating to the Senate, electoral reform and the whole democracy package, but who has these disagreements from a very sincere and principled point of view.

When my time ran out, I went over to the hon. member and indicated to him that I would make these comments when debate resumed. I want to ensure that is on the record.

The other thing I want to mention is there is nothing like having a week's break in the middle of a response. I did a little checking and it turned out that I had made an inaccurate statement regarding the minimum age at which people could serve in the Senate. I said it was 35. I am getting relatively advanced in years myself and we can make these slip-ups from time to time. Actually age 30 is the minimum age at which a person can serve in the Senate.

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The point I was trying to make at that time, however, is still valid. The bill attempts to deal in a non-constitutional way with the issue of making the Senate more democratic. We have de facto elections referred to, as the Constitution requires, as consultations. We cannot change certain things about the Senate without a formal constitutional amendment, and one of those is the minimum age at which people can serve in the Senate, which is a provision that remains in place. This was the reason for bringing up the issue at that time.

By contrast, it would be possible for individuals to be elected under separate legislation, which is before the Senate right now, Bill S-4. It would make it possible for people to serve past the age of 75 if the Senate itself ever made a decision to allow that constitutional amendment to go forward.

I point out that Bill S-4 has now been sitting before the Senate for almost a full year, despite the fact that it has only about 60 or 70 words.

Therefore, if I could take this opportunity to encourage the Senators to move a little more quickly than they have been doing in order to forward the cause of democracy in the Senate, I think they would be doing Canada a great service.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy the interventions of the hon. member in the House, especially in the areas of his expertise. That is why I would like to ask him to enlighten the House. I know he has quite a background in constitutional affairs. In fact, I enjoyed a presentation by him the other day when we were at an electoral reform meeting.

The bill has come under attack by some constitutional experts who have suggested it is unconstitutional. Yet other constitutional experts have suggested it is? Could the member enlighten the general public on both sides of the view of the constitutionality of the bill?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I do not mean to be difficult but was the hon. member referring to Bill S-4 or Bill C-43?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Bill C-43.

Mr. Scott Reid: I must admit that I have not been aware of any credible arguments that it is not constitutional. This legislation successfully attempts to skirt the constitution by limiting itself and by not actually calling for the election of senators, which would be democratic but not constitutional because it would violate the constitutionally enshrined principle that senators are appointed by the Governor General.

However, they are appointed, and this is a convention that has sprung up in Canada since Confederation, on the advice of the prime minister. Therefore, if the prime minister's advice is guided by the choice of voters choosing to make a recommendation under the Senate Appointment Consultations Act, that would be constitutionally permitted.

We do have two precedents for this. One is the recent announcement of the appointment of Bert Brown, who was elected through a consultative election in the province of Alberta, to the Senate. Nobody is contesting the constitutionality of that. The second one was the appointment a decade ago of Stan Waters to the Senate by the Governor General on the advice of Prime Minister

Mulroney after being elected in a similar manner in the province of Alberta.

I think the constitutional scholarship would all be on one side that in fact this is entirely constitutional by acting as a piece of legislation and being truly advisory.

• (1210)

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

One of the reasons I am interested in being here today is that in a previous life I was parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible for democratic reform. I also sat with the previous hon. member on the procedure and House affairs committee where I had the opportunity to travel with Ed Broadbent to several countries in Europe to establish a process on how we could study democratic reform here in Canada. It, therefore, is something I am very interested in but I also feel that the bill could be entitled "how to fulfill your electoral promises while not engaging in any of the significant constitutional changes that you promised".

Before going further, let us start by understanding what the Senate does. To function well, any independent state needs a system of checks and balances, mechanisms to ensure that all political decisions are in the best interests of the population and all citizens.

The Canadian Senate is our checks and balances. Senators are there to provide sober second thought on the work done by the House of Commons and, since senators are not subject to the vagaries of elections, they can track issues over a longer period of time than can members of Parliament. Canadian senators can contribute to in-depth studies by Senate committees on public issues, such as health care in Canada, illegal drugs, deregulation of the Canadian airline industry and urban aboriginal youth.

Furthermore, the wide range of experience of Canadian senators, who include former Canadian provincial premiers, cabinet ministers, business people from many Canadian economic sectors and respected Canadians from all walks of life, provide substantial expertise to these investigations. Senators also represent regional, provincial and minority interests that tend to be overlooked in the House of Commons. Therefore, the Senate is like the watchdog of Canadian politics, but it is a lot more than that.

I will attest to that from my own personal experience. When I first came here as a member of Parliament some five years ago, at my first meeting of the northern western caucus I had an opportunity to meet Senators Dan Hays, Jack Austin and Jack Wiebe from Saskatchewan. I had the preconceptions that probably many Canadians have, that senators are not necessarily that useful and are not doing much of a job. However, after that first meeting with them, my whole concept of the Senate and the quality of the people completely changed.

What I found with the people I just named and those with whom we share the second House is that they have a huge passion for their regions and provinces. Members of Parliament obviously do but our knowledge is limited to our ridings. However, I do not believe we could find better people who have a better understanding and a better perception of what is going on in their province or region as a whole than those senators.

I would like to name a few people and talk about the actual work they have done on certain files. In Manitoba, for instance, Senator Carstairs is now one of the world authorities on palliative care. She is asked to speak everywhere in the world. I know she travels a lot and is asked to go all over Europe to speak on palliative care. It is very important for us to have people like her representing Canada. When she is out there, she is speaking on behalf of the Canadian Parliament and we are very proud of that.

I look at Mobina Jaffer and her fight for Darfur. It is extremely important to have Ms. Jaffer representing us on Darfur.

I think of Roméo Dallaire. Can anyone think of a better person to have in terms of someone who knows about genocide and about the tough areas in the world? He has been a wealth of information. His credibility on the world stage is second to none. Those are the kinds of people we have in the Senate who are providing leadership and advice to both Houses.

On the cultural side, we have people like Andrée Champagne and Viola Léger who have contributed incredibly on the cultural side. We also have Hugh Segal and Norm Atkins. I could go on forever. The quality of the people in the Senate is varied, it is solid and they make a very strong contribution to Parliament as a whole.

• (1215)

For decades, discussions have taken place and studies have been undertaken on the need to reform the Senate. Some have simply asked for the total abolition of the Senate, pleading that the Senate accomplishes nothing. The leader of the Reform Party, Preston Manning, campaigned for a triple E Senate: effective, equal and elected. Many asked for a better representation of British Columbia and Alberta in the Senate.

Canada has undergone many major demographic shifts since the 1970s and it is easy to understand why a major reform of the Senate is needed. However, let us face it, as we say, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen". If the government is not willing to fully go ahead with a true, complete and real reform of the Senate, which requires wide consultation with the provinces and the ever perilous road to constitutional amendment, then it should not try to use smoke and mirrors to project the image that it does care about Senate reform, as it is trying to do with Bill C-43.

When I was referring to our study in Europe on democratic reform, my Conservative colleagues who were with me will certainly confirm that nobody thought we should be doing democratic reform on a piecemeal basis. Every country we visited told us that whatever we did we should ensure to analyze everything because by changing one thing we could affect another. That is extremely important to note and that is one of the reasons we think this legislation is not very serious.

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Our government structure is based on the British parliamentary system and if we were to take one piece away, it would affect something else negatively. I am not sure all the repercussions have been examined and explored. We live in a very successful democracy right now. Our system does seem to be working fairly well. Is there a better democracy in the world than Canada? Someone would need to name them because I think we have been very successful over our last 125 to 130 years as a country.

The reality is that Bill C-43 contains no real reform for the Senate. The bill is full of flaws and has an extraordinarily high potential to create awkward, bizarre situations. Even from a Conservative partisan perspective, the bill is far less than what the Conservatives promised and it actually creates more problems than it solves.

[*Translation*]

Let us be frank. The Conservative government is not really seeking reform with Bill C-43. It simply wishes to keep an old Conservative promise made to its political base without taking the time to truly reform the Senate. Once again it is unfortunate that this government is putting its own election platform ahead of real reforms that would benefit all Canadians.

Once again it is a question of perception.

[*English*]

It reminds me of the Federal Accountability Act. The Conservatives have been talking about the accountability act as the best thing since sliced bread.

In fact, when we start looking at the details and we start at looking at what is going on within the accountability act, we are finding certain things. For instance, part of the backbone of the accountability act was the public appointments commission. It would be a commission with people and guidelines in place to make sure that when we nominated people to certain appointments, it would be a fair, just and transparent process. But in fact, literally hundreds of people have been named over the last little while and there is no public appointments commission yet.

When we ask the President of the Treasury Board why that is so, he will just say that it is a complicated issue and it takes time. But Canadians are not fooled by that. They know that the Conservatives need to bring in their 300, 400 or 500 Conservative crony appointments before they can do this. That is what is sad. It is all about smoke and mirrors when they do this kind of thing. But the Canadian public is getting wise and they are seeing that this accountability act is not real.

I think we are seeing similarities here with Bill C-43. The Conservatives always speak against the Senate, that the Senate is not effective, that it does not do its job. But in fact when it serves their purpose, all of a sudden the Senate is allowable. Mr. Fortier was brought in as a minister through the Senate and all of a sudden that is acceptable and that is okay. So, there are certainly some major double standards here.

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Bill C-43 is about trying to deal with constitutional matters without touching the Constitution. It cannot be done, clearly. Bill C-43 will not do it. In fact, some might even question the constitutionality of this proposed bill. I know my colleague asked that exact question a few minutes ago. I am sure there are experts right now who are not sure if this bill is constitutional.

Even if Bill C-43 is adopted, the Prime Minister will have full power to appoint whoever he wants to the Senate, as we saw last week. The Prime Minister is already choosing senators based on public consultations, as he did last week by appointing Bert Brown. I know my colleague spoke to that a few minutes ago.

This is nothing new or revolutionary. Almost 20 years ago Brian Mulroney appointed Stan Waters based on the result of a public consultation in Alberta. So, clearly, there is nothing new in Bill C-43 and it is not what it is all hyped up to be.

With the adoption of Bill C-43, the government would consult the population with regard to Senate candidates, but it would not make these consultations binding, like true elections. There is always a condition there and that has a lot of people very upset. Again, it is about smoke and mirrors. It is about the perception that the Conservatives are making real changes but in the end the Prime Minister will have the final decision as to who gets named.

This means that if the Prime Minister disagrees with the winner of one of these Senate consultations, he could technically ignore the result and appoint whoever he wants. This is not how democracy works. This is not a true elected Senate. Even more troubling is that it could create awkward situations where an elected senator is not appointed to the Senate by the Prime Minister. But for the government it is about, again, smoke and mirrors, making people think that they are making meaningful change, but it is not reality.

Do not get me wrong. I fully support reforming Canada's Senate. But on this side of the House, we believe true Senate reform needs to reflect some public policy while respecting the Constitution. The Liberal Party believes in democratic reforms. We believe in concrete, complete and real democratic reforms. It is just unfortunate that Bill C-43 is not such a reform.

Once again, I refer the members to the study we did, I believe it was last year. Half of the procedure and House affairs committee travelled to Australia, I believe, and the other half to Europe. I was on the European trip. The advice we had from people who had done some major democratic reform was not to do it piecemeal. We were told to ensure that it is very comprehensive. I am very concerned. My Conservatives colleagues who were on that trip with us heard that as well and it seems to me that they are not listening to the advice that we received from a lot of experts.

If this government truly wants to reform the Senate, my party would be happy to collaborate and ensure a real and complete Senate reform is put forward. But true Senate reform needs to address a number of issues that are totally ignored by Bill C-43.

I believe the Senate needs to represent all provinces and territories and give a voice to those who do not have one. Regional representation is extremely important, but the process of electing senators, particularly in large provinces, would be unwieldy and

would give unprecedented influence to large urban areas over small communities.

In the United States, senators such as Patrick Leahy of Vermont and the late Edmund Muskie of Maine have clearly shown how regional representation is important. Although they have come from tiny states, they have had a voice in the American senate.

• (1220)

Unfortunately, Bill C-43 totally ignores provincial and regional equity. It weakens the voice of provinces such as British Columbia and Alberta, as those two provinces currently have fewer senators than the population warrants. It seems that this would be a major concern to some of our current Conservative colleagues from western Canada.

Alberta and B.C. have been growing disproportionately and we now have an inequity when it comes to representation in the Senate. It seems to me that this is the kind of thing that should be included in any change that we make. We cannot just leave that aside and deal with one issue when the other one is brewing as well. That is what we are talking about when we say that we are not dealing with the whole issue.

Perhaps more troubling is the fact that no consultations with the provinces and territories were held prior to the introduction of Bill C-43. So far both the provinces of Ontario and Quebec have already come out against the idea of piecemeal Senate reform and so did Yukon. I am sure that is why my hon. colleague from Yukon is here sitting beside me. He wants to make sure that his territory is well represented in the bill.

When the government does not have the approval of Ontario and Quebec, those are substantially big provinces that are missing. When such considerable changes are being contemplated to the way that Parliament functions, we would think that there would be a buy-in from the big players. Actually, the government should have it from all the players, if possible, but when Quebec and Ontario say that they do not agree, then the government has a problem.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

In addition, provincial Senate elections would be very detrimental to candidates from minority groups. The issue is very important and particularly disturbing for Manitoba. My province has a large number of anglophones and francophones are a very small minority. If senators are elected for the entire province, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Franco-Manitoban senate candidates to get elected. It will be almost impossible, given their numbers, to get an Acadian senator elected in Nova Scotia, for example, or in Alberta.

Since Confederation, Manitoba has had a francophone senator. For the Franco-Manitoban community, this has been vital. There is usually only one francophone MP and rarely are there two. There is usually one francophone MP serving all of western Canada. At present, we also have Senator Chaput from Manitoba and Senator Tardif from Edmonton. These additional representatives are of extraordinary assistance in supporting the efforts of francophone communities and francophone MPs from the west, who are attempting to support all their fellow citizens but who nevertheless have large francophone communities in their ridings.

I am thinking of Gildas Molgat, former Speaker of the Senate. He was one of the longest-serving Speakers of the Senate, and an extraordinary person. His term was renewed. I think he was the only person who served two terms, but I am not positive. He was well respected by all his colleague in both Houses. Mr. Molgat came from the small town of Sainte-Rose-du-Lac. With a small francophone minority, it would have been very surprising for him to have been elected. We believe that we would lose out on having people like Gildas Molgat.

I would like to come back to Claudette Tardif, former rector of Campus Saint-Jean and an invaluable asset to the Senate. If the Senate wants to really fulfil its mission and represent all regions of the country and all communities, all Canadians and official language minority communities must be represented in the Senate. The situation is not exclusive to the country's francophones. It would also be the case for the Métis, aboriginals and representatives of cultural communities, not to mention people from rural areas, who, statistically speaking, have fewer candidates in elections.

Senators from the Northwest Territories and Yukon sit on our northern and western caucus. They represent their region and represent, for example, the interests of Inuit, aboriginal, first nations and Métis people. If we had an elected Senate, these elements could disappear, and this is very worrisome. I think going from the current Senate—which is regional and representative of Canada's cultural diversity—to a more or less male and homogenous Senate, as the House of Commons now is unfortunately, would not necessarily be a step forward.

[*English*]

As for limits to senators' terms, I support maximum non-renewable terms. This would still enable the Senate to benefit from the wisdom and experience of seasoned senators while ensuring a good flow of new ideas and vision from newly elected senators.

There are many flaws in the bill and important items completely left out from Bill C-43. In some, the question we must address today is how to reform the Senate.

The Conservatives are proposing a piecemeal deal that will actually aggravate the problem of potential deadlock between the two houses of Parliament while increasing partisanship in the Senate. I really do not think they thought this scenario through.

On our side of the House in my party what we want and what we stand for is real Senate reform that would consider a wide number of critical issues: first, selection process and term; second, mandate; and third, fair distribution. We support Senate reform that would actually resolve problems instead of creating new ones. We support a

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reform that would better Canadian politics, not create deadlock between the House and the Senate.

This Prime Minister thrives on division and discord, not unity and harmony. This is but another example of that. Once again, the government is standing up for a partisan perception and image, rather than for a fairer and better Canada for all its citizens.

Unfortunately, Bill C-43 is just one more example of the government spending months taking its right-wing base of support for granted, and then trying to please it to keep it on its side.

Before tabling an act to provide for consultation with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, I suggest the government consult with the provinces on their preferences for Senate reforms. Perhaps this way we could see the Conservatives introduce real, concrete and complete Senate reform, rather than the piecemeal bill we have before us with Bill C-43.

● (1230)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague. That was a very good speech, informative with some very good points.

I agree with him on the general thrust, which may come as a surprise to some, that the government is one that likes to bash the Senate, that likes to say the Senate does not have any role, and it brings back and forth into the House things that the Conservatives think brings the Senate into disrepute, yet are quite happy to use the Senate when they want to.

The appointment of Mr. Fortier to the Senate just after the last election being obviously a case in point. The Conservatives said they needed this guy. He did not run. He did not want to inconvenience himself to run, but wanted to be in the Senate and take that position, so they did that.

The government leader in the Senate, Senator LeBreton, is one of the chief attack dogs on issues. She is often out in the media talking about issues and occasionally making up stuff. That is how the Conservatives use the Senate on occasion. I think that is kind of wrong.

One of the things I found out when I came here, and I will be very honest, was that most Canadians do not know that actually there is some very good work done at the Senate. Anybody who has seen the Kirby report on health care or more recently on mental health, that is incredibly valuable work. The work the Senate has done on defence, for example, and the report on CIDA about international assistance is some great work.

I may be a little partial. I have a great senator, Senator Cordy, who comes from my community of Dartmouth.

I have had a lot of discussions with people about the Senate. Like my colleague, I am very open to reforms to the Senate that make sense, that take into account consultations.

The province of New Brunswick has also indicated that it does not want to go along with this kind of piecemeal, ad hoc approach to Senate reform.

Government Orders

My colleague talked about minority populations and how this might impact them. I am not sure if he mentioned Nova Scotia, but if he did, I would like to ask him what the implications might be for piecemeal Senate reform on a francophone population, a minority population. We have had francophone senators from Nova Scotia. It is very possible we might not if reform of the Senate goes on as the government might see it. I would like to ask him his view on what might happen in a province like Nova Scotia.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's remarks. I did mention Nova Scotia. What I said was that it would be virtually impossible for a person in a minority situation like Nova Scotia's or Manitoba's or anywhere in western Canada to get elected from an official languages community, a minority community. It would be extremely difficult.

What if we did not have these people representing the interests of these smaller communities? In Manitoba, for instance, the francophone community is about 4% of the population; we are not talking about 20%, 30% or 33% like we are in New Brunswick. Provinces like Nova Scotia and Manitoba are down to 3%, 4% and 5%. To have those people there—and not only representing one's interest because they are there for more than that—means that they understand the dynamics of the communities out there, and it is important to have them there.

Under this new proposal, it basically would be whoever wins the majority. I am thinking of our colleagues from Nunavut, who come to our weekly meetings and talk to us about their issues with fishing and with guns, for instance, and all the issues specific to their communities, such as poverty and housing. I think of how invaluable that is to our caucuses, not only on a minority basis but I think on a reasonable basis as well.

There are people such as Senator Dan Hays, who was phenomenal. We were very sad to lose Mr. Hays and also to lose Jack Austin, who left just lately. They were a wealth of information. They were very bright people. Whether they came from a Liberal, a Conservative or other background, I still think they contributed to all of Canada. They did not come in there with this blurred vision. We have some very good Conservative Senators as well, such as Hugh Segal, who bring some very thoughtful ideas forward with the work they do in the Senate. I think it would be very sad for Canada and it would be a bad day for Canada for us to lose the prospect of such talent.

• (1235)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I thank the hon. member from Manitoba for his intervention, unfortunately what I am hearing from over there again is more Liberal talk about reforming the Senate but no action.

Finally we have a bill before us that is going to play a critical role in changing the whole process in the Senate to one of actually having a democratized system to appoint senators. I think that is great for Canadians. They are going to have people who are finally going to be accountable for the actions they take.

The hon. member mentioned a few senators who are doing great work. He mentioned Senator Hugh Segal. Senator Segal has said that he will be the first senator to run in an upcoming Senate election. He is prepared to take that next step because he believes in having an

elected Senate. I think that is just fabulous. He raises some concerns about having minority and official language representation from smaller populations in western Canada, but I know for a fact that we do have that type of representation today in an elected House of Commons. If we can get that type of representation in an elected House of Commons, I have no idea why it would not happen in an elected Senate.

I want to add my voice in support of this great legislation. I would hope that the Liberals will decide this is something they should support because it is the right thing to do.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, in regard to my colleague's comments, the first thing I would like to respond to is that the member speaks to this being a democratic process. In fact, it is not. The government is consulting with people. They can get elected, but the Prime Minister has discretion on whether or not he wants to name those people. There is a little gap there.

Second, I am not sure that the Conservatives have thought about the consequences of having two elected Houses. It is complicated already. I do not know if they have thought about this, but there is no dispute resolution mechanism here to resolve issues between the two Houses. I can see bills taking absolutely forever.

This is the problem when the government starts bringing stuff forward in a piecemeal way. Over the last several months, we have seen what happens when the government, in order to please the public, tries to rush decisions forward that have not been thought through. The income trusts decision is the best example that can be used. It is the biggest scandal in Canadian history, with \$25 billion lost in one day, mostly by seniors, with 1.5 million seniors affected by this.

Third, the government brought in interest deductibility. Again it was done in a rush because the government thought this might be popular with Canadians, but it did not think about the consequences. That is what this is all about with this legislation. We know what has happened lately. We have lost \$9 billion in Canadian corporations to foreign ownership because of interest deductibility and the income trust taxation. Companies from overseas are buying devalued Canadian companies. It has cost Canada \$9 billion. Lately sixteen income trusts have been sold for \$9 billion. That is absolutely unacceptable.

That is what happens when things are done piecemeal and when government thinks something might be attractive to the Canadian public but in fact does not think of the long term consequences. We now have BCE on the block, a Canadian company that OMERS is trying to purchase while competing with American interests. The American interests can write off the interest on their loan to purchase BCE, but OMERS cannot. The American interests then have a 37%—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake is rising on a point of order.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, we are here to debate Senate reform. The hon. member is talking about issues of the day and about our budget, which have absolutely nothing to do with the—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake. I will recognize the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country to ask a short question, to which I am sure the hon. member for Saint Boniface will be happy to respond.

• (1240)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to add a little to my colleague's comments and concerns about the statement of the member opposite that this is all smoke and mirrors. If anything, for the previous 13 years we have seen smoke and mirrors in the hot air from the member's government, the hot air that has been increasing the climate change and the greenhouse gases in our country.

The government of the member opposite had 13 years to implement democratic reform. If the member feels so passionately about concrete democratic reform, why did he not do anything?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to my hon. colleague's comment because what I was saying was in fact very relevant. When one makes hasty decisions, one pays a political price for them. We are selling out our Canadian companies to foreign ownership. That is what happens when decisions are made that are not based on proper analysis. That is exactly what is happening here.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a very great pleasure for me to stand in this place today to speak in favour of Bill C-43 on Senate consultations.

Let me say at the outset that this is only one bill in a suite of legislation that the government has been bringing forward on democratic reform.

We have seen Bill C-16, which is a bill to set fixed dates for elections. It received royal assent just recently and will come into effect. It states, of course, that outside of a non-confidence vote, which may bring the government down at any time, the next election will be held on the third Monday in October 2009. It is a very important piece of democratic reform that is overwhelmingly supported by Canadians.

We also have Bill C-31, which is currently in the Senate. It is moving its way along through committee. It deals with voter integrity and trying to eliminate voter fraud. I am quite confident that this bill will receive royal assent before the House rises for the summer.

However, we also have another bill in the Senate, Bill S-4. We have spoken many times on many occasions in this place about Bill S-4, but I have to say that frankly I cannot fathom why this bill has taken as long as it has in the Senate. For the benefit of those Canadians who may be listening, Bill S-4 is a 66-word bill that has been before the Liberal-dominated and unelected Senate for close to one year now. In fact, May 30 will see the one year anniversary of the bill being before the Senate.

This is a 66-word bill that has been there for close to 12 months. By my rough math, that is a little over five words per month that these primarily Liberal senators have been examining in regard to the bill. All this says to me is that either the bill contains some really big words or there is a second agenda at hand, and that agenda is that the

Liberal senators do not want to see Senate reform. They do not want to see Bill S-4 pass.

I have examined the bill and I can assure members that the words are not so big such that it would take five words per month to examine the bill, so I have to go to my second assumption, that is, the Liberal senators truly do not want to see any real and effective Senate reform. Why else would they keep a bill that is so short, so succinct, so precise and so to the point locked up in the Senate for close to a year?

If nothing else, that bill in itself speaks to why we need Senate reform. It speaks to why we need a bill like Bill C-43, which allows the process to be taken away from the prime minister of the day in regard to the appointment of his hacks and flacks to the Senate and allows individual Canadians to express an opinion on who they would like to see represent their region or province in the Senate.

I can think of no greater example than the travesty of Bill S-4 for supporting this bill, yet I hear nothing but opposition from members of the official opposition party, members of the New Democratic Party and members of the Bloc Québécois, who are saying they will not support Bill C-43, consultations that in effect would allow a prime minister to listen to Canadians before he or she makes an appointment to the Senate.

If we truly believe in accountability then we must support Bill C-43, yet I hear nothing but opposition from members opposite, and again, that confuses me. On the one hand I hear members opposite talk about the need for Senate reform, for accountability and for regional representation, yet I hear nothing but opposition to a very good piece of legislation that we have put before the House for discussion and debate.

Bill C-43 deals with a very important conception of ours, which is that all members, whether in this place or the other place, should be accountable. There is only one way to deal with true accountability. That is to allow the individual citizens of this great country of ours to have a say in who represents them so that in fact the representatives then would be accountable to the citizens rather than those who appointed them.

That is the essence of Bill C-43. It is to allow consultations to take place at a provincial or a territorial level. Those consultations, in which the will of the people would be expressed, then would allow the prime minister of the day to appoint the individual to the Senate. In other words, it does not in any way take away from the constitutionality that has been in question from time to time during this debate. In fact, it accommodates the Constitution.

• (1245)

I take some difference of opinion with my hon. colleague the deputy House leader who said that the bill would allow us to skirt the Constitution. I do not like that choice of language. I choose to say that the bill would allow us to accommodate the provisions contained within the current Constitution, and those provisions say that only the Governor General can appoint members to the Senate. The current convention is that the Governor General, before making that appointment, would take advice from the prime minister of the day, and only the prime minister. That would still be in effect. Therefore, the constitutionality argument is really mute.

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The prime minister would still appoint senators to the upper house, but only after the prime minister listened to the expressed will, through a consultation process, of the citizens in various provinces, territories and regions. What could be fairer and more transparent than that? What could be more accountable than that?

We on this side of the House say that we have to get away from the process that has occurred for the last 100 years where, for strictly partisan reasons, members of the upper house have been appointed. In all fairness, we have seen time and time again appointments made on a partisan level regardless of political affiliation and regardless of which party happens to be in government of the day.

We have seen time after time Liberal prime ministers appoint Liberal senators for no other reason than the fact that the person has been a good, loyal political partisan soldier to the Liberal Party. We have also seen that happen when Conservative governments have been in power. Conservative governments have appointed Conservative senators because of their loyalty and partisanship to the government of the day. My point is that should not be allowed to happen because there really is no accountability to the people. There is only accountability to the party of the day, or the prime minister who made the appointment.

We need to get away from that method of appointing senators. We have to allow Canadian citizens a voice in who they wish to see represent them in the Senate.

The bill deals with that in a very precise, succinct and fair manner. Consultations would be taken during federal elections at the provincial level. Should the citizens of a particular province decide they wished to see a certain individual represent them in the Senate, that would allow the prime minister to advise the Governor General of his will to appoint that person.

We do not have a constitutional argument here. We have a fairness argument, and it absolutely works.

Many times we have seen appointments made to the Senate which, under normal circumstances by anyone's standards, would not be considered to be fair and would not be considered to be representative of the people of that province. I want to draw to the House's attention only a couple of those examples.

In my opinion one of the most egregious uses of this appointment process happened with a current senator by the name of Art Eggleton, a former mayor of Toronto, a former Liberal member of Parliament and a former Liberal cabinet minister. Most Canadians will recall the disgrace in which Mr. Eggleton was dismissed from cabinet. He was found guilty of awarding untendered contracts to one of his former girlfriends. What was his reward? His reward was an appointment to the Senate. That, under normal circumstances, would never happen.

I am sure if we took a look at some of the other names of current senators in the upper chamber, we would find that the reason those people were appointed was because of the loyalty they exhibited to the party. They were appointed not because they were deserving of representing the people, but only because they carried favour with the prime minister of the day or the government of the day.

● (1250)

Mr. Blair Wilson: What about Fortier?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: This is what I find really interesting. Whenever we have this debate, we hear nothing but chirping from the other side because we touch a nerve. The Liberals know what I am saying is right but they just do not like it. They do not like to hear the words which exhibit the type of favouritism and patronage they exhibited during the many years they were in government.

Again, I go back to the fact that if they truly believe what they are saying about accountability and democratic reform, why can they not support a bill such as Bill C-43? It is the height of hypocrisy and sanctimony. They say on one hand that they want democratic reform, but that they do not like this. They like the current system where they can appoint their friends to the Senate. It comes down to that.

Senator Jim Munson, who was the former director of communications to Prime Minister Chrétien, was appointed. Why? I suggest because he was a loyal soldier to Prime Minister Chrétien and was rewarded, when Prime Minister Chrétien left office, by getting an appointment to the Senate. Francis Fox is another example. There are many. It should not be allowed to happen. What is the problem with allowing individual citizens to comment on who they would like to represent them in the Senate?

I also want to point out that this concept of having the people engage in a consultation process before senators are appointed is widely supported by Canadians across Canada. There will be some, such as our friends in the NDP, who do not want a Senate at all. They want the Senate abolished. Therefore, they would not support a bill of this sort.

Some years ago I would probably have put myself in the category of those who wanted the Senate done away with. I did not really see the need for a Senate at all times or at any time. I have since changed my view on that. Since I have been in this place, I have seen, from time to time, the upper chamber actually perform the service it is intended to perform, and that is to be the voice of reason or the voice of sober second thought.

From time to time, pieces of legislation have gone from this place to the upper chamber and brought back with meaningful, realistic and important amendments that make a bill stronger. That is an important function. However, what I cannot abide by are bills like Bill S-4, which would purport to put a term limit on senators, unduly and purposely delayed, obstructed by the unelected senators in the upper chamber simply because they do not want the system to change.

It has been said in the House before that under the current system senators can serve their terms for up to 45 years. They can be appointed at age 30 and serve, as it stands now, until age 75. Bill S-4 would set a term limit of eight years so any senator, after being appointed, would only serve for a term of eight years.

Government Orders

I understand that the leader of the official opposition has taken several positions on this bill. I understand he supports it in theory. He has said from time to time that he supports terms limits anywhere from six to eight, to ten to twelve, to fourteen or fifteen years. I do not know what is going to happen when the Senate finally gets around to dealing with the bill. Regardless, it is one step in Senate reform to have term limits set upon senators who are appointed to that place.

This is another important step because it allows individuals to comment and express their opinions on who they wish as their appointed representatives. What could be fairer?

We have a democratic system in our country right now where all members of this place are elected. Would anyone suggest that we go away from that system and have members of Parliament appointed? Of course not, it makes absolutely no sense. One of the basic tenets of our democracy is the fact that elected representatives are just that: elected by the people they represent. Yet in the Senate, it is just the opposite.

We have senators in my province of Saskatchewan and in Ontario and in every province who are supposedly there to represent the people of those provinces, but were not elected by the citizens of those provinces. Where is the fairness in that? Where is the accountability? I would suggest there is none.

• (1255)

The bill would address that flaw in the current system. It would allow individuals across the country to cast a vote, to voice their opinion on who they wished to see as their senator in their region. Who can argue with that basic tenet?

Apparently Liberals can because they are voicing their opinion today in this debate. I certainly suspect that when it comes time for the bill to be voted upon, they will voice their opinion by voting against the bill, but I cannot understand why. How can they say they are in favour of democracy and then vote against the system that would allow democracy to take place?

There are a few aspects of the bill that are worth noting as well. The first one is the method in which voting would take place during the consultation process. Currently, as everyone here knows, to be elected as a member of Parliament, we go through the first past the post electoral system. In a federal election in our home ridings, if we get more votes than any of our opponents, regardless of the percentage of that vote, we will be elected to this place.

When I was first elected in 2004, I was elected with receiving just above 33% of the vote. I won by 122 votes. This means at that time roughly 67% of the people in my riding did not want me to be their representative, but they got me anyway. In the second election luckily I was able to increase that amount to about 43% or 44%, but it still was not the majority. The majority of people in my riding voted for someone else. We suspect that even though this system seems to have worked well over time for the members of Parliament, we should enact a different voting system for those people who cast ballots on the consultation process for senators. Why? For a couple of reasons.

The primary reason is if we had the same voting system for electing members of Parliament, the first past the post system, we

might end up with the same results. I am not saying that is necessarily a bad thing. What I am saying is if we had a different system of voting, it might be able to properly reflect the wishes of the majority of people in that region who are expressing an opinion.

Therefore, contained in Bill C-43 we have a provision that would allow for preferential voting, or at least a preferential voting system, the single transferrable ballot, to elect members.

How that works very simply is this. There may be a number of candidates who are putting their names forward for senators. The individuals who wish to express their opinion cast ballots marking their preference, either one, two or three. If there were three candidates, they would mark their first choice, second choice and third choice. If there is no majority on the first ballot, in other words if none of the candidates receive over 50% of first ballot support, we would then go to a system where we start counting the second ballots and add that to the total.

At the end of the day, those people who were selected or at least elected at the consultation level would have at minimum 50% plus one vote of all those who cast ballots. By the time the prime minister got around to appointing the individual to the Senate, he or she could be absolutely assured that the individual had the majority of support of the people within their province.

We do not have this system in the lower House, but it is one that I believe is a very necessary and a very democratic method. That is why I believe this bill, through all the various aspects of the bill, is something we should support. Again, it allows for accountability. It allows for the senators, who are appointed, to be accountable to the people who cast ballots for them, rather than being appointed just because of who they know in the PMO. It also ensures that we have some democratic rights at the provincial and territorial level. Finally, it allows the assurances of the prime minister that the majority of people in the province actually voted for and wanted the senator who ultimately becomes appointed.

I look forward to taking questions from the members of the opposition.

• (1300)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's presentation. He seems to be very much in favour of the consistent application of certain principles. This raises a couple of questions.

Why did he single out only senators appointed by Liberal governments and leave aside the most egregious appointment that has been seen in decades? That would be the appointment of the public works and government services minister, who refuses to run in an election in Montreal. Every time a seat opens up, he refuses squarely to run for election. I would like to hear the hon. member's opinion about that.

If the member is in favour of consistency, I wonder if he would go a step further and argue for what exists in the United States, that judges should be elected as well. If he is in favour of consistency, why would he not be in favour of the same election rules for the Senate and the House of Commons?

Government Orders

If he believes in accountability, I would like to know what he thinks about the arguments put forth by those who believe in proportional representation, that it is a more democratic system than the first past the post system.

I would like to raise a hypothetical situation. Let us suppose that the Prime Minister went to a system where he only appoints senators who have been elected. If a province decided not to play by those rules for whatever legitimate reason it might have, and there were retirements of senators from that province, but the Prime Minister would not appoint senators unless they were elected, and the provincial government would not go to elections, that would mean that province would be underrepresented in the Senate. What does the hon. member think about that?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I find myself smiling every time I hear a member from the opposition raise some of these concerns because they have no credence whatsoever.

Let me deal with the last point first. The bill contains a provision that Senate consultation would take place at the same time as a federal election. Provinces would be consulted should they wish to engage in their own consultations during provincial elections. This is a federal House, so those provisions are taken care of. For the member to suggest it is not accountable and not democratic is sheer folly because it is.

I want to get back to the member's first point where he said it was the most egregious appointment ever. I would take great umbrage at that when he is speaking of Senator Fortier because as the Prime Minister stated at the time of the appointment, the reason he appointed Senator Fortier to the Senate was he wished to have him in cabinet representing the city of Montreal, the second largest city in Canada. He also stated at that time, and this is something that the members of the opposition conveniently forget, that the appointment is not until age 75. It is until the next election. That is it.

When the Liberals appointed senators, until 1965 they were there for life and now they are there until age 75. That is not the case here. For the member to talk about the most egregious case of appointments in Canadian parliamentary history is absolutely out of the question. It is not true.

I look forward to more questions because again, I have not had this much fun listening to questions in a long, long time.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary and the Conservative government have an open mind about the possibility of some kind of proportional representation coming into effect some day when it comes to the selection of senators. Why did they choose to initiate this process without any kind of broad consultation?

Why would the Conservatives choose a research firm like the Frontier Centre which has a stated bias against proportional representation? It is on the record years ago saying that proportional representation is a bad idea. This indicates to me that perhaps there is a preconceived bias on the part of the Tories that they would seek out and find the one polling firm that is so jaded and biased toward proportional representation that they are willing to risk their objectivity by saying so and giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to have these tiny little focus groups and then base a

conclusion on that. Does that not speak to a prejudice against meaningful reform and proportional representation?

● (1305)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Winnipeg Centre for his question, which was not on Senate reform, but was on proportional representation.

I have answered this question in this place many times before. He speaks to the consultation process that this government has engaged in, on trying to find more avenues for democratic reform, but when he criticizes the method in which we have engaged in this consultation process, he forgets one very important fact. At the procedure and House affairs committee, this government, not the NDP nor the Liberals, proposed a motion to allow members of the committee to go through a consultation process Canada wide. Every individual party in this House would have been represented by its members who would go forward as a committee and engage Canadians in the consultation on democratic reform, which I am sure would have included proportional representation.

What happened when we proposed this motion at the committee level? The NDP voted against it. The member for Ottawa Centre voted against it. Had members voted in favour of this consultation process, we would have been engaged in that process right now. Perhaps the member for Winnipeg Centre might have been his party's representative. For some reason, the New Democratic Party voted against a motion which would have allowed the procedure and House affairs committee to engage in democratic reform consultations across Canada.

The member has no credibility when it comes to asking a question about why we may have a bias. The very actions of those members showed that they clearly have a bias themselves.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the last two speakers who gave five problems with this bill that were not really answered, I want to compliment the member on saying that he recognizes that the Senate is a body of sober second thought and provides reasoned additional input into bills. In fact he made the very important factual point that a substantial number of bills have been amended and improved by the Senate.

I would like the member to follow up on the good work he did in his opening speech and outline some of those positive changes that the Senate has made to bills.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I should correct myself. In response to the intervention from my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, I said that at committee the member for Ottawa Centre voted against the motion put forward by the Conservatives. It was, I believe, the member for Acadie—Bathurst who voted against it, but nonetheless, it still was an NDP member on the committee who voted against consultations by the committee itself.

With respect to the question of my hon. colleague from Yukon, there are a number of examples, some minor and some fairly major, where senators, after examining a bill that has gone from our place to their place, have come forward with amendments that have strengthened the bill. Sometimes those amendments were technical in nature. Perhaps the wording was slightly flawed. Sometimes they were more substantive.

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My point is simply this. If the Senate was doing the job that it purports to do, if it was doing the job that we all want it to do, it would examine legislation coming from this place in a non-partisan manner to see if they could strengthen it.

The purpose of the Senate is not to obstruct legislation, but to examine it for weaknesses and to recommend positive changes. Yet what we see time and time again, by the very nature of senators being unelected and therefore unaccountable, is that they are not looking for ways to strengthen a bill, they are looking for ways in which to obstruct a bill. Again I go back to Bill S-4, a bill that has been before the Senate for close to a year. It is a 66 word bill, yet it has been there for close to a year and there is no end in sight.

That is because, in my view at least, the Liberal senators wish to obstruct this bill. They do not want to see it go forward, despite the views of the majority of members in this place. They are using the powers they have to obstruct legislation when in fact they should be doing just the opposite. They should be looking for ways in which to pass legislation as quickly and as swiftly as they can, while all the time ensuring that the legislation is properly formatted.

● (1310)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

First, I want to comment on a couple of things. I want to congratulate the Senate for its work on bills as was just mentioned. A bill, no matter how short, can be bad and should be improved and dealt with. The senators should not be bullied into pushing forward a bad bill. I congratulate the senators for their work.

A Conservative member asked about democratic reform in the previous government. The point was made that during the previous government the biggest changes perhaps in history, but at least in modern history, were made to advance democratic reform in the House of Commons. Great credit has to go to the member for LaSalle—Émard who made those changes. I will mention three of them.

First was the increased funding for the Library of Parliament to help members of Parliament to have substantial research input into bills.

Second was the election of committee chairs. This might have emanated from the opposition, but the last government brought it forward. It is distressing that the new government has taken a backward step in democratic reform by revoking that, at least within its party in not allowing elected committee chairs. The democratization of that process was done by the member for LaSalle—Émard.

Probably the greatest reform that really changed the dynamics of the House at the time was the bringing in of the three line whip. It allowed members to take their own positions on a large number of items, confidence motions as they always were, budgets, throne speeches, these types of bills, on which the government has a position. Unfortunately, we have not seen that recently from the government side, but we have certainly seen that democratization on this side of the House with significant input for members to represent their ridings.

Now I would like to get back to Bill C-43. As has been clear on this side of the House, I and other members are definitely in favour of appropriate, rational and comprehensive Senate reform. That is not the issue. Once again, if there is a bad bill, one that does not do the job, obviously we have to either amend it or defeat it.

I am not sure what the Conservative member who was complaining about the stalling of bills has to say about this, but it is surprising that this bill was tabled four months ago and it is only now before us. Why was it sitting around when it could have been brought forward a lot earlier?

The Liberal position is to have full scale comprehensive Senate reform. If we are to reform a body that is complex and which interacts in the legislative process with other bodies, obviously we have to put it all together for it to make sense. When a Ford truck is broken, we do not drop in a Volkswagen engine and assume it will fit and that the truck will start. It will not fit. It is air cooled. We will burn the engine out. We cannot try to make a change to one part.

In this particular case, it is not a change that will be effective. We should not try to make a change which would make the whole system fall apart. It would create more problems than if we looked at the whole situation and how all the parts are interrelated. I will give some examples later in my speech that outline how the different parts of the system would be negatively affected by tinkering with one part without considering the ramifications on the other parts.

It is astonishing that the Conservatives would put forward a bill that would hurt Alberta and British Columbia so much, that would decrease their representation in Canadian affairs. I am sure some Conservative members did not realize this because the individual members did not write the bill, but it is still a fact. We would never, on this side of the House at least, approve a bill that would hurt Alberta and British Columbia so much without making the appropriate adjustments to make sure they were represented.

● (1315)

Some references were made in previous speeches to the Law Reform Commission. This commission did a remarkable study on electoral reform and I will quote from *Hansard* what was said about the report. One would hope that any bill on electoral reform would look at that expert information and refer to it.

It was stated in *Hansard*:

The report is perhaps the finest treatment of the question of electoral reform in a modern democracy that has ever been written.

When the official opposition critic asked if any members of the government had read this report, not one member stood. It would seem that if we were designing a bill, we would look at all the intelligence available, especially at the best report ever written. Hopefully, before this debate is over, a Conservative member will stand and say that he or she has read that report and, more important, that it had an effect on this bill before us that has been criticized so much.

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Can anyone imagine having the Law Commission of Canada Act, an act of Parliament, disrespected by the government? There are statutory responsibilities under that act to perform services for Canadians. By law, the government must do things for Canadians but the zero funding in the budget is very questionable in relation to the proper functioning of democracy.

Another issue that has been raised in the debate about the bill is, as the deputy House leader from the Conservatives said, that it skirts constitutionality. It may be constitutional and it may not. If the bill gets to committee, we will certainly want to hear from experts on both sides of that issue, to be fair, as to whether changing one piece of a complex system would be constitutional. As all members of the House know, there are certain changes to the Senate that cannot be made in this manner or by simply bringing a bill before the House of Commons.

The other major point is that the bill would not do anything. What would it achieve? The prime minister can already appoint members. In fact, this morning one of the opposition members, in response to a question, made the point that in 1998 Prime Minister Mulroney appointed Stan Waters.

I think westerners would probably be appalled if they knew that the prime minister would not need to follow the results of these elections. If westerners elect someone the prime minister does not like, he would not need to make that appointment. The decision would still be up to him.

[*Translation*]

Let us be frank: the Conservative government does not really want to change Bill C-43. It just wants to keep an old Conservative promise to its electoral base without really taking the time to reform the Senate. Once again, it is a shame that this government is pursuing its own political agenda at the expense of real reforms that would benefit all Canadians.

• (1320)

[*English*]

I now want to try solving the perplexing question as to why the government would put forward a bill that, as I have outlined, does not change anything and, were it to change anything, it would cause all sorts of other problems.

The reason that has been hypothesized by a number of speakers so far is that the government is trying to appease its western Conservative base which it has upset so much. People might ask why the Conservatives are angry and why they are hastily bringing forward a bill with, as people have outlined, all the flaws to appease that base.

The first reason is that right after the election the Prime Minister appointed Senator Fortier after saying that all appointments would be made on merit. This came as quite a shock to Conservatives across the country but they gave them a second chance. However, it did not last very long.

The second reason is that after speaking adamantly against floor crossing while in opposition and after 40 Conservative members voted against floor crossing in a bill, the Prime Minister appointed a Liberal as a minister before a number of Conservatives who had

worked hard for the party. I am delighted that we have a Liberal in cabinet but I think a number of Conservatives were upset about that appointment.

The third reason is the fact that the government has become a huge spender. After telling people for years and ranting against the NDP and others who would spend a lot of money, the Conservatives brought in the biggest spending budget in history.

Mr. James Bezan: What does this have to do with Bill C-43?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: It was three times the rate of inflation. After talking about cutting program spending—

Mr. Blair Wilson: Tax and spend Conservatives.

Mr. James Bezan: We cut taxes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: —it was tax and spend, much to the shock of those Conservatives across the country—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. It is becoming increasingly difficult to hear the hon. member for Yukon. I will ask all members to hold off until questions and comments and then they can ask questions if they have any.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I do not mind if I am upsetting the Conservatives so much about the bad things they have done that they need to respond.

The Conservatives were yelling that they have cut taxes. I have before me a federal tax return that Canadians have recently filled out. I will go to the tax return that Canadians filled out last year. On the first \$35,595, in nice red letters here, what did all Canadians pay in income tax, especially poor Canadians? It was 15% on income tax. In schedule 1 of this year's federal tax return, on \$36,378 the rate is 15.25%. The federal income tax basic rate has increased.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member was quoting from a document and I would like him to table it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake has asked the member to table a document from which he was quoting but that actually only applies to ministers. The member would need to seek the unanimous consent of the House to allow the member for Yukon to table the document.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Merv Tweed: The Liberals deny democracy again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Let us hold off until the questions and comments period. If members from any party have questions or comments they would like to make about the member's speech, they can do so at that time. Until then let him finish.

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Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the fourth reason the Conservatives have upset Conservative voters is for this poorly thought out bill that does nothing for the Senate. Another reason is the Conservatives' flip-flop on income trusts.

Before the election, the Prime Minister said that to tax the income trusts would be an attack on the savings of the seniors of Canada. On page 33 of the Conservative platform it says "preserve income trusts by not"—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask what we are debating. We are supposed to be debating Bill C-43. Have we changed the debate since I came into the House?

• (1325)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the hon. member making a point about relevance?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I want to know how he got on this topic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would remind the hon. member for Yukon to keep his remarks as close as possible to the subject matter of the bill that is before us which is Bill C-43.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I do not mind that intervention, Mr. Speaker, because I do not have time to give the other six reasons why Conservatives are upset but I will briefly mention them.

People are wondering why the Conservatives would hastily bring forward a bill on the Senate that does nothing except cause other problems. As people have postulated, the Conservatives are trying to solidify their Conservative base after upsetting it so much.

However, it would not be fair to say that about the Conservatives without giving some examples. I gave five reasons and the others would be interest deductibility, the reverse on capital gains and the pledge to eliminate the GST on gas when it was above 85¢ a litre. I bought gas on the weekend and I have a bill showing that it is \$1.30 a litre now. The Conservatives also have the broken promise to war veterans and the promise for icebreakers in the north. Those are 10 reasons.

The famous saying is, "Every complex problem has a simple solution", but that is wrong. That is exactly what has happened here. This bill must have come as a shock to many western Conservatives. It would hurt the west dramatically if it were to go forward. The Senate would become more powerful, which was not envisioned in the original Constitution. As senators were elected, the Senate would become equally as powerful as the House of Commons.

The west is poorly represented already, especially Alberta and British Columbia. Representation in the Senate may be in the neighbourhood of 25%, whereas in the House of Commons representation is much closer to one-third. That body would then have the same power as the House of Commons but dramatically diminish the power of the west. We are already upset about the level of power.

As a definite precursor to this, we have suggested that power for the west be balanced in the Senate before its overall power is dramatically increased to the detriment of people in Alberta, British Columbia and the rest of the west. The Liberals will stand hard regardless of what people try to say about us. We certainly cannot

vote for a bill that would hurt the west until that particular problem has been solved.

There is another issue in relation to the bill that has not been dealt with. What happens when they are quasi equal bodies? What about the interaction between them? How do we break the backlogs? The last member who spoke suggested that the other body could actually hold up bills. As we know, the Senate defers to the House as it generally understands the position of the House and its role. Very seldom, unless it is a very bad bill, does the Senate stop a bill completely to make amendments. Senators understand their role, which is how the system happens to work, and that is why most bills approved by the House of Commons get through, some amended and some not.

However, how will this work when both Houses have the same moral authority? As many constitutional experts have said, there will be gridlock. This was not envisioned in the Constitution because this particular minor provision was not made. The whole system will be held up.

I want to mention a couple of other flaws, one of which I think was mentioned earlier by a member, and that was the lack of consultation. Unfortunately, this has been the hallmark of the new government on a number of issues. Some of these issues and problems might have been resolved had there been major consultation.

We have had all sorts of examples related to cuts. We had the outcry from NGOs, literacy groups and museum groups about the cuts to women's programs, the court challenges program and the Law Reform Commission. These groups were upset not just by the fact that the cuts were made but that they were made without consultation, which is not the way that government works.

• (1330)

It has been a bit shocking at the justice committee, once again, to hear the witnesses talk about the lack of consultation on bills that have come forward. Of course, the same was true with income trusts and interest deductibility. It has led to a major problem with the provinces that a member raised this morning about the bill.

Ontario and Quebec have not come on side, were not consulted, and there were suggestions from some in Yukon that because Yukon needed a senator right away, the bill should not be stalled.

The last point I want to make, and it has been made before, is the important role of the Senate to protect minorities, those people in rural areas, the Acadians, first nations, Métis and Inuit. They are not going to have a way to be represented to ensure their representation if we make this change.

A solution has to be found for all of us who represent minorities and rural areas of the country before any type of bill like this could go forward. We must ensure in a democracy that the majority does not run a tyranny over the minority and that it is properly represented.

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Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member's speech. I found it kind of humorous to be quite honest. The member seems interested in the Conservative base and the protection of the base of Conservative support in the country.

I would like to suggest a couple of things to the hon. member, that as long as we have opposition members who stand in the way of bills like age protection, the Conservative base will be strong.

As long as we have the member of Ajax—Pickering suggesting that we should nationalize the oil program, the Conservative base will be strong.

As long as Liberal members stand in the way of an accountable Senate in Canada, the Conservative base will be strong.

Canadians deserve an accountable, elected Senate. They deserve to be consulted on who represents them in the Senate and you should support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I remind the hon. member for Peterborough to address comments through the Chair, not directly at other members.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the member brought up a poor example for the Conservatives because he suggested the age of consent bill. The justice critic just reminded me that at committee last week Liberals saved the bill when the Conservatives voted against it in a voice vote.

I am not concerned about the Conservative base or worried about the 10 reasons that I outlined in my speech. It seems they have upset Conservatives. But there has to be a rationale as to why the government would hastily bring forward a bill that has so little effect, that the Prime Minister can already appoint these particular people identified in elections as the Conservatives pointed out with Mr. Waters. In fact, he does not have to appoint the person under this particular bill and there are no provisions to deal with the other issues arising.

I see there are lots of questions, which is good. Perhaps they could deal with how the bill would interact with the other problems that I mentioned, the interaction between the House of Commons and the Senate, and the protection of minorities which are very substantive issues with the bill. I am sure Conservatives would like to address those. So, how will they address those and still support the bill?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too listened to the comments from the hon. member and from his colleague earlier, and frankly, I am still just a little bit confused on whether the Liberal Party believes in Senate reform or does not.

I have heard sort of mixed signals here. I know the Liberals say they do, but it looks very much to me like they favour the status quo. If they do, I wonder if the member can outline for me the specific measures that the Liberal government took during the 13 years that they were in power to advance the cause of Senate reform, those specific measures that they took.

• (1335)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we certainly support comprehensive Senate reform and we do not support a bill that is

going to cause more problems just by taking one little section of it, as this particular bill does, and cause all the problems that I mentioned because of lack of representation for British Columbia and Alberta.

It causes a lack of representation for minorities, rural people and aboriginal people. We made it quite clear in the last government, which the member is asking about, and in this government that there needs to be comprehensive consultation with the provinces. We would be happy, after that type of consultation has gone forward, to move forward on Senate reform, which I am sure all Canadians would like.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member's commentary. He always has the knack of being able to provide some lucidity and clarity to the matters before the House.

One of the things that was mentioned by a questioner was another bill that was passed by the House, the age of consent legislation, which as the member said, would have died last week if it had not been for the Liberal caucus.

As it turns out it appears to me that the record will show that the bill in fact passed and has been sent to the Senate with Liberal support. I wonder if the member would care to further comment.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Yes, Mr. Speaker, definitely the bill has passed. It had Liberal support and it was a terrible example to use.

I want to give another terrible example from the justice committee or perhaps two. One shows the lack of consultation. We had a witness in Toronto, when the justice committee was travelling, who said that the normal procedure when the government drafted bills was to consult with the stakeholders. In this way many people bring forward their opinions and that is not what the government is doing with these bills. It did not do that type of normal process. I think that may be an underlying problem behind this and other bills.

Another example where the Conservatives pushed forward very hard is Bill C-10. A lot of the Conservatives think it is a good bill and that it is important to increase mandatory minimums. When the minimums were defeated in committee, the Liberals put forward an amendment to increase them moderately so at least there would have been some increase in mandatory minimums and every Conservative member in the committee voted against it.

We gave them the opportunity twice, so I think they have to stand up with the philosophies they believe in on all the votes, even if there are things that are proposed by Liberals which do not go as far as they would like, but certainly further along the road that they would like to go than not having any progress at all.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to explain what he meant by moral equality if elected.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for listening to my speech. That is a very good question.

Members of the Senate now realize that they are not elected. They realize that many Canadians feel that the House of Commons should have some primacy in the end result of things because the members of the House of Commons are elected.

As I said earlier, the senators very seldom stop a bill. They quite often amend it, make suggestions back to the House. Last week or the week before, we sent an amendment back and the Senate deferred to the House, and agreed to not go with the amendment it had suggested because the House did not want it.

The moral equivalency is if the senators are equally elected and then feel that they have the same moral authority as the House of Commons to stop all the bills, to start all the bills, or to deal with money bills, we could have a gridlock. Which house then would predominate? How are we going to get government bills through when they are stopped by a house that has equal moral authority or stopped on far more occasions than they are now?

That is the point I am trying to make. I think it is a substantive point that is worth debate in the House and worth debate in any discussion on Senate reform.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about electing senators which I think would help any region and any province. The member went to great lengths to say that this would be unfair to western Canada. In western Canada, if we get to elect a senator I think that would be in our best interest. I am not sure how he comes to the conclusion that this would be bad for the west. We are talking about electing senators.

• (1340)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the point is that at the moment in the Senate, unlike in the House of Commons, the west, particularly Alberta and British Columbia, is dramatically under-represented. Alberta and British Columbia have very few senators compared to their population and compared to the rest of Canada.

If we increase the power of the Senate by the ways we have just discussed, under an electoral system having a more election based Senate, then it is going to have more power as we just discussed in the member's last question.

If it has more power then we are pushing forward more power to a body where the west is not represented, whereas right now it is about 25% and in the House of Commons it is closer to 30%, which unfortunately, for the west, is not where the power and decisions are being made.

I am sure all members, if they think about that, would agree that they would much rather have a system where the west was more appropriately representative of its population and hopefully somehow together we can solve that problem in the Senate.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to confirm that it is not the west that he is concerned about. It is the Liberal Party he is concerned about because he knows if there are elected senators in the west, there will not be any Liberal senators. We have far too many right now. Is that not the real reason why he opposes elected senators in western Canada?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I never thought of that, but after the 10 reasons I gave during my speech where the

Government Orders

Conservatives have upset their own voters, I have ever confidence that we would do quite well.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the other parties are not interested in speaking to this bill.

I would like to answer a question from one of my colleagues earlier about what the Liberals did in the last 10 years with respect to democratic initiatives. I guess the member forgot that his own party appointed the member for Newmarket—Aurora as the minister for democratic reform. However, regrettably, the member did not win through the democratic process to the level she wanted and resigned. So, they did do something.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

I am standing today on behalf of my constituents, the good people of Cambridge and North Dumfries, who actually support improving democracy. They like the idea of giving some of the power back to the people. They do not like the backroom deals that we have come to know from the Liberal Party. They do not like when the Liberals keep doing that, as they just did by making Elizabeth May, the Green Party leader, an honorary member.

People in my riding of Cambridge do not like the political stacking, the partisanship that takes place, and the personal gains that are made for political purposes all the way up to the Senate. Specifically, the people in my riding of Cambridge do not like the favour the few kind of attitude. They like politics to be played out when it favours Canadians.

In particular, my riding of Cambridge is now suffering from some bad decisions made by the provincial Liberals. They have taken back money that has been promised to the hospital in my riding for many years. The only logical reason for that is that the Liberal support is collapsing in the riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries. Constituents do not want more growth in the area of partisanship by anybody here in Ottawa.

Constituents in my riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries are an honest group of people with the foundations of hard work and entrepreneurship. They go to work every day for the most part. They work hard, long hours and pay their taxes. They do not like paying as much tax as they pay and we are responding to that. They are an extremely generous group of people not just with their money and donating to the hospital but with their time. It is a very intelligent group of people. They want an increase in democracy. They want democracy to change for the better, not for the worse. They see that as a good thing.

They want to eliminate any bit of partisanship or preference to a political party or any decision making in Ottawa that favours a certain group, in particular a political group or individual, or the spouse of a campaign manager. They do not want that any more. They are tired of that kind of stuff. They see the effect of that over time and it is not a good thing.

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The people in Cambridge and North Dumfries want the House of Commons and the Senate, not just when it is convenient or before an election, to put them first always, and they should be. They do not want anyone in Ottawa working for members of Parliament in Ottawa. They want us to act in the best interests of Canada and Canadians, not the best interests of the future of the Liberal Party, as dim as that may be.

That is why people in Cambridge did not like the sponsorship scandal. They did not like it. They did not like the sponsorship scandal because it actually favoured a few people for political gain. They prefer that we work for them.

They are happy that we, the new Conservative government, have found creative and innovative ways to change democracy and put them first, not continue to put ourselves first and look out for our futures. We are here to look out for their futures.

• (1345)

Bill C-43 does take one more step forward. It is part of this government's obligations and our commitment to put Canadians first. It is good for Canadians, good for Cambridge and good for North Dumfries, and therefore I intend to support Bill C-43.

It is great to be here on this side of the House and be a part of the new, fresh Conservative Government of Canada. I will tell members why. This government is focused on putting Canadians first. On our crime and justice agenda, this government has brought forward a dozen crime and justice bills, if members can believe it, one dozen, which all the parties supported during the election.

Of course that is what those parties do when they look out only for themselves, but this government made promises during the election and here we are in government moving forward on our promises.

Yet the opposition is now opposing our crime and justice bills. Let us imagine that. These are political flip-flop games that the opposition members play at the expense of people in my riding, at the expense of safety in my community and at the expense of safe streets.

As well, the Liberals pretty much destroyed our environment when they were in power. They did absolutely nothing. In fact, it became an embarrassment. Canada became an embarrassment on the world stage. However, as we know, they promised to do it time and time again and asked Canadians to give them another chance. Canadians did so because Canadians are good people. We gave them another chance. They still did nothing. Now we know, from various statements made by those members, that they had no intention of doing it.

This new Canadian government, this new Conservative government, is here for the people of Canada. We have brought forward a number of environmental initiatives that will work both to clean up the environment, with technology that we are going to share around the world, and to maintain the health of Canadians, not just their physical health and mental health, but the health of their economy.

One of the first things this new and fresh government did was bring out the Federal Accountability Act, which of course the opposition changed a hundred ways from Sunday. Let us imagine

taking money for a political campaign from children. That is definitely not for Canadians. That is for personal political gains.

I am absolutely thrilled to be part of this new and fresh team that comes up with creative and innovative ideas and actually puts Canadians first. Bill C-43 is a perfect example of that. I just hope it does not get stuck in the Senate, because there are a lot more words in this one than the 66 words in Bill S-4. I think that is at about five days for each letter now, a difficult bill that the Liberal-dominated unelected Senate has been struggling with for some time now. I sure hope this bill does not become another example of that kind of democracy.

Let me explain what Bill C-43 is all about.

Very basically, it says that we have a couple of vacancies for the Senate in a particular province and the bill allows the people in that province to put names forward through an election process run by the Chief Electoral Officer. How innovative. That list of names goes to the Prime Minister. He then selects the names. He may in fact infer that the aboriginal communities should have better representation there. Maybe a province has selected five people for three positions and the Prime Minister thinks we need more women in the Senate. Those are decisions and powers that remain. Ultimately, none of this is going to affect the Governor General's authority because the Governor General still maintains the ability to do the appointment.

Here is what people in Cambridge did not like either: they did not like it when they heard the leader of the official opposition say that the Liberals had to get back to power as quickly as possible. But here is what people in Cambridge like: as Canadians, they want be restored to power. Bill C-43 restores just a little bit more of the influence that Canadians have on the Senate. For that reason, on behalf of the good people in Cambridge and North Dumfries, I am going to support Bill C-43.

• (1350)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the discussion there was some mention by some members that Alberta was going to have all Conservative senators and then they would have everything, all the senators and all the MPs. It made me think of one of the reasons why we have a Senate, why it was originally set up. It had to do with making sure there was representation in regions that was balanced and not necessarily all one-sided.

From that narrow aspect alone, it would seem that to have a consultation process supported by political parties that could in fact result in one party that controls a particular province having all of the senators, and all of the members of Parliament, would tend not to represent those who have a different ideological view of where the country should be going, what the future is and what the important things are. I can think of many examples of differences between the parties in this place.

Statements by Members

From that standpoint, would the member not agree that there is some merit to having representation across the country, from coast to coast, province and territory, that represents a spectrum of ideologies, to make sure that all Canadians will have representation in Parliament?

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate my hon. colleague's question, the fact remains that the Senate, over time, has come to be such a partisan and politically dominated House that it has lost its credibility with the Canadian people, and there is only one way to get it back.

In fact, it is as a result of the member's own party that we need this bill in the first place. If the Liberals had not played such outright partisan politics, I am sure the Senate would be more effective and have more respect.

On that note of the member asking me whether a group of people in Ontario, let us say, should start telling people in Alberta what their political slant should be, I totally disagree. I think the right thing to do is ask Albertans what they think and bring their views and the views of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Manitoba, whatever they are, the views of those folks, through an elected process to the Senate.

That is not happening right now. What is happening right now is that the prime ministers of the Liberal governments of the past stacked the Senate with their own political views and they are dictating the direction of the country.

• (1355)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member's speech. I thought he spoke quite well on the topic. I also liked it when he spoke specifically about his constituents in Cambridge and how he feels that they want to be part of the process and how power belongs to the constituents. I can tell members that the constituents of Peterborough are very well equipped to pick a representative for the Senate who would represent Ontario very well.

I want to go back to a question raised just a moment ago with respect to other parts of the country where perhaps a given region might elect certain members all representing a similar brand. Do members not think that it is more than undemocratic for a governing party to suggest that it should put someone in even though the constituents of that riding would never pick that person? Because that person represents a different party, is the suggestion, that person should therefore should be in. That underlines a need for democracy more than anything that I have heard in this House today, that they would put someone—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Cambridge.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments. Absolutely, that is the whole democratic process. In my own riding of Cambridge when I was first eligible to vote, I voted NDP, and Max Saltsman was one of the best members of Parliament we have ever had, but then I came to my senses.

I must tell members that my riding has gone to all political parties and is now Conservative. It is the respect of the voters that we are talking about here.

I want to remind the House that it was the Conservative Party that brought in the right for women to vote. It was the Conservative Party that brought in the right for aboriginals to vote. Now we are bringing in the right for Canadians to vote for their Senate without changing the Constitution. It is creative. It is exactly the right thing to do. It is what this country needs.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HARTLAND FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend the Hartland Volunteer Fire Department held its 15th annual trade show at the Hartland Arena and grounds.

This is the volunteer department's largest annual fundraiser. Over the past number of years, through this event and others, the department has raised over \$1 million for firefighting and rescue equipment to serve not only the town of Hartland but also the surrounding local service district.

Over 8,000 people visited the trade show this weekend, which was held in a town of less than 1,000 residents.

The Hartland Volunteer Fire Department is just one of the many volunteer fire departments in my riding and in fact across the country whose members put their lives on the line every day and not only work hard to keep their training up to date but also work hard to raise the money needed to do their job even better.

I want to extend my congratulations to Chief Mike Walton and the over 70 volunteers who made this event happen, including department volunteers, community members and 15 up and coming junior firefighters. I congratulate them on a job well done and thank them for all they do for our communities.

* * *

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, within the context of world history Canada is a very young country, but I am sure that every member of this House could stand and attest to significant contributions that people in their ridings have contributed to our local and national history.

In this respect, my riding of York South—Weston is particularly significant. Located on the major fur trading route between Lake Ontario and the Upper Great Lakes, for over 200 years it was the Humber River that witnessed farming and industrial activity unparalleled in the region.

To serve this Humber River-Weston community, the sisters of St. John established St. John the Evangelist Catholic School 150 years ago in a tiny 25 foot by 35 foot log structure.

Statements by Members

I am certain that members of this House will join me in saluting the heroic sisters of St. John and the students, staff and parents, past and present, for the magnificent contribution the school and church have made to our country and also in extending our best wishes for the future on this the 150th anniversary of St. John the Evangelist Catholic School.

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[Translation]

WORLD AIDS ORPHANS DAY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the sixth World AIDS Orphans Day. According to FXB International, which has been working with AIDS orphans for 18 years in more than 18 countries around the world, AIDS kills one father or mother every 15 seconds, and there are over 15 million AIDS orphans.

The situation is serious in several African countries, including Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, where AIDS has infected over one third of all adults. Canada's response to this crisis has not been worthy of a country with its financial and pharmaceutical means.

Although there is an act to increase pharmaceutical aid to countries suffering from this epidemic, Canada has sent no medicines to Africa since 2005.

The Bloc Québécois is demanding that the report on the application of this act be submitted to the committee so that medicines can finally be sent.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

NORTHERN RESIDENTS TAX DEDUCTION

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week in question period I asked when the Conservatives were going to bring some tax fairness to northern families by increasing the northern residents tax deduction, something that has not been done for 20 years.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development responded that instead of helping ordinary northerners with the high cost of living the government is focusing on development. If the minister wants to encourage northern development across the country, giving northern families some fairness would go a long way to doing that.

The north's high cost of living slows down development for a simple reason. Since everything costs more, business margins have to be larger. This means that small and medium size businesses cannot compete. Unfortunately, the minister feels that the only way to develop the north is to give his friends in large southern corporations all the help while doing nothing for ordinary people and businesses in the north.

Increasing the northern residents tax deduction would help northern working families with the high cost of living and spur on economic development in Canada's north. Let us close the northern prosperity gap.

LLOYD CROUSE

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a great Lunenburg native, a great Nova Scotian and an honourable member of this place for 32 years, the Hon. Lloyd Crouse.

Lloyd Crouse was first elected to Queens—Lunenburg in 1957 during the Diefenbaker sweep and was re-elected 10 times, serving the riding for a total of 32 years.

Prior to politics, Lloyd Crouse ran a fishery business, and the fishery was always near and dear to his heart.

Lloyd Crouse had an outstanding career. He was a pilot in World War II. He was a member of the House of Commons and was appointed to the Queen's Privy Council. He served Nova Scotia as Lieutenant Governor from 1989 to 1994 and was the third ever recipient of the Order of Nova Scotia in 2002.

To Lloyd's family and his wife Marion, we offer our sincere condolences. Lloyd was both a dedicated politician and a dedicated family man. He was greatly respected and will be greatly missed.

* * *

MEADOW LAKE FIRE

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the middle of the night on May 1 in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, flames engulfed several small businesses right across the street from my constituency office.

The Lumber House, a renowned local eatery, which would have been celebrating its 30th anniversary shortly, and the Thrift Mission were lost to the flames. Several other nearby businesses sustained smoke and water damage as well. Our thoughts and prayers are with the community at this trying time.

There was the potential for much greater damage. The fire could have spread easily to many other buildings were it not for the courage and bravery of the emergency personnel.

On behalf of all the people of Meadow Lake and across northern Saskatchewan, I would like to acknowledge the heroic efforts of the Meadow Lake Fire Department, specifically the actions of Chief Russell Nelson and firefighters Brian Ritco and Louis Hiebert.

This was not a typical fire. Injuries were sustained during those difficult hours in the middle of the night, but the job was completed. I encourage all my colleagues in the House to join me in praising their tremendous efforts.

* * *

JAZZ ON THE RIDGE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): On Friday, May 25, Peninsula Ridge Estates Winery in Beamsville, Ontario will present its signature gala benefit with the proceeds going to two charitable causes: the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital Foundation and the McNally House Hospice.

Through partnerships with events such as Jazz on the Ridge and the generous support of our community, the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital Foundation has raised more than \$14 million toward the building of our new hospital.

Events like Jazz on the Ridge also help the Niagara West Community Hospice, which is currently raising \$1.5 million to construct the McNally House, a residential hospice that will provide comfort and a peaceful environment for individuals with life threatening or terminal illness.

The sixth annual Jazz on the Ridge event features an unparalleled evening of great wine, spectacular food and celebrity jazz performers.

I encourage everyone to bring together friends, family and colleagues and join the over 400 guests for an inspiring evening of community solidarity, and experience for themselves why Jazz on the Ridge is one of Niagara's premier fundraising events.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

DIVING GRAND PRIX IN MONTREAL

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over the past few days, Olympic diver Alexandre Despaties from Quebec once again showed that he has what it takes to be a great athlete. With the crowd cheering him on, Alexandre displayed the full extent of his considerable talent and took home three gold medals. Solo on the three-metre springboard and the ten-metre tower, or paired with his teammate Arturo Miranda for synchronized dives on the three-metre springboard, he dominated the Canada Cup Diving Grand Prix events in Montreal.

Meaghan Benfeito also took home her share of medals, winning two silver medals in synchronized diving, the first on the tower with her long time teammate, Roseline Fillion, and the second on the three-metre springboard with Jennifer Abel.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to congratulate these divers, who did such a great job of representing Quebec. I would like to wish them every success in the events beginning Thursday in Florida.

* * *

RÉJEAN AND STÉPHANIE GIGNAC

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 24, 2006, Quebec City lost a pillar of the community, Réjean Gignac. A cruel fate befell Mr. Gignac and his daughter Stéphanie, who were swept away by the current of the Sainte-Anne River. They were friends of mine. I wanted to honour them here today, along with Francine, their wife and mother, who survived the ordeal.

Finding their bodies provides a sense of closure for Francine, their family and their friends. Now we are left with our memories, which are a constant source of inspiration: Stéphanie's hearty laugh, Réjean's unending jokes, Francine's joy at seeing her two most cherished loved ones live out their dreams and, for us, their friends, their commitment to bringing happiness to those less fortunate.

Statements by Members

I cannot neglect to mention that Francine has been as solid as a rock during this nightmare, displaying both strength and fragility. I give you my word, Francine, I will always be there for you, and together, we will hold on to the dreams of your two loved ones.

* * *

[English]

BALMY BEACH COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a truly remarkable institution in my riding. This coming weekend the Balmy Beach Community School will be celebrating its 100th anniversary.

When it opened in 1907 as the Pine Avenue School, it had just four rooms and three teachers. Over its first 20 years, the school continued to expand. However, when the school was eventually replaced in the 1970s, the community was encouraged to submit ideas on how best the institution could serve the community.

The building was completed in September 1975. Unlike many of the traditional schools, its function was to service the needs of the community, including pre-schoolers, school age children, adults and senior citizens. As a result, it is a modern facility that is open from early morning until late at night, making Balmy Beach a true community school.

I congratulate Balmy Beach on its 100th anniversary and I look forward to attending the event this Saturday, May 12.

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LEEDS—GRENVILLE

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to invite hon. members and all Canadians to visit my riding of Leeds—Grenville this year.

There are a number of celebrations taking place in my historic riding.

First, the Rideau Canal celebrates its 175th anniversary this year with events and activities taking place throughout the corridor.

Brockville, one of the prettiest communities in Ontario, also celebrates its 175th anniversary of incorporation as a police village, a new designation at the time. This was two years before York, which became Toronto, and Hamilton were incorporated.

Kemptville, a fast growing community in my riding, celebrates its 150th anniversary this year.

In the fall, we host the annual International Plowing Match near Crosby.

It is always a great time to visit Leeds—Grenville, and this year there are at least four more great reasons.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

GREAT GATHERING OF ACADIANS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the Grand rassemblement that took place last week in Caraquet, New Brunswick. This great gathering of the Acadian community of New Brunswick is the culmination of the work of the États généraux des arts et de la culture.

The event gave nearly 400 delegates the opportunity to reflect on and make decisions concerning the place of arts and culture in the daily lives of Acadians.

The event coincided with the Éloizes gala, a unique, multi-disciplinary showcase that highlights the effervescent nature of the arts in Acadia.

Thank you to all the organizers and volunteers who made this event such a great success. Make way for arts and culture in Acadia!

* * *

• (1410)

BENOÎT CHEVALIER

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the tragic death of Corporal Benoît Chevalier of 3 Wing Bagotville in Quebec.

Corporal Chevalier was one of nine peacekeepers who lost their lives on Sunday when their plane crashed in the Sinai Desert. The nine were members of a United Nations force that was monitoring the border between Egypt and Israel.

Benoît Chevalier had five years' experience in the Canadian Forces. He was born in Macamic, Quebec, where he attended elementary and secondary school.

His comrades considered him a professional and likeable man who served his country with honour. He was a son, a brother and a brave soldier.

We in the House of Commons will remember Benoît Chevalier, and we express our heartfelt sympathies to his family here in Canada and his comrades around the world.

* * *

FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am outraged by the statement by Liberal candidate Justin Trudeau, who says he is in favour of abolishing separate French language and English language education systems.

His remarks show a lack of understanding of the history of francophones in Quebec and the rest of Canada and the battles they have fought. It is shameful to want to upset a balance as delicate as French language education, which owes its existence to struggles, hard work and a refusal to assimilate.

It is incomprehensible that Justin Trudeau should raise the possibility of merging the education systems to save money, especially when education is a provincial responsibility. The right

of minority francophone and Acadian communities to be educated in French is worth a lot more than any potential savings.

Before he comes out in favour of trilingualism or quadrilingualism, the Liberal candidate should recognize that minority francophones are entitled to be educated in their own language, and he should learn what comes under federal jurisdiction and what does not.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is National Mental Health Week. Mental illness affects people of all ages, but the effect of this illness on the young is particularly tragic. It takes away their future. Mental illness affects not only the individual but the person's family. It is an issue that has affected our family.

Hope and aspirations for one's child are devastated. The child may not graduate from university or college. It may be unrealistic to look forward to marriage and grandchildren. With the present state of research, the most one can hope for is that the medication will stabilize the individual. There is no cure.

That is why Dr. John Roder's breakthrough research into schizophrenia at the Lunenburg Research Centre is so very important and welcome. He has switched his career track from well-funded cancer research to research on mental illness, the poor cousin in the world of medical research, as a result of his own son's diagnosis.

More funds are urgently needed. I hope the Conservative government will make mental health research a priority.

* * *

SENATE TENURE LEGISLATION

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Bill S-4, the Senate term limit law, approaches its first birthday, Liberal senators are running out of coherent reasons to oppose the bill, and so the silly season begins.

Only 16 of 36 senators who responded to a *Hill Times* survey support Bill S-4. According to the newspaper, "15 of those supporters are Conservatives and one was anonymous".

This confirms the democracy phobia of Liberals in the other place. It also shows that whoever is running the mad house over there it certainly is not the Leader of the Opposition, who said in February, "Term limits [for senators] are a good thing, if it's not too short".

What constitutes a not too short term in the eyes of a Liberal senator? Clearly, it is not the eight years proposed by Bill S-4. According to the *Hill Times*, "The preferred term limit for Liberals ranged primarily between 12 and 15 years". Yet last year the Leader of the Opposition said that Senate terms should be as short as six years.

The Leader of the Opposition cannot control Elizabeth May. Now he cannot control his own Senate caucus. Is he in control of anything at all?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SUPERIOR COURT OF QUEBEC

Mr. André Arthur (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to a serious problem at the Superior Court of Quebec, in Quebec City.

Justice Yves Alain has just paid a \$1,300 fine for driving his car with a blood alcohol level of 0.258, which is probably a record among judges. Nonetheless, he wants to remain a judge and continue to pass judgment on people who, unlike him, are not criminals.

Yves Alain is a Liberal appointed judge, who is considered in Quebec City to be a protégé of Marc-Yvan Côté. What is more, he is part of a group of legal bullies who have been trying for some time now to change the media landscape in Quebec by eliminating certain people through outrageous rulings.

The Government of Canada and the judicial council must give back the Superior Court of Quebec the credibility it needs to maintain public respect by chasing out this criminal and bully.

ORAL QUESTIONS

•(1415)

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, Colonel Steve Noonan testified under oath that he had been made aware of the case of a detainee who had been transferred by Canadian authorities to Afghan authorities and had been mistreated by the Afghan authorities. This claim was contradicted on Saturday by the Department of National Defence and the contradictions keep coming.

There are two possible explanations: either the government was aware of the content of Colonel Noonan's testimony and hid it from this House, or it was not aware, which further proves that the Minister of National Defence is not in control of his department. Which of these versions is correct?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very puzzled why the Leader of the Opposition continues to try to distort and mislead this House and others on the facts, because the reality does not accord with what he described. The situation is not at all what he described.

In fact what we have here is actually a situation where we can be very proud of our Canadian troops. They saw an individual receiving a little rough treatment at the hands of some Afghans and they intervened to protect him and ensure his well-being.

I think that is something we would be proud of and I cannot imagine why the Leader of the Opposition would think it is a bad thing or would want to continue to attack our Canadian troops on the subject.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is disgusting. We support the troops. Everybody in this House supports the troops.

But the government is not doing its job. If the Conservatives knew that the Afghan authority was treating the detainee that way, why did they hide it from the Canadian people and from this House?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not dealing here with a prisoner that had been turned over and was tortured in a prison. It is no such situation like that. It was a situation out in the field where Canadian soldiers observed this taking place and intervened to ensure that the situation could be ended.

That is something we should be proud of, but the Liberals persist in harping on it as if the Canadian Forces did something wrong. The Canadian Forces conducted themselves in an exemplary fashion. We have put in place now an agreement to deal with the treatment of any prisoners who are in place.

I will simply read what Paul Koring said in the *Globe and Mail*:

The new deal transforms Canada into the standard-bearer for all foreign countries in the monitoring of transferred prisoners in Afghanistan.

One would think he would—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly our troops did the right thing in this specific case. That is not the question. The question is, did the minister know? Did the Minister of Public Safety know? Did the Prime Minister know? Who knew that this specific case happened and who made the cover-up?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again the Leader of the Opposition has his facts wrong.

The facts are, as Colonel Noonan's affidavit indicates, that this is not an issue of a detainee who was transferred to Afghan authorities. It is an issue that happened out in the field, that Canadians observed and then intervened.

Perhaps this is the reason the Canadian public has so much confidence in the Leader of the Opposition that they delivered the lowest total ever in contributions, 10% of what the government did in its first quarter, the lowest total ever in Canadian history for Liberal contributions since reporting started. That is a pretty good accomplishment. It must be in his questions.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue is this. Do we have one process to transfer detainees, or two? Do we have coverage for all detainees or not? These are the questions. Are all Afghans handed over to the Afghans covered by the new agreement? Do they all receive full Geneva convention protection?

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I read considerable excerpts from the agreement that covered that and indeed answered those questions in the affirmative.

Apparently the deputy leader for the Liberal Party is following in the steps of his leader in failing to read the agreement, but somebody else read it, somebody named Michael Byers, who is not traditionally a fan of the government. He said that the enhanced agreement is now better than the Dutch-Afghan agreement, in fact, it is first-rate. If he is satisfied, I would hope they would finally be satisfied.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the new agreement delegates investigations into allegations of abuse by the Afghan authorities to the Afghan authorities themselves. This is not acceptable.

Why is the Prime Minister shirking his responsibilities? Why does he refuse to devote the necessary resources to ensure that Afghan prisons respect the provisions of the Geneva convention?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to what is being said, this is a very good agreement. For example, in an article in the *Globe and Mail*, Paul Koring said, “The new deal transforms Canada into the standard-bearer for all foreign countries in the monitoring of transferred prisoners in Afghanistan”.

We are proud of this agreement.

* * *

SAINT-HUBERT AIRPORT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 300 jobs are at risk because the government refuses to invest \$70 million in the Saint-Hubert airport in order to enable Pratt & Whitney to carry out flight tests.

The ministers responsible are passing the ball back and forth and alleging that the airport project does not meet the criteria for government programs.

Does the government realize that 300 jobs are at risk because the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and his colleague the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, for bureaucratic reasons, refuse to provide the \$70 million necessary to upgrade the Saint-Hubert airport?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, allow me to state that, today, the Prime Minister of the Government of Canada telephoned the new President of France to pay his respects and to congratulate him. They spoke cordially and amicably. It is definitely not the tone adopted in the sovereignist movement by the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the PQ.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we can see that the minister is very worried about the problems of the employees of Pratt & Whitney in Saint-Hubert.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services gave Pratt & Whitney \$350 million to subsidize the development of new engines. If the government refuses to provide \$70 million to the Saint-Hubert airport, Pratt & Whitney will move its international engine testing operations to Plattsburgh in the United States.

Does the government realize that it is forcing Pratt & Whitney to carry out its testing in the United States with the money of Quebec and Canadian taxpayers who subsidized the development of Pratt & Whitney engines?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate the fact that the Saint-Hubert airport and Pratt & Whitney are asking for \$70 million out of a total budget of \$200 million.

Given the large amounts involved, the Economic Development Agency of Canada cannot give on the spot approval to this type of project. This matter will not be settled in the media but rather around the table. The representatives of the Economic Development Agency of Canada, Pratt & Whitney and the Saint-Hubert airport are working to find alternatives and solutions.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal budget totals more than \$230 billion, yet the government cannot find \$70 million to upgrade the Saint-Hubert airport.

The Minister of Transport is passing the buck to his colleague, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, who is saying he does not have any money. In addition, the Minister of Public Works is promising to talk about the issue. With whom? We do not know.

Does the Prime Minister realize that while the government is talking with whomever, 300 jobs are on the line and economic spinoffs worth \$2 billion over 20 years could take off for Plattsburgh?

• (1425)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that Ottawa is not someplace where you ask for something and get it right away. Issues have to be analyzed. Of course, there are always budget constraints. I would remind officials at the Saint-Hubert airport and Pratt & Whitney that the newspapers do not hold the solutions to their problems. They need to sit down and dig deep. The government paid out \$350 million last December. They need to reach into their own pockets so that we can find solutions together.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec stated that Pratt & Whitney had already received \$350 million to develop new engines, but that his department did not have \$70 million to repair the runway at the Saint-Hubert airport so that those engines could be tested.

Does the minister realize that by refusing to pay the \$70 million, he is accepting that the \$350 million already paid out is funding jobs that will take off for the United States?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind hon. members once again that the budget envelope for regional economic development is \$200 million for the 14 regions in Quebec. Our friends opposite should tell us which regions' budgets they want us to take away, because we would have to take away five regions' entire budget to fund this project.

As far as I know, the Bloc Québécois members are not going to be the ones who resolve this issue. I am asking officials from Pratt & Whitney and Aéroports de Montréal to sit down with our senior officials and identify solutions. The figure quoted for phase one is \$9.5 million and for phase two it is \$60 million. We need to sit down.

There is also a department responsible for infrastructure, which might be able to help us.

* * *

MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the mystery of the Conservatives' apparent thrift has been solved. The ministers' seeming frugality is a trick. The NDP recently learned that the Minister of Labour spent over \$150,000 on flights in private jets. These expenses were never publicly disclosed. These expenses were hidden from the public.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Are any other ministers hiding expenses from the public?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. All of the Minister of Labour's expenses have been made available on websites. The fact is that the Conservative Minister of Labour's expenses in 2006 were lower than those of his Liberal counterparts in 2005.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is the measuring stick that the Conservative government is using how the former Liberal government behaved itself? It is unbelievable.

The Conservatives campaigned on accountability but they are governing like the Liberals. They are even using their measuring stick. They skirted the rules on convention fees as donations. There is the cheque cashing fiasco of the Minister of Canadian Heritage. They have made appointments to friends, issued contracts to buddies, and now their travelling expenses are hidden. It is unacceptable.

Will the Prime Minister commit to tabling all of the receipts in public so the public can have a look?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, all the expenses are published on the Internet. I invite the member to look a little closer and he might find them.

Oral Questions

Certainly, as a measuring stick we would not want to use the leader of the NDP when he was on council in the city of Toronto. I have an article from the *Toronto Star*. In 2000 when he was on council in Toronto representing a downtown ward right by city hall, he managed to use the council's chauffeur driven limousine 194 times in one year. We thought he was always bicycling to work, but apparently not.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the chaos, the confusion—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Brampton—Springdale has the floor.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, the chaos, the confusion and the cover-ups continue. The only way Canadians can get honest answers is through affidavits filed in Federal Court.

At first, there was no report and then there was a report. Then the report showed up all blacked out and now Ms. Colleen Swords, an employee of Foreign Affairs Canada, testified that she has seen a written report prepared by the Correctional Service of Canada related to the abuse of detainees.

Will the Minister of Public Safety table this report in the House? Canadians want to know the truth.

● (1430)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very frank about what is happening here. The only confusion, the only misstatement of fact, the only deliberate attempt to distort what is going on here is coming from the opposition benches.

Let me read clearly from an affidavit filed by the vice-chief of the defence staff. He said, "Nothing in the circumstances described can lead to a conclusion that the individual was tortured and that CF members were aware of such torture".

If members in the field were not aware of any allegations of torture or actual torture, how would any member of the government be aware?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government would not be aware because it is confused. It has been a week of chaos. It has been a week of confusion. It has been a week of cover-ups. Canadians really want to know the truth.

On Friday the foreign affairs minister told the House that there were more than two cases of alleged detainee abuse. Exactly how many cases of prisoner abuse is the Minister of Foreign Affairs aware of? How many written reports have been prepared? When are those reports going to be made public? Canadians want to know.

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I repeat again, what we have done is clean up the mess left in place by the previous government. We have now an enhanced agreement that allows for unfettered access. It allows for private access. It improves the relationship between the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It improves access available by the Red Cross.

What we have done is improve the situation to do our very best to ensure that the Afghan government has the capacity and the ability to do its utmost to protect detainees.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Afghan detainee transfer scandal has showcased the Conservative government's propensity for screwing up and covering up. The muzzled Minister of National Defence's deliberate confusion and lack of transparency are becoming more and more troubling.

I do not know whether the Prime Minister will let him speak today, but we would like to know why his vice-chief of the defence staff intervened this weekend. Was Colonel Noonan, who was on the ground, too transparent and too honest?

Who in his office is keeping such a close watch over this file as to prompt this weekend's updates?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read for the member opposite so he will clearly understand. This is from the affidavit:

—as Colonel Noonan's affidavit indicates, there were no specific complaints received from CF members, humanitarian agencies, detainees or former detainees to the CF...

Therefore, it is very clear. What we are seeing consistently is an effort by members opposite to distort, to stir up, to misrepresent what went on. The invention of a scandal on the other side of the House is not cutting it. Canadians are not buying it, particularly from the member.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no service at the number you have dialed.

Our brave soldiers are fighting in Afghanistan and the Conservatives in Ottawa are passing the buck. Foreign affairs denied existence of a report setting out allegations of torture. It is the lawyers' fault. The Minister of National Defence was contradicted by the Prime Minister about the existence of a new agreement. It is foreign affairs' fault. And do not forget the Minister of Public Safety who blames everybody except himself.

We have finger pointing instead of leadership, misleading instead of honesty. When will the Prime Minister put the troops ahead of them and clean up his own mess?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike members opposite, we always put Canadian soldiers ahead of a government agenda. We put them first and foremost, central in our foreign policy, central in everything we do right now to ensure they get their work done. I want to credit the Minister of

National Defence for having done his part to ensure that those men and women in uniform are getting the support they need.

When it comes to support, I want to quote the member opposite, whom I was with at a NATO meeting just last week, when he said in reference to the mission in Afghanistan:

I was part of the government when at first we decided to go to Kabul...and then we went to Kandahar...we support, of course, our government in that mission.

What happened to that support?

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the French election campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy proposed a carbon tax on products from countries that do not comply with the Kyoto protocol. Yesterday, in his speech, France's new president confirmed that global warming will be his first priority.

Does the Minister of the Environment realize that by turning his back on the Kyoto protocol and helping big oil companies, he could end up penalizing all Canadian exporters, especially Quebec exporters who account for 40% of Canada's exports to France?

• (1435)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear: we have not turned our backs on the Kyoto protocol. We are still part of the Kyoto protocol and we will work very hard to reduce greenhouse gases.

I would like to congratulate France's new president. I do not know whom the opposition leader voted for, but we are all looking forward to working with the new president.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to a survey, 92% of Albertans believe that oil companies should reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, 70% reject the Conservatives' intensity targets in favour of absolute targets. Quebecers agree.

Is the government aware that the only ones who support his phony plan based on intensity targets are the oil companies and that the people, the scientists and the manufacturers are against his plan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told my colleague from Quebec very clearly, we have absolute numbers for absolute reductions in greenhouse gases.

I know that having a government that wants absolute reductions is a new thing here in the House of Commons.

We are ready to act and we have a real plan to reduce greenhouse gases, which is something that has not happened since the Bloc Québécois first came to the House of Commons.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Department of National Defence responded to Colonel Noonan's testimony, saying that the prisoner who was tortured and then recaptured had only been interrogated by Canadian soldiers in the beginning, but that he was arrested by the Afghan police. In short, Canada is tossing the hot potato, rather than assuming its responsibilities.

Does this admission by National Defence not illustrate the government's hypocrisy in the Afghan prisoner file, regardless of the conclusion of a new agreement?

There were, and still are, two kinds of prisoners: those transferred after being interrogated by Canada, and those transferred immediately to Afghan authorities.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, what the hon. member is saying is not correct.

[English]

What we have here clearly is a case of a detainee who was not in Canadian custody. He was arrested by Afghan police. Canadian soldiers did the responsible thing. They saw what was taking place. They acted in a humanitarian way to intervene, and he was later placed in Afghan custody again. This is something for which Canadian soldiers should be commended.

What we have in place now is a new system that will work better. It has been commended by others. It has taken the best of other countries' systems and incorporated them into one that will work extremely well to protect detainees.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government may say that this agreement solves all the problems, but its obligation, as the government, is to ensure that the agreement does so. There is a double standard here.

Does the government plan to take the necessary measures and ensure that, from now on, all prisoners are protected by the new agreement, in accordance with the Geneva convention, as they should be?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done when it comes to the responsibility of Canadian Forces. If it is Afghan forces, then the Afghan forces will follow their procedures. Clearly that is the situation.

We want to encourage the Afghan government to do everything possible to live up to its expectations. Canada as well has taken steps now to ensure that the new arrangement will enhance our capacity to track those prisoners, to see that the Afghans live up to those expectations.

This has been something that has been commended by other countries, that will be studied by other countries and I suspect that it will be modelled by other countries.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is continuing with his lame excuses and questionable practices.

We learned this morning that the minister did not voluntarily disclose all travel expenses. This is even more disconcerting because we suspect that the minister travels by private air service between his riding and Ottawa at taxpayers' expense.

Why is the minister not more transparent? Does this concept apply to everyone except Conservative ministers?

• (1440)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already stated that all expenses of the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec have been published in full for all to read.

[English]

There is a difference. Not only did he spend less than his Liberal counterparts, but it seems to be almost across the board.

During the last year of the Liberal government, the treasury board president's expenses were 426% higher than the expenses of our President of the Treasury Board during his first year. The expenses of the Liberal human resources ministers were 526% higher in their last year than our Conservative minister in her first year. It seems—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at a concrete example.

On Friday, May 4, the minister was seen on Parliament Hill at noon. At 2:30 p.m., he was at a press conference in Saint-Félix-d'Otis in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. He had less than two and one half hours to travel more than 700 kilometres.

Will the minister voluntarily disclose his travel expenses for that trip? Do we need to file an access to information request or will the minister be transparent? Will he accept his responsibilities and make a true voluntary statement?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will slowly repeat my statement for the minister responsible for Shane Doan: all expenses, absolutely all expenses, incurred by the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec have been published on the website. It is good reading.

[English]

It is more interesting reading. Guess what? It is less than his Liberal predecessors, and I could keep going. The expenses of the Liberal ministers of health in their last year were 289% more than a Conservative Minister of Health in his first year.

Oral Questions

I would be happy to continue going through all the expenses. This would make for very good reading for a government that finally takes accountability and taxpayer dollars seriously.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minority Conservative government is again showing its true colours. According to the Conservatives' own Federal Accountability Act, all public opinion research must be deposited with Library and Archives Canada.

We now know that a \$117,000 research project, which should have been listed by March, still does not appear in public records.

Why is it that when it comes to the Conservative government and accountability, it is always do as I say, not do as I do?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right that under the Federal Accountability Act all public opinion research must be disclosed. We have directed that it be disclosed immediately, and it is being provided today to Library and Archives Canada. She can read it all to her heart's content.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just for the record, the Liberals have been doing that for over a decade.

While a minority Conservative government hired a separatist to lead a redundant investigation through its invisible, unelected Senator Fortier into polling commissioned by previous governments, the Prime Minister failed to disclose his own public opinion research conducted within ethnic communities this past year.

Why, oh why, does the Prime Minister insist on hiding behind the facade of accountability?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the hon. member did not hear my answer to the question. It is all being provided to the Library today. She can read it all. There is nothing to be hidden at all.

It is very different than the kind of contracts that were given under the Liberal government to Liberal sympathetic pollsters, people who continued to give tremendous support to the member for LaSalle—Émard during his time in finance. It was something that was worthy of an inquiry. That is what the Auditor General said.

The members do not hear the Auditor General complaining about our practices because we are cleaning up the mess and the way politics were practised by the Liberal Party while in government.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Asia Pacific gateway and corridor initiative is designed to enhance Canada's access to Asian markets. The goal is to have the best transportation network facilitating global supply chains between North America and Asia.

Last week the Prime Minister was in B.C. announcing further investment in this initiative.

Could the Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway update the House on this announcement?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that the Prime Minister was in British Columbia last Friday. He gave a tremendous, strategic and compelling speech on our vision of global commerce, on the Asia Pacific gateway and corridor strategy.

The Prime Minister reiterated over a billion dollars in capital commitments to the Asia Pacific gateway and corridor strategy.

* * *

● (1445)

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families are facing rising gas prices at the pump. At the same time, oil companies are raking in record profits at the expense of consumers.

The Competition Bureau is totally ineffective in this measure. It does not have the power to stop gas prices from rising and it does not have the backbone to tell the big oil industry that Canadians are sick and tired of being hosed at the pumps.

There have been six investigations and zero results. After six failures, it is time to get serious about this and have a full-blown public inquiry.

Why would the government not move on a public inquiry? It is what is needed right now for consumers in our country.

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is truly amazing is that the NDP continues to support the Liberal environment plan. Everyone knows that under that plan gas prices would rise from \$1.70 to \$2 a litre. Independent economist Mark Jaccard said that gas prices could rise as much as 60% under the Liberal plan.

Why are NDP members being hypocrites, trying to pretend they are concerned, when in fact they are advocating for \$2 a litre gasoline?

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. What we have been calling for is accountability for consumers.

Oral Questions

The government's Minister of Industry's briefing book identifies that the Competition Act is deficient. In fact, it was based on an analysis done in 1969. That is when we had the Woodstock festival. How can consumers be protected if the government is looking at a system that has not been updated in 40 years?

The briefing book also identifies that resources have not kept pace. Enforcement is not there to meet the need and the speed has been diminished.

Who are those members protecting by not updating the Competition Act?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts remain that independent economists, Mark Jaccard and Don Drummond, have said, unequivocally, that the Liberal environment plan would have gasoline prices go up by 60%.

The Liberals can laugh, scream and yell but those are the facts and they know they are true. They have the NDP supporting them and now they are trying to cry foul. They should look at what they are promoting because they will actually hurt the Canadian economy and they know it.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for more than 20 years my father worked for Alcan in the kind of good head office job that simply will not exist if today's foreign takeover bid goes through.

Prophetically, two weeks ago Alcan's CEO said that the government's interest deductibility proposal made it more vulnerable to takeover.

Since the Minister of Finance is so clearly out of his depth, will the Prime Minister order him to withdraw his interest deductibility proposal right now, today, before the Alcan board makes a decision?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is one of the most breathtakingly uninformed questions that has been heard in the House in a long time.

If the member were to read the background, which I am sure he has not, he would see that negotiations have been going on between Alcoa and Alcan for two years.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a breathtakingly dumb answer. He is clearly out of his depth.

A well-known business personality said that the Prime Minister should take out his whacking stick, clean up the department and find someone competent to do that job.

For the sake of all those head office jobs, will the finance minister withdraw his demented interest deductibility proposal today?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite promotes tax havens. What the member opposite says is that he wants to treat certain corporations more favourably and to prefer certain taxpayers in Canada over others. Tax loopholes and tax avoidance is what they believe in on the other side of the House.

On the other hand, we recognize that hard-working Canadians should be treated fairly and in that way we can reduce taxes for all Canadians, not just for his friends.

• (1450)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the business community is telling the finance minister that he needs a little more on the job training. It is outraged because the government started its competition process on the removal of foreign interest deductibility only after the policy was announced.

By disenfranchising Canadian companies, how are Canadians supposed to compete in emerging and established economies? Is this the minister's definition of advantage Canada?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member opposite how Canadians want to compete. They want to compete fairly and on a level playing field. They do not need preferential tax treatment. All Canadians ask is that they be treated fairly and that the hard-working people in Canada who get T4 slips this time of the year and pay their taxes get treated fairly, not preferentially, which the Liberals want to do through tax loopholes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. It would be helpful if we had a little more order in the House. It was very difficult to hear the minister's answer and now the member for Mississauga—Brampton South will want to ask a supplementary but I do not know how he could possibly have heard the response. I was having trouble. We will now hear from the hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South with a little more order.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has no problem with foreign companies taking over Canadian companies but he does have a fundamental problem with Canadians companies trying to expand abroad.

The Minister of Finance has been scrambling to reverse his policy for eliminating the interest deductibility tax. It has been called the worst tax policy in Ottawa in over 35 years.

Why is the minister insisting on a tax policy that will put our home grown Canadian companies at a competitive disadvantage abroad?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is suggesting that Canadian companies can only compete if they can deduct interest twice, if they can double-dip. I respectfully disagree with the member opposite. I dare say that taxpayers in Mississauga South, whom he represents, who get T4 slips every year and who pay their full share of taxes, would disagree with the member opposite saying that certain groups, certain corporations should be treated preferentially.

We are against tax havens. We are against tax loopholes. We are against preferential treatment.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the current crisis in the shrimp fishery is still quite alarming. This situation has been caused by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who wanted to politicize the allocation of shrimp fishery quotas by favouring Newfoundland at the expense of Quebec.

Does the minister plan on taking action on this issue, reducing the cost of permits, reviewing the fishing quotas, and quickly introducing an assistance plan, as suggested by the Bloc Québécois, thus helping the communities that depend on this industry?

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue in which the member has been involved for some time.

I first want to clarify that there was no political involvement or manipulation in relation to the movement of any quotas, and the record shows that quite clearly.

Second, fishermen from Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick are involved in the same shrimp fishery. They are getting a good price for their product from the processors. The processors in Quebec are not paying the same price. This is a solution that industry has defined itself.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of the federal government's failure to take action, 400 factory workers are demonstrating today in Gaspé to express their dissatisfaction with the federal government's policy on fisheries.

When will the minister wake up and implement a plan to help the communities, who are tired of sitting powerless while he does nothing?

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's frustration, especially when he sees the neighbouring provinces paying a much better price for shrimp. In fact, many of the people from Quebec are going to Newfoundland to sell their shrimp simply to get a better price. His beef should be with the processors in Quebec.

However, it is a very serious problem that we will not dismiss. We certainly will look into it to see if there is any part we can play to make life a bit easier for the shrimpers.

* * *

● (1455)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Treasury Board requires that before recommending any regulation, departments and agencies must produce a full cost benefit analysis.

The environment minister keeps making claims about his plan that a growing list of environmentalists, scientists and economists simply do not believe.

Will the finance minister confirm whether his department signed off on the costs and penalties associated with this eco-fraud, or is this whole sham simply a solo tour de farce on the part of the environment minister ?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. Why does the member from Toronto not listen to the Liberal premier of New Brunswick?

I was reading on cbc.ca, which I read from time to time, and it says, "New Brunswick's Liberal premier has distanced himself from the federal Liberals' plan to cut greenhouse gases...". Shawn Graham said Wednesday that he opposes the aggressive "cap and trade" policy favoured by the federal Liberals. Why? It may have a negative impact on our province's economy.

Why are the federal Liberals against economic growth in New Brunswick?

* * *

BRITISH COLUMBIA FLOOD MITIGATION

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, communities in B.C.'s Fraser Valley are threatened by a large scale flood this spring. The potential for a crisis is very real due to last winter's massive snow pack which is beginning to melt. In fact, some residents of Abbotsford still remember the disastrous flood of 1948. If another flood occurs, damages will be significant. The Government of B.C. has asked for emergency assistance.

Would the Minister of Agriculture and the member of Parliament for Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon tell the House what the government is doing to address this urgent issue?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member joined me, the Prime Minister and other MPs touring the potential flood zone in B.C.'s Fraser River Valley on Thursday.

As we speak, the province of B.C. is working on the dykes and other structural projects along the Fraser, including in my riding of Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, to help fight any flood waters that could come over the next number of weeks.

The government has listened to the needs of British Columbia. Following the tour, the Prime Minister announced \$16.5 million to match the B.C. government's dollar for dollar in our flood mitigation efforts in British Columbia. We have announced another \$4 million for dredging activities in the Fraser Valley to help both navigation and the flood problem.

We are getting it done in the Fraser Valley.

*Oral Questions***GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the richest Canadians have increasingly enjoyed very good fortune while, at the same time, 40% of Ontario families, more than 600,000 households, have seen little or no gains in their incomes in 30 years despite working longer hours.

Conservative and Liberal governments have failed working Canadians. Families struggle just to make ends meet. We need pay equity. We need a national child care program and we need an end to child poverty. When will the government take real action?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, in budget 2007, at long last, the government introduced the working income tax benefit for Canadians. This is a great step forward to help make things more equal for Canadians, to help Canadians get over the welfare wall and to join in the gainful employment that is available in Canada today in our strong economy.

I cannot, for the life of me, understand why the Liberals opposite plan to vote against the workers income tax benefit.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not effective. Ordinary people are struggling to afford food. One time funding and tax tinkering does not solve long term hunger or homelessness.

Why does the government continue to give tax breaks to the rich and leave the poor to struggle every day? We have no national housing program, not enough child care spaces and women in Canada still only make 71¢ for every dollar a man earns.

We can afford to change it. Will the minister stop the big industry tax breaks and start thinking of ordinary Canadians?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned ordinary Canadians and she mentioned child care.

I think the NDP have a lot of explaining to do. Not long ago, the member for Trinity—Spadina went to the government operations committee and moved a motion to remove the universal child care benefit, which provides \$100 a month to 1.4 million families every month, something that helps all Canadians.

When will the NDP members explain why they are against helping all those people? That is a shame.

* * *

● (1500)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the northeast coast of Newfoundland and Labrador is now experiencing the worst ice conditions in decades.

Unable to get their fishing gear in the water, hundreds of families have been without any income for about a month and, as a result, many are unable to provide for their families.

The minister has stated that he is monitoring the situation but time is running out. Something needs to be done and it needs to be done right now.

Will the minister stand in the House and announce an ice compensation package for fishermen on the northeast coast?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. The northeast coast of Newfoundland has experienced the worst ice we have seen in probably 30 years. It was evident by the number of sealing vessels trapped over the last few weeks.

We have had discussions with various ministers who would be involved in such a program. We are aware of it. Yesterday, I spoke to the president of the union and we had a discussion on possibilities.

We are monitoring the situation and, if help is needed, help will be provided.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, lately I have noticed a disturbing trend among the members of the opposition. Rather than letting the facts get in the way of a good accusation, they are taking allegations as truth.

In just one more example, last week the member for Brampton—Springdale accused the government of not acting for the homeless in this country.

Would the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development help the Liberals' research department with the facts on this issue?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Avalon for recently announcing \$1.4 million in new funding under the homeless partnering strategy for the Salvation Army Wiseman's Centre in St. John's.

The homeless partnering strategy works with all levels of government and not for profit to find local solutions to local problems. That is part of over \$2 billion a year we provide to the provinces for not for profit housing and homelessness.

We are getting the job done where the Liberals really failed.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 10 petitions.

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting two different petitions from British Columbia.

As many members in this House know, there are many people from British Columbia who are very concerned about the environment. These two petitions request that the Government of Canada legislate programs consistent with meteorological reality and act immediately to reduce the climate change crisis by diminishing fossil fuel dependency while sponsoring initiatives and incentives to promote less harmful technologies.

There are a number of people from my riding and other parts of British Columbia who have signed these petitions.

● (1505)

TRADESPERSONS TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION DEDUCTION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two more petitions, both of which were circulated by members and supporters of the building trades. The petitioners are from Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.

Building trades across the country have lobbied successive governments for over 30 years to achieve some basic fairness for their members. They want tradespersons and indentured apprentices to be able to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable incomes so that they can secure and maintain employment at construction sites that are more than 80 kilometres from their homes. It makes no sense for tradespersons to be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers from temporary skilled trade shortages simply because the cost of travelling is too high. To that end, they have gathered hundreds of signatures in support of my bill, Bill C-390, which would allow for precisely the kind of deductions that their members have been asking for.

I am pleased to table these petitions on their behalf and share their disappointment that this item was not addressed in the government's budget in March.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO USE OF TAXES

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions.

The first petition is from many people in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. They point out that in Canada there has been a long tradition of freedom of conscience and religion and that this has been a historical fact in Canada.

They also point out that contributing to the Canadian military through payment of income taxes is an infringement of the freedom of conscience and/or religion of those citizens who conscientiously object to participating in any way in the military and its associated activities which train people to kill and use violence.

Therefore, they call on the Parliament of Canada to establish the peace tax legislation by passing into law private member's Bill C-348, the conscientious objection act, which I have had the honour to table. The bill recognizes the right of conscientious objectors to not pay for the military but to apply that portion of their taxes that was to be used for military purposes toward peaceful, non-military purposes within the powers of Parliament.

TRADESPERSONS TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION DEDUCTION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as well, I have a petition signed by many people from the Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam areas. They point out that many tradespersons can be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers temporary skilled labour shortages simply because the cost of travelling is too high.

The petitioners call on Parliament to support Bill C-390, tabled by the member for Hamilton Mountain, which would allow tradespersons and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so they could secure and maintain employment at a construction site that is more than 80 kilometres from their home.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 188 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 188—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With regard to the Toronto Port Authority: (a) on what basis did the government classify the Q400 as a Dash-8, based on the definition of a Dash-8 as contemplated by the parties when they amended the tripartite agreement in 1985; and (b) will the government take effective measures to prohibit commercial service out of the Toronto Island Airport by any aircraft other than Dash-8s, as they existed in 1985, and short take-off and landing aircrafts, and if so, when?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), the Q400 is an aircraft trade name. The Bombardier DHC-8 Q400 aircraft falls within the internationally recognized aeronautical classification Dash-8, in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, standards.

In response to (b), Transport Canada, as one of three signatories to the tripartite agreement, has and will continue to uphold its responsibilities under the agreement including its amendments.

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-415—CANADA LABOUR CODE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: The Chair is now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on May 1, 2007, concerning Bill C-415 standing in the name of the hon. member for Davenport and Bill C-257 which, until recently, stood on the order paper in the name of the hon. member for Gatineau. Both bills amend the Canada Labour Code in relation to replacement workers.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. Government House Leader for raising this matter, as well as the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River for his intervention.

[English]

The hon. government House leader began by reminding the Chair that it has already been obliged to rule on the issue of the similarity of another bill, Bill C-295, to Bill C-257. He commented that Bill C-415 is thus the third bill banning the use of replacement workers introduced in this Parliament alone.

The hon. government House leader expressed the view that Bill C-415 and Bill C-257 share the same purpose, namely, the banning of replacement workers; that they both accomplish this purpose by amendments to the Canada Labour Code; and that they differ only in one clause and one subsection. He reminded the Chair that Standing Order 86(4) prohibits the consideration of two items of private members' business "so similar as to be substantially the same" and cited *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at pages 476 and 477, to the effect that, "two bills similar in substance will be allowed to stand on the *Order Paper* but only one may be moved and disposed of".

The hon. government House leader referred again to the ruling delivered on November 7, 2006 with respect to the alleged similarity between Bill C-257 and Bill C-295. He argued that the principle underlying the Chair's decision not to allow further consideration of Bill C-295, that the two bills "have exactly the same objective", is equally applicable to Bill C-257 and Bill C-415. He dismissed provisions of the latter bill safeguarding essential services during a strike as ancillary to its purpose and cautioned the Chair that a decision to permit further consideration of Bill C-415 would amount to a revisiting of its ruling on Bill C-257.

● (1510)

[Translation]

In his brief submission, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River pointed out that a determination, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(1), by the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with

Speaker's Ruling

respect to the votability of Bill C-415 is imminent and may be material to the disposition of this point of order.

[English]

Having reviewed these submissions with care, the Chair takes the view that the fundamental question before it may be phrased this way: Would any motion or decision of the House in connection with Bill C-415 be out of order because of the bill's similarity in substance to Bill C-257?

Of considerable relevance in this regard is the ruling delivered on February 27, 2007 with respect to the admissibility of several amendments to Bill C-257 adopted by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It was the hon. government House leader who presented so persuasive a case against the admissibility of those amendments that the Chair accepted his arguments. Ironically, his very persuasiveness on that occasion presents considerable difficulty to the case he is making today.

Two of these amendments to Bill C-257 provided for the maintenance of essential services in terms similar to specific provisions found in Bill C-415 and, of course, not originally included in Bill C-257. My ruling determined that these amendments exceeded the scope of Bill C-257 and I declined to accept arguments that they served only to clarify the bill's provisions with respect to replacement workers.

[Translation]

On April 28, 1992, at page 9801 of the *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Fraser warned that a committee:

—cannot go beyond the scope of the bill as passed at second reading, and it cannot reach back to the parent act to make further amendments not contemplated in the bill no matter how tempting that may be.

[English]

In his point of order, the hon. government House leader claimed that the two bills "have exactly the same objective", relying in part on the fact that both bills accomplish their objectives by means of amendments to the Canada Labour Code. While this is certainly the case, only Bill C-415 amends section 87.4 of the Code which deals with the concept of essential services. It thus incorporates provisions not originally contemplated in Bill C-257 whose scope, as confirmed by my earlier ruling, was judged to be limited to measures regulating the use of replacement workers during a strike. In the view of the Chair, the amendments to section 87.4 of the Code included in Bill C-415 also invalidate any claim that the two bills, in Mr. Speaker Fraser's words, "obtain their purpose by the same means".

A bill regulating the use of replacement workers need not deal with essential services. Providing for essential services in the event of the strike could quite legitimately have been the objective of a separate bill. Because of the inclusion of essential services in it, Bill C-415 has a broader scope than Bill C-257, despite similarity in addressing the issue of replacement workers.

Government Orders

Consequently, in fulfilling its duty pursuant to Standing Order 86, the Chair does not find that Bill C-415 is substantially the same as Bill C-257 and accordingly, the consideration of Bill C-415 may proceed.

I would like once again to thank the hon. government House leader for bringing this matter to the attention of the Chair.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[English]

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about something that is very near and dear to the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country. I know that when the Prime Minister campaigned in the riding at the end of 2005, there was incredible support from my constituents as soon as anything was mentioned about reforming the Senate. It is near and dear to the folks out west.

All Canadians need to have a real awakening. They have seen the reformation that needs to take place. In fact, we have an institution that has been around since 1867, since Confederation. There has been absolutely no reform or change of the Senate other than the provision in 1965 for mandatory retirement at age 75 from the previous appointment for life.

The government is determined, and based on its promises to Canadians, that at least some first steps should take place and to date there has been no progress whatsoever. I know the members opposite, the interveners earlier, were talking about it being piecemeal, that it is just trying to circumvent the constitution.

The reality is that they had 13 years to come up with some sort of concrete democratic reform and nothing took place. Working together in a minority government, we are trying to work in a compromise manner and in increments. I think the government approach is a really achievable, positive and practical step that makes a lot of common sense.

I really find it difficult that specifically my colleagues from British Columbia could vote against this bill. This is one step in the triple E Senate that we are looking at reforming.

I had the opportunity last week to meet Mr. Brown from Alberta. Since 1989 Albertans have been voting for senators-in-waiting and he is the second such individual in Alberta. Mr. Waters was the first, but he unfortunately passed away after a short term in the Senate.

Mr. Brown is ready, willing, and able to step in when the time is appropriate. I think that speaks volumes of the government for listening to not only Albertans but all Canadians, and the hue and cry that has been coming forth, that we need to reform the Senate.

Introducing this bill allows the consultation with constituents from sea to sea to sea.

The fact that senators are not elected is seen by many as contrary to the democratic values of Canadians and a major reason why the legitimacy of the Senate is often called into question.

I have the opportunity occasionally to take guests from the riding to the other house. An individual, a page, there does an excellent job. I had a chance to speak with Brad Ramsden a couple of times and he has enlightened me as to the role that the Senate plays.

I think that it does have a value in our constitutional role and our government in Canada. I value its input, but the fact is that today the 105 members, less the vacancies, who are appointed there have been appointed based on patronage, favouritism, and I think that does not speak very well for our democratic system. We live in a country that has a fundamental freedom of democracy. I do not think that there is any greater right than giving people that freedom to consult and select the individual who they want to represent their community.

The government has also introduced the bill because it reinforces, revitalizes, and modernizes long held Canadian values and most importantly the full right of Canadians to be able to choose those who will govern them.

This fundamental value has historically been enhanced and expanded by previous Conservative governments and the present Conservative government is simply continuing that tradition. I think of the statue of Robert Borden that we all walk by just outside the West Block. He led the wartime government that gave the right to women to vote. I think of Mr. Diefenbaker who gave that right to aboriginal people. These are some of the legacies of previous Conservative governments. They were excellent prime ministers and leaders such as the Prime Minister we have today.

Listening to the debate over the last few weeks there have been interveners who asked why the bill was introduced in the House of Commons rather than in Senate.

Bill C-43 authorizes the expenditure of funds related to the implementation and ongoing administration of the consultation process and pursuant to the Constitutional Act, 1867, bills that require the appropriation of funds must be initiated in the House of Commons.

At present the Governor General has the power to summon individuals to the Senate pursuant to section 24 of the Constitution Act, 1867. It states:

The Governor General shall from Time to Time, in the Queen's Name, by Instrument under the Great Seal of Canada, summon qualified Persons to the Senate;—

• (1520)

In my mind the word “qualified” is a very serious word that we need to stop and take a look at. What does qualified mean? It is up to the individual Canadians in each of the provinces and territories to decide who they feel is most qualified to represent them, not somebody who has given the Prime Minister or the leader of the government of the day the most money or helped them out the most to get them into power. We have seen this in the past, no matter which political party.

Government Orders

From a non-partisan perspective, we all need to take a step back and realize this is a very positive way. It is a legacy we can all be proud of in making a positive change in the Government of Canada.

The only difference today is that Canadians now have the opportunity to express their preferences for Senate nominees to the Prime Minister before he provides his advice to the Governor General. Looking at this process since 1989, Albertans have been providing that opportunity for their residents to vote and then give that name forward to the Prime Minister to make that choice.

The challenge of opening up the Constitution, as the Liberals have specifically indicated, is that it is a seven-fifty amending process formula. That means that seven provinces representing 50% of the population have to be in agreement, and we know how difficult that will be. It has been very difficult. Our Minister of Agriculture has been working with all the provinces to revitalize our CAIS program, helping our agricultural community and working tirelessly, and that is a very challenging perspective, getting all 13 voices together.

We need to take this in baby steps. It is a stepped approach. It is common sense, realistic and achievable.

Paragraph 42(1)(b) of the Constitution Act, 1982, requires a seven-fifty amending process for an amendment to the Constitution to alter the method of selecting senators, but the Senate appointment consultations process does not change the method of selecting senators provided in the Constitution. Therefore, there is no requirement for a constitutional amendment and no need for a Supreme Court reference.

The opposition members have to get it through their heads that this does not require a Supreme Court or a constitutional amendment, and I am opening the whole debate. This is an achievable approach. It is realistic and we need to hammer that home. We are standing up for Canadians and asking the 308 elected members in this House to do the will of Canadians.

The Governor General currently has the power to summon individuals to the Senate on the advice of the Prime Minister and this will continue after the passage of the bill. Basically nothing will change. The people will vote and through their local provinces or territories, the names will come to the Prime Minister. In reality, I cannot see any Prime Minister not accepting that person's name if he or she is qualified. The Prime Minister will do that. I know our Prime Minister has firmly said that he will be doing that as the opportunity presents itself.

Basically, this bill provides a mechanism for consultations to be held in one or more provinces to seek the preferences of the electorate on individuals who offer themselves as potential Senate nominees. Anyone who is 30 years of age right now can get into the Senate, except it is for 45 years. With our 66 word bill that is still floundering around there in the other place, we are trying to get a term limit through, whether it is 7, 8, 10 or 12 years instead of the 45 years. We are trying to have two accountable houses and an open, transparent government for Canadians.

The Prime Minister will still have the discretion to decide in which province or provinces the consultations will be held, how many places in the Senate are subject to the consultations, and in fact

whether the consultations will be held for current vacancies only or current vacancies plus future vacancies, or just future vacancies.

The process is not triggered automatically by vacancies and there will not be Senate byelections. Consultations will normally take place at the same time as a federal general election, so there is no real additional cost to Canadians. It is included in the process. They will go to the ballot. They will choose the party member that they want to select, and check off the name of the individual, the party, or someone who is running under an independent banner for the Senate.

Consultations will be smooth. The bill provides for some flexibility though, allowing that the consultations could be held at the same time as a provincial general election if an agreement is in place with the province. We are working together with the provinces and territories. I know that is something we always have to keep in mind, that we are partners in government and we work together.

This bill provides for consultations to be carried out with the use of a preferential voting system known as the single transferrable vote. In contrast to the voting system used for the House of Commons elections, electors will be able to rank their preferred candidates on a ballot.

• (1525)

Candidates receiving a defined quota of votes will be included on the list of selected Senate nominees for the Prime Minister's consideration. Should a selected nominee receive votes in excess of the quota, those votes in excess of the quota would be distributed to the electors next preferences. The vote transfer process will continue until enough nominees are selected for the number of places subject to consultation.

It is a privilege and an honour as the member of Parliament for Kelowna—Lake Country to stand here in the House today and speak about a bill that is helping to bring reformation to the other place in this Parliament that is long overdue.

I thank the members opposite for their attention. I hope they will give due consideration for this incremental step that I have said is common sense, reasonable and achievable.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech and a few things puzzle me about his speech.

First of all, we have perhaps the first and second actions of the Prime Minister on taking office which are: first, appointing someone, a former financial supporter from Montreal to the Senate, which he said he would not do; and second, he put that person in the cabinet as Minister of Public Works. The two first decisions of the Prime Minister regarding the Senate go against his election promises and go against what he says he is trying to now rapidly run backwards and trying to fix with Bill C-43.

Let me ask the hon. member a question because it is another would-be senator that is of interest as well. We have Mr. Bert Brown, the senator-in-waiting, for supposedly the same principles that are enunciated in the bill, taking the consultative referendum or preference given by a province or territory.

Government Orders

I would ask my hon. colleague to consider and recall how many Es did Bert Brown plough in his barley field? It was not one E. There were three Es: equal, elected, effective and comprehensive. It is not done piecemeal. There is no room for what the hon. member calls baby steps.

Canada is a big country. Let us have the constitutional courage of the Fathers of Confederation, and open it up and do it properly if we are going to do it. We should not say we are going to do one thing and do another as with Senator Fortier. Then, of course, even worse, trying to do it piecemeal.

The most extraordinary thing is that this hon. member pretends to represent people from British Columbia, the most disadvantaged people in the country, by giving more validity, more credibility, and elected status to a senator when the distribution is so clearly against the equal distribution for the west and British Columbia.

I would like to hear the hon. member explain to his constituents and my constituents in British Columbia why this could possibly be a good thing, entrenching and amplifying the distribution that is so much to the disadvantage of British Columbians?

Mr. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fact that Senator Fitzpatrick in British Columbia and I work very closely. He is a very hard-working individual and will be retiring soon. He is in the last year of his term and will be turning 75 on his next birthday. He has been a real asset to our community.

I spent nine years on city council and was disappointed that my predecessor, Werner Schmidt, who sat in the House for almost 13 years was often not included in some of those discussions. I think there needs to be more cooperation between the two houses. By electing people, rather than appointing them on partisanship, it would eliminate a lot of those implications. We need to work together.

The fact is that we are speaking up for our constituents in British Columbia who want an elected Senate. We realize we cannot have all three Es at once.

I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Brown last week when he was here in Ottawa. I had three high school students from my constituency visiting and we had a good chat. Mr. Brown is very excited about the opportunity. He realizes that he is part of a process in moving toward the triple E. Hopefully, one day he will be sitting in the Senate when that happens. I have mentioned that we need to work in stages that are realistic, achievable and common sense.

With regard to Senator Fortier, he is a dedicated, hard-working and very talented individual who actually took a pay cut to come and work in the Senate. He has agreed to have his name stand in the next election. I think that speaks volumes for his integrity.

• (1530)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder which of the three Es this bill purports to achieve. It is obviously not equal, because British Columbians are disadvantaged, and that problem has not been solved. It is obviously not going to be effective, because of the gridlock that it will cause between the two Houses, as has been outlined earlier. Last, it is not elected, because the Prime Minister

gets to make the choice in the end just like he does right now, so it does not change a thing.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct in the sense that western Canada, specifically Alberta, with 28 Conservative members of Parliament and only six Liberal senators, is definitely not equal. We are looking forward to having individuals in Alberta, B.C. and across the country elect those individuals that they feel will best represent their concerns. As I mentioned, the prime minister of the day will have the opportunity to appoint the individuals that Canadians have elected. I cannot see any prime minister not going with that train of thought.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, taking part in this debate on Bill C-43, is a little like going to the dentist. Personally, it is the last thing I want to be doing, but what can I say, sometimes we need to go to the dentist. However, we never need to go to the tooth puller.

I truly think the bill before us is of absolute no relevance. It addresses a very secondary matter to the detriment of more pressing priorities than the proposed reform, and that the Conservative government should be concerned about.

Bill C-43 provides for the consultation of electors in a province with respect to their preferences for the appointment of senators to represent the province.

Part 1 provides for the administration of a consultation, which is exercised under the general direction and supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Part 2 provides for the holding of a consultation, initiated by an order of the governor in council.

Part 3 provides for a process whereby prospective nominees may confirm their nominations with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Part 4 addresses voting by electors in a consultation.

Part 5 sets out the rules for the counting of votes pursuant to a preferential system, which takes into account the first and subsequent preferences of electors as indicated on their ballots.

Parts 6 and 7 deal with communications and third party advertising in relation to consultations.

Part 8 addresses financial administration by nominees.

Part 9 provides for the enforcement of the enactment, including the establishment of offences and punishments for contraventions of certain provisions.

Part 10 contains transitional provisions, consequential amendments to the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act, coordinating amendments and commencement provisions.

As I mentioned from the outset, the bill is irrelevant. First, it is quite clear to us that the government, the House of Commons, cannot unilaterally change the Senate without the Constitution being changed. Since the Constitution is a federal constitution, all the stakeholders, in other words, all the provinces, Quebec, the federal government, the parliaments of these different jurisdictions, have to take part in the reform process.

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As I said at the beginning, we do not think this bill is appropriate because what we really need is something that includes a review of the Constitution. In the late 1970s, the Supreme Court of Canada studied Parliament's ability to unilaterally amend the constitutional provisions concerning the Senate and, in a 1980 decision concerning Parliament's jurisdiction over the upper chamber, decided Parliament could not unilaterally make decisions about major changes to the essential character of the Senate.

It is likely this legislation will encounter opposition from the provinces, including Quebec. Quebec is not the only province that does not support this government's approach in tabling this bill. The government is heading down a path that leads to the reform of an institution whose relevance is in doubt. Even so, the proposed reform is a minor one.

Do they seriously think that a constitutional negotiation process—which would be necessary, as I said—makes sense right now when the government and Parliament should focus their attention on far more important issues? Just consider reintegrating Quebec into the Constitution that Pierre Elliott Trudeau unilaterally patriated.

All of Quebec's governments, regardless of whether they were Liberal or Parti Québécois, have refused to sign the Constitution as it was patriated in the early 1980s. I would note that there is a three-party consensus on this in the National Assembly among the Liberal Party of Quebec, the Parti Québécois and the Action Démocratique du Québec.

It is clear to us that neither the powers of the Senate, nor the senator selection method, nor the number of senators for each province, nor the residency requirements for senators can be changed without going through the usual amendment procedure set out in section 38 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which requires the consent of the Senate, the House of Commons, and the legislative assemblies of at least two thirds of the provinces, that is, seven provinces, making up at least 50% of Canada's population.

● (1535)

This is the famous 7/50 formula.

We can see that this bill is irrelevant and could even be harmful, setting in motion a round of constitutional negotiations on a relatively minor issue, as I said. On September 21, 2006, Quebec's intergovernmental affairs minister, Benoît Pelletier—who was recently reappointed—testified before the Special Senate Committee on Senate Reform, where he stated:

—from the Quebec government perspective, clearly any future transformation of the Senate into an elected chamber would be an issue that should be dealt with through constitutional negotiations and not simply through unilateral federal action.

He added:

If the Senate becomes a chamber of elected representatives, its original purpose would be changed. Whether this is achieved directly or indirectly, it becomes an extremely important change which must be debated within the framework of constitutional discussions.

So as I mentioned, Quebec's intergovernmental affairs minister, Benoît Pelletier, simply reiterated Quebec's traditional position to the senate committee by saying two things: first, that the federal government cannot reform the Senate unilaterally, and second, that the federal government cannot achieve indirectly what it cannot

achieve directly. Clearly, introducing this bill is a way of doing indirectly what the government does not want to do directly.

As I said earlier, Quebec is not alone in its opposition to electing senators. The premiers of Saskatchewan and Manitoba have called on the government to abolish the Senate instead of trying to reform it. Even the premier of Ontario has expressed serious doubts, saying that electing senators would exacerbate inequalities, under the Senate's current mandate.

Electing senators indirectly would change the relationship between the House of Commons and the Senate and create confusion. I will come back to this. These changes cannot be made unilaterally without the consent of Quebec and the provinces, as Quebec is now recognized as a nation by the House of Commons. Everyone will appreciate that such a reform would be most unwelcome and would not be in keeping with the spirit of either the Constitution or what has been passed in this House.

I said that the first reason this bill is irrelevant is that it will inevitably lead to a round of constitutional negotiations, which do not make a great deal of sense, whether they concern the Senate or just the election of senators. Therefore, once again, if the government goes ahead, it will come up against this constitutional problem.

The second thing that, to me, makes this bill irrelevant, is that, even reformed by Bill C-43, the Senate is still an useless institution. Originally, the Senate was supposed to be a chamber of sober second thought. It was also supposed to protect regional interests. But when we look at the current makeup of the Senate, we see that the appointments were clearly partisan, which has distorted the nature or mandate of the Senate.

Introducing the election of senators will not resolve the issue, because senators will sooner or later have to affiliate themselves with a political party in order to have the necessary resources for the elections. So the Senate will become more partisan and we will depart even further from its original purpose, which, in my opinion, is no longer relevant in the 21st century.

As I was saying, the indirect election of senators would not improve this situation. On the contrary, the electoral process will tend to increase the role of political parties and indirectly elected senators could become concerned with things that now fall under the authority of the House of Commons. This would create a duplication, or, at the very least, confusion, at a cost of \$77 million a year. We think this is an extremely high cost for an institution that is not only useless, but that, in the case of the proposed reform, would create confusion and a significant duplication of legitimacy.

It is important to note that because of the evolution of the democratic process in Canada, in the provinces and in Quebec, no province has had an upper house since 1968.

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• (1540)

It is interesting to note that members of several provincial upper houses—unlike the Senate of Canada—once had to earn their election, for example, Prince Edward Island. Such upper houses have disappeared over the years, however. Quebec abolished its legislative council in 1968. That was nearly 40 years ago.

Furthermore, I feel it is important to point out another factor. Bill C-43 is irrelevant. Despite the amendments proposed by the bill, the Senate would not be truly democratic. The indirect election by Canadians would give the Senate a superficial democratic credibility. In many respects, the Senate would remain a democratic aberration.

First of all, public consultation is not binding. The bill provides for public consultation, but does not talk about an election, per se, in order to select senators. The Prime Minister maintains the authority to appoint or not appoint the senators chosen by the public and could therefore decide not to appoint a candidate selected in the election process. In one of the background papers provided by the government concerning this bill, it states:

The Prime Minister can take into account the results of the consultation when making recommendations to the Governor General regarding future representatives of a province or territory in the Senate.

Furthermore, how can we trust this Prime Minister, who did not hesitate to appoint Michael Fortier to the Senate, even though he himself criticized the Liberals' partisan appointments? We therefore see that this new Conservative government—which is no longer new, since it has been in power for 15 or 16 months—simply copied the Liberal method of appointing senators.

Also, I recall very well that, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister promised to appoint only elected members to the cabinet. With that Senate appointment, he broke the promise he had made to voters during the campaign. During the next election, voters will be able to judge for themselves how well the Conservatives can keep their promises.

One more factor is very worrisome. Voters will not be represented equally in the Senate. For instance, in the case of Prince Edward Island, one senator will represent some 27,000 voters, while in other areas of Canada—particularly in Quebec—that proportion will be much higher.

There will be virtually no way to remove senators.

The bill provides for the consultation of the population for the appointment of senators, although it is not binding, as we have just seen. They will be appointed for one term. I realize that some say that the bill provides for a maximum term of eight years for senators, which could solve the problem. But it seems to me that presenting oneself to the electorate only once in eight years is far from a guarantee that these so-called “elected” senators will reflect the concerns of citizens of Quebec or Canada.

In addition, the Senate is an institution that was created a very long time ago, and I find it ridiculous that certain restrictions on presenting oneself as a candidate for the position of senator have been retained. At present, you must be at least 30 years old and own real property worth at least \$4,000 in the province and the riding that the individual is appointed to represent. Hence, all those under 30 are excluded. I find that very discriminatory. The rule about assets

penalizes a part of our population that might seek to be candidates for such elections. This additional factor demonstrates that the proposal before us does not address the root cause of the problem and that it even seeks to rehabilitate an institution that has lost credibility in the eyes of a good number of Canadians and Quebecers.

Indirectly, the elected Senate would even undermine the parliamentary system. I will come back to that. As you know, in the British parliamentary system, the executive defends the confidence conferred on it by the House of Commons, which is also elected. Thus, the election of the Senate alone would undermine the preeminence of the House of Commons and would create confusion. The election of two Houses would complicate the issue of preponderance and consequently would weaken the parliamentary system.

• (1545)

The Bloc thinks that this is an ill-conceived and irrelevant bill. Moreover, there is no set spending limit for the candidates. The government says that the individual contribution limits and the transfer limits imposed on parties will be sufficient to limit spending. However, since there is an unlimited number of potential candidates and election spending is subject to partial reimbursement out of public funds, it seems unreasonable not to limit individual spending. Lastly, some seats could be vacant for four years, unless there is a reserve. If a senator left their seat for health reasons, if they died or left for some other reason, we would have to wait four years for a new senator. As I said, unless a reserve is created, the bill is ill-conceived from this perspective.

For all these reasons, we would have preferred debating another subject today. As I said earlier, I feel as though I am at the tooth puller instead of being at the dentist. I do not want to alienate my dentist or dentists in general. It is good to go to the dentist, it is even recommended. But it is not recommended to go to a tooth puller.

I think we should be addressing real problems and real issues, such as the fiscal imbalance. In the budget—we continue to support Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007—there is a partial financial correction to the fiscal imbalance, but the crux of it is not corrected. The federal government has too much revenue in relation to its responsibilities. Its transfers related to matters under provincial jurisdiction continue to keep Quebec and the other provinces at the mercy of unilateral decisions made here in Ottawa, even though those jurisdictions belong to the provinces. The Bloc feels that the tax base corresponding to the transfers for health, social programs and post-secondary education should, quite simply, be transferred to the provinces as tax points, whether through the GST or income tax.

Government Orders

Still with the fiscal imbalance, the ability to control or even limit the federal government's spending power should be a priority. The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have repeatedly promised legislation to limit federal spending power. We are still waiting for this legislation. Such legislation would allow a province, such as Quebec for example, to withdraw from a program implemented, in a shared or unilateral manner, by the federal government in the jurisdictions of the provinces and Quebec. Quebec could opt out with full compensation and without condition. This is important for the people of Quebec and people who need a good health care system, a good education system and social programs that provide an adequate social safety net. For those people, the Senate is of little or no concern in their daily lives.

I would now like to talk about the environment. It seems to me that, ever since the plan was introduced by the Minister of the Environment, criticism has not stopped flooding in from all sides, including from scientists, environmentalists and industrialists alike. We just learned this morning about a poll conducted in Alberta that reveals that 92% of Albertans believe that the oil companies should make a greater effort to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Even more interesting, 70%—I am not sure about this percentage—of Albertans said that these reductions should be in absolute targets, and not intensity targets. What people want in the next few years is a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to what we have seen in recent years. They do not want to see merely a slower increase, which would still mean more in the end, even if we produce less per tonne. It is not only Quebecers and the general population of Canada that are concerned about this. These are also the concerns of Albertans, who, as we all know, are closely tied to the oil and gas industry.

I would like to talk about foreign policy. This should have been a concern. We do not have a foreign policy statement. The Liberal government, before the election that brought its defeat, had introduced a foreign policy statement dealing with defence and international trade.

• (1550)

No one seems to know where we are headed with this, but we are still spending. The government has just announced the purchase of more tanks, but they were purchased on the sly. International cooperation, however, has not seen much development.

Lastly, employment insurance, assistance programs for festivals and exhibitions, the Saint-Hubert airport, these all deserved greater attention, but that attention has been diverted to Bill C-43.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thorough coverage of this issue as well as some other important issues to Canadians that do not directly relate to Bill C-43.

I certainly agree with what the hon. member said about the need for a comprehensive reform of the Senate if we are going to make any changes at all. The built-in inequities that currently exist and the potential for a gridlock with the House of Commons could be exacerbated if there were elected senators without dealing with issues such as mandate and distribution.

On the issue of distribution, the hon. member mentioned the disproportion between Quebec and one of the Atlantic provinces, which he mentioned but which I cannot remember which one, that had a Senate seat for every 27,000 people. That is an extremely important comparison to make but only to give further emphasis to the discrepancy in representation for those in British Columbia where there is one senator for every 660,000 people. That is an extraordinary difference.

I am hopeful that the hon. member from the Bloc is suggesting that in any change to the Senate there would be a redistribution of seats so that British Columbia would enjoy the same representation as Quebec currently does. That would be an extremely important improvement.

My colleague raised the issue of Quebec not having been a signatory as a province to the 1982 Constitution. We know that is so and we regret that fact. I think all members of the House would like to have seen that happen. However, that raises an interesting situation. My numbers may be slightly off but the vast majority of federally elected members of Parliament from Quebec, I think it was 74 out of 75, voted with the Liberal government of the day to support the repatriation of the Constitution and the constitutional amendments, including the charter. Quebec has been a magnificent model for the rest of the country in terms of its charter legislation provincially and the jurisprudence that has come out of that.

If the hon. member does not think it is significant that elected MPs from Quebec supported the charter, I wonder what he thinks the significance is of his role as a federally elected member of Parliament in the Bloc. Does he then relegate the Bloc Québécois to insignificance in this chamber?

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked a number of questions just now. I will start by addressing the last one because it is extremely relevant. It shows how important the Bloc's presence is here in Ottawa as long as Quebec is part of the Canadian Confederation, which we hope will not be for much longer, but that is the subject of another debate.

The member is right. In 1979 or 1980—I do not remember exactly when the vote took place—73 or 74 Liberals voted for this bill. As far as I know, three members—two Liberals and one Conservative, Roch LaSalle, the member for Joliette, if I may remind the members—voted against it. At that time, nobody in the House of Commons—except for a few individuals—was particularly concerned about protecting Quebec's rights as a nation. Now we have a political party that represents a large proportion of the people of Quebec, who believe that they are a nation and that that nation should have everything it needs to develop fully, including a country of its own.

The Bloc Québécois' presence here has done away with the schizophrenia that existed back then. Had the Bloc Québécois been around for that vote, there might have been 50 Bloc Québécois members voting against the unilateral patriation of the Constitution. Obviously, this debate is ongoing in Quebec and is far from over.

Government Orders

I would like to clarify something else. We do not want to reform the Senate. We are not here to reform Canadian institutions. We want out. We will not stop amendments that may be relevant on a democratic level—like the amendment to the Canada Elections Act concerning campaign financing—but we are not here to make major changes to federal institutions. We are here because we want out.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and speak on this very important bill.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission.

When we talk about the Senate, it brings out a lot of emotions in Canadians. That is because the Senate is becoming a dinosaur of an institution on the Canadian democratic scene. That is not because of the individuals who are in the Senate. They are very fine individuals and are dedicated and committed to public life for the betterment of Canada.

We are talking about an institution that shackles these individuals and stops them from using their full potential to contribute to public life in Canada. That is because over a period of time the way the institution has been managed has been manipulated and has slowly come to the point where today Canadians do not wish to have this institution.

Right across the country we are seeing debate about abolishing the Senate. Right across the country we are seeing that Canadians either do not want the Senate or they want to reform it.

When I was campaigning in 1997 in Calgary and I talked about the Senate, there was an immediate anger from Canadians. This institution did not represent their point of view. It did not represent what people normally would feel, which is that they have an elected representative in the Parliament of Canada. What they had was not an elected representative. What they had in the Senate was somebody who was in the Parliament of Canada but who was not speaking for them.

That is something that Canadians and anyone in a democratic institution understands, and they say that it is not acceptable. As a matter of fact, even today Tony Blair is trying to bring reform to the House of Lords because he knows that these institutions have outlived their usefulness. That is the way it is. For our institution here in Canada it is the same, but I want to make sure we understand that we are not talking of putting down the senators now.

Both the Liberal Party and our colleague from the Bloc, as I just heard, are saying that the bill does not bring about proper reform. The Liberals are saying that we should do a full reform, that this is what they want to do. Yes, we all agree that there is a need for reform, but that, as we know and as they know, is not going to happen because of the way our Constitution is set up. We need to take incremental steps toward achieving that goal.

Canadians want this. They are demanding that something be done about this institution. Regretfully, I would say that this institution is a blight on democracy in Canada because of the way it is set up. Again I want to say this: it has nothing to do with individuals there.

Around the world, Canada has a very stellar reputation for democracy. We go out preaching democracy, just as I have done many times myself. The foreign affairs committee is doing a major study on democratic reform and how Canada should go ahead and promote democracy around the world. This is one of our very strong values when we go out into the world. CIDA does it. Everyone else does it. It is a strength that Canada has. People around the world respect Canada for this institution and for what we do in the promotion of democracy.

• (1600)

On many occasions I have had the opportunity to speak members of opposition parties who have come to Canada to see how Canadian democracy works. What has been amazing during many of the times that I have gone overseas and have talked to parliamentarians in other parts of the world is that they really do not know how our Senate works. They think our Senate is an elected Senate. They think our Senate is something very powerful, like the American senate.

I have gone on visits with senators. I have seen red carpet laid outside for the senators. Some think that the Senate is the most important institution in Canada. When I tell them that there is something wrong in our democracy and that the Senate is an institution that is not elected by Canadians, that is the first shock. The second shock is that it is a job for life. Where would anyone get a job for life? The senators have nothing to fear. They have nothing to worry about. That is another shock for people. People ask me if I am telling them that senators are there for life and do not have to be re-elected. I tell them yes, they do not have to be re-elected and they are there for life.

They ask, “Who appoints them?” The Prime Minister, I say. What criteria are there to be in the Senate, they wonder. They ask, “Is it to be a buddy of the Prime Minister or what?” There are no criteria for who will be in the Senate, I tell them.

When they first hear about this, they actually start shaking their heads and say that we must be kidding or joking and I tell them no, we are not. It is a shock to them that in Canada, a land that promotes democracy out there in the world, we have an institution that is absolutely undemocratic. It is totally undemocratic. It has become undemocratic over a period of time because of the way it has been manipulated, the way that has been done.

Canadians today have absolutely no confidence in that institution. What do we do? Do we close our eyes? Do we say that we have an institution but there is nothing we can do because we want it to have complete reform? That is a cop-out. The Liberal Party would like to leave the Senate as it is because it is an institution that has benefited them the most, so now they say that we must have complete reform.

Government Orders

I just heard my colleague from British Columbia say that British Columbia is unrepresented in the Senate. They are all angry with the Senate. We just heard the member from Quebec talk about why the Senate is irrelevant as far as he is concerned. But we have to do something. We cannot just carry on. We cannot just carry on with our eyes closed and say that here we have an institution that is non-responsive and we cannot do anything about it, because it will never happen. We know how the Canadian political scene is. It will never happen. There are differences between provinces demanding all these things. Where will we get this unanimity between provinces? How many provinces will get what seats? Who will do what? Will it be an elected Senate?

However, do we close our eyes and let that institution carry on and be a burden on the taxpayers, who are getting nothing out of it? No.

Even better, in regard to the individuals who are serving as senators and are excellent people, we need their expertise. We need to give them legitimacy. We need to understand that. We need to know that when they are saying something people are listening to them. Right now nobody listens to them because of the way it is set up. They themselves are shackled. They are very fine individuals who have served Canada very well. They need to be heard. If they cannot be heard with this kind of institution, then they are muzzled, they are silenced, because nobody will listen to them.

Do we want an institution like that? No. We need to do an incremental step. Yes, this bill may not address many of the concerns that everybody has, those I have just outlined about the amount of representation and from where, and all of these other things that are a big flaw in this institution. We will not be able to do all of it. This may not go all the way, but it is a step in the direction of what Canadians want, which is that they will have voice in who will be sitting in the chamber. The bill provides them that voice. We have to be cognizant of the fact and provide them with that without changing the Constitution. As for any move to change the Constitution, believe me, it is not going to happen. We have seen this happening in the past. We have seen these things going on out there, with too much diversity of opinion to have unanimity on what to do.

I know that everybody in the House knows we need to make a change. I am urging all members to let us go on with this small, incremental step.

•(1605)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the hon. member's remarks and also to many remarks earlier in the day. I am absolutely amazed at how government members can stand there and say that certain things fit in with a certain perception of the Senate in this country.

I would ask the member to give us some specifics. He mentioned that Canada is seen as one of the best democracies around the world. That did not happen just because of this chamber. That happened because of both chambers. It is great fun in this House to attack the other chamber, it seems, but let us put some evidence on the table.

The member said that the Senate is a blight on democracy. Could the member tell me how? Could he explain specifically how it is such a blight on democracy? He said the Senate has become

completely undemocratic, and I ask members not to give me the excuse that senators are not elected, because that is just an excuse.

As for whether senators are elected or not or appointed under certain conditions to do certain things and be a chamber of sober second thought, which they are, let us have some facts. The member went on to say that nobody listens to them, yet time and again I have heard members on that side of the House quote the Kirby report, et cetera.

Instead of just attacking, could the member explain constructively all the points that are so bad about our Senate? Yes, it needs to be changed, but I ask him to explain it. He should not just cater to the perception that is out there. Let us have some facts.

•(1610)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the member is saying to show him what is wrong with the Senate and why Canadians are upset about the Senate. It is amazing. I can give a litany of things, aside from the fact that senators are not elected. Also, when the Liberals were in government it was a reward for their buddies and for the then prime minister's buddies. That is what is wrong with the Senate. It is because their buddies are in that institution—

An hon. member: Let's talk about their work.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: The member can listen to the Senate reports, but I can tell him what Canadians are saying out there and I can tell him what constituents are saying out there. They are saying, "They do not listen to me".

Yes, the Senate is a blight because, aside from the fact that they are not elected, it is a job for life. Where else is there a job for life anywhere out there?

Third, let us look at the record of that party for its buddies who have been put in the Senate as a reward. That is the chamber of second thought? A reward for their buddies?

That is not what the issue is here. The issue here is that we need to reform the Senate so that the people of Canada now can have a choice.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for those watching at home I need to clarify the Liberals' position here. The question that was asked was, "What is wrong with an institution within a democracy in which no vote is cast?"

By most traditional definitions of a democracy, there is some sort of issuance of the public opinion, whereby the citizens of a country get to express their opinion and place in the stead of their voices the elected officials. That is what the foundation of democracy has been. The Liberals have somehow confused themselves with the notion that while the Senate is placed with well-heeled fundraisers and political friends that somehow represents a shining moment in the democratic process.

We disagree with much of what is being said by the government on this issue. We think this is a band-aid approach to a fundamentally flawed institution. Anybody who knows the NDP and has voted NDP knows that this has been a very clear policy for many years for us.

Government Orders

I have a question for my hon. colleague, who has said a wide range of things. On this value for money question, has he done any estimates on how much it actually costs to sustain this place of privilege, this place where appointments are given by fundraising capacity for a particular friend? Then that cost must be justified against his own government's appointment of its senator into cabinet when the Conservatives were unable to win a seat in the Montreal area and then chose to appoint someone into the cabinet. It seems contradictory in terms to use what we all agree is a terrible method. Now it seems that the government has hypocrisy in its midst. I wonder if he can explain that to Canadians.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, we do not have hypocrisy in this. What we are saying is, as the hon. member knows and has said, this is a flawed institution. Therefore, we need to have a small incremental step moving toward that direction to improve this institution. That is all the bill would do. We have to move ahead and do something about this institution, and the bill is all about that.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-43, the Senate appointments consultations act.

If people are from western Canada, they will know that there are a lot of strong opinions about the Senate. I grew up there and I was influenced by many of those opinions. Like every member of Parliament, I try to keep in touch with my constituents and when I do, from time to time I hear some pretty strong sentiments about the Senate of Canada.

I was at a home show this past weekend for 20 hours or so and talked to hundreds of people on a lot of different topics, but they had opinions about the Senate as well. It is pretty clear, at least in western Canada, it has lost some credibility among Canadians.

There are a number of opinions in the House as well. We heard Bloc members speak, but I am not sure if they have a coherent opinion or view on what the Senate of Canada should do or whether it should exist or not.

The NDP's position is pretty clear, that it should be abolished. It seems to me that misses the point. I believe the Senate does do some good work. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I follow the work of the Senate committee as well and appreciate what it contributes to our work in the House.

I am starting to read through a human rights committee report from the Senate called "Children: The Silenced Citizens". I appreciate some of the insights it is bringing to this. I do not think abolishing it is answer.

The Liberal position is a bit fuzzier. In my opinion they favour the status quo. They talk about favouring some kind of comprehensive overhaul of the Senate, whatever that might look like. We realize that is a very difficult thing to do. I think they conclude that it is better to do nothing than to do something, which is what we are going to do. They prefer the system we have now where senators are chosen based on either the party's support or the prime minister of the day. I do not think Canadians prefer that approach, as my colleague, the member for Calgary East, has said so eloquently, and we need to change that.

Our position as a government is clear. We want to work toward an effective, independent and democratically elected body that equitably represents all regions. Bill C-43 is not the only part of our agenda in this regard. Bill S-4, a bill that is in the Senate, would put term limits on senators of eight years. The Senate has had the bill for almost a month, as has been said already in the debate, a bill that is a couple of paragraphs long, 66 words. We are having a hard time getting that out of there. However, it is an important part of the reform of the Senate.

The question before us as parliamentarians is how does Bill C-43 contribute to this goal of the government of an effective, independent and democratically elected body that equitably represents all regions?

Because I anticipate this question coming, let me say that we could achieve this goal through a major overhaul of the Senate. As we all know, subsection 42(1) of the Constitution Act makes it very difficult to amend the Senate. Seven provinces representing 50% of the population is needed to approve any amendment. This makes it very difficult, if not impossible to get there, at least in a very expeditious way. It requires a level of consensus that is very difficult to achieve.

What are our options? I suppose the options are to do what the Liberals propose, which is to do nothing. Our option is to take a practical, achievable step that will provide a solid basis for further reform so we can get all the way there.

• (1615)

We want to generate momentum. As the people who live in the provinces see how this works, that we allow a democratic process to be involved in who represents them in the Senate, they will recognize that we now need to take further steps to get where we need to go.

The bill gives Canadians a voice in choosing who represents them. The way that it works now, according to section 24 of our Constitution, is the Governor General from time to time summons qualified persons to the Senate, traditionally on the advice of the prime minister. In fact, it happens no other way.

As the member for Calgary East has said, it goes against the grain of what Canadians think should happen in a democratic system. In fact, it is unlike most other democratic countries that have a higher chamber. Most countries have gone to an elected body. Canadians want to have a say in who represents them.

This is just another in a list of Conservative democratic reforms. Under the government's leadership of Robert Borden, women received the right to vote. Under the government of John Diefenbaker, aboriginals obtained the right to vote. This is another step forward in having a more democratic Parliament.

The bill would provide mechanisms for consultations to be held in one or more provinces to seek the preferences of the electorate on individuals who offer themselves as potential Senate nominees. It is envisioned that this will happen usually at the same time as a general election, although there is a bit of flexibility built into the act so it could happen at the time of a provincial election as well.

Government Orders

The bill would provide for a single transferrable vote to give a certain element of proportionality. It is an important improvement to make it different from the House of Commons, which continues to operate with the first past the post system.

In my view, and I think in the view of constitutional experts, this does not require any constitutional change. It does not affect the Governor General's power to appoint or the prime minister's power to recommend. It is not a direct election of senators. It does not change the constitutional requirements of who can serve as a senator. Bill C-43 would simply provide a mechanism for the prime minister to hold a consultation with the citizens of Canada.

I have heard a number of objections already. One is that the Senate is a place where the representation of women and minorities can be more accurately reflected. If people were to take the House of Commons tour, as I have with constituents from time to time, and go to the other place, they will be told that the appointment of senators allows for more women and minorities. In fact, numbers have increased both in this place and in that chamber, but I acknowledge that there is more to be done in that regard.

The government is hopeful, as it starts down this road, that women and minority candidates will participate fully in this consultation process. I see no reason why that would not and could not happen. In fact, there still is a role for political parties to play in the nomination of potential Senate nominees, as here in the House of Commons, although a more limited role, which is as it should be in the Senate. Therefore, parties can take the initiative to work toward this as well.

In this bill the prime minister's prerogative to recommend qualified individuals remains. Should the prime minister feel it was necessary to take steps to address a particular imbalance, perhaps in one of these areas, he or she could continue to appoint a selected candidate to address the imbalance.

I am pleased to support this bill. Bill C-43 takes an important step toward improving and vitalizing the Senate as a national democratic institution. That is what Canadians want. They want an effective, independent, democratically elected body that equitably represents all regions. Bill C-43 takes an important step toward that goal.

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before moving on to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Richmond Hill, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Passport Canada.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comments on the Senate and this incremental reform were thoughtful.

I want to ask him a fairly big vision question. If this is an incremental step, what is it an incremental step toward? Will the Senate mirror the House of Commons in representative make-up, that is gender, race, linguistic and regional issues, and will it mirror the Commons in terms of its power? Is there a possibility of deadlock? The overall question is, if we are going to have two animals of the same sort, why not join in with the NDP, not that I agree with it, and eliminate the Senate?

What assurance could the member give the House and the people of Canada that the regions of Canada and the minorities of Canada, by linguistics and race, will be protected as they are in the Senate? What is wrong, as the Americans do, in giving small places representative power beyond their numbers? Who ever complained that a senator from Maine might be the president of the United States some day? What is so wrong with representing minorities and regions in a fashion that is not first past the post by the most people, which would result in a make-up like this chamber, which is primarily white and male?

• (1625)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, I do not see anything in the current approach to the Senate, either in the current make-up of the Senate or in the approach to actually appointing who is there, that would meet any of the goals the member seems to want.

If it happens there is a more equitable distribution there, of women for example, as reflecting the population or minorities, that only happens by accident. The prime minister of the day has no formula to follow as senators are appointed. I do not see there is any great difference here.

We have a formula now in terms of how many senators can come from each province or region. In fact, when we talk about equitability, I do not think I share the view of the member for Vancouver Quadra. We do have a problem in B.C., that we do not have the right number of senators, but not because there is only a certain number for the population of British Columbia. That would make it a proportional institution, something like the House, which runs counter to what the Senate should be like. It should be an equal number of votes for a region or province. It does not have to do with proportional representation based on population.

There is some work to be done. We need more senators from B.C. because the other regions have more.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the member's comments about representation of women. We know the House of Commons is failing miserably in terms of representation of women. In fact, in the 2006 election, the numbers here fell from 65 to 64, which is exactly 20.8% of the House.

I was interested to hear the member talk about the fact there was a possibility that representation of women could be looked at in the Senate. He also talked about parties and that they may or may not be involved. We know the parties, except for New Democrats, with 41% of their members being women, have also failed miserably.

Could the member comment on how he would see this proposed electoral Senate reform addressing the fact of under-representation of women in both chambers?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Senate reform and there are two ways built into Bill C-43.

First, the political parties can have a role in the nomination of Senate candidates and parties that choose to do so can work toward involving more women in those.

Government Orders

I do not know of any nomination events in our party, for example, that have excluded women simply because they are women. However, nor should they be included just because they are women. I do not think Canadians want it to work that way. However, parties can take a role in encouraging, nurturing and providing opportunities and so on.

The other way, as I said in my remarks, is that at the end of Bill C-43 when we have implemented this approach, the prime minister still has the power to recommend to the Governor General whomever he chooses.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-43, the Senate appointment consultations act.

As members will note throughout my remarks, the intent of the bill and the way in which it was done is typical of the new government's approach to doing things. It has a nice sounding name with kind of an empty slogan. It has good optics but it is just a smokescreen because, at the end of the day, it is the usual charade from the Prime Minister as he tries to leave the impression that he is doing something progressive but, in essence, he is following his undemocratic ways of making government policy.

It is great in perception but it is poor in reality. I maintain that this approach is dangerous in reality. What the Prime Minister is attempting to do is to change the Constitution by non-constitutional means.

Constitutions are important and they are there for a reason. They are the foundation on which we do things as a country. What the Prime Minister is trying to do in this instance is to go around the Constitution by one, two and three small steps. However, at the end of the day we could have a country that we do not quite recognize.

We all know the Prime Minister's love for the presidential style. We see how he operates with his podium. He kind of likes the U.S. Republican kind of system but we have a representative democracy in this country. We are based on the British system. We know where the Prime Minister really wants to go.

We just heard a shout from the other side. It is rather interesting how government members tend to fall in line and try to build on the lack of understanding of the Senate to make their point.

I listened as the parliamentary secretary to the House leader spend a lot of his time this morning attacking the Senate. He did not give much information on Bill C-43 but he spent most of his time attacking the Senate and using examples such as the Senate is not passing Bill S-4. One the lines he used was that the bill was only 66 words but that it had taken them 12 months. I believe the point he made was that it was five words a month. What does that have to do with the issue?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: That has a lot to do with it, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, it does not. The member opposite says that it has a lot to do with it but it does not. The fact is that those 66 words are important in terms of what they may mean in the future. It is not the number of words that matter, it is what the words mean. It is the consequences of those words and those decisions that may be

made in the future as a result of changing the constitutionality of this country in a certain way.

One of the reasons the Senate is in place is to give legislation sober second thought in a much less partisan way than is done in this chamber. The Senate's job is to protect against a government that abuses its power and tries to undercut the safeguards that are placed in the Constitution, which is exactly what the Senate is doing.

Yes, I know the country and the people in this House have a certain negative perception of the Senate but how many of those people who always talk negatively about the Senate have actually watched what it does? How many of them have read Senate reports? None or very few. I see one member and I know he is an avid reader who has no doubt read the reports.

• (1630)

However, it is very evident that protection is needed right now from the Prime Minister in terms of where the country may or may not go. When we have a Prime Minister who is operating more like a dictator than a prime minister and a representative of democracy, then we need that sober second thought.

What makes it more serious is that party talked about coming to this place and having free votes and it has not had one free vote. We do not hear government backbenchers speaking out and, in fact, we hardly even hear a cabinet minister speaking out.

Hon. Joe McGuire: A one man government.

Hon. Wayne Easter: As my colleague said, this is strictly a one-man show.

This bill is designed to manoeuvre, manipulate and move toward constitutional change without doing it properly under the Constitution that was passed several decades ago.

We all know the Prime Minister likes to operate, as I said earlier, in a presidential style. We know he likes the system south of the border much better than this system. However, the system south of the border, in terms of its congress and senate, has checks and balances that our chambers do not have. If we are going to make those kind of changes and go in that direction, then we should do it all inclusively.

If the Prime Minister wants to go down that road and make the kind of changes that we know he is thinking about, then he should have the courage to put forward an all encompassing package that proposes the changes and sets in place the processes necessary to do it in a well-debated and well-balanced way.

I am very concerned about the process that the Prime Minister follows on a number of fronts but I will get to those a bit later.

I must point out that instead of saying what this bill would or would not do for democracy and in getting a more effective Senate, government members just attack the integrity of the Senate and follow the negative perceptions that are out there. I believe they do so in order to build and expand on those negative perceptions.

Government Orders

In a former life I was a farm leader and I had the opportunity to make quite a number of presentations before both the Senate and the House of Commons. From my perspective, the Senate usually did a more thorough job because partisanship was not at play. No political games were being played. The Senate does in fact do good work.

The parliamentary secretary who just spoke mentioned a Senate study that he is currently reading. I have a number of studies here that the Senate has done but one that is well worth reading, entitled, "Understanding Freefall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor", was done by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

We all know the work the defence committee has done in terms of security at our borders. It is unlikely that same kind of report would have been done in the Commons because the Prime Minister would not allow his members to speak negatively about some of the things that could be happening at the border. However, the Senate is not afraid of doing that and it takes those kinds of positions.

In his remarks on April 20th, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform said:

This bill follows through on the promise made to the people of Canada in the Speech from the Throne to "explore means to ensure that the Senate better reflects both the democratic values of Canadians and the needs of Canada's regions". More importantly, this bill strengthens the pillars of our proud Canadian democracy.

• (1635)

The House leader never went on to prove his point. He never elaborated in terms of how this would strengthen democratic values and meet the needs of the regions. In fact, it does nothing of the sort.

He went on at great lengths to talk about the importance of the vote, and I agree with him, but a vote must also mean something. However, in the way that Bill C-43 is written, a vote does not necessarily mean much at all. It is non-binding on the Prime Minister. It is piecemeal in terms of its approach. It does nothing to reflect democratic values or to enhance Canada's regions any more than is already the case with appointments.

I want to go back to the member's second point because I want to make a last line in the quote by the House leader. He said:

More importantly, this bill strengthens the pillars of our proud Canadian democracy.

Absolutely nothing is further from the truth. This bill does not strengthen the pillars of our democracy. In fact, it is a manipulation by the Prime Minister in trying to get around the Constitution. That is not strengthening our democracy. That is undermining our democratic values.

If anything, the Prime Minister should absolutely follow the Constitution and do the process in the proper form and in the proper way. The Prime Minister is attempting to get around the Constitution without really going through that necessary process to make constitutional change. In other words, the very process that the Prime Minister has chosen is against the foundation of our democracy, our Constitution.

I want to quote what the Library of Parliament had to say on the proper process. It says:

In 1982, the Constitution of Canada was patriated. It is now expressly provided by section 42(1)(b) of the Constitution Act, 1982 that an amendment to the method of selecting senators must be agreed on by the Senate, the House of Commons and at

least two-thirds of the provinces that have at least 50% of the population of all provinces.

That is the proper process.

The Library of Parliament goes on to say:

At present, members of the Senate are appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

It then talks about the premise of Bill C-43 and states:

The premise of Bill C-43 is that it does not, as such, amend the method of selecting senators and therefore does not require a constitutional amendment.

I will admit that is what the Library said. The Library goes on to say:

Instead, it establishes a list of selected nominees that reflects electors' preferences.

What that really means is that the Prime Minister is making the change in a kind of a sneaky way. He is manipulating people, which is what he typically does. I will get to a better example later.

I want to mention one other thing because quite a number of people talked about the day of the vote, polling day. Many have said that it will not cost more because it will be done the same day as a general election, federally or provincially.

Let us think about that for a minute and look back throughout history. When Mr. Mulroney was prime minister there were quite a number of Liberals in the Senate. It balanced the power of this place. When Prime Minister Chrétien was first elected there were more Conservatives in the Senate and it balanced the power of this place again.

However, if there is an election and there is a sweep politically then we do not have that safeguard in the Senate. We no longer have that sober second thought because everybody will be taken. We all know that sometimes happens in elections. We are politicians. We saw it in 1993. If that sweep would have happened in 1993 with a Senate election, we would not have a Senate to give that sober second thought that is direly needed when some legislation is passed in this place.

• (1640)

Let me sum up a few more points on the bill as they relate to what I would call our constitutional avoidance Prime Minister. We believe in the Liberal Party on this side of the House in democratic reform, but the bill is not democratic reform. It allows Senate nominees to be elected but does not make the elections binding. This could lead to potentially wasteful elections that the Prime Minister could ignore at will.

I see some members looking surprised that the Prime Minister might ignore it. I do not think there was a prime minister ever in Canadian history who has broken as many promises as this one did, everything in terms of no appointments to the Senate, a senator sitting over there in the Senate not able to answer questions, his position on income trusts, his promise on the Canadian Wheat Board but not really having the authority to make that promise but still manipulated it to get his way, and the list goes on too long for me to elaborate.

The bill also ignores provincial and regional equity, weakening the voices of the provinces such as British Columbia and Alberta that currently have fewer senators than their population warrants.

Government Orders

The initiative will increase partisanship in the Senate and aggravate the problem of potential deadlock between the two houses of Parliament. As so often the case with this government no meaningful consultations were held with the provinces or Canadians. In fact, Ontario and Quebec are among those who have already spoken out against the idea of piecemeal Senate reform.

Senate reform should not be piecemeal. It must be considered as a package: the critical issues of selection, process and term, mandate and fair distribution. Simply put, the Senate election bill tries to skirt around the Constitution and haphazardly elect senators while still doing nothing to improve the representation of British Columbia and Alberta in Canada's Senate. It also fails to provide any kind of dispute mechanism should there be a deadlock between the House of Commons and the Senate.

I want to come back to process. At the end of the day, the tactic of the Prime Minister is a process that implies democracy but really is anything but. No better example is the undemocratic process that the Prime Minister managed to follow on the Canadian Wheat Board file.

Let me make a point in terms of what the Prime Minister considers democratic. He initiated his constitutional process by organizing a secret meeting in Saskatoon on July 25, 2006, to which only declared anti-Wheat Board individuals—

• (1645)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I fail to see what issue the member for Malpeque is trying to raise. This has absolutely nothing to do with Senate reform, something that he has absolutely no clue about how to get anything done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will remind the member for Malpeque to try to keep his remarks as close as possible to the subject of the bill.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, in fact I will. I am talking about process and about the undemocratic actions of the Prime Minister.

He then set up a task force implementing marketing choice for wheat and barley dominated by well known anti-Wheat Board individuals. He ordered the Canadian Wheat Board to remove from its website its technical response to the task force report. He and his parliamentary secretary travelled the country bad mouthing the Canadian Wheat Board's marketing performance. By order in council he placed a gag order on the Canadian Wheat Board.

In the middle of farmer elections he took 16,000 members off the list. He removed or fired appointed Canadian Wheat Board directors including the CEO who had supported single desk selling. In conducting his barley marketing plebiscite, he refused to use the questions developed by the general farm community and conducted one without a public voter's list, a secret ballot, a clear statement of winning conditions or as—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what can we say? Obviously, democracy and accountability do not matter to the Liberal Party. In fact, we can see following the speech from the hon. member that the culture of entitlement is alive and well over

there because as long as it is okay for Liberal prime ministers to appoint bagmen and Liberal-friendly individuals and have them there until the age of 75, the Senate is just great. That is the way it should be.

My constituents do not think it is great. They think they should be consulted as to who should represent them in the Senate. I think every member of this House should support this bill because the people of Canada deserve to be consulted as to who should be in the Senate.

The hon. member knows that this is not a constitutional item whatsoever. He knows it is perfectly constitutional and he should support it. I bet the people of Prince Edward Island would like to have some say on who represents them in the Senate.

• (1650)

Hon. Wayne Easter: I wonder if the member checked with the Prime Minister to see if it was all right for him to say that because those are the democratic principles that the leader of the governing party should go with over there.

If members go back to my remarks, they will see that I did not say the Senate was just great. There are problems with the Senate. I said the Liberal Party believes in Senate reform. But we also believe, in this party, that if we are going to do constitutional reform, we do it properly, not piecemeal.

Let me remind members again that I used the example of the Canadian Wheat Board, so that all Canadians could see how undemocratic were the actions of the Prime Minister. There was no voters list. Can members imagine that? There were no real scrutineers. That is the way the government operates and that is the best example to show how absolutely undemocratic it is because it just believes in one thing, and that is, the Prime Minister's ideology. He really does not care what Canadians think.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am very surprised that a member who has been around as long as he has could misunderstand a bill and perhaps even misrepresent a bill as badly as the member did. Everybody knows that constitutional experts have openly said that this does not affect the Constitution at all. It does not take away any of the powers of the Governor General and, ultimately, it does not change any of the powers of the Prime Minister. All it does is ask folks on the ground, people in the member's own province, in the member's own riding, if they have an opinion as to who should represent them in the Senate.

The member mentioned we did not consult anybody. That is absolutely not true. This was brought up in the last election. We consulted all Canadians if they were interested in increasing the democracy around here and Canadians said yes. The Liberals said no.

I would like to ask the member if his party consulted anybody when it gutted health care? Did it consult anybody when it dismantled the military? Did it consult anybody on its failure on the environment? Did it consult anybody on that \$2 billion it wasted on the gun registry? Did it consult anybody when it misplaced \$1 billion in human resources? Who did it consult when it invented the sponsorship scandal?

Government Orders

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, really, I should not have to answer this question. It is evidence from their tactics that instead of defending their bill and trying to point out the good points, I guess they cannot find any, the Conservatives go and attack things that happened over the years. I could get into each one of those points, but I do not intend to.

The fact of the matter is it was this party, it was the government of Jean Chrétien, that turned the finances of this country around. At the end of the day when government was turned over to that party, the Conservatives got the biggest surplus ever on a turnover of government and what did they do? What did the Minister of Finance do? He slashed social security programs for Canadians. Now they are back to regifting them a little, but they slashed. They are basically wasting that surplus, that good financial management, left to them by this side of the House.

Let us come back to the bill. The fact of the matter is that the House leader knows that these elections are non-binding on the Prime Minister and that he can still do as he pleases.

•(1655)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rather disappointed today that the debate has reached this level. For example, the hon. member for Peterborough referenced the recent appointment to the Senate of the bagman from Quebec. It is rather surprising because he has had an opportunity to run in two byelections since then, which he has not done. Then we hear the debate on the Wheat Board.

I know that eventually the government is going to try to get around the legislation dealing with the Wheat Board, but today we are talking about accountability in terms of what we are doing in the House. We have before us a bill that is 51 pages in length that talks about consultations.

We have to look at Alberta where a lot of this started. There was a senator appointed on the basis of consultations and a second one is waiting for Senator Hays to get old enough to retire. One wonders what the process is about. What percentage of the voting population in Alberta was actually involved with naming in terms of consultation?

The hon. member has brought up a lot of good points and I am also looking for an opportunity to bring some points forward, but I would like to reference the hon. member for Peterborough and his bagman from Quebec that was recently appointed to the Senate. Would the hon. member for Malpeque briefly give us his impressions about that appointment, a minister of the Crown in the Senate being a bagman from Quebec?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Will all Liberal senators run in the next election? Is that your point?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member for Miramichi asked the hon. member for Malpeque a question, so I will let the hon. member for Malpeque answer the question.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I know why the member opposite is yelling. It is because he has egg on his face. The fact of the matter is the bagman from Quebec was appointed to the Senate.

However, worse yet, it was something the Prime Minister said he would never do. He appointed, as Minister of Public Works, a non-elected member, who was bagman for the Conservative Party in Quebec, to the Senate in a place where we on this side cannot put tough questions to the Minister of Public Works.

The fact of the matter is it is again a case of the Prime Minister saying one thing and doing another, and that is what worries Liberals about this particular bill. It is not binding.

The key point is this. The Constitution was put in place for specific reasons, that is to protect the foundation of our democracy and the rights of the two chambers. What the Prime Minister is doing through this bill in a very sneaky fashion is trying to use the negativity toward the Senate to make his point.

That is why members on the government side never talk about what the bill would really do. They just talk about the rhetoric, the Senate. Really, when one is making constitutional change, it should be done properly and not through manipulation and piecemeal fashion as the Prime Minister is trying to do.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the debate over the Senate is certainly getting vigorous. I listened to the hon. member as closely as I could. I did not want to listen too closely because I know that tomorrow he will have a totally different story on a totally different subject, and the next day it will be whatever direction the political wind is blowing.

I have a serious question for the hon. member for Malpeque. We have to look at Senate reform. We know what the challenges are with the Constitution. The reality is that it is going to be extremely difficult to reform the Senate. However, would the member for Malpeque consider an even Senate?

Never mind the difficulty of getting there with 10 senators, one from each province. Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and New Brunswick have a certain advantage now, but what would be wrong with equal representation for all provinces in the Senate? In reality, what would be wrong with that?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, why does the government not propose that? If that is where it wants to go, then why does it not propose it?

We would like, instead of this piecemeal approach, for the government to propose a real, long term solution. It should not do it in a piecemeal fashion by getting around the Constitution.

I might say this. The member knows that I am one member who does not change his story every day. I do not. Many in that party do.

The member mentioned that it is extremely difficult to change the Constitution, and that is true. I know it is even more difficult for the governing Conservative Party because it has never really managed to make some of the really difficult decisions. It was Prime Minister Trudeau who brought the Constitution home. It was the Liberals who made the hard decisions in terms of balancing the books, so that we could turn the country over in good financial shape to these folks. The bottom line question again is: why does the government not abide by constitutionality, have the proper discussions, and do—

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• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

I am pleased to rise in the House in support of Bill C-43, a new bill to implement and improve the way in which worthy citizens can be considered for appointment to the other place in this Parliament. This has been a subject of great interest to the citizens of Simcoe North. Each chance I get I speak with them and from time to time they make it clear to me that the government needs to move in a direction away from the notions of governance around elitists and the privileged.

This bill is the second installation of our new government's sensible and incremental approach to making the Senate more accountable and democratic. It follows Bill S-4, a bill to limit Senate tenure which was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs back in February.

The Prime Minister best expressed this initial two part process to improve our institutions in a speech he delivered in Ottawa on February 6. He spoke of Canadians' commitment to democracy being the wellspring of our success as a country. He reminded us that the scandals of the previous government had shaken Canadians' faith in our democracy. He expressed the hope that public apathy and cynicism should diminish as the memory of those scandals do also.

The Federal Accountability Act has already gone a long way to restoring public trust in Canada's government, but we know there is much more to be done. For our government that means modernizing the upper house by setting fixed terms for senators and by finally giving Canadians a say in who represents them in the red chamber.

It turns out that Bill C-43 on Senate appointment consultations, while separate and distinct, actually complements the aims of Bill S-4 in bringing practical and important steps in achieving Senate reform.

This sentiment was best expressed by the several witnesses to the Senate Special Committee on Senate Reform. In its first report in October 2006 the committee echoed the need for additional legislation on advisory elections to smooth and improve the effect of fixed terms for senators. This is a natural fit for the direction we are heading in to make the Senate more reflective of the will of Canadians, by allowing citizens to express their opinion for Senate appointments and by limiting the term for which senators would serve.

One of the witnesses to the special committee, Mr. Gordon Gibson, summed it up well when he stated that the Senate "would be unacceptable without term limits", but that it was equally clear to him that term limits are "unacceptable without an electoral system".

In the last 139 years there have been no less than seven different resolutions and proposed reforms to improve the process of selecting senators, the first as early as in 1874, only seven years after Confederation. Of course with the exception of the 75 year age limit that came in in 1965, all of those measures failed. The essence of these improvements was to recognize that modern democratic

institutions must be products of the people they represent. In fact the notion of having important offices in our democratic systems remain appointed as opposed to elected is completely at odds with the contemporary understanding of governance and the democratic values of Canadians.

Witnesses at the Senate Special Committee on Senate Reform argued broadly that to be effective within a democratic process the Senate requires the legitimacy that would be provided by elections. One of the other witnesses, John Whyte, senior fellow at the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, noted, "The case for Senate reform is overwhelming. Political power in legal democracies is accountable power". He went on to argue that having unelected senators undermines the Senate in four ways. First, it does not reflect democratic choice. Second, it receives minimal public attention. Third, it exacerbates the confusion about who senators really represent. Fourth, it leaves senators unaccountable to Canadians for the work that they do.

• (1705)

We are proceeding prudently and sensibly without opening up an exhaustive and intractable constitutional negotiation. This is an achievable approach to meaningful Senate reform that can become the foundation for broader discussions on constitutional reforms to the Senate in the future.

On that note, I would like to remind hon. members that this bill does not require a constitutional amendment. It retains the powers of the Governor General to appoint, and the powers of the Prime Minister to recommend senators. However, the Prime Minister is allowed to consult in making Senate appointments, and who better to consult on this issue than Canadians themselves? The bill creates an objective and modern mechanism for the Prime Minister to do just that, to engage Canadians in consultation.

I would like to take a moment to point out some of the features that I think make this bill so relevant, flexible and practical. First, as I mentioned before, there is no constitutional amendment required.

Second, the voting procedure recommends that Canadians vote for senator nominees, likely during a federal general election, but the flexibility is there for a provincial election as well. This makes the process efficient and less costly.

Third, the voting for senator nominees is proposed to employ a single transferable ballot, also known as a preferential ballot, so the voters can express their first, second and so on preferences for Senate nominees.

This voting system has the added benefit of playing down the partisanship component of Senate nominees, leaving Canadians to consider not just the party affiliation of the nominee, but also his or her personal qualifications to fill that role.

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We know the other place is supposed to be, as the preamble of the bill suggests, a chamber of independent, sober second thought, so Canadians expect the role of the parties to be less apparent in Senate deliberations. We also know that Canadians have expressed more than a little disdain at the Senate when senators take the partisanship arguments too far and ignore the will of the elected House of Commons. Regrettably we have seen too many examples of that, even recently, with Bill S-4, a two page bill which was adjourned and postponed day after day after day by the Liberal majority before it went to committee, I think some 260 days after it was first introduced in May last year.

This proposed consultation process speaks right to the heart of independent expression in the Senate. It will be a level playing field between independent and party sponsored senator nominees.

The fourth feature of the bill is the fact that this process adheres to the Canada Elections Act on the important tenets of financial administration, limits on advertising and the transparent reporting and auditing of financial records.

Of note is the upholding of an important standard that we adopted in the Federal Accountability Act to limit donations on election campaigns to \$1,000 annually per individual and the banning of donations from corporations and unions. That said, and in respect to the expected costs of running a province-wide campaign, senator nominees will not be faced with an expense limit. This no expense limit feature, it should be pointed out, is still confined by the donation limit of \$1,000 per individual.

This bill, an act to establish Senate consultations, call them advisory elections if you will, encompasses all of the right components to modernize our democratic systems in a practical and durable way.

The bill is separate but complementary to the aims of Bill S-4 to limit Senate tenure. It will strengthen our federation by making the upper house more accountable to the people and by enhancing the Senate's legitimacy and credibility as one of our cornerstone democratic institutions.

This bill delivers what is contemplated in its opening paragraph. It speaks to the importance of our representative institutions evolving in accordance with the principles of our modern democracy and the expectations of Canadians.

I want to close with just a few thoughtful words of one of our founding fathers, Sir John A. Macdonald, who, during the debates on Confederation, remarked on the Senate:

It must be an independent House, having a free action of its own...but it will never set itself in opposition against the deliberate and understood wishes of the people.

Bill C-43 delivers on the wishes of the people in a genuine and sensible way. Canadians finally will have a say on who sits in the Senate. I encourage all hon. members to support the bill.

• (1710)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly we had a number of very good presentations. The hon. member has brought forward his support for the bill. We on this side of the House have some concerns. I would like to ask him a very basic question.

In Ontario very soon there will be a provincial election. We know that there may be vacant Senate seats in Ontario and according to the bill, anyone from North Bay to Ottawa would be able to put forward his or her name to become a senator. There could be 30 names on the list. The one who got the most support might have 7% of the votes that were cast, and maybe as in Alberta, only about 20% of the people would vote. How would this be a significant factor in terms of making a decision on behalf of the Prime Minister?

If a person from North Bay or any other place, let us say, Sioux Lookout, wanted to be a senator, how would that person contest this consultation to get a fair number of votes across the great province of Ontario? Would he or she be able to achieve his or her objective to become a senator?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his very insightful and very specific question.

I did not get into the details in my remarks, but one of the features of this bill is the voting system. The voting system is done on a preferential ballot. If there were, as the member has cited, a large number of people running for just a few Senate seats in Ontario, the process envisages a preferential system where voters could indicate their first, second and third choices, and if none of the 30 nominees was successful on the first ballot, the proportion of ballots would then be considered in the second and third components, until eventually all those seats were filled. This is a modern proportional system. It is used in other democracies in other parts of the world, including Australia.

With regard to regional representation, nothing in this bill takes away the ability for the Prime Minister to ultimately make the decision about how those important regional representations should be taken into consideration.

I hope that answers the member's question.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the member.

He very appropriately did not criticize the members of the Senate. A few members have spoken of the good work they do and I wonder if he could outline some of the good work that the Senate does.

While he is thinking of his answer, I want to say to westerners that they must be shocked, after hearing all the Conservatives talk about having an elected Senate, to find out that according to the bill the Prime Minister gets to make the decision. People could vote for whomever they want but the ultimate decision would still be made by the Prime Minister.

Once again the Senate has two huge functions, to represent the regions and minorities. This bill hurts those two functions of the Senate. It makes that less possible. Westerners must be shocked that there would be a bill that would hurt the west. The member used legitimacy and credibility going to the Senate because of this, which it will, but the west is under-represented and they have not fixed that first. This will hurt the west dramatically.

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●(1715)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the work of the Senate has been important to this Parliament throughout history. There has also been since the early days an expression that the Senate needs to be reflective of the considerations of the public in making sure that their work is properly represented. We are working in that vein to move that along.

In terms of the previous member's question in regard to how this representation works, albeit it is a progressive and new approach to voting, but in fact no senator could ever be elected with such a small minority. I would say again to the member for Yukon that when it comes to actually considering those important considerations in the Senate with regard to representation, these would still be a factor. In fact the way this is envisaged, individual Canadians—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my thanks to the member for Simcoe North for sharing his time.

I am pleased to rise today, on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells, to participate in the debate on Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

The bill establishes a mechanism for consulting voters with respect to their preferences for the appointment of senators to represent their province or territory. The bill sets out the guidelines for electing Senate nominees. While it is not the full-fledged reform that many Canadians demand, Bill C-43 represents a practical and achievable step that provides significant and meaningful democratic reform. It may only be a small step, but it represents real change.

For too long, Canadians have been forced to settle for the status quo. Senators appointed largely on partisan grounds lack legitimacy and fail to act as regional spokespersons. It should therefore come as no surprise that Canadians want changes to the Senate. In fact, in poll after poll Canadians across the country have confirmed their support for Senate reform, including the election of senators.

In spring 2005, the Alberta Senate Reform Task Force found near unanimous support for the election of all future members of the Senate. A 2004 CTV poll asked Canadians “Do you want to elect your future Senators, yes or no?” Over 80% said yes. After the last federal election, an Environics poll done by the CBC found 71% of Canadians wanted to elect senators. Nearly one year ago, in June 2006, Ipsos Reid conducted a poll on Senate reform. Among reform alternatives given a plurality of Canadians, 44%, backed an elected Senate. Among British Columbians polled, more than 50% backed an elected Senate over other alternatives.

Despite lengthy debates and various attempts at reform, the Senate has remained essentially unchanged since its first sitting in November 1867.

In the late 1970s there were a number of proposals to turn the Senate into a house of the provinces. Drawing on the model of the German second chamber, it was argued that senators should be appointed by provincial governments.

In its 1984 report the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform concluded that direct election would best achieve its primary objective of strengthening the Senate's capacity to fill its role of regional representation.

Prime Minister Mulroney tried to introduce changes to the Senate through the 1987 Meech Lake constitutional accord, which would have required Ottawa to fill Senate vacancies from a list submitted by the affected provinces, and through the 1992 Charlottetown accord, which proposed to give all provinces equal seats in the upper chamber and introduce elected senators, either by the province's electorate or legislative assembly. Both attempts to amend the Constitution failed, and since then Senate reform has largely been ignored.

The Prime Minister has observed that the all or nothing approach of previous governments to Senate reform has resulted in nothing. This is precisely the reason that Canada's new government has taken a fundamentally different route. We are pursuing a staged approach that will provide practical, sensible reforms which will build a foundation for more fundamental future reform.

As a first step, the government introduced legislation to limit the tenure of Senate appointments to eight years, rather than the current provisions whereby appointees can retain office until age 75. Changing the tenure of senators to eight years would enhance the legitimacy of the Senate and accordingly, enhance its role in providing sober second thought. Eight year terms would also provide a renewal of ideas and perspectives on a more regular basis.

Taken together with Bill C-43, the government is proposing real reform to the Senate. These changes may not meet all expectations, but they are achievable. If implemented, the bill will provide concrete results.

●(1720)

We cannot adopt sweeping Senate reform without constitutional amendments. More comprehensive change that will make the Senate an effective, independent and democratically elected body that equally represents all regions will require the consent of at least seven provinces representing 50% of the population. That is because comprehensive changes would alter essential characteristics of the Senate. This will obviously take more time.

Critics of this proposed legislation, notably Liberal senators, contend it is unconstitutional. However, the experts have spoken. Pre-eminent constitutional scholars agree with the government. Provided changes do not legally affect the role of the Governor General in making appointments, or the role of the prime minister in recommending them. There is nothing unconstitutional about this endeavour.

Bill C-43 does not affect either of these roles. It does not create a process for the direct election of senators. It does not change the constitutional qualifications of senators. In short, it does not affect any of the matters identified in subsection 42(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982 as requiring the so-called 7/50 amending procedure.

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The prime minister is allowed to consult anyone in making Senate appointments. Bill C-43 simply provides a mechanism for him to hold a consultation with the citizens of Canada.

I applaud the government for taking this very important step to reform the way senators are chosen. It is an improvement that has the wholehearted support of my constituents. For far too long, Liberal politicians have told Canadians there was nothing that could be done to cure the democratic deficit in the Senate short of a constitutional amendment.

Canadians were not buying that excuse and neither are we. The government has taken a significant first step toward ensuring that this important democratic institution evolves in step with the expectations of Canadians.

The bill represents a significant improvement to the status quo and will provide a solid foundation for further reforms. I hope all members will support the initiative.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question. I made remarks earlier that this is anything but democratic and anything but constitutional. The member for Fleetwood—Port Kells said that the government would be moving forward eventually with the effect of having an independent and democratically elected Senate.

Could the member tell us when her boss or when the Government of Canada is going to bring that total package forward? That is what we really need to see. We need to see a total package not a half-baked idea, and this legislation is clearly a half-baked idea that is not well thought out.

We have not debating the whole constitutionality around it. Could the member give us a timeframe of when the total package will be coming forward, or indeed is there one?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, with this proposed legislation, our government is attempting to make the Senate more accountable and more democratic.

We are doing consultations with Canadians across the country. For the first time ever, Canadians will have a say in the selection of senators. The senate appointment consultations would give Canadians a voice in choosing who represents them in the Senate of Canada.

For years, Liberal politicians visiting my province only paid lip service to Senate reform. They acknowledged the popular support for change and voiced their agreement, but did absolutely nothing. The Liberal excuse has been that reform requires constitutional change so reform must be put off until Canadians are ready to open up the Constitution again. Liberals knew very well that Canadians had no appetite for constitutional reform, that people did not want a repeat of Meech Lake. This excuse served the Liberals very well.

Liberal prime ministers have had no interest in changing the Senate. It has worked very well for them also. They are happy with a system that has allowed them to appoint their cronies and hacks to the upper chamber. They asked why mess with a system that rewarded so many card holding Liberals?

●(1725)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I have entered a time warp. I can hear the same comments coming from the opposition that I am sure Prime Minister Robert Borden heard when he brought in voting rights for women. I am not sure the opposition actually said that was a half-baked idea. There was significant opposition, though.

I was hearing the same sort of comments when I closed my eyes and thought about John Diefenbaker bringing voting rights for the aboriginal community.

I appreciate the member's comments. Is this is a step in the right direction? Anything that moves the country toward greater democracy has to be something better than what the members opposite are calling half-baked, and how shameful.

The member mentioned a number of how many people in the last election supported Senate reform. I think she said it was 80% or somewhere in there. Could the member please refresh my memory on how many Canadians support this move?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, what I will tell the member is we need an elected Senate. We need a democratic process in place. I am very proud of my government's achievements. It is the Conservative Party that gave women the right to vote. It is the Conservative party that gave aboriginals the right to vote.

I am sure it will be the Conservative Party that will put an elected Senate in place. An elected Senate is past due. Canadians want accountability and Senate reform is part of it.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to engage in this debate.

Members of the opposition have referred to former Prime Minister Diefenbaker. I cannot help but shake my head and think of former Prime Minister Diefenbaker, who believed in things like the Bill of Rights. He was a Progressive Conservative. To quote Danny Williams, he was not a "regressive Conservative" like the Reform-Alliance Conservatives are. I think that is important to point out to the House. I dare say that they should not be invoking the name of John Diefenbaker, who had an appreciation for rights.

A debate about the Senate was greatly advanced and put forward by the Reform Party. I remember how Preston Manning and the Reform Party were advocating for it, but the reality is that when they were talking about Senate elections, they talked about the three Es: elected, effective and equal.

But before I even get there, let me say that if we want to change the Constitution of Canada, this bill is trying to do it through the back door. The Senate is part of our Constitution. It is the chamber of sober second thought.

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I must say that I have had occasion to plead my case with the Senate to defeat a government bill. I was a member of the government in the House of Commons and I went there with a colleague of mine from the Liberal Party as well as a colleague of mine from the Reform Party. Even though there was a majority of Liberal senators, they saw the wisdom of our appeal and held up a bad piece of legislation. I will be forever thankful for that. It certainly brought home to me the importance of having a Senate that is depoliticized as much as possible and indeed the importance of having a chamber of sober second thought.

We talk about going through the back door or doing it properly according to the Constitution. To amend the Constitution, which the bill essentially would require if it were to be meaningful, we need to have, according to section 38 of the Constitution, a resolution of the Senate and of the House of Commons and two-thirds of the provinces, seven having at least 50% of the population.

We know that Quebec and Ontario are opposed. Combined, they make up much more than 50% of the population. Further, I point out on the question of being equal that Alberta has 10.3% of the population of Canada, yet only 5.7% of the seats. British Columbia has 13.2% of the population of Canada but only 5.7% of the seats. In the case of the province of Ontario, it has 22.9% of the senators and over one-third of the population. How does it make sense to do an unconstitutional runaround on electing senators when a vote in British Columbia or Ontario or Alberta would be a very small fraction of the vote in other provinces?

● (1730)

I thought we generally agreed that there is agreement to having representation by population. This certainly does not address that. It is done very much in a piecemeal fashion.

I listened to the debate. I noted that the member for Cambridge said this was a great plan. Back during the time of the Meech Lake accord, the then premier of Ontario, Liberal David Peterson, made some comments about giving up some Senate seats from the province of Ontario. That suggestion did not go over well during the election campaign that followed shortly. The reason was that the people in Ontario did not want to see under-representation in the Senate made worse. The people of Ontario believe, as I dare say the people of Cambridge do, in representation by population.

This does not address that issue. As I said, it is piecemeal and it is through the back door. The fact of the matter is that because we cannot make these elections binding we depend on the Prime Minister to keep his word. I am sure all members of the House would agree, and all people involved in income trusts would agree, that this Prime Minister does not necessarily keep his word. He might keep it some of the time, but he surely does not keep it all of the time.

I think this whole issue of Senate reform, the issue that is masqueraded as Senate reform, is really dishonest, because it does not address the question as it goes to the very foundation of this country and our institutions. There is a way of properly doing constitutional reform. That is why we repatriated our Constitution. It was so we could do that here and not have to go to Westminster cap in hand. That was done on April 17, 1982.

That constitutional reform was done under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Let me say that there was a great deal of consultation around the country. It was comprehensive. It got tested by the courts. It had the provinces onside. This bill does none of that.

I mentioned that the Prime Minister does not always keep his word. We all remember the election. As soon as the election was held, his word was broken when he appointed to the Senate the Minister of Public Works, who was not a member of the House of Commons and who was not elected to anything. Here we have one of our most sensitive portfolios in the Senate, and we in the House of Commons cannot ask questions of that minister. This is so very much a typically Conservative smokescreen and piecemeal optics.

May I say that when the member for Calgary East talked about the Liberals appointing their buddies to the Senate, Brian Mulroney, in his nine short years, appointed 57 senators. I really hope that the member for Calgary East gets the message.

I think I am hitting a nerve on the other side. Notwithstanding that the Reformers came up here and said they were going to engage in civil debate, those folks over there have forgotten all that, just as they have forgotten coming to the Parliament of Canada to represent their constituents.

● (1735)

I remember a time when I looked across the aisle and listened to the Reform Party members and the leader did not even sit in the first row. He sat in the third row. Eventually he moved up to the first row. I remember how for every vote before this chamber the whip for the Reform Party said, "Reform Party members are going to be voting this way", except those members who had been instructed by their constituents to do the other.

We have come 180 degrees to the party that is now on that side. I note the member for Wild Rose. He remembers those days as well. I appreciated those days because it helped bring some reform into this chamber. The only problem was that as soon as those members got into government the heavy hand of dictatorial power from the Prime Minister came down, the likes of which Parliament has not seen in 50 years. It is just unbelievable. We have situations—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, can you call for order?

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The rule of thumb is very easy. If I can understand the hon. member that I have recognized, then everything is fine, but if I cannot, then I must ask for the cooperation of all members, and this is what I am doing.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I look back with fondness to the days when the Reform members were actually civil in this House and not using a mob-like mentality.

Government Orders

I want to get back to the Senate. If we were to have elected senators with votes that mean a lot more in one province than say in Alberta, British Columbia or Ontario, that would undercut representation by population. However, beyond that, it would give the Senate the kind of power that it does not have now.

One can just imagine what would happen to this chamber of democratically elected members from roughly equal constituencies, and I say roughly because we have some changes to make, and all of a sudden we have these bogus re-elected senators, who would not truly be recognized in the Constitution, holding up a bill of the House of Commons and not backing off when the House of Commons sends the bill back for the second time. The institution of the House of Commons then must prevail.

I mentioned that because this bill does absolutely nothing to deal with that issue.

I want to talk about a possible elected Senate that is amended by the Constitution and what I could support. I could support an elected Senate that is dealt with by the Constitution but that the powers of the Senate and the House of Commons must be very well defined. The ultimate authority of the House of Commons must prevail.

We also need to find a way of reflecting minorities in our country who might not be represented in the House. We must ensure that the Senate has the kind of knowledge base that is not necessarily reflected in this House. We need people from the arts and people with great expertise from social services, social sciences and the hard sciences. We also need to ensure we have people like Senator Roméo Dallaire who has expertise in the military. Those types of people are very important.

However, when we put that package together we must do it within the confines of the Constitution. Otherwise, as the premier of the province of Ontario said, to do otherwise would have the province of Ontario calling for the abolition of the Senate which, in the end, would be a mistake.

I would challenge members opposite to go back to Alberta, to go back to their constituencies in Ontario or to go back to their constituencies in British Columbia and ask their constituents if they think it is fair that their province is under-represented. I do not think the members will be surprised by the reactions they get. I believe the people will say that they think it is unfair and that if we are to have elections, we need to have a Senate based on representation by population.

• (1745)

The Senate has worked well for the most part because it has tried to be non-partisan as much as possible given the fact that Brian Mulroney appointed 57 senators and given the fact that most senators are political appointments.

However, I can say that the decorum in the House of Commons could do well to look to the decorum in the Senate. The displays and discourtesies that we have in the House, such as those afforded by the member for Cambridge, do not represent the kind of behaviour they have in the Senate.

If we want a Senate that is partisan and a Senate that does not work as effectively and efficiently as it does now, then we would

want to pass this bill. However, I think most Canadians, on a sober second thought, not a knee-jerk reaction to a particular poll that might be done in the same fraudulent way as the consultation on the Wheat Board was done, would want us to leave well enough alone.

I know former Premier Peterson of the province of Ontario quickly learned that Senate seats are not given away for the province of Ontario, particularly when it is under-represented.

We should not be having this debate because what we are debating is a way to go around the Constitution. The reason we have a Constitution is because we consulted widely with all the stakeholders. Constitutional change is not easy but if we are going to amend the Constitution of this country, we need due diligence and a comprehensive approach where the problems are thought out and term limits are actually looked at.

I know there is debate on having term limits of 8 years, 12 years or 15 years. If, at the end of the day, our aim is to make the Senate as non-partisan as possible, a Senate that manages from time to time to do great work, then we would not want a senator having to run in an election every eight years. We might want the appointment to be for a longer term of maybe 12 to 15 years. If we were to do that, then we would ensure that the people have the background, the expertise and the experience in the Senate to make it happen.

It should come as no surprise to the government that Bill C-43 will be defeated because it does not have the support of the House. I will be looking forward to voting against the bill when the time comes.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I kind of remember one thing the member said in his speech but most of his speech was pretty bungled up. I do not even know if he knew for sure what he was talking about. However, he made a couple of comments about the days when the Reform came in and he was right on. I do not think I have changed since 1993 when I came in as Reform member.

However, when we arrived here there were a couple of things we recognized. First, Brian Mulroney was the first prime minister to appoint an elected senator, Stan Waters. Stan Water was a Reformer. Is that not amazing? Brian Mulroney belonged to a different party but he appointed the choice of the people.

We then had to wait a long number of years until we finally got the present Prime Minister who once again has appointed another great Canadian, Bert Brown, to the Senate. Those are people who were elected.

During those 14 Liberal years, I will bet a dollar to a doughnut that if I heard it once I heard it a thousand times coming from the Liberal benches that we should elect our senators. They actually said that in conversations outside and all around. The Liberal members of the caucus, through those years, said that it was a good idea to elect members to the Senate.

I cannot believe what I am hearing today. What happened to the good old Liberals who were here back in the days when the good Reform were here? What kind of a change have they had that they would do that?

Government Orders

I can go through a whole list of boondoggles that started changing the trend of thought in this place, all the way to Gomery through to the cancellation of the helicopters, time after time after time. It is no wonder we lose our decorum in this place when we find out about the billions of dollars that the people over there, when they were in charge, did.

I would ask the member to reconsider, to go back to the Liberal thinking that I heard in the early years of Reform, that an elected Senate is a good idea.

• (1750)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, the member must imagine things if he thinks he heard me talking about an elected Senate. I have never talk about an elected Senate.

I am glad the member for Wild Rose cited some examples where Conservative prime ministers appointed Liberals to the Senate. I must say that our last Liberal prime minister appointed a senator, Mr. Hugh Segal, to the Senate.

The member talks about a number of things. He did not answer the question which I raised in my speech as to what happened to voting for one's constituents that the member and all the Reformers were so keen on. That has disappeared. We even had a situation where a minister of the Crown, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, because the Prime Minister announced a policy to recognize the Québécois as a nation, resigned his seat in this House because he was not allowed to come into this House and vote his conscience.

When I was in a similar situation and resigned as parliamentary secretary, there was never a question that I would come into this House and vote against the legislation.

The member mentions Gomery—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Cambridge.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure where to begin here. I am getting the impression that the member has no support for democracy whatsoever. The member mentions things that are advantageous to him, depending on the argument that he presents.

The member loves history. He was talking about the Reform Party. I will not mention what that member said at the University of Waterloo regarding an ethnic group. I will mention that the member walked into a function yelling and screaming because the audience there was representing and exercising their right to freedom of speech and he yelled against it.

The member is not interested in democracy. He is interested in anything away from election and democracy. He talks about listening to constituents. I want to remind the House that it was that member who was here during the Gomery scandal. It was that member who was here during sponsorship. It was that member who was here during the boondoggle. It was that member and his party who have gotten us to the point that has created the appetite for Senate reform through their partisan political manoeuvring.

The member brags about not voting with his government and not supporting his leader. Why would the people in his riding vote for him if he cannot even support his own party?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I hope you will give me as much time to answer as the member got to ask questions. Let me say to the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. In fairness, the hon. member should already know that I am giving two minutes per question and two minutes per answer.

• (1755)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I will be quick. Cheap politics and slander will get the member nowhere.

In terms of being elected by my constituents, I have been elected five times with bigger numbers each time.

The member talks about Gomery. Let me talk about the eight cabinet ministers and MPs that in nine years were fined and convicted, some went to jail, under the Mulroney government.

He talks about Gomery. Let me talk about the book *On the Take: Crime, Corruption and Greed in the Mulroney Years*. The former Prime Minister was talking about patronage appointments and he said he was going to clean it up. Then he went to the Conservative meetings and was going to appoint everybody a senator or a judge. He said that eventually he would appoint a Liberal, but it was only after he appointed every living, walking Conservative. That is found in the book—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo should know that when the Speaker stands, he sits down.

I hope that the hon. member for St. Catharines is rising on a point of order and not a point of debate.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

First, the member is using a prop in the House. Second, he is not even speaking to the topic that he originally started out with respect to his speech, and third, he never even answered—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. When the Speaker stands up, the hon. member sits down.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo was not using a prop. He had a book in his hand from which he was reading.

The hon. member for Yukon should note there are two minutes left, one minute for the question and one minute for the response.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly tame this down a bit.

Three of the newer Conservative members suggested the bill had to come forward because of partisanship in the Senate. Because the member has been here longer than most of us, I would like him to explain how the Senate is much less partisan than the House. In committee, senators are much less partisan and that is a benefit. Perhaps the members opposite should take that lesson from the Senate.

Government Orders

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, may I say to my colleague and all members of the House that when I disagreed with a government bill strongly enough, I went with a Reform member and a Liberal member up to the Senate, to the committee dealing with the citizenship issue, and the Conservatives and Liberals all agreed with me on that committee. They would not let the bill come out of committee because they thought it was bad legislation that should be improved. I cannot point to a better example of having a chamber of sober second thought.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to stand in the House again and support Bill C-43, the Senate appointment consultations act. It is also a pleasure to split my time today with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Our government is proposing to make a series of reforms to make the Senate more democratic and accountable. This bill details to Canadians how they would be able to play a role in selecting the senators who will represent them and their region. Senate appointment consultations would give Canadians a voice in representation and Canadians are asking for it.

We believe, and the people I represent in Crowfoot, Alberta, believe that this is a practical and achievable step. It provides significant and meaningful democratic reform. The type of reform, to be quite honest, that is supported by most Canadians and the type of reform that looking across is very much needed.

We promised in the last election and in the Speech from the Throne that we would take a step by step approach to reforming the Senate. We can take real action in improving the credibility and legitimacy of the Senate without embroiling this government and Canadians in constitutional negotiations.

Our approach includes the practical and meaningful steps of introducing term limits for senators, which is Bill S-4, and consulting Canadians about their preferences for who would represent them in the Senate, which is Bill C-43, the bill we are debating today.

As an Alberta member of Parliament, I can assure the House that we do know something about senatorial elections and something about the Senate of Canada. In 1989 Alberta first used an election to decide a Senate nomination. The prime minister of the day then appointed the winner of that election, Stan Waters, to the upper house in 1990. I was involved at that time and I can tell the House that Alberta was excited about Senator Waters coming to this place and representing Albertans. He represented all Canadians very well.

People in the province of Alberta, British Columbia, and in fact throughout all of western Canada, were very pleased by the way Senator Waters represented them. He toured all of Canada and told Canadians about the need for senatorial reform.

When the Liberal government returned to power in 1993, there was no more progress in terms of bringing democracy and accountability to the upper chamber. It came to a grinding halt with that Liberal regime.

Since 1993 the federal Liberal Party has named none of those Canadians who put their name forward for Senate elections or those who have been duly elected. This is a shame because provinces for the most part are willing to do the work to get better representation in

the Senate. Average Canadians who are engaged in this discussion want to be involved in the process of who will represent them in the Senate.

In 2006 the Conservative Party of Canada came to power. This government has taken the first opportunity to appoint a senator endorsed by Canadian voters. Our Prime Minister announced that Bert Brown, a constituent of mine, would take a seat in the Senate when a seat becomes vacant this summer and become known as senator Brown. Albertans are pleased with that announcement. I had the pleasure of having dinner on Saturday evening with Bert and Alice, Betty Unger, and a number of others.

● (1800)

No Canadian has done as much to advance the cause of senatorial reform as Bert Brown. He has been a tireless advocate for the democratization of the upper house over two decades. He ran in three Alberta Senate elections and is the only Canadian to be elected twice as a senator-in-waiting.

In short, he is a very patient individual when it comes to becoming a Senator, but he is also a perfect role model for elected senators. Mr. Brown, 69, is a farmer from Balzac, Alberta. He is currently a Calgary area zoning and property development consultant. He is also a constituent of mine. That is why again I commend him and I speak about him with great fondness.

Over 300,000 Albertans voted for him in the province's 2004 Senate election. That is 300,000. More Albertans voted for Bert Brown than all Liberal candidates put together in my province in the last general election. Yet, the party opposite asks: which Albertans actually voted for him? Well, 300,000, which is many more than those who voted for all the Liberals combined.

The Senate of Canada was to be an upper chamber for regional representation. It used to be that the senators met in groups in the regions they represented. They would come together based on their region and they would have what we could call a mini-caucus meeting. There was no real special attention paid to a senator being Independent, Liberal or Conservative. Senators were more concerned about the region that they represented. They were concerned about working together to help their region.

Nowadays, the upper chamber is fraught with partisanship. Senators meet in political party caucuses each week. The Senate chamber is to a great deal about party politics. The Senate needs to be reformed.

The House of Commons is supposed to be political. Canadians hope that the Senate would become more independent, more perhaps intellectual, checking the work of the House and helping the House pass good legislation. Senators would actually ask how is this going to affect my region, not necessarily how is this going to play out in my political party.

For a long time, decades, the Senate has posed problems that the average Canadian voters wished that we would address and that we would fix. Canadians have been told that we cannot fix this problem. Canadians have been told by the Liberals and others that we do not want to touch it because we would have to change the Constitution and that we do not want to get into constitutional wrangling again.

Government Orders

Bill C-43 does not require constitutional change. It does not affect the Governor General's power to appoint. It does not affect the Prime Minister's responsibility or power to recommend senators. It does not create a process for the direct election of senators. It does not change the constitutional qualifications of senators.

In short, it does not affect any of the matters that are identified in the Constitution and so this is a process that is achievable. It is a small step. It is a first step and one that we should be grabbing onto.

Constitutional scholars agree that the government's approach is constitutional because we do not legally affect the role of the Governor General in making those appointments or the role of the Prime Minister.

Canadians may not know that our Prime Minister is allowed to consult anyone in making Senate appointments. Bill C-43 provides a mechanism for him to hold a consultation with the citizens of Canada and generally speaking in each province when a vacancy comes he can consult. The governor in council can make an order for a consultation which will be carried out under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer. The order may specify the provinces and territories in which the consultation is to be held. The Prime Minister has the opportunity then to do this.

I see that you are telling me that my time is up, Mr. Speaker, so I will bring my comments to a close. Sometimes when we are elected to the House, we believe that we can come in and make major changes immediately. I think as time goes on we realize that we must become satisfied with small incremental steps.

• (1805)

I think this step will enhance the legitimacy, the credibility of the Senate. We have one party that wants the abolition of that. I think if the Senate became more involved in regional representation, it would help. I believe we need this process. I will always support Canadians making the decision as to who best represents them.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that the bill was brought first to our House December 13. Those of us who saw it at that time wondered if it would ever come back. However, it is back today.

There seems to be some degree of apology from the government that it brought it back to the House for further consideration, hoping for it to go to committee. However, when I listen, I am afraid I hear some members opposite saying they are dissatisfied with some of the senators sitting in the room just across the way from us.

First, the member for Crowfoot says "if the provinces are willing". Could he explain that? It is my impression that at least two of the major provinces do not want to hear about the bill. Second, could he give us the names of the constitutional scholars who believe this bill is constitutionally correct?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, first, do I have the specifics as to those constitutional experts? No. However, a number of constitutional experts have said that if we are to move in these kinds of steps, in these small incremental steps, that we are allowed to do that. Indeed, we have already seen the constitutionality of it in the fact that former Prime Minister Mulroney appointed Stan Waters to the Senate.

Does the prime minister have the ability to consult with who would best represent them? Yes. Does that consultation, like the old Liberal ways, have to be with just the Liberal boys in the back room or can it be with all the province as a whole? Our argument is the prime minister can make that consultation with whom he or she wants. Our Prime Minister has said very clearly that the ones he takes his marching orders from are the people, the citizens, the voters. That answers the question.

• (1810)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague was a Reformer, as I was at one time. I want to ask my friend a couple of simple questions.

How does he reconcile in his own heart a Prime Minister and a leader who has taken the public service and removed them from the equation of effectively having input into government public policy, a Prime Minister who has chosen to muzzle his cabinet, muzzle his MPs and muzzle the media, all of which are violations of the essence and the pillars of an effective democracy?

How does my hon. friend reconcile in his own heart, as a Reformer, as somebody who wants to reform the system to make it more democratic and accountable to the Canadian public, a system where the Canadian people have input into public policy, the current situation he finds himself in, with a Prime Minister who is a follower of Leo Strauss?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to a question, in fairness to the person who asked this earlier. There are a number of people, Patrick Monaghan and Peter Hogg, constitutional scholars, who agree with this. There are two names, and there are a number of others who do.

I do not agree with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, respectfully, who says that we are being muzzled, that this Prime Minister is somehow telling us when we can stand up and sit down and say this and say that. That is not the case.

The Prime Minister is one who has always encouraged us to represent our constituents, to go out and listen to what they have to say. We go back on a weekly basis, and many times the Prime Minister has encouraged all of us to listen, not so much the talk, talk, talk we are used to from the Liberal side, but the listen, listen, listen to the constituents, to the people we represent.

The member across the way made mention that at one point in time he was a Reformer. He was a Canadian Alliance member at one point in time as well. I am not certain if he ever lasted long enough to be Conservative of Canada. When it comes to what he sees on this side, he sees a government that is effective, a government that is united, a government that is working for the betterment of Canadians and a government that wants accountability and democratization of the Senate.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me today to stand in the House to speak to Bill C-43, the Senate appointment consultations act.

The most important thing about the bill is that it is about democracy, democratic reform, something of which we can all agree. I know the Canadian public agree that we could use a lot more in this great building. It is long overdue.

Government Orders

When we talk about democratic reform, I will give some examples. It baffles me why the opposition across the way have these cold feet and great fear of democratic reform. In an example that did not happen too many years ago, there were some changes made where senators were limited to the age of 75. Some other democratic reform was that they had to attend some meetings, instead of being in Florida or Mexico.

Rome was not built in a day and neither will some of the reforms we need in the country. This is just another one in a list of keeping that reform going.

The bill is also about accountability. It is about giving people a voice in selecting their senators. It is also something the government believes is a practical and very achievable step toward significant democratic reform.

In my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, 86% of people who responded to a question in one of my householders said that they wanted to see an elected Senate. There was also a number in there who wanted to see it totally abolished, but I do not support that. However, some people do because of some of the things that went on over the years. I figure if we get the right kind of reforms in this place and in the other house, we will go a long way to appeasing some of those people.

Although Bill C-43 is not totally about the election of senators, if passed, the bill will provide the type of democratic reform that is supported, as I said, by my constituents, and I believe most Canadians. Canadians will have a say in who will represent them in the Senate.

Bill C-43 is one of the reforms that can generate momentum on comprehensive change to the Senate. The bill does not require any constitutional change and political parties would have more of a limited in relation to the political financing of Senate nominees. Parties would not control the order of the candidates on the ballot, which is a good thing, and voting would also be for individual candidates.

Furthermore, the bill recognizes that citizens, not political friends or big donors to the prime minister are in the best position to advise the prime minister about the people who should speak on their behalf in this great institutions.

We know Canadians think it is time to act on this idea. Canadian voters would be able to indicate their preferences regarding which potential Senate nominees they would like to see represent their provinces or territories.

I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Crowfoot, for sharing his time with me. He spoke about the great Senator from Alberta. Albertans are way ahead of the rest of the country in electing senators and pinpointing who they would like to represent them. Every province and territory should have that same kind of process.

The single transferable vote allowed for in the bill would allow Canadians to rank their preferred Senate nominees in order of preference. They can rank them one, two, three or as many as they see fit. The system is very adaptable in that where there are many vacancies in a province, it provides proportionality in the results.

If there is only one vacancy, the system requires a successful nominee to receive a majority on the vote. How can we argue with that process? What is wrong with it? I cannot think of a valid reason why anyone in the House could argue that point.

Bill C-43 is about consultations and information gathering. The prime minister can consult anyone in making Senate appointments and the bill would provide him or her a mechanism to hold a consultation with Canadians.

● (1815)

Bill C-43 follows through on the promise made to the people of Canada by the government in the recent Speech from the Throne where it said,

—explore means to ensure that the Senate better reflects both the democratic values of Canadians and the needs of Canada's regions.

The bill would provide the country with a revised Senate, with a truly national democratic institution. There is no reason for this bill not to pass. In fact, it should pass unanimously.

I call on all members of the House to clear their minds of all partisan cobwebs and to support the bill.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member understands the bill. I have no big problem with an elected Senate. I think Senate reform is a good idea. I think proportionality and representation are all good ideas, but I do not know that they can be done piecemeal.

The member said that when we have one Senate vacancy, there would be an election with a transferable ballot, a preferential ballot, not the first past the post. If we look at a province like Ontario and consider that the government is advancing two bills, one for fixed terms limiting the terms at eight years and another one for elected senators, we would have to calculate that every four years we would have at least 12 or 13 senators to be elected.

Presumably we would not have one a month or every two months. We would have these all at the same time. If we had a dozen senators and if it is split every four years for an election, then we would have a minimum of 12 people. If we want to set the selection of the three preferred ones, we would have to be voting for 36 people, I would presume, or a long list of people. It seems to me like a complicated and convoluted process.

In a province like Ontario, how would anybody from any of the regions outside Toronto ever get elected?

● (1820)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for what looks like support for Senate reform. That is good to hear.

When it comes to reforming the Senate, there are further changes I personally would like to see. I ask my colleague across the way to support the government in getting those. In the meantime the indication has been that they will not support the full changes needed for Senate reform.

Government Orders

What we do, like the government did a few years ago when it made the reform changes in as far as limiting the age and making one sit at meetings, is some reform a little at a time. It is not the way we all want to maybe see it happen, but we are trying to do a little at a time.

I look very forward to the final vote on this and to see the members support it. I hope the member will be persuaded and that the rest of his colleagues will do the same thing.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his enlightening comments. Finally, we are hearing some reason in this debate because what we are hearing from the opposition parties is completely ludicrous.

We know people across the country want to see Senate reform. They have been talking about it. It is ranking higher and higher in opinion polls, but yet we are hearing from the opposition party that it is not going to support the bill. We found out today that the Liberal dominated Senate will not support Bill S-4 to bring about term limits into the Senate.

Why does my colleague think the opposition parties are not supporting democratic reform in the Senate and ensuring we bring modernization into this institution?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I do not like to speculate in this place, but I will use accountability, for an example.

It is something that should have been passed. We all want accountability, at least one would think that we all would in the House. A very simple act should have taken no time at all. While I forget the exact amount of time, it was almost an embarrassment to that great institution over there how it was dragged and drawn out. I do not know whether that is the reason they do not want to see, as long as we are in government, things improve over there. I have no idea.

I know previously a colleague from British Columbia over there talked about the leadership. I know my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake and I are proud to stand behind our leader. I am sure that hon. colleague from British Columbia wishes he was still over here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Miramichi has the floor for 10 minutes, of which half will be today, and he will be interrupted at 6:30 p.m..

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly interesting to hear what is projected for the House with this bill. I know Conservative Party members have problems because when they established themselves as the new Conservative Party, even within the Senate, some Progressive Conservative senators did not want to join the new establishment. So even within the Senate itself I know they perceive some problems with who they think supports them in the Senate.

I am a member from New Brunswick, a region of Canada which has 10 senators. We have to look back at the Constitution of this country whereby Atlantic Canada, the maritime provinces were provided with 24 senators, in other words at that time one-quarter of the Canadian Senate. Over the last 140 years numerous changes have occurred within Canada. We hear people speak about the need to make some changes to the Senate, but I have always been proud of

the Senate. In fact when I went home this past weekend I heard as many people criticize this House as I went around the streets of my constituency as I did those who might want to criticize the Senate.

When we look at bills like this and the accountability bill that is tied in with this one, we have to wonder how accountable we are to the people of Canada when we spend the whole day talking about Bill C-43. It is 51 pages long and my impression is that I am disappointed if our justice department wrote this piece of legislation. If the justice department did write it, there certainly must have been a lot of instructions from somebody who had some very different ideas on how the future of our Senate should be determined.

The House of Lords in Britain at the present time is undergoing some changes. Certain restrictions are being placed upon the future of that house. Who should be members of the House of Lords in the future is a matter of great debate within the British parliament .

Two houses are part of our federal system. Each house reflects different ideas, different backgrounds, different concerns. When I heard today about setting up a consultation process, it is simply an attempt by the Prime Minister and the Conservative government to get around what really should be the Constitution of our country. They want to rely on a complicated system of people in an election giving preferences and a long list of who might be a senator in that particular province or region.

I have not heard, for example, a comparison to the United States Senate where each state has two senators. We should look at the costs of running for the U.S. Senate and what the people of Canada might spend on getting a consultation process that might be used for the Prime Minister to appoint somebody to the Senate.

We had a recent debate on justice and the appointments to the judicial system. Will the next step be to have elections of judges as they have in some countries, in fact in parts of the United States? Maybe that is the next step the government is considering.

In my own province recently, talking about the concept of offering party followers some of these appointments, we have had three judicial appointments recently. One was a former leader of the Conservative Party in New Brunswick. Another was the chief organizer for the government and that party in the last federal election. The third one has very close ties to a former member of Parliament.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: These are qualified people.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: I wonder where we are coming from in terms of openness, in terms of providing a better government for this country.

● (1825)

Mr. Speaker, I see I have roused a little bit of concern on the other side when I bring those points forward. I think I may have to stop because someone's jacket is on the floor, who is going to step on it? Back home when people talk tough talk like that, they throw their coat on the floor and someone jumps on it.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: That is so low. These are qualified people. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: But these Irish. I have Irish friends and they always attempt to show their real strength.

I am sorry if the hon. member wants to interrupt me on something different.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Shame.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: Mr. Speaker, it is a shame when the Minister of Finance wants to interrupt somebody on a different issue from what I was talking about. It is a shame. He should apologize to the hon. member from Nova Scotia and not try to disrupt this House.

* * *

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 3, consideration of Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum penalties for offences involving firearms) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division at report stage of Bill C-10.

Call in the members.

- (1850)

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. The recorded division will also apply to Motions Nos. 2 and 17 to 20.

- (1900)

[English]

(The House divided on Motion No. 1, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 172)

YEAS

Members

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Abbott | Ablonczy |
| Albrecht | Allen |
| Allison | Ambrose |
| Anders | Anderson |
| Angus | Arthur |
| Atamanenko | Baird |
| Batters | Bell (Vancouver Island North) |
| Bell (North Vancouver) | Benoit |
| Bernier | Bevington |
| Bezan | Black |
| Blackburn | Blaikie |
| Blaney | Boucher |
| Breitkreuz | Brown (Leeds—Grenville) |
| Brown (Barrie) | Bruinooge |
| Calkins | Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country) |
| Cannis | Cannon (Pontiac) |
| Carrie | Casey |
| Casson | Charlton |
| Chong | Chow |
| Christopherson | Clement |
| Comartin | Crowder |
| Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley) | Davidson |
| Davies | Day |
| Del Mastro | Devolin |
| Dewar | Dhaliwal |
| Doyle | Dykstra |
| Emerson | Epp |
| Fast | Finley |
| Fitzpatrick | Flaherty |

- | | |
|--|---|
| Fletcher | Galipeau |
| Gallant | Godin |
| Goldring | Goodyear |
| Gourde | Grewal |
| Guergis | Hanger |
| Harper | Harris |
| Harvey | Hawn |
| Hearn | Hiebert |
| Hill | Hinton |
| Jaffer | Jean |
| Julian | Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission) |
| Karygiannis | Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's) |
| Kenney (Calgary Southeast) | Khan |
| Komarnicki | Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings) |
| Lake | Lauzon |
| Layton | Lemieux |
| Lukiwski | Lunn |
| Lunney | MacKay (Central Nova) |
| MacKenzie | Manning |
| Mark | Marston |
| Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca) | Martin (Winnipeg Centre) |
| Martin (Sault Ste. Marie) | Masse |
| Mathysen | Mayes |
| McDonough | McTeague |
| Menzies | Merrifield |
| Miller | Mills |
| Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) | |
| Moore (Fundy Royal) | |
| Nash | Nicholson |
| Norlock | O'Connor |
| Obhrai | Oda |
| Pallister | Paradis |
| Petit | Poilievre |
| Prentice | Preston |
| Priddy | Rajotte |
| Reid | Richardson |
| Ritz | Savoie |
| Scheer | Schellenberger |
| Shipley | Siksay |
| Skelton | Smith |
| Solberg | Sorenson |
| Stanton | Stoffer |
| Storseth | Strahl |
| Sweet | Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) |
| Thompson (Wild Rose) | Tilson |
| Toews | Trost |
| Tweed | Van Kesteren |
| Van Loan | Vellacott |
| Verner | Wallace |
| Warawa | Warkentin |
| Wasylcyia-Leis | Watson |
| Wilfert | Yelich — 160 |

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

- | |
|--------------------------|
| André |
| Bagnell |
| Barbot |
| Bennett |
| Bigras |
| Bonin |
| Brown (Oakville) |
| Carrier |
| Coderre |
| Cullen (Etobicoke North) |
| D'Amours |
| Deschamps |
| Dion |
| Dryden |
| Easter |
| Faille |
| Fry |
| Gaudet |
| Godfrey |
| Guimond |
| Ignatieff |
| Kadis |
| Kotto |
| Lalonde |
| LeBlanc |
| Lemay |
| MacAulay |

Government Orders

Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Pearson
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rota
Roy	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner
Valley	Vincent
Wilson	Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins	Lévesque
Plamondon	Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 carried.

[*Translation*]

I therefore declare Motions Nos. 2 and 17 to 20 carried.

[*English*]

The next question is on the amendment to Motion No. 3.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it I think you might find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to all the remaining motions dealing with amendments to Bill C-10.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The House divided on the amendment to Motion No. 3, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 173*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Arthur
Atamanenko	Baird
Batters	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Benoit
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comartin	Crowder

Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McDonough	McTeague
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Savoie
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipty	Siksay
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylycia-Leis	Watson
Wilfert	Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

André
Bagnell
Barbot
Bennett
Bigras
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Carrier
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Fry
Gaudet
Godfrey

Government Orders

Goodale
Hubbard
Jennings
Keeper
Laforest
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Malhi
Maloney
Matthews
McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Roy
Scarpaleggia
Silva
Simms
St. Amand
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Valley
Wilson

Guimond
Ignatieff
Kadis
Kotto
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
MacAulay
Malo
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Ouellet
Pacetti
Pearson
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Simard
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Szabo
Temelkovski
Turner
Vincent
Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins
Plamondon

Lévesque
Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to Motion No. 3 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 3, as amended.

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 174)***YEAS**

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Angus
Atamanenko
Batters
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davies
Del Mastro
Dewar
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Baird
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit
Bevington
Black
Blaikie
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Charlton
Chow
Clement
Crowder
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau

Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Julian
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McDonough
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shiple
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert

Godin
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
McTeague
Merrifield
Mills
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Savoie
Schellenberger
Siksay
Smith
Sorenson
Stoffer
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

André
Bagnell
Barbot
Bennett
Bigras
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Carrier
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faillie
Fry
Gaudet
Godfrey
Guimond
Ignatieff
Kadis
Kotto
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
MacAulay
Malo

Government Orders

Maloney	Marleau
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Pearson
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rota
Roy	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner
Valley	Vincent
Wilson	Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins	Lévesque
Plamondon	Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 3, as amended, carried.

The next question is on the amendment to Motion No. 4.

(The House divided on the amendment to Motion No. 4, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 175)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Arthur
Atamanenko	Baird
Batters	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Benoit
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean

Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McDonough	McTeague
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Savoie
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Siksay
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylcia-Leis	Watson
Wilfert	Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

André
Bagnell
Barbot
Bennett
Bigras
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Carrier
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faillie
Fry
Gaudet
Godfrey
Guimond
Ignatieff
Kadis
Kotto
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
MacAulay
Malo
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Ouellet
Pacetti
Pearson

Government Orders

Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Roy
Scarpaleggia
Silva
Simms
St. Amand
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Valley
Wilson

Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Simard
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Szabo
Temelkovski
Turner
Vincent
Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins
Plamondon

Lévesque
Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to Motion No. 4 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 4, as amended.

(The House divided on Motion No. 4, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 176)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Angus
Atamanenko
Batters
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davies
Del Mastro
Dewar
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Julian
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Baird
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit
Bevington
Black
Blaikie
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooog
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Charlton
Chow
Clement
Crowder
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Godin
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning

Mark
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McDonough
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert

Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
McTeague
Merrifield
Mills
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Savoie
Schellenberger
Siksay
Smith
Sorenson
Stoffer
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

André
Bagnell
Barbot
Bennett
Bigras
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Carrier
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Fry
Gaudet
Godfrey
Guimond
Ignatieff
Kadis
Kotto
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
MacAulay
Malo
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Ouellet
Pacetti
Pearson
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Simard
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Szabo

Government Orders

Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Valley
Wilson

Temelkovski
Turner
Vincent
Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins
Plamondon

Lévesque
Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 4, as amended, carried. Therefore, Motions No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 are carried.

The next question is on the amendment to Motion No. 9.

(The House divided on the amendment to Motion No. 9, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 177)***YEAS**

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Angus
Atamanenko
Batters
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davies
Del Mastro
Dewar
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Julian
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McDonough
Menzies
Miller

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Baird
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit
Bevington
Black
Blaikie
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinoooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Charlton
Chow
Clement
Crowder
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Godin
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
McTeague
Merrifield
Mills

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shiely
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert

Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Savoie
Schellenberger
Siksay
Smith
Sorenson
Stoffer
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Bachand
Bains
Bélanger
Bevilacqua
Blais
Brisson
Byrne
Chamberlain
Crête
Cuzner
DeBellefeuille
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Gagnon
Gauthier
Goodale
Hubbard
Jennings
Keeper
Laforest
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Malhi
Maloney
Matthews
McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Roy
Scarpaleggia
Silva
Simms
St. Amand
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Valley
Wilson

André
Bagnell
Barbot
Bennett
Bigras
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Carrier
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Fry
Gaudet
Godfrey
Guimond
Ignatieff
Kadis
Kotto
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
MacAulay
Malo
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Ouellet
Pacetti
Pearson
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Simard
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Szabo
Temelkovski
Turner
Vincent
Zed— 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins Lévesque
Plamondon Williams — 4

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to Motion No. 9 carried. I therefore declare the amendments to Motion Nos. 10 to 16 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 9, as amended.

(The House divided on Motion No. 9, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 178)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Arthur
Atamanenko	Baird
Batters	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Benoit
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McDonough	McTeague
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda

Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert

Government Orders

Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Savoie
Schellenberger
Siksay
Smith
Sorenson
Stoffer
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Yelich — 160

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	André
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Barbot
Bélangier	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Blais	Bonin
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Byrne	Carrier
Chamberlain	Coderre
Crête	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Dhalla	Dion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Goodale	Guimond
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jennings	Kadis
Keeper	Kotto
Laforest	Lalonde
Lavallée	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Matthews	McCallum
McGuire	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Pearson
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rota
Roy	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner
Valley	Vincent
Wilson	Zed — 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins Lévesque

Government Orders

Plamondon

Williams— 4

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 9, as amended, carried. Therefore, I declare Motions Nos. 10 to 16, as amended, carried.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, that worked so well, I believe if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the votes just taken to the motion for concurrence in report stage of Bill C-10.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1905)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 179)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Arthur
Atamanenko	Baird
Batters	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Benoit
Bernier	Bevington
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Blackburn	Blaikie
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Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hangar
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
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Mark	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayer

McDonough

Menzies

Miller

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)

Moore (Fundy Royal)

Nash

Norlock

Obhrai

Pallister

Petit

Prentice

Priddy

Reid

Ritz

Scheer

Shiely

Skelton

Solberg

Stanton

Storseth

Sweet

Thompson (Wild Rose)

Toews

Tweed

Van Loan

Verner

Warawa

Wasylcia-Leis

Wilfert

McTeague

Merrifield

Mills

Nicholson

O'Connor

Oda

Paradis

Poilievre

Preston

Rajotte

Richardson

Savoie

Schellenberger

Siksay

Smith

Sorenson

Stoffer

Strahl

Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)

Tilson

Trost

Van Kesteren

Vellacott

Wallace

Warkentin

Watson

Yelich— 160

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	André
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Barbot
Bélangier	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Blais	Bonin
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Byrne	Carrier
Chamberlain	Coderre
Crête	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Dhalla	Dion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Goodale	Guimond
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jennings	Kadis
Keeper	Kotto
Laforest	Lalonde
Lavallée	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Pearson
Proulx	Ratans
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rota
Roy	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner

Valley
Wilson

Vincent
Zed- — 102

PAIRED

Members

Cummins
Plamondon

Lévesque
Williams- — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I posed a question with regard to the closing of the consulates in Japan, Italy and Russia. At the time, I was told that there would be no difficulty and that the government would be able to respond effectively by using handbooks.

I point out to the House as an example that in Osaka, Japan, 25 million people live in the Kansai region. Japan has the second largest economy in the world. It is a major trading partner. In fact, it is our number two trading partner for direct investment as well. Yet we were going to close that consulate, in which there is a GNP greater than that of all of Canada. The government response was that it wanted to save money. This is at a time when the government is flush with dollars, yet it wanted to cut these consulates, and more will be on the chopping block.

I would point out that I put a motion forward at the foreign affairs committee to have the minister appear. He did appear, but his answer was not sufficient. I see the minister smiling over there. I would point out to him that if we are going to be global, if we are going to compete with the Americans, the Australians, and others, then we have to be a player. We cannot do it simply from the capital.

The former Japanese ambassador raised questions about this. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Japan opposed this, as did the Canada Japan Society.

Everyone knows about doing business. Japan is an example. We closed those two consulates in Japan on March 31. Everyone knows that we need to make friends first. Business comes second. We need to have those contacts. By closing those consulates, we unfortunately sent out a very damning statement about our interest in that part of the world. We did the same in Milan, Italy, which was a jumpoff point for our business people in eastern Europe. Suddenly it has been closed and the opportunities for us are gone.

Now we learn that 19 more may be on the chopping block, including one in Riga, Latvia. This again sends a very negative image of Canada.

The government says that when the Liberals were in power we closed consulates. I would point out that when we inherited a deficit of \$42.5 billion some consulates were closed by our government. Now the Conservative government is awash in money. I respect the

Adjournment Proceedings

minister, but he should know better. He received letters indicating the problem with closing these consulates. If we really want to be competitive, if we really want to be on the cutting edge, then we should not be closing them.

The Conservative government has not been honest. It has not answered the fundamental question. What is the overall strategy of the government when it comes to our representation abroad? What is the master plan?

Apparently there is no master plan. If there is a master plan, the government should be able to produce it. It should be able to tell us why it is doing these things. It should be able to tell us its strategy. There is no strategy on that side of the House.

Those members talk about wanting to be competitive internationally, yet they are closing consulates. They want to be competitive and yet they have no strategy. The government is not helping the business community, including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which says the government has no China strategy either. At the end of the day, we have a government with no direction.

This is an important issue not only for our business community but also for Canadians who are travelling abroad. Essentially, we need a clear mandate as to what the government is all about when it comes to our representations abroad.

● (1910)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this very important question. What is of course always surprising is that the Liberals seem to forget their record. They were the government for the last 13 years and their record was that they closed 31 missions. Then they re-evaluated that and they opened up 43.

The government's re-evaluation process is based on how best to represent Canada overseas, how best to make use of our resources to ensure the maximum advantage for Canadian tax dollars, and at the same time ensuring maximum advantage in our relations in the countries where our embassies are in order that they are at their utmost levels and not affected.

The hon. member has talked about Osaka right now. I want to remind him that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has recently talked to the new ambassador from Japan and is in constant touch with his counterpart in Japan. They understand the reason why these things take a normal process. There has not been any impact on the relationships between Canada and Japan or any of those countries.

He keeps asking, "But do we have a strategy? Do we have a plan? What is our plan?"

The Minister of Foreign Affairs told Parliament last week that we are doing what all governments should do: reviewing the places where we would have the most important strategic presence and we will make ongoing assessments as time goes by.

I will remind the member that, yes, the government will make an announcement when we are opening and we are closing. It will not come from the opposite side. The opposition needs to understand that it is not the government any more.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recently told the committee, and I want to repeat it for my hon. friend here, that no decision has been made with respect to further mission consolidation and if it does over time, this government will make a decision.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, the member has not answered the question, which is: What is the overall strategy of this government when it comes to representations abroad?

I am talking about closing missions. When we had a \$42.5 billion deficit, some were closed. But now we have 4 closed and 19 more on the chopping block.

The parliamentary secretary talks about the Japanese ambassador. The former ambassador of Japan to Canada, Ambassador Numata, said:

But I'm afraid that the closure of these offices will not really be helpful...I keep going back to this point about perception. It sends the wrong signal. I'm sure it's not the intent of the Canadian government, but in this world you have to be concerned about perception.

So, clearly, maybe the government does not care about perception. Maybe it does not care about whether our business people compete with the Americans, the Australians and others. But the reality is, if we are going to close, and the minister was asked a point blank question, "What is the strategy, the overall policy, going to be?" The answer is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where he is getting this number of 19 that we are going to close. I have just told him that should this happen, the Government of Canada will make an announcement.

As to the strategy, what strategy? The strategy is that it is an ongoing process to ensure that the best services are provided in the most effective manner making use of Canadian tax dollars to ensure that Canada's presence overseas is as robust as possible. Priorities change and with that things change.

I want to remind the member again, once more, we will make an announcement should it happen. As the minister said, there has been no decision made with any further mission consolidation.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

PASSPORT CANADA

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this adjournment debate and to express my concerns regarding the problem of delays in processing passports. Canadians must now wait months, sometimes even more than three months, before receiving their travel documents because of the lack of action by the Conservative government.

On February 13, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told the House of Commons that 500 new employees had been hired by Passport Canada to deal with the backlog at passport offices. But on April 23 — more than two months later—he stated that he hoped "to have them all on stream very soon".

The minister's statement clearly indicated that absolutely nothing had been done. On May 3, the minister admitted that the employees were still in training. We must take action now to provide service to our citizens. Thousands of Canadians, if not millions, have waited months and months to obtain a passport and continue to line up for days on end to submit their applications.

The number of applications continues to grow. In December 2006, Passport Canada had already received 31% more applications than the year before. In addition, Passport Canada's toll-free line is rarely available because of this increase. Normally, the telephone information system can manage 25,000 calls per week, but the agency is currently receiving 140,000 calls. Demand for passports is increasing because of the new American policy that requires Canadians to show a passport to enter the United States.

We have known this new law would be implemented since April 2005. At the time, the Liberal government put in place an awareness-raising strategy through the Department of Foreign Affairs. Obviously, the Conservatives dropped the ball when they took power. They waited until April 2007 to train new employees to try to fix the situation. They even left it up to the provincial governments to negotiate with Washington. In February 2007, the premiers of New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba went to Washington to convince American authorities to relax their new rules requiring Canadians to show a passport to enter the United States by land or water.

The premiers are suggesting that an improved driver's licence could be used instead of a Canadian passport. While I fully support the measures taken by the provincial governments, I continue to wonder why they had to take action in this matter, which is clearly a federal jurisdiction. The Conservative government lacks leadership and refuses to take action in this matter, leaving the problem with the provinces, individuals, and citizens of the country.

Today we clearly need to know. Will the minister responsible for Passport Canada admit that the problem, and resulting delays in receiving one's passport, is solely and directly his fault? It is clear that the minister has not done his job. For a number of months—let us say 16 months—he has been aware of the problem. We are still waiting for the minister to take clear action for the Canadian public, but we have a government that wants to do absolutely nothing to help the public and just contradicts itself from one month to the next. Will the minister agree today to take full responsibility for the problem of delays at Passport Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to discuss the topic of Passport Canada with the member for Madawaska—Restigouche this evening.

Passport Canada's volume has reached levels never seen before, as the organization issued a record-breaking 3.6 million passports in the last fiscal year, some 500,000 more than the previous record-breaking year.

Adjournment Proceedings

Due to the new U.S. requirements for air travel to the United States, Passport Canada continues to experience a sharp volume increase in passport applications.

Since November, Passport Canada has processed over 1.8 million passport applications and is making every possible effort to cope with an incredibly heavy workload. For that reason, since the fall, Passport Canada has hired 500 new clerks and passport officers. Hiring will continue until passports can be issued within the prescribed service standards.

New passport officers currently need to go through a stringent 12 week training program to ensure that the security and integrity of the Canadian passport is not jeopardized. Under no circumstances will Passport Canada allow untrained personnel to take on tasks associated with the production of such a highly secure document.

Of the 500 clerks and passport officers that were hired, 376 are clerks and 124 are passport officers. Of these 124 passport officers, 110 have already been deployed across the country. This leaves only 14 passport officers in training. Clerks, meanwhile, are trained on the job and immediately deployed.

Passport Canada's infrastructure was designed in the 1990s to produce 13,000 passports per day. However, measures implemented in anticipation of the western hemisphere travel initiative, including the hiring of the 500 new employees, has raised production to 20,000 passports per day.

Passport Canada is now able to cope with the demand and is addressing its backlog. Should demand continue at current levels, Passport Canada forecasts that most of its service channels will be back to normal this summer.

Passport Canada is continuously looking at ways to improve security and client services, while prudently managing its funds in order to ensure an accessible, reliable, flexible and efficient service at a reasonable cost.

My government welcomes a dialogue with MPs to resolve this matter.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, judging by what the parliamentary secretary said, the current situation is clear. The government and the minister have completely failed to fulfill their obligation to ensure that Canadian citizens can obtain new passports within a reasonable period of time.

Excuses about how volume has increased or this, that or the other thing happened are no good. This government was elected 16 months ago. It was aware of the situation, but did nothing. Judging by what the government has said today, it is clear that it does not want to do anything. Before now, it took 21 days to get a passport. Now, it takes more than three months. The fact that it now takes over three months to get a passport means that the government and the minister have failed. This is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, we have hired 500 new officers. We will continue hiring officers to ensure that we fall within the prescribed service time limit. Due to this unprecedented demand, we have naturally seen a huge demand for Canadian passports.

At this time, Passport Canada has also launched our initiatives, including policies and programs in facilitating the passport application process while maintaining stringent security standards, automating our processing system, expanding the receiving agent network, and looking at other innovative solutions such as launching a travelling service to accommodate rural communities. We are doing everything possible to ensure Canadians receive the service they are looking for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*Translation*]

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:23 p.m.)

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