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(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 17, 2007
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 17, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*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 one petition.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled, "Recommendations to the Minister—Immigration and Refugee Board Appointments".

* * *

LIVING DONORS REIMBURSEMENT ACT

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-444, An Act to provide for cash contributions to provinces that operate programs for the reimbursement of the expenses of living organ donors, to provide for the appointment of a National Organ Transplant Coordinator and to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, for his tremendous long-standing assistance on this issue. I also wish to thank my colleague, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, for seconding the bill.

The living donors reimbursement act is an important step in increasing living organ donations in Canada. Thousands of individuals in Canada are currently waiting for an organ. Living donors are a vital part of Canada's organ donation system, as organs

from living donors are typically healthier, function better and last longer.

We as a federal government must do more to ensure that living organ donors, who are truly giving the gift of life to others, are reimbursed for their out of pocket expenses and lost income.

The bill would amend the Employment Insurance Act to allow those who are convalescing from their organ donation to claim loss of their wages.

The bill would also appoint a national organ transplant coordinator to lead the efforts to coordinate and match potential donors with recipients.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-445, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for loss of retirement income).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to introduce this bill today on behalf of thousands of retirees who have been cheated because their employer failed to assume its obligations with respect to their retirement plan, or because it stopped fulfilling those obligations.

In particular, there is the case of retirees from the Jeffrey mine in Asbestos, in my riding, Richmond—Arthabaska, and retirees from Aciers Inoxydables Atlas in Sorel-Tracy, in the riding of my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, whom I would like to thank for his support in this matter.

I would also like to thank my colleague from Chambly—Borduas, who met with these retirees, and drafted this bill with them—which is important to note—to provide a refundable tax credit for the loss of retirement income.

Of course, I hope to have the support of all members of this House to help these retirees, who have become victims, recover part of the money they have lost.

Government Orders

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

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DYSTONIA AWARENESS WEEK ACT

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-446, An Act respecting National Dystonia Awareness Week.

She said: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the 50,000 Canadians who suffer from the disabling neurological movement disorder known as dystonia, I am pleased to introduce an act respecting National Dystonia Awareness Week.

Dystonia is not well understood and is an often misdiagnosed disease that affects certain regions of the brain responsible for involuntary movement and can manifest itself through a variety of symptoms.

The purpose of the bill is to get greater awareness of the disease, especially of its severity and long term chronic symptoms, by designating the week commencing on the first Sunday in June as National Dystonia Awareness Week.

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

* * *

STANDING ORDERS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been extensive consultations among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

[*Translation*]

That, for the year 2007 only, Standing Order 28(2)(a) be amended in column A, replacing the words "The Friday preceding Remembrance Day" with Friday, November 2, 2007, and replacing the adjacent sentence in column B with "Tuesday, November 13, 2007".

[*English*]

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1010)

PETITIONS

JUSTICE

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of a number of citizens in my riding of Palliser, as well as citizens across Canada.

The petitioners call upon the government to proceed with changes to the criminal justice system so that those convicted of serious criminal code offences serve their time consecutively and not concurrently, and that those convicted of multiple criminal code offences have their time served for parole eligibility with those convictions counted consecutively.

The petitioners want to ensure that the victims of violence crime see justice done in our Canadian criminal justice system. I would like to commend the efforts of Lorne Ridgway of Avonlea, Saskatchewan, whose family was touched by a terrible violent crime, who spearheaded this petition.

* * *

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, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC MARKS ACT

The House resumed from May 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, An Act respecting the protection of marks related to the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games and protection against certain misleading business associations and making a related amendment to the Trade-marks Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-47, Olympic and Paralympic Marks Act.

Today I would like to talk about the importance of sport and the importance of supporting it. I will of course address the importance of the Olympic Games and, above all, the importance of protecting Olympic marks from ambush marketing and trademark theft.

According to the Olympic Charter, established by Pierre de Coubertin, the goal of the Olympic movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. What an excellent example and lesson for our youth.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-47 because we believe in the Olympic ideal. We do not think it is outdated. On the contrary, we believe it is important to promote the movement. Furthermore, as we have seen in this House, the Standing Committee on Health has tabled bills concerning obesity rates among our youth. Sport is a good way to tackle that problem.

Government Orders

Problems of hyperactivity among young people, the majority of them boys, can be resolved by involvement in sports. It is therefore important for our society to support sports, and the Olympic Games provide an excellent opportunity to focus on sports and increase activity.

We had an example of this after the Montreal Olympics of 1976, as generations of young people acquired a taste for sports in general, Olympic sports in particular. It is a matter of health and of well-being.

We became aware, however, at the same time, that funding was both difficult and fraught with peril, and this is why Bill C-47, is so important. This bill makes possible the funding of the Olympic Organizing Committee, which is essential. We need to keep in mind that we are talking of \$700 million in connection with Vancouver and with marks. Forty percent of the Olympic Games budget is linked to sponsors, whose ability to use Olympic marks is what will be able to fund those games.

This bill deals with the protection of Olympic and Paralympic marks, and with protection against certain misleading business associations between a business and the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games or certain committees associated with those Games.

It is therefore important for us to provide real support, but for a limited time. This bill is about special protection, but for a limited time, of intellectual property rights, words and symbols relating to the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-47. We note, however, that the Conservative government may be moving quickly to protect Olympic marks, but it is taking far more time to protect intellectual property adequately. At the present time, in fact, the Standing Committee on Industry, Sciences and Technology is looking at the issue of counterfeiting and intellectual property, a major problem for our economy.

Even the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is hard at work to find ways of dealing with film pirating. This committee has, moreover, adopted a motion, thanks to the efforts of the hon. member for Hochelaga, the Bloc Québécois justice critic, which is about proceeding with an examination of this matter.

Canada has, unfortunately, already been faulted for its inaction on film pirating by just about every country on the planet, and rightly so. No fewer than 20% of films pirated by videotaping in a movie theatre originated in Canada.

So what about intellectual property? Generally, the notion of intellectual property covers rights related to intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary, or artistic fields. Intellectual property rights include patents, trademarks, copyright, industrial drawings, integrated circuit arrangements, plant breeders' rights and so on.

•(1015)

All of these are considered intellectual property. We know that if intellectual property is not protected, not only will creativity and inventiveness be suppressed, but the cost to our economy will be enormous. This is becoming a disaster of epic proportions.

The Olympic mark, which we are discussing today, includes all names, phrases, marks, logos and concepts related to the Olympic movement. If we do not protect Olympic marks, why would major sponsors want to invest in these Olympic Games? It is critical that any unauthorized use of the Olympic mark be prevented because it could undermine the entire sponsorship system, the way the Olympic Games organizing committee awards licences and the committee's ability to raise the money needed for these games. Products, sponsorship and licences are truly essential to the success of the Olympic Games, and that is why we really support this bill.

This bill criticizes ambush marketing. What is ambush marketing? Users, individuals, retailers and people selling all kinds of products could claim to own Olympic marks and use them to sell their goods. They would use the marks to appeal to the public so they can sell their fake Olympic logo products.

This bill is really aimed at protecting these Olympic marks. Not protecting them will reduce the value of sponsorship rights. Why would major sponsors pay top dollar for sponsorship rights if they are worthless because the marks are used by everyone? For viable Olympic Games, the trade-marks must be well protected. Every time the Olympics are held, a new bill must be introduced, because the Olympic marks are extremely valuable.

Canadian and foreign organizations have always invested a great deal of money because we have been able to guarantee the Olympic marks. Unauthorized use of Olympic marks must be illegal and carry severe penalties. With this bill, we are not trying to prevent companies from doing business, but it is important to protect the rights of major sponsors who are supporting sport and the building of facilities that will stay in Vancouver and promote sport, which is what happened in Montreal.

For example, under this bill, it would be illegal to use the Olympic rings, the Olympic torch, the logo of the 2010 Olympic Games or the mark Vancouver 2010 on a website or sign, in a written document or on an item, or to use the Olympic mark in a corporate or company name or a trade-mark. The Olympic Organizing Committee is responsible for protecting the Olympic mark, but it is prepared to take legal action if necessary to protect that mark. This could include orders to seize unauthorized wares and recover damages.

Government Orders

What sorts of activities are considered ambush marketing? They include the unauthorized use of the Olympic mark or similar marks or names in connection with a business, organization, event or commercial Internet site; an Olympic contest, including offering a trip or tickets to the Olympics as a prize in a program or promotion; "good luck" advertisements or advertising or prizes to congratulate the Olympic athletes; and references to the Olympic movement, the Olympic Games or the athletes in advertising or marketing.

● (1020)

There are also the merchandise, posters and stickers distributed in connection with the Olympic Games, publications in connection with the Olympic Games, including programs, guides, magazines, maps and supplements, books, personal journals and calendars, and visitor services in connection with the Olympic Games.

One question often asked by promoters is whether Olympic Games tickets can be given as prizes in a contest or promotion. There are specific conditions attached to Olympic Games tickets that expressly prohibit using them for commercial, advertising and promotional purposes, including as prizes in contests. A person who obtains Olympic Games tickets in a manner that violates the applicable conditions can be refused access to the games site or be asked to leave the premises.

So the Conservatives' haste to defend the Olympic trademarks stands in some contrast to their lack of haste in defending athlete development in Canada and Quebec. On that point, it seems to me that introducing this bill should be an occasion for the Conservative government to give more thought to how it supports sport. We cannot support sport in Canada and Quebec only when the Olympic Games are being organized. We should be doing that all the time, and it should be a requirement, for public health. In our opinion, it is important that more Canadians, in all segments of society, take part in sports activities of every variety.

After the 1976 Olympic Games, the Government of Quebec did a lot for sport. In my riding, there was a very important initiative: the creation of the Les Estacades Sports Complex, in which \$8.5 million was invested. And what is this sports complex? It is a strategic centre for sports development, not only for young people who are involved in a program combining sport with academic work, but for all adults and young people in the riding, who can all use the sports complex, which has also received substantial funding from the Mouvement Desjardins. This will make it possible to build an indoor soccer field and an Olympic-sized arena, to open around about December. There will be a range of facilities that everyone in the riding will be able to use.

We are increasingly realizing that soccer is an expanding sport, and one that calls for little expenditure. As a mother, I have seen my sons play a lot of soccer. The youngest still plays. This is a very democratic sport, in the sense that it does not involve astronomical costs for parents. Every family can let their children get involved in this sport, which genuinely contributes to improving our young people's health.

In conclusion, I will say that we support this bill, to ensure, obviously, that there is adequate funding for Olympic sports and to support amateur sport.

● (1025)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that 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, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to lead off the third reading debate on Bill C-10.

During the last federal election, the Conservative Party of Canada laid out clear plans to make our streets and communities safer for Canadians. We promised to target criminal enterprise and the gangs that profit from violence, drugs and fear and undermine people's sense of personal security and their confidence in the Canadian criminal justice system.

Canadians listened to our message of hope and responded by granting us the privilege of forming the government, so today I am very proud to stand in the House as Minister of Justice to follow through on our promises to deliver on our core promises to tackle crime.

In order to make our communities safer, we introduced several criminal justice bills aimed at getting violent, dangerous criminals off our streets.

We introduced Bill C-22, the age of protection bill, to protect 14 year olds and 15 year olds from adult sexual predators.

We introduced Bill C-27 to improve the process for keeping violent and repeat offenders in prison, and Bill C-9, which aims to put an end to house arrest for serious and violent offenders and which, I am pleased to say, has passed this House.

These are just a few of our recent initiatives.

Bill C-10, the bill that we have before us at third reading, is an important piece of legislation that specifically targets gun and gang violence.

Government Orders

I am very pleased that we have received the support of a majority of members of the House to restore the bill, and while the bill we debate today is amended somewhat from its original form, it still contains tough mandatory minimum penalties for serious offences involving firearms.

More specifically, Bill C-10, as amended, proposes escalating penalties of five years' imprisonment on a first offence and seven years on a second or subsequent offence for eight specific serious offences involving the actual use of firearms. Those offences are: attempted murder, discharging a firearm with intent to injure a person or prevent arrest, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage taking, robbery, and extortion.

I should point out that these tough penalties will apply when the offence is committed in connection with a criminal gang or if a restricted or prohibited firearm is used.

Who can be against that? Who can be against those provisions? This is what we talked about with the Canadian public in the last election and I believe there is widespread support for a bill of this nature.

Bill C-10 defines what will constitute a prior conviction with respect to these use offences, that is, the use of firearms. This means that any prior conviction in the last 10 years, excluding the time spent in custody, for using a firearm in the commission of an offence will count as a prior conviction and will trigger the enhanced mandatory penalty for repeat offences.

Also, I should point out that Bill C-10 now proposes penalties of three years on a first offence and five years on a second or subsequent offence for four serious offences that do not involve the actual use of a firearm. Those offences are: illegal possession of a restricted or prohibited firearm with ammunition, firearm trafficking, possession for the purpose of firearm trafficking, and firearm smuggling.

For the non-use offences it is important to note that the prior convictions for both the use offences and the non-use offences will trigger the higher mandatory minimum penalties applicable in repeat offences.

The bill, as amended, also creates two new offences dealing specifically with the theft of firearms. Breaking and entering to steal a firearm and robbery to steal a firearm now are made indictable-only offences, subject to life imprisonment.

Therefore, as we can see, this bill targets serious gun crimes with a particular focus on when such crimes are committed by criminal organizations, which of course includes gangs.

•(1030)

It sends a very clear message to the public that this Conservative government is serious about dealing with this type of crime. I am very pleased and proud that we are introducing this piece of legislation and seeing it through to its conclusion.

I should point out the manner in which Bill C-10 was amended at report stage is an example of this government's willingness to make this minority Parliament work. Together with members of the New Democratic Party we dealt with a problem and we found a solution

that responded to our respective concerns and priorities. I am pleased that we had their support and that of several other hon. members of this House.

I saw, I believe, about five members of the Liberal Party who broke ranks with their own party. I want to tell the House how much I welcomed that and certainly appreciated their support. I think they received the message on this. I am very pleased to have that support at third reading. I would welcome more support from other members of the opposition.

I should point out that Bill C-10 has the support of other important stakeholders as well. Police officers and prosecutors are supportive of this government's attempt to pass this tough on crime legislation. They have said that tougher mandatory penalties are needed to target the specific new trend that has emerged in many Canadian communities, and that is the possession and use of firearms, usually handguns, by street gangs and drug traffickers.

In that regard, I point out the support that this approach received from the attorney general of Ontario. He pointed out in a *Globe and Mail* article on March 6 that he liked this approach of getting tougher. He called on his federal colleagues in the Liberal Party to get behind legislation of this type because he believed this was the way to go.

Mr. Speaker, the safety and security of Canadians are not partisan matters. If we want to see progress in tackling gun crime, we will all have to do our part.

Police officers have to do their part in investigating and apprehending those who commit crimes. Crown attorneys have to do their part in ensuring that accused persons are effectively prosecuted, and of course, judges have their part to do in imposing sentences.

As parliamentarians we have a strong role to play as well. We set the laws. We signal to the courts what we consider to be appropriate penalties for specific crimes.

There are a number of opposition members who say they cannot support Bill C-10, but many of these same members have already supported mandatory penalties in the past, and particularly for firearms offences. In fact, it was the Liberal government that introduced a number of mandatory penalties in the mid-nineties and proposed a very modest increase to some of the gun-related crimes in the last Parliament.

This government does not believe a one year increase is going to make enough of a difference. We want to send a clearer message. We need to ensure that the appropriate stiff penalties are imposed on gun traffickers and gang members who use guns in such serious offences as attempted murder, hostage taking, robbery and extortion.

We believe that the proposals in Bill C-10, as amended, are both tough and reasonable. As I have already indicated, the proposals are restricted to the key areas that are a growing concern to people across this country.

Government Orders

There certainly is evidence to support the problems associated with the current level of gun crime. Crime statistics, police, and several other experts in this area, point to a growing problem with respect to guns and gangs. While the national trends show an overall decrease in some crime over the past few decades, it is not the case with violent crimes such as homicide, attempted murder, assault with weapons, and robbery, especially in larger urban areas across the country.

Statistics also show that while crimes committed with non-restricted guns are down, handguns and other restricted or prohibited firearms have become the weapon of choice for those who use firearms to commit crimes.

Toronto's rate of firearm homicides in recent years has frequently been reported by the press. Statistics Canada data shows that it is not just a problem unique to central Canada. The rate in Edmonton has also recently increased and Vancouver has consistently had higher rates over the last decade.

• (1035)

Gang-related homicides and the proportion of handguns used in violent crimes have become a major cause for concern and gun crime with restricted weapons or guns used by gang member is an increasing problem in urban communities.

Organized criminals are fuelling much of the crime problem and the government's justice agenda aims to curtail this problem by increasing the mandatory minimum penalties for crimes committed with guns, ending house arrest for those convicted of serious violent crimes and sexual offences, and other significant crime, such as major drug offences.

As I mentioned earlier, Bill C-10 includes a number of sentences for both use and non-use firearms offences with the stiffest penalties. The bill targets serious gun crimes committed by gangs or organized crime and the prohibitive weapons that they use.

In addition to this legislation, the federal government of course has a role to play in making funds available to help prevent crime before it happens. I am happy that the government has made investments in crime prevention and specifically to help at risk youth from becoming involved in criminal gangs, guns and drugs.

Funding is available to allow communities to examine issues surrounding gang involvement, create awareness of youth gang recruitment, prevention and intervention strategies, identify service gaps and best practices, and develop program responses.

Several activities have already started to fulfill the government's commitment to work with the provinces and territories to help communities provide hope and opportunity for our youth and end the cycle of violence that can lead to broken communities and broken lives.

I would like to speak for a moment on how the bill is consistent with the sentencing principles provided in the Criminal Code and charter rights. The Criminal Code provides that it is a fundamental principle of the Canadian sentencing regime that a sentence should be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender.

It also provides that the purpose of sentencing is to impose sanctions on offenders that are just, in order to contribute respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society.

Accordingly, the objectives in sentencing are to denounce unlawful contact, deter the offender and others from committing offences, and separate offenders from society where necessary, as well as assist them in rehabilitating and accepting responsibility for their actions while repairing the harm they have caused to victims and their community.

The manner in which the higher mandatory penalties will apply under Bill C-10 is intended to ensure that they do not result in disproportionate sentences contrary to the charter. The higher levels of seven years for using a firearm and five years for non-use offences are reserved for repeat firearms offenders.

If an offender has a relevant recent history of committing firearms offences, it is not unreasonable to ensure that the specific sentencing goals of deterrence, denunciation and separation of serious offenders from society are given priority by the sentencing court.

The government considers that the mandatory penalties proposed in Bill C-10 are not only just but are also appropriately targeted at the specific problem which they seek to address; that is the new trend that has developed with respect to guns and gangs.

At the beginning of my remarks I mentioned that the government is determined to make Canadian streets safer, communities safer and to stand up for victims. The good news on this front is that we are only just getting started.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that our Conservative colleague is speaking of progress.

He feels that Bill C-10 is a sign of progress. The Bloc Québécois believes that it is reactionary and that it is reminiscent of 19th century thinking whereby those who commit crimes must be punished.

However, history has shown that those who commit crimes do not give a second thought to the fact that they may spend their lives, or many long years, in prison. This has been documented by studies conducted by universities and prevention groups.

Government Orders

I suggest that my colleague travel a bit and that he come to Quebec, where he will see that we think in terms of prevention rather than repression.

What does he have against prevention? Why does he always think about repression? Is it because he is mired in the reactionary thinking of 19th century morality?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a very interesting point. He said that people who commit crimes do not think about the consequences. Certainly, I believe they should think about the consequence. One of the good things about this bill is that we are going to give them the opportunity to think about them.

So, if individuals did not get the chance to think about the consequences or did not get a chance to think about the victims or what they are doing to their community or their family, it would be my sincere hope that with a mandatory five years in a federal penitentiary those individuals would have that time to reflect and think about where they had gone astray and how they have messed up their life.

As I said, one of the good things about this bill is that extra opportunity. If these individuals did not have enough time to reflect and to change their ways, and wanted to commit another serious crime with a restricted firearm in an attempt, for instance, to shoot or wound somebody, those individuals then would have seven years in a penitentiary to think about it. So then, again, that time for reflection would certainly be there.

However, as I said to the hon. member and as I pointed out in my remarks, I am certainly interested in intervening with these individuals who do not reflect on the consequences of what they do and I am very much in favour of programs and, quite frankly, funding.

I indicated a number of the areas in which the government is taking action. I think it is very impressive. I would let the member know that \$16.1 million—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry but the Minister of Justice has gone on for some time and there are others who want to ask questions.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have just heard the Minister of Justice say that he wants to intervene earlier, and he has talked a little bit in his comments about Bill C-10 about crime prevention and community-based programs.

Following up on the comments made by the member from the Bloc, it seems that we have seen a huge amount of emphasis from the Conservative government on its crime agenda and that it is very willing to grab the Criminal Code and say, "What are we going to do to toughen up the Criminal Code and bring in more penalties?"

In certain circumstances, that is obviously an appropriate thing to do, but I think it begs the question as to what is the government's agenda in terms of crime prevention?

We have virtually had no debate on this. We have seen no initiatives from the Conservatives. I think that most people in local

communities would agree that certainly law enforcement and penalties are very important measures.

However, the real building block of healthy and safe communities is around dealing with proper housing and dealing with substance abuse in a way that is actually helping people, from a health point of view, and not simply just throwing people in jail because of a health issue and a substance use issue.

I would really like to ask the minister this question. Although he made the briefest of references to crime prevention, where is the government's agenda on crime prevention and supporting strong and healthy communities? We have really seen that it does not exist from what the government has brought forward in terms of the budget and other legislative initiatives. I would like to ask him to comment on that.

● (1045)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, in her opening remarks the hon. member said the government places a huge emphasis on its criminal law agenda. I agree with that. This is actually one of the pillars upon which this government rests.

We made it very clear to people in the last election that we want people to have confidence in the criminal justice system, we want safer streets, we want safer communities, we want less crime, and we are prepared to take steps in that direction.

I do not want there to be any misunderstanding from anyone on this. This is one of the very important items that this government promised when it came into office and we are prepared to stand on.

That being said, the hon. member made the very good point that everyone has a stake in intervening and trying to prevent crime in our communities and she said I only made the briefest of reference. Of course, I was running out of time at that point, but I certainly believe in that.

That is why I was indicating that there was funding. Just in the last budget, there have been initiatives introduced by my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, and me to tackle the problem of youth gangs and to intervene at an earlier point to try and get those individuals.

Certainly, over the years I have supported those programs that work with young people and try to get them off a track, so that we are addressing those individuals who, as my colleague from the Bloc said, commit these offences, but they do not think about the consequences. Obviously, we want to work with the provincial authorities, the municipal authorities, interested—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the Minister of Justice, who is quite concerned with safety. However, I strongly believe that not allowing judges to decide on the appropriate sentence for each individual who commits a crime is not the right approach for ensuring safety.

Government Orders

With automatic sentencing, more people will go directly to jail. We know from experience that prison is a school for criminals. Thus, we will be training more criminals, unless the Minister of Justice introduces a bill that imposes a life sentence on anyone using a small firearm at some point in their life. With the minister's bill, more criminals will be turned loose. They will offend again and our cities will be even less safe.

Has he given some thought to this point in his bill?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is upset that we are proposing to send these individuals to prison. I must point out again who we are talking about. These are individuals who have used a restricted firearm for the crimes of attempted murder, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, hostage-taking, robbery and extortion.

The hon. member asks why there is no other alternative. Believe me, if I thought that sending these people to camp or sending them away on a vacation somewhere was the solution to this, I would go along with that. However, it seems to me that when individuals commit these serious crimes, and do them repeatedly, because the bill talks about escalating penalties, when people cannot get the message that this type of activity is abhorred in Canadian society, then one of the options proposed in this legislation is imprisonment.

I will give the Bloc Québécois credit for being consistent. It consistently opposes these efforts to toughen up the Criminal Code. We have a break coming up and I would ask the hon. member to go back and talk to some of his citizens, explain these offences that I am talking about here of people using restricted firearms, using a pistol in an attempted murder, and see if they agree with me. I bet they will. I think they will say that the Conservatives are on the right track and that maybe those individuals should be in prison and not sent to summer camp in those instances.

● (1050)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to address the House on Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code or, more specifically, an act to implement minimum penalties for offences involving firearms.

I would like to say at the outset that this bill does not allow judges to impose stiffer penalties. The maximums are still the same. For serious offences, the same maximums can be imposed on criminals by judges and they will continue to impose maximums in serious cases.

I would like to remind people that we have a committee system. When a proposal comes to Parliament we have a committee meeting. A number of members from each party go to the meeting to hear expert witnesses in the field. We look at bill after bill day in and day out and obviously members of Parliament cannot be experts on all of them. Therefore, we bring people who have spent their careers in these fields before committee and, based on their knowledge, expertise and input, we wisely make our decisions.

I do not think, in this particular case, a single committee member would not admit that the overwhelming evidence from a vast majority of experts indicates that mandatory minimums do not work. I am sure it would be self-condemnation of the cognitive abilities of

any member to actually suggest that was not the case from the expert witnesses that came before committee.

It is in true conscience, using the system as it is meant to be used, that one could take the expertise and overwhelming advice in this particular case. Quite often in committees there is a lot of conflicting advice from both sides but in this case there was some on the other side but very little.

I agree with the Minister of Justice that this is a non-partisan issue and I will be doing that in my speech today. In order to be non-partisan, I will only refer to things that witnesses before committee have said. I will put their testimony on the record so that other members of Parliament can hear what some of the people who have devoted their lives to this type of work have said.

First, I will present some comments from the Canadian Bar Association, a national association that represents 37,000 jurists, including notaries, law teachers and students across Canada. The association's primary objectives include improvement of the law and the administration of justice. In fact, I believe the government's justice minister would have been a member of this association in his previous life.

The CBA consistently opposes the use of minimum penalties. It supports measures to deter the illegal use of firearms but stresses that such measures must be consistent with the fundamental sentencing principles in the Criminal Code with constitutional guarantees and following the well-established guidance offered by Canada's common law. This is the position of the CBA, representing 37,000 individuals. It is opposed to this legislation. Surely, it must have good reasons and information for making such an important decision.

The CBA's opposition can be summed up in four points. First, unlike what many people may think on the surface:

Mandatory minimum penalties do not advance the goal of deterrence. International social science research has made this clear. Canada's own government has stated that:

The evidence shows that long periods served in prison increase the chance that the offender will reoffend again...In the end, public security is diminished, rather than increased, if we "throw away the key".

Basically, this law would make society more dangerous. I know that is not what appears to be what happens on the surface but, as the social science experts and the government's own report suggests, this would make society more dangerous.

The second reason the Bar Association brings forward is:

Mandatory minimum penalties do not target the most egregious or dangerous offenders, who will already be subject to very stiff sentences precisely because of the nature of the crimes they have committed. More often, the less culpable offenders are caught by mandatory sentences and subjected to extremely lengthy terms of imprisonment.

● (1055)

What happens is that these serious offenders are already given long sentences and the people who should not have long sentences because of the circumstances are the ones who are unfairly caught by these minimums once discretion is taken away from the judge.

The third reason the Bar Association provided is:

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Mandatory minimum penalties have a disproportionate impact on those minority groups who already suffer from poverty and deprivation. In Canada, this will affect aboriginal communities, a population already grossly over represented in penitentiaries, most harshly.

The fourth reason the Canadian Bar Association provided is:

Mandatory minimum penalties subvert important aspects of Canada's sentencing regime, including the principles of proportionality and individualization, and reliance on judges to impose a just sentence after hearing all facts in the individual case.

Another important criticism from the CBA comes from its interpretation of section 718.1 of the Criminal Code. CBA states:

Section 718.1 of the Criminal Code states that the fundamental principle of sentence is proportionality, requiring that a "sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender".

Bill C-10 would require the same mandatory minimum sentence to apply to all offenders, even though offences and the degrees of responsibility vary significantly. I think anyone would agree that that would not be fair.

Proportionality reflects the delicate balance that must be achieved in fashioning a sentence. Common sense and fairness require an individualized proportional sentence. The Canadian Bar Association believes this is why minimum sentences have been severely criticized in many important studies, including Canada's own sentencing commission report.

Further, the Criminal Code contains a statutory acknowledgment of the principle of restraint, stating that the purpose of sentencing is to separate offenders from society where necessary.

I will now quote the final words of the address from the Canadian Bar Association. It says:

The mandatory minimum sentences proposed by the Bill would focus on denunciation and deterrence to the exclusion of other legitimate sentencing principles, and too often lead to injustice. Ultimately, it is unlikely to enhance public safety, but likely to instead further erode the public's confidence in the fairness and the efficacy of the Canadian justice system.

I will now quote some other witnesses we had before the committee who also provided evidence and the expertise from years of experience in this field as to why this is flawed legislation, and by flawed I mean flawed in the view of the expert witnesses who came before committee.

One of the witnesses, Paul Chartrand, a professor of law at the University of Saskatchewan, told us that if we wish to "promote a just and tolerant Canada...then, with respect to Bill C-10, is minimum mandatory sentencing a legitimate means to address the problem? My answer is no."

Professor Chartrand went on to ask, "Will mandatory sentencing work? Once again the answer is no." In his opinion, the way to combat crime is to combat the root causes of crime: assist children through children's benefits; assist families through community services, recreation and so on.

Professor Chartrand also told us that the federal government could not do it alone. He said that it would need to work not only with the provinces and territories, but with municipal governments as well.

Another witness, Mr. Alan Borovoy, general counsel, Canadian Civil Liberties Association, told us about the flaw within Bill C-10.

This is taken from the minutes of our justice committee meeting on November 29, 2006. He said:

• (1100)

I have another case to illustrate the nature of the injustices this is capable of producing. In 1994 the Ontario Court of Appeal reduced the jail sentence of a prisoner who had been convicted of discharging a firearm with intent to cause harm. They reduced this sentence from 12 months to six months because in the opinion of the court he had an exemplary record previously and he was acting in a situation of high stress that required split-second decision-making. The prisoner, it turns out, was a police officer. The person at whom he unloaded his firearm was a burglar he was chasing. He grazed his arm.

If that man had come up for sentencing today under the provisions of Bill C-10 he would serve no less than four years, and I am certain that the Conservative Party is definitely in support of our police officers and would not let such an egregious offence against justice occur. There would be all sorts of other situations when the conditions would mandate a sentence that is different from a minimum sentence.

As I said, the maximum sentences are not changed here. Very stiff penalties are available in the justice system. They are not increased in the bill and are still there for the judge to use under this particular bill.

Thanks to the grace of Bill C-10, this police officer, who was doing the best he could, might have had to serve five years. I find it inconceivable that even the most ardent proponents of mandatory minimum sentences would wish that kind of outcome on that police officer.

How does that happen? It is because simplistic solutions like mandatory sentences inevitably encounter a complex reality. We cannot always make them fit. That is why this bill is such an abomination.

Once again, those words were from testimony before the justice committee on Bill C-10 by Mr. Alan Borovoy, general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

Let us go on to another witness so that members do not think this is about just one or two people, although we have had the reference from an organization that represents 37,000 people in the legal community in Canada.

We will go on to Mr. Graham Stewart, the executive director of the John Howard Society of Canada. He left us with the following message to mull over:

Respect for the criminal justice system will never be achieved by measures that breed distrust of our judiciary. Measures that would eliminate the discretion of the court and replace it with one that is inherently arbitrary cannot generate public confidence in either the judicial or the political systems.

Mr. Stewart also outlined this grim reality, an offshoot of Bill C-10:

Harsh penalties encourage greater recidivism. When the impact of Bill C-10 runs its course, the same number of gun offenders will be released each year from prison as is the case today. Having served longer sentences, those being released from our prisons will likely be much more difficult to reintegrate into society. We will have fewer resources to either prevent crime or rehabilitate offenders. They will be more likely to offend again.

Government Orders

There we are hearing the same message that we have heard before. When we put people in prison for longer sentences, especially when under the circumstances those sentences are not just, offenders actually tend to reoffend. Our criminal justice system has actually failed in that respect. Most of the crimes in society are not first offences, so the way to stop them, as the witnesses said, is to first of all deal with the root causes and, second, with the treatment in the jails, or alternative sentencing, which another bill tried to eliminate a lot of, but fortunately Parliament would not allow that to occur.

That is why I was somewhat apprehensive when the justice minister said in his speech that there is much more to come after these bills.

Another witness explained that when we put people in jail for a longer time, in that university of criminals, they come out worse. They come out more likely to reoffend and then society's recidivism problem is worse. Thus, we are going to increase crime in society because people are more likely to offend when they come out. Once we get caught up on the years, we are going to have the same number of people being released.

• (1105)

People have to remember that all these criminals get released. Everyone we are dealing with under the bill gets released. There are a few dangerous offenders, but there is another bill that keeps them in forever. Under this bill, everyone gets out.

If we want to do justice to the victims in our society, if we want to do justice to innocent people so they are not re-victimized or are not victimized for the first time, we want society to be safer. We want people who are coming out of prison to be less likely to reoffend because they are the ones who actually create most of the crimes.

How are they going to be less likely to offend? The statistics, the social scientists and the experts who came to committee showed that the actual facts are that they are less likely to reoffend if they have had shorter sentences and the appropriate treatment.

Mr. Stewart also asked this key question, which no one on the government side could respond to, when he said:

The introduction of new mandatory penalties will be increasingly difficult to control. If mandatory minimums work for one offence, why not all offences?

I would like to go on to yet another witness who came before the committee. I guess people listening at home and the many members of Parliament here are beginning to understand why the public perceptions on crime are different from what we might have thought. I think that is one of the reasons why the committee system serves Parliament well. People thought that in general crime was going up, but violent crime is going down.

In fact, I have to commend the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. In about two weeks, it will have a session specifically on crime, on the fact that violent crime is going down, and on what the role of the media is to ensure that people get the right perception.

Similarly, a number of people coming to committee would have thought that on the surface this type of bill is common sense. That is why I think the testimony from so many witnesses, who were called to the committee by all parties, changed the minds and the understanding of a number of people in regard to what is a very

complex situation. It has to be complex or we would have solved it long ago and obviously we have not.

I will go to the second last witness I want to speak about and that is Ms. Debra Parkes, member of the board of directors of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, which of course has tremendous experience in this area. She said:

—we're seeing a moving away from this approach [of harsher sentences] by other jurisdictions that have taken this approach in a very concerted effort. A number of American states, as well as jurisdictions in Australia, are starting to move away from imposing mandatory minimum sentences, precisely because they come at great human and fiscal cost, as well as not delivering on the promise of deterrence.

Once again, although we would not think it, intuitively it turns that yet another witness has explained that this approach is not a deterrent.

Also, Kim Pate, executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, summed up the association's position by saying:

—the public would be best served by the withdrawal of this bill and not proceeding any further with mandatory minimum sentences provisions of this nature.

As I mentioned at the start of my speech, these were the people who appeared before the justice committee hearings on Bill C-10.. The overwhelming majority of witnesses advised the government not to proceed with this legislation, reminding the government that the vast majority of information and their extensive experience indicate this policy will not succeed, and the government would best serve the interest of Canadians by directing its attention at other and more successful ways of deterring crime.

In conclusion, I think it is the objective of all members of the House of Commons to reduce crime. I think members of the House are very good listeners in their role. Hopefully they will listen very carefully to the evidence, to the facts and to the experts as they search their hearts in making their final decision on what is actually best and what will make Canada safer, and hopefully they will take into consideration the years of expert testimony that I have just presented for the members of the House of Commons.

• (1110)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite if he has been involved in any altercations that involved armed robberies. As a criminal lawyer practising in northern Alberta, I remember, for instance, one individual who took an axe, believe it or not, into a convenience store and held it up. He was a relatively young man. It was his second offence. He had been out on I think a fairly light sentence on a previous offence. Indeed, when he held up that convenience store, he traumatized the clerk behind the counter, quite frankly, and also the other individuals who were there.

Government Orders

I know that we often speak of criminals and the rights we should give them, but I am wondering if the member actually has been a victim or has talked to victims who have been involved in this type of altercation and what his interests are in that. Could he see himself supporting a bill that allows people to be traumatized, that allows people to continue to be aggressive in robberies or situations like that, and that allows people to not be deterred? Because there is evidence on both sides of the equation to say that these types of bills indeed do deter people from committing crimes like that.

I am wondering if he has talked to victims' groups or has been involved with groups of people who have suffered as a result of these kinds of crimes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I have not been involved with that type of firearm, although I have been shot at by artillery when I visited our troops in Afghanistan.

On the case in question, we leave that decision to a judge. This bill does not give out more severe penalties than could be given to that person. That person would be provided the severe penalties by a judge who has heard all the witnesses and who is an expert in this field of making those decisions as to what is deserved.

As I said, in certain cases this bill could put a person in for longer than they reasonably should be in jail, therefore making them more dangerous when they come out. This would make it more likely that person the member talked about who was so upset would be reoffended against by a criminal coming out in a worse state and being more likely to reoffend.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's points in his presentation. I was taken by the story about the policeman. What I am considering now is that right across this country we are arming more of our peace officers, our park wardens and our border guards. I am thinking to myself that in reality these people must uphold the law at least to the extent that every other Canadian citizen must. In the case of those who are empowered to carry a firearm, they must act with complete regard for the law.

I am thinking of the case of a police officer who shot at someone and was charged for it. He obviously had done it outside the law. He grazed the person, but he could well have killed somebody there, and there has to be some deterrent for that as well. There has to be some understanding that leniency is not given simply because one is in a position of authority in this country. There is no leniency given to endangering other people's lives.

The effects of this law are going to be profound for people who carry lawful firearms, but there are important considerations that we must take into account as well in the protection of our citizens and their rights.

Does the hon. member across not consider that whether a policeman shoots somebody unlawfully or an ordinary person shoots somebody unlawfully, the end result is the same, with the victimization of both the person who was shot and his or her family?

• (1115)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I agree completely, and that is why the police officer received a jail sentence. Whether it was a police officer or not, the judge felt in this case that it was a high

tension situation, the person had to act quickly and there should have been some leeway for him to give a just sentence.

The member mentioned people who carry firearms for the protection of Canadians. Will these people be deterred from using their firearms given the fact that they could get lengthy unjust sentences? Will they be less likely to discharge their firearm in the line of duty to protect innocent citizens, allowing more innocent citizens to be in danger or hurt in a particular situation? People should think about that ramification.

I hoped the member would talk about aboriginal people because we both have them in our ridings. I did not get a chance to emphasize a point that one of the witnesses made, which is the fact that we already have a disproportionate number of aboriginal people in our justice system. A number of the bills that the government has brought forward will exacerbate this situation. I do not want to just chastize the government and its agenda, but there has been no effort by Parliament to deal with that problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Yukon for his clear and concise presentation. I very much appreciate him mentioning the committee that could not find expert witnesses in favour of this bill. I also appreciated it when he talked about the 37,000 jurists from the Canadian Bar Association who are opposed to this bill.

This leads me to my question for the hon. member. Is this not a vote-seeking bill? The minister seemed to be saying earlier that the Conservatives introduced this bill because they promised they would. That seems very much like electioneering to me.

With this kind of bill, judges no longer have free will. Could the hon. member for Yukon tell us—in aboriginal communities in particular—how a judge can truly assess a person's situation when he is forced to impose minimum sentences under the law? We keep hearing exactly the same thing, but I think the hon. member could give us a different and clearer explanation.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, first, unfortunately the member is right. Some people will vote on this because of what they said during the election campaign. In true fairness, to be wise and just legislators, we sometimes have to eat crow if expert witnesses show us we are doing the wrong thing. That is why we have a committee system.

The member's second point was very important. The Criminal Code of Canada specifically allows under sentencing that the special circumstances of aboriginal people be taken into account, specifically because they are incarcerated disproportionately in numbers.

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The member is exactly right. How can the judge look at that situation if he has no option. This may actually be unconstitutional. It may be against the provisions of sentencing in the Criminal Code because it does not allow special consideration for aboriginal people. They are automatically assigned a minimum sentence. The government has set up a conflict by having these very long mandatory minimum sentences.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we track criminals and their histories, research has shown that if we support parents and their newborns and young children from say the ages of five, six and seven, this can prevent them from ending up in the criminal justice system to a much lesser degree.

What can we do in those early years so we do not end up having this same discussion five or ten years from now? I am interested in the member's comments on the early prevention side.

• (1120)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, a couple of witnesses definitely talked about the root causes. They said that the solution was to deal with those, including early childhood development.

We have to deal with the problem early on and resources should go toward addressing that. However, it has been proposed that the resources go toward incarcerating more people, which will cost more, make them more likely to reoffend and make society more dangerous.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to what has been said because this is not the first time we have talked about this bill. The more I listen, the more I realize this is nothing but smoke and mirrors and that the government wants to implement a bill to try to bolster its image and make people believe that minimum sentences are the only solution to making them safe at home, in their town, province and country.

If we look at everything going on around us, we see that truly tragic events occur, like the one at Dawson for example. I doubt that the prospect of a minimum sentence would have stopped this young man from committing that crime. I doubt that the prospect of a minimum sentence would have stopped Mr. Lépine from killing so many young women at the École polytechnique.

Most of the tragic events of this kind are unplanned crimes committed by a deranged individual, and minimum sentences would not change a thing.

A number of American states, unfortunately, still have the death penalty. But still a lot of crimes, murders and homicides, are committed in those states. This means that it does not work very well, despite the death penalty. We should wake up and look at who the people are in the U.S. prison system who have been sentenced to death. They are not white collar workers, or millionaires, or people who have had an easy life. There is always a small percentage of incorrigibles, of course, people who can never be helped to reintegrate into society or turn their lives around. Unfortunately, these people do exist. The devil exists. I know personally that he exists.

Earlier, one of my colleagues asked the hon. member in the Liberal Party whether he had ever been victimized by a criminal act.

If so, he would know and understand what it is to be afraid of being victimized. Personally, I have been victimized. Several times I have found myself in dangerous situations where I was facing firearms and knew the end might be nigh.

I had a job in a restaurant and, very late one evening, a young man put a gun on his table because I did not want to serve him and so he tried to threaten me. I know, therefore, what it is to be threatened. However, the fact that crimes are committed does not mean that all the people who commit them are habitual criminals. That is not true. Many people can be reintegrated into society and can go on to make a great contribution. We see it every day and we know some of these people. I would not want to see these people's lives permanently blighted because they made a mistake when they were young. But that is exactly what minimum sentences do.

Under the Canadian legislation, there are already 29 acts that can result in a minimum sentence. Does the system work better because we have all these provisions? Are there fewer people in prison?

As my colleague in the New Democratic Party just said, if we really want to combat crime, I think we should attack the root causes, which are poverty and a lack of human contact, human warmth and communications, as a result of which many of our young people find themselves isolated and without anyone to guide them.

• (1125)

I believe that if we paid more attention and ensured that people have real jobs and real salaries perhaps it is possible that we would have less crime. I am not talking about cheap labour, about seasonal jobs, or jobs where a woman who works 35 hours, 40 hours or 60 hours is compelled to remain on the employer's premises and can not go out. It has been proven that imposing minimum sentences does not reduce crime. Many studies have been done on this subject.

I found a study conducted by Nicole Crutcher and Thomas Gabor. It is a study that was carried out over a period of 20 years. Twenty years is not insignificant. A study carried out over 20 years is a serious study.

This study showed that minimum sentences accomplish nothing and do not help in any way. It is simply a way of making people believe that because we put more people in prison and give them minimum sentences that there will be less crime. That is not true. That is not the way it works.

According to this study, only a small proportion of offenders committed to prison are of the calculating type who carefully weigh the pros and cons of committing a crime. They also said that many offenders prefer to go to prison rather than serve community-based sentences. They do not consider the difference between a sentence of three years, five years or ten years. They do not make that distinction. When they commit a crime, they do not think of the sentence they might receive. The only thing they think about is not getting caught. Publicizing the penalties will not make them think about them any more, believe me.

Government Orders

It would be better to reinstate the gun registry and ensure that we do not just give young people the tools to commit crimes.

Yesterday, on television, I heard that a grandfather had obtained a gun permit for his two-year-old grandson. Two years old. Is that what our colleagues of the Conservative party want to see? Is that what should happen? Do we need weapons to defend ourselves? That is what was claimed in the United States during the shooting some weeks ago. Is that what we want? Do we all need to have weapons so that the law can come after us every time we use them to commit a crime? There are no weapons in my house. Most people do not want them either. We will not prevent people from owning weapons through minimum sentences. Rather, let us arrest the real criminals and put them in prison.

Very often, young people who are members of a street gang commit small crimes. That is unfortunate. Let us deal with the problem of street gangs. We should not think that minimum sentences will stop young people from becoming members of a street gang. That is not the way things work.

When criminals commit crimes, they do not think, "I might get caught and be put in jail for three years, so I had better not use a weapon. Instead, I will just give the victim a little piece of paper that says I am about to commit a crime". They do not think that. Once they have decided to commit a crime, they do it regardless of the minimum sentence associated with it.

● (1130)

For example, if a young man without a record gets caught doing the kind of thing teenagers do to impress their peers or if the only thing he knows how to do is to be the baddest of the bad, he could wind up in jail for a long time. He could be lost to our society. That would be very unfortunate.

Now, instead of getting rid of the methamphetamines, ecstasy and hard drugs that hurt our children, instead of conducting raids all over the place to wipe the drug problem out, the government wants to give people minimum sentences. That makes no sense. That is not how our society works.

I know that teenagers are often easily influenced. We have to keep an eye on them constantly. The most easily influenced teenagers are the ones who fall through the cracks. The rate of incarceration among young people from aboriginal and visible minority communities is high. Why? Because poverty is even more prevalent in those communities than elsewhere. Would it not be a better idea to provide social housing and affordable housing, to offer young people decent jobs and to build community centres? Would it not be better to give them the opportunity to work in the summer and in their communities rather than cut youth employment assistance programs? That is not what the government is doing.

Under the pretext of wanting to ensure public safety, the government has introduced legislation that will help very few people, and will fill up our jails with even more people. What will they do once our jails are full? They are already full. Will they build more jails? Perhaps they want Canada to become a military state. Do we want to live in the kind of country where the only thing the government does is make sure that nobody ever commits a crime?

We have to get serious. The government does not govern for itself. It governs for the people it represents.

We were accused earlier of not consulting the people we represent. It is precisely because we consulted them that we refuse to adopt such a philosophy. It is precisely because we consulted them that we know that this is not what people want. On the contrary, people are asking us to restore the gun registry. Police forces are asking us, and so are abused women and other groups. That is what people want to ensure real security. That is what we need. We need tools. We do not need stringent legislation that will put more people behind bars without giving them the opportunity and the chance to otherwise rehabilitate themselves. That is not what we need. That is not what people want.

My colleagues from the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberal Party have also made their position very clear. We want humane measures, measures that allow people who have lost their way to get back on the right track, to start over and participate in society, instead of being sent to the dungeons for 10, 15 or 20 years, where they will certainly not learn anything.

When these people are released from prison, they certainly will not be out to do good, because they will have only one thing in mind, and that is what they learned on the inside to avoid being sent back. When a person is released after 10 or 15 years, a person who was young going in, what have they learned about society? What have they learned about living in society? What have they learned about involvement, sharing or integration? Nothing. They have learned only how to survive. Is that what we want, a population of survivors? That is not what I want.

I am convinced that many members in this House will agree with me. Survivors are like rats and will do anything to get by. That is frightening.

● (1135)

It is scary. But with progressive and humane laws that take into account all the factors, enabling judges to hand down informed sentences, we can move forward. As a society, with such laws we can be proud because our children will not fall through the cracks. I am sure of this, because all the studies say so and prove it. It is not Nicole Demers saying it. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I am allowed to name myself. Hundreds of experts say so. The proof is that in the United States, in states where there are mandatory minimum sentences, there is more crime than in other states.

So what does the government need to see the light? What does it need to open its eyes? I do not know. Instead of using smoke and mirrors, the government should listen to real people and stop holding little focus groups that give the answers they want to hear, instead of real answers from real people who live in the real world. That is what it should do.

I hope that this bill will not be adopted. I really hope so because if that is the direction we are going, it will be a serious mistake that will affect our children, grandchildren and the society we live in. That is for sure.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to that speech but I thought it was somewhere between a rant and a ramble. I was not exactly sure where the member was coming from. She was all over the map, talking about wanting to represent the people and then bringing out some studies and focus groups to support her opinions.

The legislation that we adopt in this place is about representing the people. Canadians are asking for tougher sentences. It is fairly simple. We are giving them tougher sentences because that is what Canadians want. We know that these things are a deterrent.

The previous speaker, the member for Yukon, was talking about how prison actually makes people worse. He would argue there be no prison at all under those circumstances.

The opposition members' comments on this kind of legislation is that they have no real position other than they would like to hold these people by the hand and the poor little darlings are the victims rather than the perpetrators of the crime. It is time that we said that criminals are criminals and they deserve to be punished accordingly—it is that simple—rather than to hold them by the hand, pat them on the head and tell them, “Be a nice little person. Please, do not do it again”.

I would hope that all members of this House would recognize that Canadians want a judicial system that works, that applies punishment, that makes sure our streets are safe. This kind of legislation is resonating with the general public.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, as usual, our Conservative colleagues are not listening. They do not listen to us and they do not listen to the people. So those comments do not surprise me.

[English]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually found the member's overview to be quite eloquent and substantive. It is funny how members can sit in this place and draw different conclusions and inferences, but that is mine.

I would also like to make clear that in terms of mandatory minimums what is being offered up and the amendments that have been proposed by the opposition, in particular this party, are very close. In fact, there is only a difference of about a year in terms of the discretionary capacity. We really are not arguing from hugely different perspectives.

My area of York South—Weston in Toronto is one of 13 neighbourhoods that are at risk. At a public meeting I was told that we are treating the symptoms and not the disease when we come down heavily with respect to our criminal justice system. My son is a lawyer and he has told me that judges have indicated that they do not have a lot of flexibility with respect to people in the criminal justice system who in fact return to prison.

What tools are available within the criminal justice system, in particular in the prisons, for effectively dealing with those who have to go to prison? It is not that we want them to go to prison, but that is where they end up. How can we ensure that when these people, in

particular the young people, get out they can be productive members of society?

Could the member perhaps give us a bit of insight as to what tools and programs the government could establish that would make sure that we are not creating further problems for our community when people do come out of prison?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, certainly, with rehabilitation services in our prisons, we would be further ahead. In Quebec, we have a number of programs designed to rehabilitate our young people and prisoners. If we really wanted to tackle crime, we would tackle the problem of excessively early parole. That legislation has no teeth. If we really want to deal with this problem, that is what we should do.

At present, we have education, information and awareness programs in our prisons, especially in Quebec. Groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous and religious groups visit prisoners and meet with them to talk with them, try to understand them and see how they can get back into society when they leave prison.

A great deal of prevention is done as well. Other groups promote discussions where victims meet with criminals and talk about their experience as victims. Even if that particular criminal was not directly involved with these particular victims, the victims can still explain how crimes affected them.

This raises awareness. When someone becomes more aware, I think we have to look at what point that person has reached in his or her own life. Often, these people are quite desperate and not very spiritual. In my opinion, with this sort of approach, which is much more humane, we may be able to bring these people out of the misery they are living in, so that they will not go back to prison but choose to re-enter our society.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in reality, what we clearly need to do in this Parliament in the near future is to concentrate on crime prevention.

The continuation of some of the things we do in this country as a result of the ill-fated war on drugs that has been going on for the past 30 years has driven up the crime rate to an unbelievable extent. It centres around the activities of human beings and their needs and desires. It has created a situation where we built the criminal industry to a degree that is unprecedented for one particular substance or another in our society.

Does the hon. member not think that in the future we in Parliament should be looking at crime prevention? Should we not be looking at ways to take the oxygen out of the criminal industry and look at ways that we can rationalize the behaviour of people in society so that the use of heavy sentences is not the prime consideration of Parliament?

Government Orders

•(1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. This government's prime consideration is not really getting rid of crime. The government has slashed funding for every area where money is needed to prevent people from turning to crime. It has cut funding for prevention and information and for programs to help the illiterate, who do not have much opportunity to improve their lives and are easily influenced by others. The government has turned its back on every area where continued funding is needed. It has abandoned aboriginal communities, women, children and seniors.

In so doing, it has set the stage for even more crime.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for Laval on her fine presentation on the human side of this issue, which is important to the Bloc Québécois. I am proud to have the hon. member for Laval representing the riding next to mine.

I would like her interpretation, among other things, of the fact that the government is cutting \$10 million from the summer career placements program. Students need this additional income in the summer in order to pursue their studies. I find it inconsistent to invest this \$10 million in maximum sentences that will result in more incarceration. I would like my colleague to say a few words on that.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. In this matter, not only has there been a financial cut, but the method has also changed. Now one major centre has the opportunity to decide, for the surrounding regions, who will get the summer jobs programs. This is being done without any regard for the area, the social stakeholders who need this money, or for what has been done in the past. Now an impersonal, administrative approach is being used in a big office. These are administrative cuts and an administrative approach is being used without any regard for the impact these cuts will truly have in these areas.

In my riding, four agencies were doing exceptional work; one agency in particular. They were working in a multi-ethnic area that has a high crime rate with youth who cannot necessarily rely on their parents for help with their school work, people who do not have many job opportunities. Unfortunately, racism still exists today and a person whose skin is a different colour than the local people sometimes has a hard time finding work.

These young people, through agencies working in the area with people from the area, could be assured that at least for the summer they could gain self-confidence, become involved and stay motivated. This no longer exists.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this House today to speak to Bill C-10.

This is a bill that would improve the safety of all Canadians by ensuring that violent criminals who use firearms to commit their offences will receive serious prison time consistent with the gravity of their offences.

This bill addresses two groups of offences. First of all, there is one group which involves offences in which a firearm is used in the

commission of another crime. We call that the use offence, where it is actually being used in the commission of a crime. The second group involves the possession of illegal firearms, and we call those non-use offences.

Let me deal with the first group. Bill C-10 will impose mandatory minimum penalties where a gun is used in the commission of a serious Criminal Code offence. These offences would include such things as attempted murder, discharge of a firearm with intent, sexual and aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage-taking, robbery and extortion.

If a restricted or prohibited weapon is used in the commission of any of these offences or if such guns are used in relation to gang activity, which of course is a very real problem in Canada, a first time offender will receive an automatic five year prison sentence. Penalties escalate to seven years on a second and subsequent offence for the same or similar type of gun crime.

Clearly, this bill targets repeat violent offenders who must be kept off the streets for the good of our communities. It also provides a deterrent to youths who are involved in gangs, forcing them to weigh the consequences of their actions before engaging in crime.

The second group of offences of course involves the illegal possession of a restricted or prohibited firearm, and some of the offences that would be targeted under this particular section would be firearms trafficking, stealing a firearm, possession of a firearm for the purposes of trafficking in narcotics, making an automatic firearm, and also firearms smuggling. For these non-use offences of course there are going to be mandatory minimum sentences as well.

This legislation is aimed directly at, among other things, the gun trafficking industry. Virtually all gang-related crime we see across Canada is committed not by those who purchase their firearms legally and register them, but by people who purchase them illegally on the black market or steal them from legitimate gun owners.

In my home province of British Columbia, it is estimated that gang-related shootings or murders occur on average of once every month, sometimes more often than that. The rate of increase in gang activity in B.C. is astonishing. Most of it, of course, is fueled by the drug trade, mainly high grade marijuana, and it is carried out by young people with illegal firearms who have complete disregard for the safety and the lives of those around them.

In my home riding of Abbotsford, we are known to be a beautiful community. It is a safe community, relatively speaking. It is in a beautiful setting, nestled between 10,000 foot Mount Baker and the Fraser River. We are a community of elderly, young families, singles and students who all enjoy Abbotsford because of the quality of life it offers. It consistently scores high in all of these areas. In fact, it was recently named as the most generous community in all of Canada, and that is backed up by a number of different studies, both Statistics Canada and other studies within British Columbia.

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However, the blight has crept into Abbotsford. Gangs and guns are increasingly common, usually in connection with the drug trade. Although the gangs in my area are quite fluid and frequently travel throughout the lower mainland, we have seen our share of unimaginable pain and grief caused by shootings.

The 2006 year end statistical report from the Abbotsford Police shows that 126 firearms offences took place in my riding. Some of these include robbery; assault; a sexual assault with a weapon; drive-by shootings, which are very common now; and home invasions. This is happening in Abbotsford and it is happening right across the country in communities that all of us live in.

• (1150)

On September 26, 2006, the *Abbotsford Times* reported that the police responded to a 25-year-old man who had been shot and was in serious condition. The man was known to police who believed he was purposely targeted.

Just last Friday, May 11, the CBC reported a shooting on Commercial Drive in Vancouver in a popular cafe. This man was shot several times in the stomach and transported to hospital for emergency surgery.

An 18-year-old Abbotsford native, Yulian Limantoro, was gunned down when he got caught in the crossfire of a drug deal gone sour and that was in Surrey on March 3, 2006.

On October 28, 2005, a 40-year-old woman in Port Moody was struck by a stray bullet while watching television in her living room. The bullet lodged itself in her brain but luckily she survived.

Of course, none of us can forget the string of violent crimes the city of Toronto suffered in 2005. By mid-September 40 people had been slain in the city. All of us were shocked and horrified especially by the senseless death of grade 10 student, Jane Creba, on Boxing Day 2005. Jane was gunned down on busy Yonge Street along with six others who were injured in the crossfire. The 15-year-old was the 52nd murder in Toronto in 2005.

Going back to 2006, police in B.C. recorded that over 1,000 firearms were used in crimes or kept illegally in the lower mainland. Anyone who still thinks gun crime is an American phenomenon need only look at British Columbia.

Between 2001 and 2006, 195 British Columbians died in gun-related homicides. In 2006 alone police recovered 379 semi-automatic pistols, 28 revolvers, 139 other handguns, 76 rifles, 66 shotguns, 88 assault rifles and 12 modified weapons.

The current mandatory minimum penalties for gun crimes are not sufficient. We need to discourage these criminals by making it costly to buy, sell or use firearms in the commission of offences. The way we do that is by taking away their freedom to commit such crimes and making the penalties for subsequent offences escalate in severity.

Bill C-10 will not only send a clear message that gun activity will be met with serious consequences, it will also take these criminals off the street for longer periods of time.

To place this into context, I want to stress that the bill does not represent an across the board increase in mandatory minimum

sentences. Rather it targets crimes that are specifically related to gang activity and repeat and violent offences.

Going back to my community of Abbotsford, as the House knows, Abbotsford shares the border with the United States and it is part of a complex web of organized crime on the lower mainland of British Columbia. Drugs, such as high grade marijuana, meth amphetamines, crystal meth are regularly exchanged for firearms from the U.S. These are the same firearms being used to commit the wide range of violent gang related crimes we are witnessing today.

Although both American and Canadian border security officials are quite vigilant in protecting our borders and stopping the cross-border gun trade, there is only so much that they can do with limited resources when the same people go to prison for short periods of time and are turned back onto those very streets only to take up crime once again. Of course, usually that is violent crime.

The gun and drugs trade are quite lucrative industries. Unfortunately, there are many young people that are into the gang lifestyle. These mandatory minimum penalties that we are proposing should go a long way in discouraging youth from taking up this behaviour.

Our Conservative government is also concerned with preventing young people from getting involved in the crime lifestyle in the first place through community initiatives. That is why in our 2006 budget the government invested \$20 million in a plan for communities. This money will be focused on preventing youth crime and helping young people stay away from guns and gangs.

I believe that both this bill and our other prevention initiatives will work together to reduce the number of gun-related crimes and deaths in Canada.

• (1155)

If we do not send a clear message to criminals that the consequences of using handguns to carry out a crime will far outweigh the benefits, I believe these gun crime numbers will only increase. The clear message we are sending is this. Criminals should be prepared to go to prison if they commit a serious gun offence, period.

I believe these penalty schemes will also be an important tool for police officers who must place themselves in potentially deadly situations on a daily basis. They will now know that should they send an offender to prison for committing a firearms offence listed in Bill C-10, that offender will not be back on the streets for a long time. When we take those offenders off the streets and put them behind bars for longer periods of time, they do not represent a crime threat during that period to ordinary, hard-working, law-abiding citizens. At the same time, police officers can focus their efforts on other criminals in our communities.

It is clear that our communities across the country are suffering from violent gun crime, yet the previous Liberal government, over 13 years, did absolutely nothing to address this scourge in our country. Sadly, the Liberal and the Bloc opposition parties have done everything in their power to try to thwart our attempts to pass Bill C-10.

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In fact, when this bill went to committee, it was essentially gutted, leaving it meaningless. It had no teeth to it anymore. It was only with the support of the NDP that we were able to reintroduce the mandatory minimum sentence provisions of the bill, a five year mandatory minimum sentence for the first offence and seven years for a second and subsequent offence. Even so, the 10 year mandatory prison sentence that we had proposed for a third and subsequent offence was removed. The bill, as drafted, is better than nothing at all. Canadians are demanding this kind of legislation.

It would be comical, if it were not so serious, how the Liberals have managed to flip-flop on the issue of gun crime. The House may recall that through a deathbed conversion late in the election campaign, the Liberals suddenly agreed to get tough on crime and specifically promised to introduce and support tough mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes. They suddenly got religion so to speak.

These were promises that were made to Canadians about their personal safety, yet here we are. The Liberals are asked to defend Canadians against an ever increasing cycle of gun violence, and what do they do? They have done a 180° turn and have fought against our Bill C-10. Shame on them. The Liberal Party of Canada has rightly earned its title of being soft on crime.

In order to end the cycle of gun violence, our new Conservative government is committed to filling our election promise to get tough on serious criminals. We owe nothing less to the Canadian public than to protect it to the fullest, and I believe this bill is the way to do that. Effective deterrents, including escalating minimum jail terms, are an important step in reducing crime on our streets, as is choking off the supply of illegally acquired handguns.

That is why we have these two facets to the bill. One deals with the use of firearms in an offence. The second is the illegal possession of firearms. Typically, if a drug trafficker's car is stopped, guns will be found in that car, so it is easy to prosecute these individuals.

British Columbians and residents of Abbotsford are tired of watching criminals execute violence and get off with a slap on the wrist. Finally, we have a government that is committed to the right of law-abiding citizens to live in safety and security. That is a promise we made during the election and one on which we are fully following through.

I trust the House will do the right thing, protect Canadian families the way we promised to do.

• (1200)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely tried to listen to and absorb the remarks of the hon. member. However, in the end I found his remarks to be partisan, simplistic and misleading in many respects. I am not saying everything he said is misleading, but simplistic to be sure. As a result, they are not credible and I will ask him a couple of things.

He said that the proposed new sentencing will cause gangs or criminals to reconsider if they really want to go ahead and do the crime. Has he ever been to one of these crime meetings where they sit down and consider if they really want to do the crime? Do they use a calculator? Do they have a lawyer come in and tell them what the sentencing might be if they are convicted? Do they have a chart

on the wall and a road map that tells them exactly what the sentence will be?

I have not heard of these meetings, these deliberations, so maybe he could inform the House about where these meetings take place and what they consider. It is a revelation to me that criminals or potential criminals sit down and go through the deliberation about whether they will really do the crime and measure up what the penalty will be.

The second thing I want to ask the hon. member, and he is really being quite misleading, is this. He said, "The Liberal government, in 13 years, did absolutely nothing to address the issue of firearms crime". I will not use the harsh words, but what he said is absolutely untrue and misleading. The member clearly omits to mention that the House, under a Liberal government, did enact additional penalties, mandatory minimum penalties of one year and four years for firearm crimes. That does not equal absolutely nothing.

The member should be careful about what he says. Could he answer those two questions, please?

• (1205)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, the member referred to my speech as partisan and simplistic. Quite frankly, that is exactly the kind of double-talk that Canadians have come to expect from the Liberal Party of Canada.

For years the Liberals have been promising to get tough on crime. What the hon. member does not explain is why, during the last election, they promised to impose tougher mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and now have done a complete flip-flop. That is embarrassing. Canadians expect more than that.

Am I being partisan? You bet, Mr. Speaker, I am being partisan. I am standing up for Canadians who deserve to be protected against gangs, drug criminals and those who use guns in committing crimes. They are not only targeting people who are involved in the drug trade, but are impacting innocent bystanders who are being killed and permanently maimed.

I ask the member to reconsider his position, as a party. The Liberal Party should come on side and do what is right for Canadians. I would be ashamed to be a Liberal today. I would be ashamed to stand up and say "We promised to get tough on these gun criminals, but today we are changing our minds and we hope Canadians forget about it".

I encourage the member to re-evaluate his party's position on this issue. This is an issue that is critical to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the time I thought the member for Abbotsford was speaking about prevention. I would like to point out to him that, just before, the Minister of Justice also spoke about prevention. He said that the Conservative government was very interested not only in being tough on crime, but also in establishing prevention programs.

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When the minister said that, I wondered why current projects on the table and accepted by the provinces are subject to cuts when they get to the federal level? Cuts have been made to all prevention projects, even those that are inexpensive.

I believe that the member for Abbotsford provided the answer. He said that the government was providing \$20 million for prevention. Imagine, \$20 million in prevention for all of Canada. The Canada summer jobs program injected \$95 million and now has been reduced to \$85 million. It is a prevention program because it keeps young people busy, teaches them a trade, and gives them something to do.

The experts estimate that between \$400 and \$500 million are needed for a solid prevention program to be implemented in Canada. Yet, we are talking about only \$20 million. What can we do with this amount? That is a pittance.

In view of their election promise—since that is what the Conservative Party always goes back to—I am asking the member for Abbotsford why he does not think he could support a bill that calls for prevention rather than repression.

• (1210)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we do have a plan for prevention. I want to remind the hon. member that on January 23, 2006, Canadians elected a new Conservative government, certainly not a Bloc government and not a Liberal government. Why? One of the reasons was the Liberals were known to be soft on crime.

To specifically to address the member's question, I remind him, just from my own experience in British Columbia, that our Conservative government does take a balanced approach to the issue of crime in our country, ensuring that our youth are not enticed into a life of crime in the first place.

In fact, let me give him an example. We have taken action by giving almost \$2 million to British Columbia's anti-gang initiative, which is called "Preventing Youth Gang Violence in British Columbia". It is going to be implemented in Abbotsford, my hometown, as well as in Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Kamloops, and we hope to expand that in the future. It aims to reduce gang involvement through public forums that discuss issues that are relevant to the community, education and awareness campaigns, after school recreation programs, youth mentoring programs, intervention programs, parent education and youth outreach programs.

Do we have a balanced approach to this? Yes. It is not all about getting tough on crime. That is part of it as is Bill C-10. However, we are also addressing the underlying causes of crime.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that the purpose is over time to ensure that we have fewer people facing the criminal system and in the position of being incarcerated and given that we know what happens in the early years is the single biggest determinant about whether youth and then adults will be involved in crime, other than the \$100 a month for families, could the member tell me why slashing child care programs and programs that support parents to do a good job at raising their children will be of assistance in this way?

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I have appreciated getting to know the member over this past year and a half, another colleague from British Columbia, although we sometimes share different perspectives.

I remind her that it is not only the universal child care benefit that our government has delivered. We have delivered many other family friendly initiatives such as the \$500 sports tax credit for families. We have also delivered just recently the family tax credit, which provides an extra incentive for families to take the money and apply it to the children rather than paying it to the tax man.

I want to also mention that the focus of Bill C-10 is not just deterrence. In fact, in my mind deterrence is probably the least of it. For me, it is important that we get the violent offenders out of society so our police can focus in on some of the underlying petty crime that our youth tend to get into. By allowing them to focus their efforts on the criminals who perhaps are on the cusp of becoming lifetime criminals, we are going to do an excellent job of moving forward, ensuring that our youth are encouraged to be upright, responsible citizens.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I begin my remarks I thought I should refer to the remarks made by the Minister of Justice who spoke earlier. He clearly was speaking in an effort to articulate good politics as opposed to good public policy. What the minister was articulating was in part lousy public policy but, from his point of view, good politics.

He said that the government wanted to send a message. I think he meant the government was trying to send a message to criminals on the assumption that we have in every case identified who those criminals are. He wants to send a message to criminals, but really what the Minister of Justice and the government are trying to do is send a political message to Canadians. It is political. It is not good public policy. The whole exercise smacks of politics and not public policy.

My colleague from Yukon mentioned a list of witnesses who appeared before the justice committee, the vast majority of whom had good public policy reasons not to agree with the mandatory minimum sentencing regime proposed in this bill.

One of the assumptions underlying mandatory or harsh sentencing is that it will deter. There is a sense that the higher the sentence, the higher the deterrence. There may be some logic in that, but statistics, sociologists and criminologists now consistently tell us that it is not the severity or length of the sentence which deters, it is the prospect of being caught that is the major component of deterrence in society.

Whether it is a potential life sentence or a two day sentence, the person who may or may not commit a premeditated crime is thinking more about the prospect of getting away with it as opposed to what sentence might be imposed later. It is false logic to presume that by increasing sentencing or imposing a mandatory minimum sentence there will be a direct linkage into the mind of a potential criminal.

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By the same token, my party and I readily accept that there are envelopes within the Criminal Code, components of activity where society needs to denounce the criminal activity in a way that requires the use of a mandatory minimum.

I will point out for the sake of reference that the Criminal Code was amended relatively recently, just in the last three or four years, to impose one year mandatory minimums for firearm offences and a four year mandatory minimum sentence for a robbery with a firearm. I believe that is section 344. We also have mandatory minimums for drunk driving, particularly on a second offence. If someone reoffends, the offender will do time. Parliament, government and Canadians accept the existence of mandatory minimum penalties.

The false logic underlying this bill, however, is that by creating and delivering a whole raft of mandatory minimum penalties, it will cause a direct response and a reduction in crime. This is not the way it works. I do not think any credible witness at the committee that reviewed this bill was prepared to accept that if we bump all these sentences into mandatory minimums, the crime rate is going to drop. There might have been a feel good part in putting criminals away.

• (1215)

I will quote the Minister of Justice. I found it hard to believe, but the Minister of Justice said that the criminals will have time to think about it in jail. The question raised by the member from the Bloc Québécois was whether or not the potential offender might have thought about it before he or she committed the offence. The minister's logic was the person would have time to think about it afterward. That is like the horse going out the barn door; once the act is done, it is done. There is no deterrence there. I regretted that logic and I regretted the fact that the minister did not want to address the logic pattern that was introduced by the member from the Bloc.

The minister was also, in my view, trying to send a message and another example of that messaging is a quite inappropriate use of the term "house arrest". House arrest actually has nothing to do with the bill that we are debating. Bill C-10 deals with mandatory minimum penalties. The minister was referring to Bill C-9, the bill dealing with conditional sentences. Purely for the sake of a twisted messaging, the Minister of Justice, the Attorney General of Canada, resorted to a street term that is not used in the Criminal Code and he referred to the concept of house arrest.

Most Canadians would ask what is house arrest, does it have something to do with bail or prison? Anyway, if the minister wants to use these silly street terms instead of the proper terms, that is his business. He also referred to "sending the offender to camp". What nonsense. We are hearing this from the Minister of Justice. Surely he could use terms that are properly in use in the Criminal Code instead of using street terms to try to send some subliminal message to the public.

Anyway, I thought that his use of the terms "house arrest" and "sending people to camp" was really a disingenuous and dishonest attempt to deprecate our current corrections procedures. I personally do not like that coming from a government minister, but that is his business and if he were here now, we would probably have a little debate on it. Having had an opportunity to address the minister's remarks on this bill, I will now get to some of my own.

An hon. member: Maybe you should.

Mr. Derek Lee: Well, maybe I won't. The member does not like my remarks about the minister but this is a public forum.

Mr. Ed Fast: That is shameful.

Mr. Derek Lee: There is nothing shameful about this. This is a House of free speech.

In any event, I want to note that throughout the country there is a perception that there has been an increase in violent crime. In the statistical data if we look back into the 1960s and forward to the present, we can see an increase in crime. Many criminologists say it is actually an increase in reported crime. The criminal activity of the 1960s and early in the 1970s, was in fact arguably under reported so that our data was a little bit lower than it actually should have been. In any event, the trend line was there. We can see the material increase from the 1960s right up to 1992.

In 1992 things changed sociologically. I do not believe it was anything government did or did not do. We were in a bit of an economic recession at the time but we can see the trend line. After that point in time, all criminal activity starts to drop. I still accept that there is a perception in society, that people see a lot more crime. They are certainly getting a lot more media. We have more television, more newspapers and more Internet. If there is something happening out there in crime, people are going to hear about it and that may exacerbate the public policy problem.

I am not saying there is not any crime. There is a truckload of it and it is a social issue, but it is not increasing in the way that people are being led to believe that it is. In Toronto there was a sense that we had of a very serious firearm problem about two years ago. That was true. There was a clear spike and increase in the number of shootings and firearm incidents in Toronto. As I am going to point out a little later, that year 2005 turns out to be spike, a spike up and down. Things are actually quite different now.

• (1220)

However, in looking at crime statistics from across the country, I can see that not every city, not every urban area or every rural area is in the same position. There are cities in Canada that have crime rates almost double what they are in Toronto or Montreal. That may seem counterintuitive to many of us, but while big cities do have crime, small cities also have crime. In some cases the rates of crimes, not necessarily the raw incidents, are significantly higher than some of our other urban areas.

In these places across Canada, citizens definitely have an issue. I represent a Toronto area riding. It is impossible for me to speak about this issue without acknowledging that in various parts of the country, the north, the east, the west, the south, there are different takes, different perceptions of just how bad or how good or where the level of criminal activity is.

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Before going on any further, on the sentencing that is currently in the Criminal Code, including the existing mandatory minimums that I mentioned earlier for firearms, my party in the last election campaign did undertake to increase the mandatory minimum penalties. The member opposite makes that point, but the increases that were proposed were an increase of the one year and four year penalties that were there.

What the government had proposed in Bill C-10 was a whole regime of increasing mandatory minimums, an escalating scheme of mandatory minimums that ran three, five, seven and up to 10 years. That is a much different kettle of fish than what the Liberal Party had proposed, of targeted, specific, reasonable mandatory minimum adjustments in the Criminal Code. Maybe we could put that debate to rest. Was it discussed in the election? It sure was, but I wanted to be clear about what my party had proposed.

We are not talking about creating a new offence. This bill does not create new offences. This bill does not create new sentences. All of that is already in the Criminal Code. What the bill does, and I could say only, is create a mandatory minimum sentence at the bottom end. Judges in this country are charged with sentencing and they can give the appropriate sentence and they do. Ninety-nine per cent of the time they give the right sentence. They can sentence to more than the mandatory minimum and sometimes they do, but it depends on a whole number of criteria set out in the Criminal Code. We legislated them here about 10 years ago.

In my view the criminal justice system from the point of view of the sentencing regime is working quite well. Once in a while there is an aberration. Once in a while there is a circumstance in a court and a judge and a set of facts that looks a little odd. A newspaper, a television station, a reporter will see it and think it looks strange, that a penalty looks a little stiff, or that a penalty looks a little light and it becomes a public issue, but those cases are far and few between. We just see a lot more of them now because we have a lot more media. If it is a story, it is a story.

In one of the comments on this bill earlier today there was a scenario that I found very compelling at the committee. It relates to sentencing in the rural areas, in the north, the west and the east of the country, but generally in the north. We have to remember that before someone is actually sentenced, there has to be an investigation, the person is charged, convicted in a trial and then is sentenced.

•(1225)

A witness at the committee made this point in a very compelling way. When there is a conviction in a northern community for an offence, even if a violent one, the only prospect for rehabilitation and reintegration of an offender from those northern communities is if he or she is able to be in that community.

It is just not possible to take offenders from a northern community, yank them out, send them to some place in the south and hope that they can rehabilitate or reintegrate. They are not from the south. They are citizens of our north.

Instituting a mandatory minimum regime of sentences over two years essentially ensures a federal sentence. All sentences over two years are served in federal penitentiaries. Sentences under two years are served in provincial penitentiaries. By imposing mandatory

minimums way beyond the two years, this type of sentencing would remove individuals from their northern communities and place them in a federal penitentiary, which could be a thousand miles away or two thousand miles away, but not even close to their communities.

It is generally accepted that prisons are simply warehouses for offenders, where young people actually learn better how to become criminals. Prisons are not the best location. I accept that we need them to protect society, at least as a clearing house, but the witness from the north said that the existence of these new sentencing regimes with mandatory minimums greater than two years would make it virtually impossible to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders from those northern communities. In other words, we are creating lost causes before we even begin.

Members may ask me what I would propose for someone who has committed a serious crime and needs to do serious time. The criminal justice system has already provided for that with a regime of sentencing options and a skilled judge who will make the decision on what an appropriate sentence for that convicted offender will be, taking into consideration all aspects of the case, including the circumstances of the victim, previous criminal record, propensity to reoffend and prospects for rehabilitation. That is what we ask our judges to do. The escalating sentencing regime contained in this bill would, practically speaking, remove all of those options from a sentencing judge. If the bill passes, that will be the case. I regret that but that is the way it is.

In the remarks of my friend opposite, he referred to the spike this year in Toronto of gun crimes. I am pleased to report that while in 2005-06 the incidents of shootings were at about 87 and 81, this year the number of shootings to date is at 60, which is a drop of over 25%. The reason for that is good policing. However, I do not have time to go into the details. One shooting is too many but if we have a huge city with a few million people, we will have incidents, and I am saying that there has been a 25% drop. The perceived increase in these firearm incidents is not there, and these decreases have occurred under current laws. I just wanted to get that on the record. I give a lot of credit to the Toronto police and their new policing methods.

•(1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):
Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-10.

I will point out to my colleague that in the province of Quebec—my province—there is a body, namely the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, which has an obligation to protect citizens and in particular to make recommendations to the federal government, since we are responsible for the Criminal Code, on harsher sentences for alcohol-related offences.

My response to my colleague's theory is as follows. When I started practising law, the fine for someone who had consumed alcohol was only \$300. We subsequently created three different levels with different penalties for each of the first three offences. This is called the progressive system. If we had heeded my colleague at that time, today there would be but a single \$300 offence, and everybody would be fine with that. The criminals would be protected but the victims left out.

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I would like to ask a question of my colleague, my fellow committee member, whom I appreciate for his good advice on procedural matters. Even if his party is opposed to the bill, I know very well that his fellow citizens will agree with us, because the people of Canada do want to see victims protected before criminals.

Why does my colleague not agree with imposing progressive penalties for criminal acts, particularly in these specific cases where extremely serious offences are involved? We are not talking about minor situations, but extremely serious ones. We have been doing that same thing for over 20 years, and the most clear example of this is section 259 of the Criminal Code which, as my colleague is well aware, sets progressive sanctions for criminal acts.

• (1235)

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I did say in my remarks that I support, as does my party, the existence of mandatory minimum penalties for drunk driving offences. Those penalties, of course, start off with a mandatory fine and then the offender will do time after a second offence. The person will not do seven years, but the person will do a few weeks, although I do not recall exactly how many weeks. The point is that with the mandatory minimum the offender will do time. There is an escalator for a third offence and the offender will do more time. However, we are talking about doing time as opposed to doing years and years of time.

The reason I would object to the escalating three, five, seven and ten-year type escalation is that the three, five, seven and ten years have never been shown to provide any more public safety. If it is necessary to keep the individual in jail because the person is a very violent offender, then the judge should impose a lengthy sentence of that nature.

However, I object to the automatic, structured, built-in, no exception mandatory minimum in the bill running up to seven years.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments but I was somewhat disturbed with his approach to Bill C-10. He has acknowledged that the perception among Canadians is that we have a crime problem and, quite frankly, I concur with that perception. I believe there is statistical evidence to support that.

What really jumped out at me was his statement that "the sentencing regime is working quite well". In other words, business as usual, no change is required and even though Canadians misunderstand, everything is okay.

I do not know whether he has spoken to victims. He may have but I would be surprised if he had. I have. Has he spoken to police officers? I have spoken to police officers in Abbotsford and they do not concur with the assessment that the system is fine and working well. It is a revolving door justice system right now and rank and file police officers will tell him that.

The member then accused the minister of having twisted messaging, subliminal messaging and of twisting the facts. That is disrespectful language toward a member of this House of Commons who has been a lawyer for many years, has served as crown counsel, as attorney general in Manitoba and is now serving as justice

minister here. He should not make such demeaning references to what is an attempt to protect Canadians.

If Canadians have the perception that our justice system is not serving their needs for safety and security, how is it that the member can justify taking the approach that everything is okay and that the current sentencing scheme is actually acceptable?

• (1240)

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that everything was A-okay. I said that the current sentencing regime in the Criminal Code was generally working all right. However, there has never been a time in the history of the human race when there has not been a problem with crime, let us say, ever since Cain killed Abel. There also has never been a time when we have not found the need to alter the Criminal Code. We are always adjusting. I have been here for 19 years and I can hardly recall a year when there was not a Criminal Code amendment on the order paper somewhere. There are 15 of them now.

The point is that it is one thing to respond to public perception that there is a problem but it is another thing to analyze it from a public policy point of view to see exactly what the problem is and what the best response is. A whole bunch of knee-jerking, increase the sentencing and get tough on crime things, without dealing with the public policy issue in detail and with precision is not my way of doing things.

If a problem is seen, I really do want to address it. If a weak sentence in a particular case or systemically is a problem for society, if we saw one place where we, as a society, had to really firm up, like we did with drunk driving and with firearm offences three years ago, and as we might need to do in other things in society, I am prepared to do that.

What I do not support is the approach in the current bill that simply lists about 20 different things and says that we will now impose an escalating three, five, seven, ten-year thing where we know statistically, based on corrections' social science, there is no payback unless we need to keep an offender in because he or she is a danger.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I did not hear the full debate and just caught the last comments of the member, I share a number of his concerns about an over-reliance on the Criminal Code to fix problems around crime instead of having a balanced approach around crime prevention and building healthy communities.

From the point of view of minimum mandatory sentences, I would remind the member that it was the former Liberal government that, I believe, had brought in about 60 such new offences in terms of minimum mandatories.

Our justice critic has made it very clear that where we can use it in a very specific way, and the issue of drunk driving would be one of those instances, it can be very effective. However, in actual fact we already have a history, as a result of the previous government, of using minimum mandatory sentences.

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I believe that in the last election the then Liberal leader made a commitment that he would double the minimum mandatory sentences for this particular offence that would go actually beyond where the current bill is. It would have been a doubling of the sentence and would have taken us beyond where we are now. I just wanted to remind the member of that in terms of the history.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the reference to doubling the mandatory minimums was with respect to the now existing one year mandatory minimums, which were applied to quite a broad spectrum of firearm offences and which exist in the code now.

It is one thing to double one year to two years or two years less a day. There is one offence—

● (1245)

Ms. Libby Davies: No, it is four to eight.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I hope the member is not suggesting that there is a whole bunch of four year mandatory minimum sentences in the code, because there is only one. It is section 344 and it is robbery with a firearm. Robbery with a firearm currently has a four year mandatory minimum.

All the other offences to which the hon. member has made reference are the one year mandatory minimums which currently exist in the code and which the Liberal Party in the last election said it would double. Making a one a two or two years less a day is a far cry and much different from three, five, seven and 10. That is the difference. That is a huge difference.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how much time I have, but I will not be taking up a lot of time. I will start and see where we end up.

I was listening to the debate on the monitor in my office for the entire morning and trying to get a lot of things done, but I could not help but come over and try to get involved with the debate to some degree because there are a few things that I would like to point out.

Just very recently we heard a speech from the member for Abbotsford that was what I considered to be a talk that was coming from the hearts, the souls and the minds of ordinary people in his riding. A lot of ordinary people are out there wondering what is going on and what is happening.

I have a lot of respect for lawyers, I really do, but they seem to approach things with a totally different idea than a lot of us do. I say that simply because it is difficult to understand them when they begin their lingo. Their language becomes so legalistic that it is difficult to know exactly where they are at and their comeback always is that the problem with people like me, the member for Abbotsford and others is that we are just too simplistic. I have heard that term so many times that it just about drives me crazy.

It is a simplistic answer, they say, when what we are doing is expressing this in terms as best we can, as every member can, and I know that you are the same, Mr. Speaker. We listen to the people in our ridings. They are really fed up with some of the things that are happening in our justice system. They want a truly good justice system. It appears to have turned into more of a legal system, where we are constantly engaging in debates as to what this term means and what that term means, et cetera, such that we lose sight of some things, that is, the public is not happy with the way that the justice

system is operating. That is it, pure and simple. The public is not pleased.

Members can check any poll, or if they like they can conduct their own in their own riding. Even the Liberal member who just spoke can do that in his own riding with just ordinary people out there. Members can forget about those ordinary people being simplistic. Members should just remember that they are the people who are thriving in this country, who are working and paying their taxes, and they want the services rendered by this government to be efficient and effective.

One of the best things we can do to answer a lot of their concerns is provide a system that will make society as safe as possible and will protect society as a whole. One of the most elemental duties that we have as members of Parliament is to come up with legislation that will do that. I think we all try hard to do that, even in our own way of thinking, which too often is referred to by too many people in this House as simplistic.

The day that I really started getting more concerned than I ever had in the past was the day I saw 14 farmers, and prior to that another two, hauled away from a court, in shackles and chains, and going off to jail to serve consecutive sentences. Consecutive sentences meant that for each crime they had to serve a specific amount of time before they began to serve the next one. The courts do not usually sentence people consecutively; they sentence them concurrently. Clifford Olson, for example, is serving a life sentence for the death of 11 people, but he is only serving one. He probably should be serving 11 life sentences.

These farmers were hauled off to jail. They were taken to jail in shackles and chains, in most cases in front of their wives and children. For what? For selling their own grain, their own product that they raised on their farms with their own hard-working hands. They broke the law because they went across the border and tried to sell their grain. Nobody is denying that it was a disobedient thing to do and nobody is denying that maybe there should have been some charges. That is not the question.

The question is this: how did the punishment fit the crime? How well did we do in that department? We had farmers who worked hard to raise their own crops and who, in a form of civil disobedience, made a move to try to make more money, more profit, for their farms, which are struggling all the time. How well did we do when the Liberal government in power at the time did nothing about the fact that all these people were hauled off to jail?

Mr. Ed Fast: That's the Liberal way.

Mr. Myron Thompson: That is the Liberal way. That is what I was thinking. This is not right. There is something wrong with that picture.

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•(1250)

Of course, somebody might say that is a simplistic way of thinking, but it is not. The punishment should fit the crime. I see nothing wrong with that philosophy. Yet when we check on various other aspects of sentencing, we see that offenders actually receive house arrest or community service when they commit a violent offence. All of this was going on at the same time that those 14 farmers were hauled off to jail for selling their own grain. But that is probably simplistic talk.

Millions of Canadians are wondering when we are going to stop all this nonsense and start addressing crime. They want us to send out a strong, loud and clear message that it is not acceptable for criminals to hurt people or their property or do something that is against the law. It blows my mind that some members cannot grasp that concept.

Yet on one occasion a bunch of farmers were hauled off to jail in shackles and chains for selling their own grain. They were hauled off in front of their crying wives and kids. I was there and I saw it. I talked to the wives and the children after the event was over and those farmers were locked up and the doors were slammed shut. It was that day that I vowed we had to get some common sense into the minds of the people here in the House of Commons. We need to realize that this kind of activity is not right.

So we prepared legislation. We want to get tough on crime so we brought in minimum mandatory sentencing for the use of a gun in the commission of a crime. We are trying to send the message that it is not acceptable to use guns for the purpose of committing crimes. We are telling criminals that it is not going to be tolerated. We are going to get tougher. We are telling criminals that minimum mandatory sentences will be the result.

Is this going to deter criminals? As people say, it probably will not go through the minds of a lot of them. I do not disagree with that. That is not the point. The point is this: is the punishment going to fit the crime? Is it going to match up? Yes, we are starting to take serious action, particularly against people in cases of violence and who use guns in the commission of a crime.

There are a lot of examples out there. There is not a member in this House of Commons who cannot think of one particular instance where house arrest or community service was the punishment for a crime of violence. It is a shameful disgrace to this place. Unfortunately, many of the crimes I know of were crimes against children, the most vulnerable in our society, who are treated with the least respect.

We are trying to bring forward a piece of legislation that will send a message that this House of Commons is not going to tolerate violent crimes. We are going to do our very best to make certain that criminals pay the price for their crimes, that they get a penalty they deserve.

Yes, at the same time, we have to work very hard with earlier programs and prevention activities. I was in a schoolhouse for 30 years and 90% of my time was spent trying to prevent kids from getting into trouble. However, they learned after a period of time, and they knew that once they crossed the line they were going to be held responsible for their actions. They knew that the punishment

would not be pleasant. I was trying to send out a message that I did not tolerate the activity that took place and I wanted it to cease.

•(1255)

I find it really discouraging when we get a debate going in the House of Commons and the best argument I keep hearing is, "I listened to the speech by the fellow from Abbotsford and he was far too simplistic". Good grief, he is talking the hearts and minds of the people in his riding who discuss these very issues day in and day out with every one of us.

I will be frank. I am pretty simplistic and I will be as simplistic as I can. I am sick and tired of this nonsense. I am really sick and tired of it. I have acquaintances, friends of mine, who have lost loved ones and have had no real closure because the perpetrator is going to be released on parole very soon who took the life of an individual. They do not understand why their loved one is gone forever and the perpetrator, who committed the most sadistic crimes of sexual assault and murder, is going to be released back into our society soon.

We can all rub our hands together and say we have done a wonderful job. I want us to think about that just a little, just start thinking about it a little more. Does the punishment fit the crime? If it does not, then let us do something about it.

I am proud of the Minister of Justice who brought this bill forward and wants to do something about it. None of us has any magic answers as to what we can do that will make it better, but we have to concentrate on all the possibilities.

In the meantime, when individuals cross the line and use a gun in the commission of a crime, the penalty will be stiff. It will be tough. If that does not work, we may have to make it tougher. We have to get a message out that this is not the society we want to live in.

If it takes a few million dollars more to build another penitentiary to keep people like that off the streets, then let us do it. What is wrong with that? I always thought keeping criminals behind bars was a wise thing to do.

There are small communities in rural Alberta that do not have police on every corner or do not have access to police. There are small businesses and little grocery or hardware stores in small towns where it would take a policeman half an hour to get to once a crime has been committed.

How do they live? They live behind bars. They have bars on every window and door. They are doing everything they can to protect their property and keep criminals from coming in. They unlock their doors, enter their businesses, slam their doors and work throughout the day behind bars because they are afraid of the people on the street running free. There must be too many of them because there are constant troubles of breaking and entering and destroying property. Hopefully, they do not run into any these people while they are at work because it could be dangerous.

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I hope that people do not believe that I am being too simplistic. I have lots of friends and relatives who all work hard and pay their taxes. The least I can do for them while I am here, I hope, is to make certain that we have people in this place who are willing to decide that criminals are not a good thing in our society and we are going to do the very best we can do take care of it. Then we get into these legal matters and opinions which most of us, including me, do not understand when conversations are engaged in with witnesses in committee. When the Bar Association representatives have discussions with members who have law degrees, they lose me most times. I admit that.

I listened to one speech today about the expert witnesses who are against this bill. I do not know why they are considered to be expert witnesses when people who agree with the bill, like the police and many others, are not referred to as expert witnesses. In other words, if witnesses agree with that member's idea of what the bill should look like, then they are experts and if they do not, they must not be experts.

The police made a very good presentation in regard to their support for this bill and others associated with it. It made very good sense.

• (1300)

We certainly did not get into any legal wrangling because they would lose me, but we can converse and society as a whole can converse. I simply say "Wake up, folks, wake up". The public out there is not satisfied with the way the justice system is working.

If people do not believe me, get on those little computers and newspapers and put out all kinds of polls and ask: "Folks in my riding, are you satisfied with the way our justice system operates, yes or no"? Then people will see how satisfied Canadians are.

Canadians are not satisfied. They are paying for something they are not satisfied with. I say let us work hard to give them something that they are paying for and that they will be satisfied with. I believe in satisfying the customer.

If that is too radical or too extreme for some members of the House, then that is too bad. That is the way it ought to be. That is the way people are telling me in my riding it ought to be. As long as I can stand on my two feet in this place I am going to expound that. That is the way it ought to be.

Wake up and do the right thing and support Bill C-10 to indicate to the public out there that we are taking crime a little more seriously. Let Canadians know that we are not being simplistic about it, but that we are sincere about it. If people think I am not sincere then give me a test.

I do not know if I have any time left, but I do not think I need to say any more. I have just about said all I want to say and all I can say. For the love of me, I cannot understand what goes through the minds of individuals who simply say that the punishment fitting the crime is not right.

I will revert once again to that day that I saw farmers hauled off in shackles and chains for selling grain. I do not think there was a person in the entire public society of Canada that cheered that day, not one. "Yes, we are going to teach those farmers a lesson".

They say it is not a deterrent to do these other things, but they certainly thought that would be a deterrent. It is not about deterrents. It is about punishment fitting the crime, letting society know as a whole that it is not acceptable to hurt people in this country, that it is not acceptable to destroy their property or steal from them. It is a wrong thing to do. It is a very wrong thing to do and we are going to take tough action.

I am thankful that we have a minister sitting in that seat that wants to do just that. I thank the House for the time. I did not intend to speak today, but I could not resist after hearing many of the things that I heard this morning.

I hope people will give this bill a second thought before they react to the bill with such negativism and criticism that says we are too simplistic because we mean what we say and we are going to get the job done. It has not been done for years. Now is the time to get it done.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would never second-guess the hon. member in articulating on behalf of his constituents, or for that matter, any MP here. That is what we are here to do. I have worked with the member on the justice committee. We do not always agree, but most of the time we do and it has been a good run over a number of years.

However, I wanted to ask two questions. The first one is really a comment. In the matter involving the grain farmers who were ultimately jailed, as I recall it, I believe they were fined by the court. When they came back to court, not having paid their fines, not because they could not afford to but because they refused in protest to pay the fines, I believe the court had no alternative but to resort to either imprisonment or contempt. The court resorted to the short jailing. So the member is correct. It happened, but the sequence involved more than just selling grain and going to jail. It was more complex than that.

Does the member not think that in this House from time to time we are forced by reason of the federal jurisdiction to focus on only two things when it comes to response to criminal activity? The only thing we can do federally is write the Criminal Code and from time to time set the sentencing range. That is all we get to do.

With criminal activity there has to be an offence, an investigation, it may need police intelligence gathering, a charge, a conviction, and a sentence, but we only write the law and deal with the sentencing. The provinces and the cities do the policing, the investigation, and the prosecution is done by the provinces. So, we actually may be kind of frustrated from time to time that we do not have a greater role on the ground in the components.

Does the member not think that out of frustration from time to time we federally may tend to overemphasize our role in that whole complex thing with just the law and the sentencing?

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•(1305)

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to comment once again with regard to the farmers. It is strange that such things as house arrest, community service or those kinds of penalties did not enter the minds of the court. It was jail. The farmers did not comply. Jail.

I am talking about the punishment fitting the crime. They did not pay a fine. Jail. I guess the Liberals do not get the picture. It is not the idea of how much more was involved in it. That was the event that took place. Did the punishment fit the crime? The answer in Canadian society was no, not even close. Unfortunately, the answer is also no in society when we ask if the punishment fits the crime in so many of our violent crimes that take place. The answer is still no.

As legislators, we write the laws and what is wrong with providing sentences that we believe, from our discussions with our constituents, are more in line with the thinking of society as a whole which pays for a system that it wants to work on its behalf. We must write laws that make it possible.

We have many laws. Sometimes I do not think we need to write any more laws. I look at the maximum penalties on some of these charges and my goodness, when is the last time we ever had a maximum penalty issued in Canada? So, I guess the judges need a little nudging from minimum penalties to nudge them toward a little more severity in their sentencing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what my colleague from Wild Rose had to say. I can assure him that I do not think anyone tolerates crime. I understand that he is impatient and fed up with the crimes being committed.

I do not feel that the solution proposed in the bill is the right one. For example, in the United States, more criminals are incarcerated and the crime rate is much higher than it is here. It has been proven that the homicide rate is three times higher in the United States than in Canada. Maximum or additional prison time does not have the desired results. I do not believe that anyone here thinks that people in big cities such as New York or Chicago feel safer because more people are put in jail.

Instead, I would direct my colleague to the budget cuts the government is making to get to the source of the problem. The summer career placement program was cut by \$10 million this year. They are not consulting those who live in the communities, and decisions are made by civil servants who are not necessarily aware of the needs. Young people absolutely need these jobs. The government's budget cuts could leave these kids with nothing to do, and perhaps they will become criminals.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that. Should the government not get to the source of the problem, rather than further punishing the criminals?

•(1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I understand the question and I would not mind getting into a debate with him some day on the cuts that took place and on the things we are doing. However, I

hope everything that is being done is being done in the best interests of Canadian society. I trust it is, but I am not going there today. We are talking about Bill C-10.

All I am saying is that as part of the justice system, we must provide tools for our courts to allow them to move more toward penalties that Canadian society would expect for the kinds of crimes criminals commit. We will work on all kinds of aspects of preventing crime, and we should at every chance we get. The debates on the cuts will take place and they should take place.

When he compares us to the states, I have been in many of the penitentiaries in the states, visiting and finding out what is going on. They have some penitentiaries that are releasing inmates who are having no recidivism. They are run in a manner that we would not even consider in Canada because it seems to be too draconic.

Maybe our prison system needs to be looked at when we release them. What are we doing in the penitentiaries other than letting the inmates call the shots?

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I followed the logic and the desire of my hon. colleague, the member for Wild Rose, to be simplistic, but it does not seem to follow in terms of crime.

His party has insisted on continuing a war on drugs when we know does not work. It just creates more crime, more criminals, more shootings and more trouble in the homes and the neighbourhoods of this nation. An enormous percentage of the population makes choices about what kinds of substances they indulge in and we make crimes against some of them. We make it criminal for some of those things, so we create crime.

Does the hon. member agree with me that we should look at our laws to see if they are working to reduce crime or to eliminate it? When we take those choices, then we can also look at how tough we can enforce the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Wild Rose has approximately 30 seconds for his reply.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, 30 seconds is a tough amount of time to answer a question like that.

I am pleased we are continuing to work on the war on drugs. I have attended at least seven funerals of students of mine who died because they were involved in drugs. It is an activity that needs to be stopped. I do not know how we stop it, but it has to be stopped. If a person starts saying that legalizing it makes it better, that is absolute nonsense. I will not even go there.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: There you go, you lose your simplistic argument.

Mr. Myron Thompson: I knew I would get a reaction like that from an NDP. After all, if we would legalize everything that is immoral or evil against society, then it would not be used. I guess that is what he is thinking.

I will use my last three seconds to defend the war on drugs, and I hope we become victorious in that one.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleague from Wild Rose will listen to what I have to say to him because I want to start by pointing out that my intention is not to say that he is a simplistic member. I do not believe he is, for a number of reasons.

I have had the opportunity to see the member for Wild Rose at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and he is a reflection of many people in Canada: people are asking serious questions about crime and how to put a stop to it.

I would never dream of telling the member for Wild Rose for whom I have enormous respect, that he is a simplistic person and has simplistic solutions. We are dealing with the extremely complex problem of crime here. My colleague and I do not look at things the same way when it comes to fighting crime.

In the few minutes I am allotted, I will try to show that the way to fight crime is not to increase minimum sentences. I know that I will not show this to the satisfaction of the member for Wild Rose, but I hope that some in this House will understand.

I was a lawyer for 25 years. For the last 15 years, I worked exclusively in criminal law, as a criminal defence lawyer. I have seen virtually all the amendments that members have adopted in the House of Commons in the last 15 years, to amend the Criminal Code. Because I have been here only since 2004, I had nothing to do with the amendments to the Criminal Code made by this House. We criminal lawyers, however, worked with those major changes to the Criminal Code.

I want to point out to my colleague from Wild Rose and all his colleagues in the Conservative Party that from 1991 to 2000—I am not going back very far, and I have the same figures as my colleague has—crime dropped by nearly 26% in Canada. Crime has fallen and is still falling.

But even better, the number of violent crimes—homicide, attempted murder, assault, assault with a weapon, sexual assault, kidnapping and robbery—fell year over year between 1992 and 2004. In 1992, there were about 1084 violent crimes, the ones I have just listed, per 100,000 population in Canada. But in 2004 there were only 946. That is a drop of 13%.

Violent crime fell by 13%, but crime overall fell by 25%. Quebec and Canada are safe countries. These are good places to live. So where is the problem?

• (1315)

There is a fundamental principle, one that has been stated by the Supreme Court of Canada. I hope that the 308 members in this House respect that institution. The Supreme Court of Canada has said, and reiterated, that when sentence is to be passed, one of the essential factors is the individualization of sentences. What that means, in words that are easy to understand, is that when a person comes before the court, the judge must impose a sentence that fits the person standing before the judge. I know that, unfortunately, these are not words that the member from Wild Rose and a majority of the Conservative Party members want to hear. They should go and read the Supreme Court's decisions. I am not the one who wrote them.

Personally, I have enormous respect for the Supreme Court and what it has said, which I repeat: the sentence must be individualized and must fit the individual.

What that means is that when an individual receives a sentence, we must tell that person or make him or her understand that the crime is serious and that society condemns that crime. However, in the sentence that the judge is about to render, an important factor must be considered: the possible rehabilitation of the individual. On that point, once again, I address myself to the member for Wild Rose and his colleagues in the Conservative party. Following recent amendments, the court must take into account the impact of the crime on the victim. In English, that is known as an impact statement. The victims come into the court and give testimony to explain the impact of the crime on them.

I would say to the member for Wild Rose and his colleagues in the Conservative party that since this measure came into force less than 10% of victims come before the court. It is not because we do not want to hear them; it is because, very often, they do not want to have any more to do with the justice system. Why is that? There are a lot of questions to be asked.

In the Bloc Québécois, we think that introducing minimum prison sentences is not the way to solve the problem. The member for Wild Rose and his colleagues in the Conservative party should realize that perhaps the problem lies not at the entrance to the court or prison but at the exit. What we are saying is that an individual who receives a sentence must serve time in prison and, if he or she serves a prison sentence, that person should be eligible for parole. Could someone be paroled too quickly? That is a debate that we should have soon in this House. However, we will not solve this problem by tying the hands of judges with minimum sentences. That is false.

Once again, I address the member for Wild Rose. He was present at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights when the former justice minister came to testify. We asked him questions. We asked him if there were studies; whether any investigations had shown that increasing minimum prison sentences had reduced crime. The answer is no. It is no.

Therefore, we cannot vote in favour of a bill that does not solve the problem. I will try to explain to the member for Wild Rose and his colleagues in the Conservative party what will happen if this bill is adopted. We will have an accused person, who initially faces a minimum prison sentence of five years, for example.

• (1320)

So on his lawyer's advice, he will plead not guilty, choose trial by jury, and ask for a preliminary hearing in order to drag out the proceedings as long as possible. Then he will try to plea bargain.

I invite the hon. member for Wild Rose to come to some court houses with me, whether in Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal. Anyone who has done any criminal law will tell him that plea bargaining goes on, and the Bar came and told us that Bill C-10 will only cause it to increase.

This means that people will come before the judge, talk to the crown attorney, and ask him to withdraw a charge in exchange for them not dragging out the proceedings forever. We have seen it on many occasions.

Government Orders

I believe that the hon. member for Wild Rose and several of his colleagues were present here in the House when the Supreme Court of Canada determined that a minimum sentence of seven years in prison for importing narcotics was cruel and unusual punishment. I did not make up the Charter. However, we have had a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms since 1982, and it is applied.

What I am trying to say, not only to the hon. member for Wild Rose but many of his colleagues as well, is that we are not getting at the root of the problem. Increasing minimum prison sentences will just jam the courts with legal procedures. We even have some figures. The hon. member for Wild Rose will agree with me on this because we saw figures in committee showing that we will have to spend nearly \$22 million a year just to deal with the additional inmates in the prison system.

If they want to build prisons, they can build them, but that will not solve the crime problem. There are deep-seated reasons for crime. We do not want to get into this debate right now, but there are deep-seated reasons for delinquency and violence. I hope that the hon. member for Wild Rose and his colleagues are familiar with them. It is poverty. That much we know.

As I was studying this situation, a question occurred to me. If the hon. member Wild Rose is so much in favour of Bill C-10, why are crimes committed with hunting weapons not included? They are not in the bill. We have a problem, though, because 35% of the homicides in Canada are committed with hunting weapons. So little holes are starting to appear in this, and soon little holes become big holes.

This bill will not solve the problem. What I mean—and I want the hon. member for Wild Rose to be very aware of this—is that this bill tries to condemn people who walk around with revolvers shooting at anyone at all in the streets. On this point, I totally agree with him. We need to get rid of that. But what is going to happen? Instead of committing armed robbery with revolvers, people will do it now with a 12, 410, 22 or 303 calibre weapon.

This is what I have to say to the hon. member for Wild Rose. This aspect is not in the bill. I put the question to the minister. If the member for Wild Rose was at that committee meeting—like his colleagues, he did not miss many—he knows that I asked the minister. The minister replied that it was not necessary because it could lead to the imprisonment of aboriginal and Inuit people. How ridiculous. We have a problem here. We are in the process of creating a second justice system, and that is unacceptable.

• (1325)

I would add that there are three times more homicides in the United States than in Canada, and four times more than in Quebec. There is a real problem here. This bill does not solve the problem of violent crime. That is what I want the members opposite to understand.

The Bloc Québécois believes that it is perhaps the parole system that poses a problem. I leave it to the hon. member for Wild Rose to pass along this message, because he knows the Minister of Justice very well.

I would like to return to what the member for Wild Rose said in response to my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party. Perhaps

judges must be given instructions. In my opinion—at least, I hope this will be the case—there will always be courts of appeal and the Supreme Court to review, study and analyze the appropriateness of a sentence, and to confirm if it was handed down in accordance with the sentencing rules governing the courts. That is what I would like the members opposite to understand, as well as those who are about to vote in favour of a bill that not only is incomplete and fails to solve the problem of violent crime, but will only exacerbate the existing backlogs in our court rooms. If this bill passes, there will be more backlogs. Criminal defence lawyers will make a pile of money. I can guarantee it.

What I find regrettable as well as that huge investments are also planned for the prisons. The hon. member for Wild Rose has visited a number of penitentiaries. I too have been inside on a number of occasions to visit clients, unfortunately. Penitentiaries are schools for crime. No one in this House can convince me otherwise. Programs need to be set up to provide help to people who want to take control of their lives.

Throughout my career, I asked my clients questions, as did others when they were inside. What I asked is whether they would have thought twice about committing such a crime, had they known there was a minimum three year jail time for it. They said no. When a person has made up his mind to commit a crime, he will do anything to make sure he does. We must stop holding on to this belief that crime will be reduced if prison time is increased. It is a false belief.

What we must do is to work as quickly as possible at solving the problems that are the causes. What must be done in particular is to start thinking seriously that there may be a problem at time of release. What I mean by that is that people may be getting out a bit too soon. On this point, I agree with the hon. member for Wild Rose, who shares that opinion and has often expressed it in committee. Inmates are getting out too soon. They get three years jail time and are out on the street in six months. That may be one part of the problem, but it is not going to be solved by tying the judges' hands and telling them they have to impose this or that minimum sentence. On the contrary.

Mr. Normandeau, a Université de Montréal criminologist who has examined most of the files at the Montreal Palais de Justice, reports that the result of having minimum penalties was that lawyers plea bargained to get their clients charged with offences not carrying a minimum sentence. So what will happen next?

• (1330)

It is not difficult to figure out. They will go to court and say to the crown attorney: "Withdraw this charge and I will plead guilty to a slightly more serious charge, armed robbery". They will then be given a two-year sentence and the problem will be solved.

In closing, I invite the member for Wild Rose and his colleagues in the Conservative Party to think twice about a bill that does not solve the problem of crime. Probably the best thing to do is to admit that they made a mistake, withdraw the bill and to do what it takes to find other means of dealing with crime.

Government Orders

● (1335)

[English]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should be honoured because I felt that the entire speech was dedicated to the member for Wild Rose. Although I appreciate the member's speech and his opinion, I could not disagree with him more. I am encouraged more than ever to support these kinds of legislation and I will continue to do so.

The member constantly insists, as do other members, that poverty is the major cause of crime and that if we did not have poverty there would be no crimes.

I would like to remind the member that in all the crime statistics from the dirty thirties, the poorest time on the North American continent, that was when crime was the lowest in the history of the North American continent.

I will not say that poverty does not contribute to crime because it probably does. However, on my tour throughout the country visiting all the penitentiaries, when I asked the inmates how they ended up in prison, I would say that close to 70% to 75% of the inmates said that it was because they drank alcohol and got drunk a lot. They said that if it had not been for booze they would not be there.

Most of the guards and the wardens agreed that our prisons would be quite empty if it were not for booze. Evidently booze is a major cause of crime. What does the member suggest we do about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say to the member for Wild Rose that I respect his opinion. I respect what he said because he is talking about real, everyday life. He is a worldly man and I know that he has been in this House since 1993. He is experienced. However, we do not have the same perspective and I respect that.

Yet, I would say to the hon. member that the best sentence—and I can speak about this out of experience—is the one that our client accepts and that he is willing to serve. I know that what I am saying is difficult to accept.

This is what I mean. When we tell a client that he has committed a crime while under the influence of alcohol, we explain that the judge has no choice but to impose a sentence. Let us take, for example, impaired driving causing bodily harm. Until the accused recognizes that he has a problem with alcohol, there is nothing we can do. We could put him away for centuries, but that will not solve the problem. He must come to the realization that he has a problem, he must accept it and take steps to deal with it. Then, rehabilitation can begin.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the Bloc for his speech. I have a few points to raise.

We, the Liberals, intend to vote against Bill C-10 at third reading stage because we are against the escalating minimum sentences as proposed by the government, with the support of the NDP.

The Bloc sat in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights throughout all the meetings for consideration at second reading stage, and the experts were all but unanimous that, generally speaking, minimum sentences are not effective. Nonetheless, under

very specific circumstances, this could be acceptable, but escalating minimum sentences should never be implemented. Since 2003, some 25 U.S. states have experimented with this type of program and have cancelled it.

I am still rather stunned to see that the NDP, after hearing all these expert witnesses, has decided despite everything to form an alliance with the Conservatives—such a regressive party and government—and support this bill and the amendments the government reinstated at report stage. What does the hon. member think about that?

● (1340)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple answer. I can understand the Conservatives because this is part of their platform. I respect that. I am trying to get them to change their minds and to explain this to them. However, I cannot understand the NDP. The only explanation I can come up with is that they are quite simply playing politics. Often those who play politics do not ask too many questions. Nonetheless, I am utterly convinced that the NDP members will vote in favour of this bill even though they are fundamentally against it. I highly recommend to them that they call in sick and not come to the House because, with all due respect, I would have a hard time understanding the New Democrats thereafter.

I spoke to them. I did everything I could to make them understand that it does not make any sense to pass such a bill, unless they are getting ready to join the Conservative Party, which I doubt. Either that, or they are playing more politics. In a matter as important as fighting crime, we should avoid playing politics, which only serves a small group and will truly deny many people their rights.

That is all I can say. With all due respect to my NDP colleagues, I would invite them to reconsider their position. That being said, I understand the Conservatives. I tried to explain things to them at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights several times, but I did not succeed.

[English]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the member's speech, thankfully, because I have heard many members from his party speak to this issue, he at least mentioned victims. He talked about victims' impact statements and about victims being involved in this. He said that victims' statements should be part of sentencing, and that would be good, but that only a limited number of victims got involved in the victims' impact statement process.

I might suggest that the reason for that is the limited time they see the person who committed a crime against them getting. They may not want to be involved in sitting across the table with the person who victimized them so that the person could get out early and victimize them again.

Government Orders

He also said, in answer to the question asked by the member for Wild Rose, that the best sentence was the sentence that the client accepts. I love it that we are judging the sentences on how well the criminal likes them and that we should tailor the sentence to fit the individual. Again, we should set sentences based on what the perpetrator should say.

He went on to say that perhaps we should look at the parole system in closing off the end of it so that if people were not getting out early we could probably accomplish what we are trying to accomplish by putting them in for longer.

I am not certain how opening or closing either end of this works but I will just quickly get to how we protect the victim. One of the greatest ways is to have the person incarcerated at the time when they might have committed the crime and then the crime would not occur at all. What we are suggesting by mandatory minimums is that people are actually in jail rather than out perpetrating crimes.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, there might have been a communication problem somewhere. I have a lot of respect for the interpreters, so it cannot have been a bad translation.

I will try to speak slowly. We respect the victims. Anyone who takes the time to listen to me will understand that.

Recently, victim impact statements were introduced. Victims can go to court to explain things in their own words. That is important.

I hope the members will listen carefully to all of what I have to say. I never said, and I will never say, that we have to impose a sentence at the request of a rapist, an individual who committed armed robbery or a murderer. With all due respect to my colleague, that is not what I said.

I am talking about a sentence that will be accepted by the individual. If I tell my client that he will get three years in jail, that that is to be his sentence, he will be prepared for a three-year sentence and will serve out those three years in jail. But if he gets a minimum sentence that he was not expecting, that is dangerous because basically, it means he is going to crime school—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the member, but his time is up.

The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak today in this House about 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.

This bill has been brought back to the House with significant changes after being reviewed by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. But behind the scenes, an unholy alliance has developed between the reactionary minority Conservative government and the NDP. Together, these two parties put back a series of regressive provisions, ruining the good work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I think that the newly amended bill is simply not good legislation.

However, I am happy that this bill has shed some light on the debate on mandatory minimum penalties.

So I am proud to speak, and I invite my fellow members to follow the lead of the Liberals and vote against the bill as newly amended.

The bill the government initially introduced proposed heavier minimum sentences for repeat offences, despite the views expressed by experts on the fight against crime. In addition, the bill even went so far as to add offences unrelated to the crime in question to the previous convictions.

It is important to remind this House why the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights so substantially amended the initial bill. The opposition members on the committee were very reluctant to introduce escalating minimum sentences depending on the number of previous convictions.

[*English*]

In undertaking this task, the committee members were simply agreeing with most of the expert evidence they heard. In the opinion of all the experts, and it is perhaps rather surprising, there is no proof that minimum terms of imprisonment deter offenders who commit serious crimes.

In certain cases, in California, for example, the method seems to have actually been counterproductive. The annual rate of serious crime has risen since this type of sentencing was introduced. This is the conclusion of the recent report by a commission set up to study the California correctional system.

In January 2005, the Little Hoover Commission submitted to the governor of California its report on what it called “California’s corrections crisis”. The report highlights the major failure of the Californian “three strikes and you’re out” system. It raises serious questions about the Californian model of sentencing, which there is called “determinate sentencing”. Here in Canada, it is called “minimum mandatory penalties”. In other words, its determinate sentence is the U.S. equivalent of the mandatory minimums that the Conservative government wishes to not implement, but to make even harsher and escalating here in Canada.

The report of the Little Hoover Commission of California is clear:

Despite the rhetoric, thirty years of “tough on crime” politics has not made the state safer. Quite the opposite...

California has one of the highest recidivism rates in the nation. Furthermore, Governor Schwarzenegger himself described the California prison system as a powder keg.

Is it not absurd that at the very moment that Americans are trying to fix their flawed system, Canada, under the Conservative minority retrograde government, is trying to copy the American’s old and utterly proven to be inefficient model?

Government Orders

The American model of escalating minimum mandatory sentences is a failed model. Why in God's name, for heaven's sake, would Canadians want to follow a failed model? We want to follow models of excellence. The American model of determinate sentencing, and in particular escalating determinate sentencing, which is the equivalent of the Canadian mandatory minimum sentencing or penalties, is a failed model. In fact, since 2003, some 25 American states have eliminated their lengthy minimum mandatory penalties and their escalator penalties.

Criticisms of mandatory minimum sentencing are based on very sound arguments. It has more than its share of drawbacks. Often, and because of the excessively serious consequences it can have, what happens is charges are withdrawn or pleas are modified to get the charges changed and diminished. Equally often, the threat of a mandatory minimum sentence will discourage an accused person from pleading guilty, which obviously results in greater costs and delays for the system.

As well, this type of measure can also make a jury hesitate to convict, not because of the accused's actual guilt or innocence, because the sentence strikes the jury as being unjustly harsh, given the crime committed, given the accused, given the victim and given the real and proven impact on the victim and the community.

Also, it is known that mandatory minimum sentencing seems, as evidenced by the Australian and American experiences, to hit harder at members of certain ethnocultural communities, blacks and aboriginals. That certainly is not an outcome that Canada should be seeking.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Paradoxically, the increase in mandatory minimum sentences suggested in the newly amended bill would have cost Canada's justice system an exorbitant amount of money. Does this government realize that, by proposing to increase the number and length of minimum sentences and decrease the number of conditional sentences, it would have added a huge number of inmates to our already overcrowded penitentiaries, according to its own Minister of Public Safety?

According to Neil Boyd of Simon Fraser University, Canada would have to build no fewer than 23 new prisons to house all these new inmates. At \$82,000 a year per inmate, the bill this government initially introduced would have cost Canadian taxpayers an additional \$220 million to \$245 million over five years.

In addition, this new obsession with sending people to prison systematically will obviously lead to other additional costs, because it is reasonable to assume that, with this attitude, appeals and lengthy trials will become increasingly common. Mandatory minimum sentences are therefore not the best way of dealing with crime in Canada. They restrict judges' discretionary power to look at the particular circumstances of a case. We should use mandatory minimum sentences very sparingly to target specific offences and, above all, we should limit them to first offences. That is what Bill C-82, introduced under the former Liberal government, sought to do.

• (1355)

[*English*]

The whole point of minimum sentencing is its effect on an individual committing a first offence, taking into consideration the impact on the victim of that offence and on the community where the offence took place. It is designed to take the person guilty of serious wrongdoing out of his or her community for awhile in order to prevent that person from committing other crimes, while at the same time ensuring the community is not put at risk again. In such cases, this kind of sentencing serves its purpose very well.

The problem with escalating minimum mandatory sentencing, proposed in the newly amended version of Bill C-10, was that they applied to repeat offenders. What was initially proposed would have forbidden judges, in the case of a recidivist, to tailor an appropriate sentence that took into account the criminal, himself or herself, the particular circumstances and nature of the new crime, the impact on the victim and the community and the background situation and the possibility of rehabilitation.

In the case of a repeat offence, a judge needs to be able to consider all these factors in order to determine an appropriate sentence. With escalating minimum sentences, this is impossible. With this bill, as it has been amended at report stage by the government with the collusion of the NDP, it will now be impossible.

The newly amended bill shows that the government wants to bring its so-called crime fighting strategy into line with the repressive approach favoured in the United States by the very right wing. The Conservative Party is proposing to emulate a model that does not work.

I might add that the NDP's support for this style of justice is baffling, at the very least. Once again the NDP is sacrificing its progressive roots for short term political gain and being the enabler of the right wing agenda of the Prime Minister.

Let us look at a few facts. The difference in rates of serious offences between our two countries is astonishing. For example, according to Statistics Canada, and that is not a left wing organization, the rates for robberies are 59% higher in the United States than in Canada. What about the rates for aggravated assault? They are 85% higher in the United States than in Canada. What about the murder rates? The murder rates are 275% higher south of our border than they are in Canada.

I am sure my hon. colleagues will be interested to learn that a Calgary resident is 840% less likely to be the victim of murder than a resident of Dallas. If we want to compare the degree of safety of our two capital cities, a resident of Washington, D.C. is 2,700% more likely than his or her Ottawa counterpart to be the victim of a serious crime.

I do not know where the government wants to lead us with its copycat, tough on crime strategy, but one thing is certain. These numbers show—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine will have seven minutes at the end of question period, but now we will move on to statements by members.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***SCIENCE FAIR**

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize the achievements of Barrie students who are participating in the Canada-wide science fair in Truro, Nova Scotia.

I am proud to stand today and state that of the 459 students competing in this national competition, five are from Barrie.

These remarkable whiz kids include Cameron Armstrong who will be presenting his project on the effects of carbon dioxide on global warming.

Matt Shwed has used his love of physics to create a project called "Cosmic radiation".

Alexandra Milak created a project called "Forget me not" which tests the emotional memory of Alzheimer's patients.

Luke Regier has a project called "Blowing down the walls of Jericho" that conducts tests to determine the best ways to get volume and bass in sound and music.

Sergio Morales created a project called "Insect immigration to Canada" which explores the relationship between insects, fruit and pesticides.

These talented students have worked hard and I, along with all Barrie residents, wish them best of luck at the Canada-wide science fair.

* * *

● (1400)

*[Translation]***COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM**

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the Conservatives' threat, the Liberal members and the other opposition members have formed an official languages advisory committee to take control of the work and to continue to respect the country's linguistic minorities. We showed respect by listening to representatives of the court challenges program and members of the SOS Montfort committee, including Gisèle Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde clearly summed up the situation by stating that the elimination of the court challenges program is outrageous. The connection is clear. Mike Harris' Conservatives tried to violate the rights of minority language communities by threatening to close the Montfort hospital. Now, the same party has eliminated the court challenges program, which helped all communities, including those in Madawaska—Restigouche.

When will the Conservatives respect the right of minorities to ensure their rights are respected? They must listen to the people now and reinstitute the court challenges program today.

THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to criticize the current government, which is trampling on democracy and has no respect whatsoever for Quebec voters.

The Conservatives are calling all the shots in the committees. They even went as far as cancelling the Standing Committee on Official Languages. They have appointed unilingual anglophones to positions that require bilingualism. They have reduced French requirements for senior military officers. They have made it impossible for minorities to go to court to defend their rights.

They have no respect for the unanimous demands of Quebec's National Assembly and they believe that giving Quebec fewer seats in this House is fair to the Quebec nation. They do not even honour majority votes in this House. How many times do we have to remind them that they are a minority government?

The Bloc Québécois will continue to take responsible action in the best interest of Quebec and will always demand that democracy be respected.

* * *

*[English]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the Conservatives strip the capacity of the federal government, Canada's heritage and culture are key casualties.

Heritage buildings hold special places in the history and life of our communities. The Work Point Officer's Mess, a good example, the oldest wooden building in the Victoria area, was taken down despite pleas to the Conservative minister about its value to the community.

Victoria's heritage tax incentive program stimulates the rehabilitation of heritage buildings into hundreds of units of rental housing downtown. Yet, the federal government actively undermines the program by charging GST on the increased value to land and buildings.

Culture is a defining element of Victoria with its local arts and festivals, yet federal support is now mired in partisan politics.

I call on the government to do its part and stop leaving municipalities to struggle alone in preserving Canadian heritage and culture.

* * *

LANDMINES

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Jane Taber of *The Globe and Mail* did not find the reception I hosted with Mines Action Canada on cluster bomb awareness compelling, the 60 members of Parliament plus their staff from all parties who attended the event may argue otherwise.

In fact, the international community, comprised of more than 46 states including Canada, may also argue otherwise. More important, innocent civilians who have been socially, economically and personally affected by these weapons may argue that Ms. Taber just does not get it.

Statements by Members

I would like to thank Mines Action Canada for all its hard work and dedication toward a vital cause, as well as a special thank you to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade for her immeasurable support and leadership toward a cause that affects the lives of thousands of innocent civilians every day.

I commend the Canadian government for its leadership in Oslo and look forward to its continued leadership in Lima next week.

* * *

GREENVISIONS

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a new charity in my riding called Greenvisions. Greenvisions is dedicated to lobbying for more parks and green spaces in Brampton, especially in the new subdivisions of Gore and Castlemore.

The green spaces and environmentally sensitive land in the Castlemore area are vital to future generations. There are deer, fox, and many other animals and plants that depend on this sensitive land for survival.

According to Greenvisions, in just six years from 2001-07, the ratio of park land to developed land in Brampton has decreased by almost 20%. This is why during the last election the Liberal Party committed to expanding the protection of national parks.

Personally, I am also strongly committed to protecting wildlife habitat to maintain a high quality of life for my constituents. I strongly urge all residents of Brampton to take part in protecting our green spaces.

* * *

●(1405)

BIOTECH COMPETITION

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ted Paranjothy, a grade 12 student at Fort Richmond Collegiate in Winnipeg.

This incredible 17-year-old has won a triple crown in high school science, achieving first place in regional, national and international biotech competitions. His project researches a potential alternative to chemotherapy by killing cancer cells without harming cells themselves.

He hopes that one day his research will be, in his words, a commercially available and cost efficient therapeutic alternative to conventional chemotherapy.

At such a young age, Ted has already accomplished much. He is an example to every Canadian and demonstrates what the youth of Canada have to offer our country.

I was able to personally thank him when he received his award at the Chateau Laurier earlier this week. Congratulations Ted. He makes us all proud.

[Translation]

ANESS DOMINIQUE

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, May 20 to 25 is Aboriginal Awareness Week and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Aness Dominique. He was baptized Ernest by a priest so that he would have a French name and not an aboriginal one. In the Inuit alphabet, there is no letter “r”. His family and friends were not able to pronounce his name, so his grandmother renamed him Aness.

A painter for 20 years, he has dedicated himself to raising awareness of his culture's roots. His works highlight the oral tradition that has been lost over the years. It is clear that this artist embodies the vitality of aboriginal culture.

My colleagues and I salute Mr. Dominique's efforts to advance aboriginal culture, and congratulate him for his presence on the national and international stage.

* * *

[English]

ARCHBISHOP OF OTTAWA

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we welcomed Ottawa's 10th bishop in 160 years. In that time Ottawa has had 66 mayors and Canada has had 37 prime ministers.

[Translation]

Pope Benedict XVI named His Grace Terrence Prendergast of the Society of Jesus. Our new archbishop is an exemplary teacher and spiritual father.

[English]

Our new archbishop will minister to half a million Christians. He will also be an inspiration to this capital city and to parliamentarians of all faiths.

At a time of social upheaval, the Church must instruct the faithful, minister to the needy, and strengthen the family as an anchor for hope for future generations.

[Translation]

I know that His Grace will have the strength to follow the advice of Saint Paul: “—preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”.

We offer these best wishes to our new Father: *Ad multos et faustissimos annos.*

* * *

[English]

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May 23 will mark the 93rd anniversary of the arrival of *Komagata Maru* in British Columbia, carrying 376 South Asian immigrants to our shores, only to be met with injustice and denial of the right to land.

Statements by Members

I would like to recognize the tremendous work of Mr. Sahib Thind and the Professor Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation of Canada as well as those Canadians who have worked so hard to bring this issue to national attention.

This was truly a Canadian tragedy. I call upon the government to formally acknowledge this with an apology.

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[*Translation*]

CELEBRATION OF LOVE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, May 12, 2007, I had the pleasure of attending the reception to mark the Fête de l'Amour in Lac-Saint-Charles. The Fête de l'Amour is an event for couples in the Lac-Saint-Charles area who are celebrating their anniversary, in multiples of five years.

During this annual celebration, which was organized again this year by Maurice Cooper and his amazing team of tireless volunteers, I had the pleasure of meeting several couples from my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles who have been married for 50 or 55 years. The event is a wonderful celebration of life and love. I offer my congratulations to these extraordinary couples and wish them continued happiness and long life.

I would like to send special congratulations to the two couples attending the reception who celebrated their 55th anniversary this year: Ludger Rhéaume and his wife, Jacqueline Renaud, and Laurent Lepire and his wife, Patricia Lepire.

They are a model of sharing, love and harmony to those around them and an example to us all.

* * *

●(1410)

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are proud to mark the International Day Against Homophobia.

Canada has made progress combating the various forms of negative behaviours that target gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited, trans and intersex people.

This year's theme is "Taking Action in Schools". We pay tribute to the many gay-straight alliance groups that meet in schools across Canada, groups that provide safe places for youth to discuss sexuality and plan action supporting equality.

In my riding, I have visited gay-straight alliance groups at Burnaby Mountain, Burnaby North and Moscrop Secondary Schools. Whether straight, gay, lesbian, bi, trans or questioning, group members are learning to be themselves and to stand up for human rights.

On this day we also remember that transsexual and transgender Canadians face daily discrimination and must be explicitly protected by our human rights laws.

Canada's foreign and international human rights policies must also reflect the Montreal declaration and the Yogyakarta principles, which call for worldwide action on equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and intersex people.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day Against Homophobia.

In some ways there is much to celebrate. Canada has made great strides in ensuring equality under the law for gays and lesbians.

I am proud to have played a role in bringing about these significant legislative changes under the last Liberal government.

However, much of the credit must go to the activists within the GLBT community itself. They fought long and hard to bring the bitter realities of their inequality to the attention of Canadians, using the court challenges program to demand their minority rights under the charter.

Today, other minority groups such as transgendered persons, who still face discrimination in law, have no such recourse.

The new Conservative government, like the old Conservative government, cancelled the Liberal initiated court challenges program, effectively denying disadvantaged groups in Canada access to justice.

On this International Day Against Homophobia, we need to remind ourselves that in today's Canada minority groups can no longer take their rights for granted.

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[*Translation*]

QUEBEC

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government claims that Bill C-56 does not threaten its relations with Quebec. However, it should consider the concerns expressed by the National Assembly, which yesterday introduced and unanimously adopted a joint motion calling on the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bills C-56, which will change the number of seats in the Parliament of Canada, and C-43 on the Senate.

The National Assembly is so concerned over the latest events involving the French language that it adopted another motion reiterating the importance of defending and promoting French as an official language of Canada and calling on the government to take action in response to the latest report by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The Bloc Québécois is here to defend the interests of Quebec. The Conservatives had better watch out, because we will always demand that the decisions of the National Assembly be honoured.

Oral Questions

[English]

MEMORIAL CUP

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hockey fans across Waterloo region are ecstatic with the recent announcement that Kitchener has been selected to host the Canada Hockey League's 2008 Memorial Cup.

Kitchener loves hockey. It will be a thrill for hockey fans to watch the best of Canada's young players on the ice at the Aud for our biggest major junior hockey tournament.

We can be sure the Kitchener Rangers will make us proud and Kitchener will turn out in droves to support the hometown team. Already volunteers are signing up to support the Memorial Cup. There is no doubt that all of Kitchener will benefit from hosting this prestigious event.

The Rangers last hosted the Memorial Cup in 1984 and in 1975. The Rangers won it in 1982 and 2003.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating the Kitchener Rangers and the city of Kitchener on being awarded this enormous opportunity. I invite hockey fans to plan to attend Kitchener May 16 to 25, 2008, for the 90th anniversary of the Memorial Cup championship.

* * *

●(1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first a Liberal called for a new national energy policy. Now Liberal candidate for Papineau, Justin Trudeau, is panning capitalism and millions of jobs it creates. Like father, like son.

Two days ago the Liberals went from zero to Bill C-288 in 43 seconds to kill the auto industry. Now Trudeau muses about ending capitalism in the automotive capital of Canada, built by capitalists like Ford and Chrysler. Perhaps Trudeau is revealing a deep dark secret Liberal agenda dating way back to his dad?

The weak Liberal chief will not rein him in like he refused to with his other star mouth, Elizabeth May, for her Nazi hysterics. I guess he concedes no capitalism and no jobs are his Liberal Party's position, and to prove it, the Liberals voted against budget measures to make it easier for industry leaders, a.k.a. capitalists, to create more Canadian jobs.

With his star candidate, the Liberal so-called leader has gone back to the Trudeau days of deep recession and high inflation to chart their future. Canadians just cannot afford the Liberals again.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning, at the official languages committee meeting held in exceptional circumstances, we heard a great deal of poignant

and moving testimony, including the words of Gisèle Lalonde, the great franco-Ontarian who helped to save the Montfort Hospital. She said: "The end of the court challenges program is an assault on the weakest members of our society. If that program had not been there, we, the francophone minority communities, would not be here today".

Is the Prime Minister not moved by that testimony? Will he reinstate the court challenges program?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows, the program is the subject of proceedings in the courts and no comment will be made on it.

That being said, an additional \$30 million has been allocated for promoting the linguistic duality of Canada. The Leader of the Opposition and his party voted against that additional \$30 million.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to object to the false figures that the minister has just given.

The action plan for official languages is \$750 million. In the budget, the government falsely stated that it was \$640 million, to which it added \$30 million, which means it has been cut by \$80 million.

Will the minister do the right thing and put back the missing \$80 million?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is what is false.

The budget allocated to the action plan for official languages provides for \$642 million. The \$100 million the Leader of the Opposition is talking about was money that had been reallocated. The new money is the \$642 million. That is what we kept in place, and we have added \$30 million.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, \$80 million has been cut and taken away from official languages communities. That is the truth.

But the official languages communities are not the only victims of the government's hard-heartedness. Parents of students, unilingual Canadians, women, people with disabilities, racial minorities, the economically disadvantaged and the sick were able to get justice under this program.

Why is the government working so hard to deprive minority groups of access to the protections in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Oral Questions

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is where we see a genuine generous intention when it comes to minority communities: \$30 million additional dollars for the communities. This very morning, with my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, I announced funding of up to \$195,000 for L'écho d'un peuple. These are concrete actions to promote the linguistic duality of Canada.

* * *

[English]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* reports today that Conservatives want to think small. Doing big things makes Canadians uncomfortable they say. This small-mindedness exposes a government that has simply run out of gas and worse, does not understand who Canadians are.

The Conservatives failed to appoint an ombudsman for crime victims—

An hon. member: We appointed one.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: —the ombudsman does not speak French.

They appointed a chairman of the national commission of a bilingual region who is not actually bilingual.

When will the government stop dividing Canadians, think big instead of small, and start understanding who Canadians are?

• (1420)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I could understand the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, having trouble understanding what a real Canadian is since he spent 30 years outside of Canada, in the United States recently.

Let me tell the House what a real Canadian is. A real Canadian is somebody who stands up for middle class taxpayers, who helps working families with lower taxes, who stands behind our troops in Afghanistan, and who does what he said he would do. That is what real Canadians are, and those are Conservatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday members of the National Assembly called on the federal government to take action in response to the latest report of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

This is a call from Quebec for leadership from the federal government to defend linguistic duality in Canada.

I have a very simple question: will the government promise today to adopt all the commissioner's recommendations?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we took good note of the motion passed yesterday at the National Assembly, just as we took good note of the motion passed

by the National Assembly calling on us to correct the fiscal imbalance. And that is what we have done.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister unleashed a wave of discontent in the rest of Canada when he recognized that Quebec forms a nation. To seek forgiveness, he has announced democratic reform that favours western Canada and Ontario over Quebec, which will see a reduction in its political weight.

What reason can the Prime Minister give for reducing the political weight of Quebec except to show his electoral base that recognizing the Quebec nation does not have any real and practical consequences for him?

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. Bill C-56 guarantees Quebec's level of representation. I will quote an article by Gilbert Lavoie published in *Le Soleil*:

There is nothing really new about the [Conservative] government's Bill C-56. The federal government is required, as are the provinces, to review Canada's electoral map after each census and to adjust ridings to reflect demographic changes. As a founding nation, Quebec has a constitutional guarantee: it will never have fewer than 75 members in the House of Commons in Ottawa, even if its population were to decrease.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member should read the same paper and look at the unanimous motion of the National Assembly. I think he would understand something.

This government's Quebec ministers have done nothing to defend the political weight of their nation, the Quebec nation. None have spoken to the motion adopted unanimously in their National Assembly, that of Quebec, which asks this government to withdraw this bill. Only the Bloc Québécois is here to defend the interests of the Quebec nation.

What is this minister waiting for to rise and ask the Prime Minister to withdraw the bill, as requested by all elected members of—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the hon. colleague gets carried away, I would like to say this to him: I do not think he has a great deal of experience in the National Assembly. I can say that I have sat in the National Assembly with other members who are here today.

With regard to defending Quebec's interests, I believe that they are very well served in this House.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has indicated in the past that he respected the will of the National Assembly, which is the supreme body of the nation of Quebec. Yesterday in that assembly, federalists and sovereignists alike voted unanimously against Bill C-56, which would dilute Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. Quebec is therefore calling on the government to withdraw the bill.

Oral Questions

If the Prime Minister truly respects the nation of Quebec and the decisions of its National Assembly, what is he waiting for to withdraw the bill?

• (1425)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, the bill includes guarantees for Quebec. The Leader of the Bloc Québécois invited me to continue to read, so I will continue to read the article in *Le Soleil*.

But the old principle of “one person, one vote” calls for an increase in the number of ridings, and therefore the number of members, in parts of the country experiencing high demographic growth. That is the same principle currently forcing Quebec to review its electoral map, to the great displeasure of regions like the Gaspé or the Lower St. Lawrence, that fear their representation will be diminished—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Papineau.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the ministers and members from Quebec in this government who claim to be defending Quebec. I challenge every one of them to rise and tell us that our National Assembly was wrong to call for the withdrawal of this bill.

Is there a single member of this government who would dare rise and say he does not accept reducing the political weight of our nation in Canada? Is there a single one who has the courage to do so?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative members from Quebec have risen. However, the Bloc Québécois has never been able to do anything for the province of Quebec.

I will continue to read the article:

On the federal scene, it is entirely normal for the provinces, where populations are increasing, to see their representation in the Commons increase. In fact, this is a requirement under section 42 of the Constitution, which establishes the principle of proportional representation of the provinces.

We have guarantees with proportional representation. Quebec's representation is fully guaranteed.

* * *

[English]

INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is running on empty as we sit here today. All it has got left is petty vindictiveness, bullying procedural tactics, filibustering, shutting down opposition debate on important issues. The government is winding down and terminating the good work of committees.

What should the Conservatives be doing? They should be standing up and protecting Canadian industries that have increasingly become the target of foreign takeovers. They should be telling Alcoa that it cannot takeover Alcan unless it guarantees that all of the jobs are protected and unless it moves its world headquarters to Canada. Will they do it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand it when I hear it from the Liberals, but I am surprised when the NDP members start being concerned about the way that things are being conducted. They think that an hour or two

of debate in a committee by a Conservative is a delay and an obstruction.

Let me talk about delay and obstruction. Let me talk about some bills that were at the justice committee. Bill C-10 on mandatory penalties for gun crimes was there for 252 days. That is obstruction and delay. Let us talk about, for example, the criminal procedure bill, Bill C-23. That was at committee for 213 days. Let us talk about the age of protection bill, Bill C-22. That was held up at committee by the opposition for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the government does not care a bit about the takeover of our key industries in this country and that is a sad fact.

[Translation]

The government is responsible for protecting Canadian jobs. Alcoa's takeover of Alcan can be subject to conditions. It would be in Canada's interest and in the interest of workers because Alcan is a Canadian industry flagship.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to ask Alcoa to protect jobs and to make the takeover conditional upon Alcoa moving its headquarters to Canada?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows full well, we have legislation in place that ensures that the best interests of Canada are protected in any such case.

His alarmist approach to concern about takeovers simply is not represented by the facts. There were in fact 660 deals in 2005-06 in which Canadian companies were taken over by foreigners. During the same time there were more, 790 deals, where it was Canadians taking over foreign companies.

We are part of a global economy. I know the NDP would like us to be a little island unto ourselves, but we are a trading nation. We are an international country. We are part of the world. We are doing well because of that. That is why we have got the strongest economy in Canadian history.

* * *

• (1430)

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every summer in my riding 45 to 65 autistic children attend the Yes I Can day camp. For years the summer career placement program has provided up to 30 students working as counsellors at Yes I Can camp.

This week the executive director of the camp learned that the government has rejected its application for the \$38,000 it needs to hire the students. No money, no students, so no camp this summer for 45 children.

Will the minister explain this decision to the parents of those children?

Oral Questions

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. It is an important question.

I want to point out that the same amount of money that was provided last year for not for profit groups is being provided this year. I think that is an important point. Thousands of young people are getting jobs as a result.

This is an important issue. It has come to my attention that some very worthy groups have not been funded. I am asking my department to get to the bottom of it.

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 20 years both the Saint John Y and the Rotary Boys and Girls Club have received funding for summer career training. This year? Denied. More than 50 other Saint John not for profits were denied.

Will the Prime Minister instruct his minister to come to New Brunswick next Tuesday for a meeting about why that meanspirited party is denying students? Why has the Prime Minister let his minister for buzz cuts pull a full monty on our students and our not for profit communities?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I simply have to point out that the Liberals' record is that in the past they cut summer career programming for students many times.

I want to point out that this government has preserved every cent of funding for the not for profit sector. In the member's riding there has been funding for: the Canadian Red Cross; Athletics New Brunswick; ONE Change; the Canada Games Aquatic Centre; the Heart and Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick; the Atlantic Centre of Excellence; the Saint John YMCA; the Victorian Order of Nurses; the Ruth Ross Residence; Hospice Saint John, and many others.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision of the Conservative government to cut \$55 million from the Liberal summer student placements program is affecting more than 120 organizations in Vancouver. Many of these organizations employ students and train them and still have not heard. Semesters have ended and university students still have not heard. High school students still have not heard if they are going to get jobs.

Silence, that is all the government has for them. How long is the government going to let incompetence and ideology hurt real people?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will set aside the irony of hearing that member talk about incompetence.

The fact is that we have preserved every cent of funding to the not for profit sector. It is that member who should apologize for misleading the House with respect to the amount of funding that is going to the not for profit sector. Every cent has been preserved. The member should explain why her government repeatedly cut funding to students.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the devastating effects of this government's decision to cut the summer employment program for students are already being felt in Hull—Aylmer.

Many requests were simply rejected this year. Organizations whose requests were turned down include the Aylmer Museum, Entre deux rous, which helps people in wheelchairs, and the Outaouais seniors' foundation.

What is the government hoping to accomplish with this move? What does it have against students, people with disabilities, seniors and culture? What does it have against the Outaouais' community organizations?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is something the member does not understand. Groups do not automatically receive funding. They apply every year. If they meet the criteria and provide students with good summer jobs, that funding will flow, and it has. It will flow to the tune of \$77.3 million for the not for profit sector this year alone.

I wish the member really would find the integrity to tell the truth about this program.

* * *

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Quebec National Assembly passed another unanimous motion demanding that decisive action be taken to defend and promote French. An example of such action that had proven its worth was most assuredly the court challenges program.

Will the minister, who claims to concern herself with the conditions facing francophones, reinstate that program, which would be a good start?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect for my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, the fact remains that concrete action will come from this side of the House and certainly not from the benches of the Bloc Québécois, who will never be able to do anything for official language minority communities outside Quebec and within Canada. We allocated \$30 million in additional support to the program for the promotion of linguistic duality. This morning, funding of \$195,000 was announced for L'écho d'un peuple.

I invite hon. Bloc members to get out of Quebec and see this fabulous—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Gatineau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we must stop taking Canada's Acadians and francophones hostage. They have rights because they exist, and not because Quebec is part of Canada.

Gisèle Lalonde said that she could never have saved the Montfort Hospital, the only French speaking hospital in Ontario, without the help of the court challenges program.

Will the minister please stop telling francophones that their rights matter, but they are about to lose their means of defending them?

Oral Questions

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are giving official language minority communities additional means for concrete action. This is a great deal more than the Bloc Québécois can do for communities outside Quebec. The Bloc has never put pressure on the Parti Québécois to bring Quebec to the table of the ministerial conference of the Francophonie, which would have been useful to communities outside Quebec.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a document prepared by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 2006 but never made public by the government reports that there is a shortfall of \$938 million for basic services for first nations for 2007-08.

In light of this, can the minister explain why the budget does not include this \$938 million when we know the abysmal state of many aboriginal communities across Canada?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to review any document that my hon. colleague might have in his possession, but as he well knows, the budget this year for the Government of Canada includes \$10.2 billion in expenditures for aboriginal programs and services. This is \$1 billion more than any previous budget on the part of the Government of Canada.

Those are the facts. I would be pleased to discuss this further with him.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I invite the minister to look again at the documents in his file. I am talking about basic services like primary education, drinking water, infrastructure, income support and housing. These are basic needs.

How can the minister knowingly deprive the first nations of \$938 million when we know the deplorable conditions in which aboriginal communities are forced to live because of this minister's mismanagement?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the questions from the hon. opposition member, but we disagree with him on this issue.

This year, the budget includes \$10 billion for federal aboriginal programs. This government is working with Canada's aboriginal peoples under many programs for women, youth and other aboriginal individuals.

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● (1440)

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives do not seem to understand that their cuts to the

summer career placement program have had serious repercussions on a number of organizations.

In my riding, the Fondation de la Maison des arts de Laval, the Musée des Enfants de Laval and Tourisme Laval will all feel a major impact. What does the government have to say in response to the letter from the president of the Musée des Enfants de Laval, who asks: "How can anyone have so little regard for children, culture and education?"

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member would raise this issue. When she was answering questions on this very issue when she was on this side of the House, she suggested that students should just stay in school as a way of dealing with the cutbacks the Liberals brought in. I can provide the member with the quote.

The real issue, though, is that every year thousands of groups are denied because there are always more applications than there are resources, but we are preserving every cent of the funding for the not for profit sector and we are ensuring that students are getting a quality work experience.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years the Oakville Economic Development Alliance has employed summer students to staff its tourism centre, but yesterday it was told it did not qualify for funding this year.

This is the first time it has ever been refused funding by the federal government and now it does not know how its centre will be staffed. Just as the tourism season heats up, why has the government left the Oakville tourism centre in the lurch?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada summer jobs project is part of youth employment strategies designed to get students the best possible work experience they can get, but we are also operating in a context where we have the lowest unemployment rates in just about 40 years.

We are continuing to make sure that those in the not for profit sector are provided with \$77.3 million in funding, which is exactly what that sector received last year. If they guarantee that quality work experience, they get the funding.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives strike again, targeting the most vulnerable in society by gutting the Liberals' summer career placements program.

In my riding of Brampton—Springdale, the family day care centre was denied; Habitat for Humanity, denied; the Bramalea Christian Fellowship Church, denied. Last summer they hired over 60 summer students. This year, under this Conservative government, they have received nothing.

The students of Brampton—Springdale have a message for this government: "You're fired".

Why is this government not standing up for students and non-profit organizations?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it may not be fair to point this out because the member may not have all the information, but in her riding, St. John Ambulance was approved. As well, there are: Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Peel, approved; Canadian Mental Health Association, approved; Community Environment Alliance, approved; Harvest Worship Centre, approved; and Jesus First Ministries, approved.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister claims that student job money for my province is the same this year as it was last year. He is wrong.

There are not so many Safeways or Wal-Marts in Newfoundland and Labrador as the minister alludes to, but there is Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, where 25 students last year had high tech jobs in science and technology as research assistants. There were 25 and this year there are none.

Since those students probably will not be going back to university this fall because of that minister, will he go back to school this fall and rediscover his ABCs, anything but Conservative?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would have to say is stranger in the House.

I want to point out that in the member's riding we provided funding for: the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council; the Stephenville Theatre Festival; Big Brothers and Big Sisters; Deer Lake & District Literacy Council; Books for Babies; Baie Verte Peninsula Family Resource Program; the Canadian Cancer Society, West Haven Camp; and the Family Outreach Centres. There is a very long list.

I want to remind the member that when his government was in power, it actually cut programming for students across the country. He really should be ashamed.

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●(1445)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the U.S. have long cooperated to maintain mutually beneficial defence trade controls. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, the U.S. amended its international traffic in arms regulations to impose stricter rules governing military procurements.

Despite harmful economic and strategic implications for Canada, the Liberals did nothing to respond. Could the Minister of National Defence update the House on how Canada's new government is protecting Canada's national interests?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that we have a new ITAR agreement with the United States. We are the only country that has secured such an arrangement.

Unlike the former Liberal government, which ignored the problem, we are getting things done.

Oral Questions

We sought and achieved a solution that supports common security objectives. This is good news for the Canadian Forces, ensuring that we can continue to move forward with the purchase of critical equipment for our troops. This arrangement is the first phase in resolving a complex issue for both governments and industry.

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AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives filibustered for two hours today to prevent a wounded veteran and a law professor from testifying at the ethics committee.

It is more than just human rights reports that are being covered up. The Minister of Public Safety talks about the work that Correctional Service Canada officers are doing in Kandahar, but what he does not mention is that their reports have been censored, totally censored.

What is it that the government is hiding? Why is it censoring the reports? Canadians have a right to know.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course it is always a challenge when members ask questions of three different ministers in one question, but I will do my best on the first part.

I do not know about the filibuster. I know there was some debate. I know that the witnesses she is concerned about are testifying. At least that is what I have been told, but perhaps she has been told otherwise.

That is the way we do things on this side of the House. We get the job done. We do not delay justice bills for 270 days or 175 days because we actually do not want to get tough on crime. We try to take action on this side, regardless of a year-long effort by the opposition to filibuster every meaningful part of our government agenda.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just like it censored and denied access to the human rights reports that were put out by foreign affairs showing that the government was fully aware of the possibility of torture and killings in Afghan prisons, the Department of Foreign Affairs has completely blanked out the report from the corrections officers. It is totally blank. Nothing is in it.

What is the government hiding? What was in the report? Why is it censoring every report that comes out from Afghanistan?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. I dare say that we have the most transparent, open and forthright government that this country has seen in an awfully long time.

As evidence of that, one only need look at the efforts that have been made by this government to be more transparent. One only need look back to 2002.

By the way, these reports are for internal circulation and are redacted internally. This is not something that happens at the political level. I can understand the member opposite from the NDP not knowing that but certainly members on the other side of the House did the same thing since 2002 when the mission began.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's incompetent handling of the Afghan detainees has raised its ugly head again.

Last week the Conservatives tried to prevent witnesses from being called before a committee to answer questions about why foreign affairs first denied the existence of a report on abuse in Afghan prisons and then blacked out much of its disturbing content. Today, Conservative members prevented these witnesses from giving evidence.

The Prime Minister has said that none of his ministers were responsible for the cover-up. Why are the Conservative committee members now helping out in this cover-up?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would know a lot about cover-ups, of course, with his involvement previously in keeping information private around the sponsorship scandal. However, the process to which he is referring has not changed one iota.

I know he likes to take up a rarefied air in this auspicious chamber but he knows, having been a government member, that nothing has changed. The process for these reports, which are circulated internally within interdepartmental circulation, has not changed nor has the redaction. The member knows full well that this process took place under his government.

● (1450)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next time maybe he can talk about Mr. Schreiber.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister refuses to admit that he is responsible for the cover-up concerning the Foreign Affairs report on Afghan prisoners. The Minister of Foreign Affairs admits to us that he does not read his mail and says that his staff had nothing to do with it. As for the Minister of National Defence, well, his phone seems to be out of service. We are witnessing a planned cover-up. No one wants the truth about this damning report to get out. Canadians deserve the truth.

What is the government afraid of?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, I invite the member to ask Marc Lalonde about the individual he just mentioned, and I know I can read because I read the book which he has referenced at least 10 times in reference to the sponsorship scandal. I will say it again that the process with respect to redaction and with respect to internal reports has not changed.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We must have some order. The member for Bourassa has asked a question and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responding and we need to be able to hear the response. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor and we will have some order, please.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the process, we have obviously enhanced the original arrangement where there were shortcomings. We have made these reports available.

I can also tell the member that I wish him very well in his lawsuit with Mr. Doan.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we waited several days for an answer from the foreign affairs minister. A few days ago we got one and it was totally unacceptable.

He said that his government would not bring a foreign affairs subcommittee motion on Iran to the courts because it would give Iran's president a platform to proclaim his noxious views. Why then do we have courts at all?

If somebody says something repugnant, do we just let him go? Do we not bring him to his proper justice? The more repugnant is the more we do not do anything; that makes no sense. We deserve a far better answer from the foreign minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question by the member opposite is very reminiscent of his admonition of his leader during leadership debates. They did deserve better.

With respect to this committee report, clearly the sentiments expressed by the member opposite are shared on this side of the House. We completely condemn the comments of President Ahmadinejad. These are distasteful, disgusting comments that incite hatred.

This government has done something about that. We have raised this issue at the United Nations. We are prepared to work with members opposite if they will stop with their petty political nitpicking.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the minister is hiding behind a political rant. That was no answer.

Following his logic, does this mean that we would not bring the great villains of the past to court because of what they might say about the Jews, the Tutsis or the ethnic minorities in Cambodia or Bosnia?

Oral Questions

We do not hide ignorance, we confront it. We get it to expose itself in front of the world, embarrass it and show it for what it is.

Will the minister and his government support that motion?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what political posturing, what bombastic baloney from the member opposite.

This is the government that stood up for Israel during a time of need. This is the government that has repeatedly and consistently stood strong for human rights around the world.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite, from that past government that shrank in the face of adversity when the human rights of Canadians abroad were at risk.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development claims an intent to better focus the funding of the new Canada summer jobs program. In his remarks yesterday, he attempted to distort reality by trying to run down the groups and activities funded under the old program.

Does the minister really believe that projects mainly involving organizations working with the disabled, culture, tourism activities and youth camps do not deserve financial assistance?

•(1455)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. These groups do tremendous work, and no one questions that. As I said to my colleague across the way, I will look at some of these projects or I will have my department look at some of them.

However, I would remind the member that Canada summer jobs is part of the youth employment strategy and it is designed to give students the best possible work experience so they can take it and parlay it into successful careers.

I do not think anyone would argue about that being a very worthy end for a program.

* * *

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 30, the CRTC announced a 5% increase in regional telephone charges. The decision by the Minister of Industry to deregulate the telephone services sector is directly responsible for that increase. The Bloc Québécois had predicted that the rural regions would get it in the neck if there were deregulation. And so they have.

Does the minister realize that there is no other solution, if he wants to avoid penalizing the regions still further, than to backtrack on his decision?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decision reached by this government to put the consumer in the forefront of telecommunications reform is a good one. I would like to see support from the Bloc Québécois because, as early as this coming September, in all major Canadian centres we will be seeing lower telephone charges, competition and wider choices for all consumers. This is what the government has done, unlike the Bloc Québécois, which has been sitting on the opposition benches for 13 years now and has done absolutely nothing for Quebec consumers.

* * *

[English]

MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity boasted that he had attended more than 100 meetings, events and celebrations with dozens of communities and organizations across the country in the four months that he has been on the job.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Churchill has the floor.

Ms. Tina Keeper: However, Mr. Speaker, there are no records of any of these trips in the proactive disclosure that he is required to file by law.

Could the secretary of state tell the House how much his meetings have cost? We will pay for them if he tells us where are they posted.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know members like to cheer the minister on but he stood to answer the question and everyone wants to hear the answer. We will now hear from the minister. Order, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank the member opposite for giving me an opportunity to highlight my efforts to ensure that the Government of Canada is close to and listening to our ethnocultural communities in a way that the Liberals never did.

I want to tell the member that whether it is our redress for the Chinese head tax, cutting the right of landing fee in half or any of our work with these communities, we have delivered more in 15 months than the Liberals did in 13 years.

As it relates to my expenses, all of them have been submitted and will be posted by departmental officials in full accordance with the rules.

*Points of Order***AGRICULTURE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is getting things done for all Canadians. Whether they are anglophones or francophones, urban Canadians or rural Canadians, people right across the country are seeing the results of the hard won efforts of this Conservative government.

Today the Minister of Agriculture assigned responsibility for the rural and co-op secretariat to the Secretary of State for Agriculture. Would the secretary of state tell us how he plans to help farmers and other rural Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

[*English*]

Under the strong leadership of this Minister of Agriculture, farmers throughout the land now have a voice here in Ottawa.

[*Translation*]

I am very proud of my new responsibilities for the rural and cooperatives secretariats. I am from a rural region and I want to see our regions succeed.

Today I announced \$3.25 million in funding for agricultural cooperatives producing biofuels.

We are working for the farmers, we are working for the regions, and we are working for the environment.

* * *

[*English*]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of removing politics from the summer jobs program, the Conservatives have removed the funding for the summer jobs. Because of the millions of dollars cut from the summer jobs program, fewer jobs will be created. Canada's most vulnerable youth in communities have been cut off. Museums, parks and a little league programs for disabled children have been rejected.

Would the minister tell us, for every one job his inadequate program creates, how many more jobs are lost because of his cuts?

• (1500)

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject that characterization. We have maintained every cent of funding for the not for profit sector; \$77.3 million. I note from the committee transcripts this morning that the member for Trinity—Spadina actually lauded us on our approach regarding criteria, and I thank her for that support.

I note that there are sometimes examples of groups that perhaps should receive funding and I have asked my department to get to the bottom of this. We do want to ensure that worthy groups and good students get opportunities, and they will.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one does not solve the problem by cutting. For every job the minister has cited today, there will be thousands of students left unemployed because of the government. The employers that the minister is rejecting are

the backbone of our communities. Everybody loses with these cuts: students, families and the economy.

Under the Liberals the program was inadequate, but the Conservative government has made it worse.

Will the minister tell the House how many students will go without work this summer because, with a \$10 billion surplus, the government cut funding for student summer jobs?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first answer is that many students will not go looking for work this year because we have the lowest unemployment rate in just about 40 years. I think that is pretty important to point out.

However, we have maintained the funding for the not for profit sector at \$77.3 million and we have changed the criteria and some members in the NDP seem to like that idea.

The member should also have the integrity to acknowledge that the funding has been preserved for the not for profit sector. It does not flatter her when she misleads the House that way.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises out of question period. During the course of question period, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development repeatedly referred to and read from a list of projects pertaining to the summer jobs for students program.

Since he has that list in his hands at this moment and since he referred to it repeatedly and read from it explicitly in question period, would the minister be good enough, under the rules, to table that list now in the House of Commons?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have my preparation for question period. I do not think it is the usual practice to share our notes for question period. However, all of this will soon be made public on the Internet. He is certainly free to scan this and use it in whatever way he finds suitable.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that members ought to be entitled to know what summer job grants are being given in their ridings. The minister is here citing from a list he obviously has. Perhaps what he is telling us is that he has not got the complete list with him, but surely he has access to it.

Why would he be saying that members ought not to have access to that list, that the public ought not to know immediately what are in those lists and what grants have been given out in each of the ridings of all the members of the House?

The Speaker: Order, please. I do not think I need to hear more on this point. The minister has indicated the list will be made available on the Internet in due course. How soon that is, I do not know, but members can ask the minister questions about that tomorrow in question period and seek to ascertain when the material will become available.

Business of the House

I will look at the question and examine it to see if this in fact has been made public before and if not making it public at this point constitutes a breach.

It is time for the Thursday question, then we can move on to other procedural matters, of which I have notice of several.

* * *

• (1505)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would be good enough to outline the business that he has in mind for tomorrow and for the week of May 28, when the House returns.

Could he also advise the House of the business specifically that he hopes to see completed in that next sitting period, which would be the last one before the longer summer break? It would be useful for members to know the particular items the government House leader is anxious to see completed in that timeframe.

Finally, could he enlighten the House as to how he thinks the business of Parliament is expedited by the constant filibustering in a number of committees by members of the government.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to make an effort to answer all those questions. It could go on for a long time, but I will do my best.

• (1510)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Don't filibuster.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I would not do that.

Tomorrow is an allotted day.

Next week is constituent consultation week, when the House will be adjourned to allow members to return to their ridings and meet with constituents to share with them the activities of Parliament since the last constituency break.

For the interest of members, I will quickly review our plan for the context of our overall legislative agenda.

As he requested, this is currently strengthening the economy week, where a number of financial bills moved forward. The budget bill was sent to committee and, hopefully, it will be reported back tomorrow, or soon, so we can deal with it at third reading when the House returns after the break.

Bill C-40, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act, was read a third time and sent to the Senate. Bill C-53, an act to implement the convention on the settlement of investment disputes, Bill C-33, the sales tax bill and Bill C-47, the Olympics symbol bill were all sent to committee and we all would like to see those back in the House for report stage and third reading.

In an earlier week, Bill C-36, the bill that makes changes to the Canada pension plan and the Old Age Security Act, was made into law after receiving royal assent.

Strengthening accountability through democratic reform week was a success with the consideration of Bill C-43, Senate

consultation. We had three new democratic reform bills introduced that week: Bill C-55, to expand voting opportunities; Bill C-56, an act to amend the Constitution Act, democratic representation; and Bill C-54, a bill that would bring accountability with respect to loans. We hope to continue debate on that particular bill later today.

Bill C-16, fixed dates for elections, was given royal assent and is now law, which I think is the cause of the commotion now in all the committees where Liberals are using procedural tactics. Now they feel they can do it with a free hand.

Two other democratic reform bills are in the Senate, Bill C-31, voter integrity, and Bill S-4, Senate tenure. I really would like to have the term limits bill from the Senate for an upcoming democratic reform week if the opposition House leader can persuade his colleagues in the Senate to finally deal with that bill after 352 days. We may get 352 seconds in a filibuster, but they have had 352 days so far. They have been stalling for a year.

During the consultation week, I will be interested in hearing what our constituents think of the plight of Bill S-4 and the irony of those unaccountable senators delaying it.

We dedicated a good deal of our time focusing on making our streets and communities safer by cracking down on crime. Now that we have had the help of the NDP, we restored the meaningful aspects that the Liberals gutted in committee to Bill C-10, the bill to introduce mandatory penalties for violent and gun crimes. We are continuing to debate that bill today at third reading.

Bill C-48, the bill dealing with the United Nations convention on corruption, was adopted at all stages.

Bill C-26, the bill to amend the Criminal Code with respect to interest rates, was given royal assent.

Bill C-22, the age of protection, was given final reading and sent to the Senate, although it did spend close to, if not in excess of, 200 days in committee where the Liberals were obstructing and delaying its passage.

We made progress on Bill C-27, the dangerous offenders legislation. We would like to see that back in the House.

Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment) and a host of other justice bills are working their way through the system.

Privilege

Members can advise their constituents that when we return, we will be reviving two themes, back by popular demand. Beginning May 28, we will begin again with strengthening accountability through democratic reform with: Bill C-54, political loans; Bill C-55, additional opportunities for voting; and Bill C-56, democratic representation.

Up next is a second go-round on strengthening the economy week with Bill C-52, the budget implementation bill, which will be called as soon as it is reported back from committee.

[*Translation*]

In the near future, we will have the improvement of aboriginal people quality of life week with Bill C-44. This bill will grant first nations residing on Indian reserves access to the Canadian charter of human rights. They have been denied this right for 30 years. Unfortunately, Bill C-44 is being delayed by the opposition. This is another bill being delayed by the opposition in committee.

After Bill C-44, I intend to debate Bill C-51. The agreement establishes the use and ownership of land and resources and will foster economic development. This bill illustrates Canada's commitment to the North and to settling land claims.

[*English*]

I wish all members a productive constituent consultation week and look forward to more progress on the government's legislative agenda when the House returns on May 28.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, once again we have seen the tendency of the government to filibuster itself.

I point out to the House that when the typical Thursday question is asked, it usually takes the House leader for the opposition something less than one minute, respecting the prerogatives, timing and tradition of the House. I trust in future that the question will be allowed something in the order of five minutes so there can be a little fairness shown, obviously in response to the government's tendency to filibuster everything.

If the government House leader is looking for an explanation as to why the atmosphere around this place has tended to sour in the last little while, he might just look in the mirror.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I say in a spirit of generosity, I knew the member was going to ask the context of the legislation that we wished to complete in the balance of our time here. Had that not been held up in committee so long, the list would not have taken so long to read?

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find the opposition House leader has asked what is called the usual Thursday question in an attempt to determine the future business of the House for the week to follow.

The reply of the government House leader I can only describe as disingenuous. He has taken the opportunity to give a speech about virtually the entire government agenda, of which he may be very proud, but which was not the purpose of the question.

If these kinds of liberties are going to be continued to be taken by the government House leader, it may destroy the whole purpose of

the Thursday question. He should take that into account, and I think you should too, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but think the hon. member did not hear the opposition House leader pose his question. He asked, in addition to next week, what other aspects of the government's agenda did we wish to see completed before we finished the session for the summer.

This happens to be a fairly ambitious agenda. That is the nature of this government. He may not like seeing a government that wants to get things done, but the reality is I was answering the question he asked.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I refer to Standing Order 18, which states: "No member shall...use offensive words against either House, or against any Member thereof".

I therefore respectfully submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development attacked my integrity when attempting to answer my question. When I stand up to the Conservative government to defend the interests of students, seniors, the disabled, and the cultural and community organizations of the Outaouais, among others, I am very proud of my integrity.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the comment to which the member is referring. He might wish to repeat so we could respond more appropriately. Otherwise, I would ask that we be given an opportunity for the Minister of Human Resources to return to respond to it.

Certainly, though, when it comes to question period in terms of attacks on integrity and character, I know where they come from mostly.

The Speaker: We will leave the matter for the moment. I am sure all hon. members will have a look at the record.

The chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MINISTER'S LETTER TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of personal privilege.

Privilege

As members of Parliament, we carry out our everyday work following a code and a set of ethics. I have had the good fortune of having been here for almost 19 years. This is my first experience that I have seen a minister telling committee members how to do their work. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration sent a letter to all members of the committee intimidating us as to how we carry on our work. I would like to refer to a few passages from the letter. It reads:

Some of the questions during May 2nd appearance related to matters on which public servants cannot testify. For reasons of clarification, and so that all understand the parameters around such appearances, I have taken the step of instructing my Deputy Minister to provide the following information to departmental officials, prior to their next appearance before the Committee.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, this is telling civil servants not to be accountable to this House. It continues:

Public servants are to assist the standing committee by factually answering questions, but are to explain rather than defend or debate policies. Thus, for example, they can provide information on how a particular program or policy is implemented; questions relating to whether the program or policy can or should be changed is the exclusive realm of a Minister.

The minister is there and taking advice of her bureaucrats. Certainly this does not jibe. It continues:

—I will ask that my Deputy Minister indicate that, if the witnesses have any doubt about answering a question put to them by the Committee members, they should not answer immediately, but provide a response, in writing, at a later date. This may delay the Committee receiving full and complete answers to legitimate questions, but as it is your intention to swear them in, this guidance is for their protection.

As I said, this is the first time that I have seen a minister act that way, but it is not unusual. It clearly demonstrates that the minister is trying to muzzle the committee.

As this is a repeated circumstance by the Conservative government in this current Parliament, I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you investigate this matter. I feel that my privileges have been infringed and trampled upon by the minister. I am asking that you look into this matter and respond back to this House.

• (1515)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

The hon. member accused me of instructing witnesses from my department of withholding information. This is a very serious allegation, as intimidation of witnesses is clearly inappropriate.

I submit that the member's question of privilege is not valid for two reasons. First, there is no evidence that the situation described by the hon. member constitutes a prima facie breach of privilege. At most, this is a debate about the interpretation of facts. Second, this concerns proceedings at the standing committee. Since the standing committee has not presented a report on this matter, this matter cannot be considered in the House as a valid question of privilege.

Now if I may present the factual situation, Mr. Speaker, the citizenship and immigration committee was hearing witnesses from my department during a committee meeting on May 2, 2007. During this meeting the atmosphere and manner of questioning the departmental witnesses was hostile and some of the witnesses felt intimidated.

As the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I wrote to the chair of the committee, copying the members, following this meeting, expressing my concern over the intimidation of witnesses. I informed the chair that I had instructed the deputy minister of the department to instruct any future witnesses from the department that they should put their response in writing at a later date if they were in doubt of information that was required at the time of the questioning. I also instructed the deputy minister to indicate to future witnesses that they should not tolerate instances of inappropriate ways of questioning.

This was an attempt to ensure the well running of the committee and the well-being of my departmental officials.

Here is the \$10,000 question. It is the procedural point.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that this cannot be a valid question of privilege at this time since the citizenship and immigration committee has not presented a report to the House on this matter. Page 128 of Marleau and Montpetit states:

Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from the committee which directly deals with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual Member.

As the citizenship and immigration committee has not reported on this matter, I submit that this is not a valid question of privilege at this time.

• (1520)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo also gave notice on the same point, I believe.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question relates to the same letter dated May 16, 2007 sent to the chair of the committee and copied to all members of the committee.

My question of privilege flows from an attempt by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to intimidate the standing committee on the subject by limiting the testimony of witnesses appearing before it.

The minister's letter dated May 16, 2007 proposes to put in place guidelines and severe limitations on the testimony of witnesses. These proposed limitations are contrary to the law, privileges and customs of Parliament. They amount to a serious breach of my privileges as a member of Parliament and to the privilege of the House itself.

I want to be clear in stating that the committees are entitled to seek information from witnesses through both testimony and evidence. In this context, where public servants are called upon to testify, there must be a way to ensure that committees obtain the information they require while respecting the public servants' professional duty to the crown.

The minister will want to look at the appropriate provisions of the Parliament of Canada Act which specifically authorize committees to swear in witnesses. An attempt to deny that part of the law is an assault on my privilege and those of every member of the committee and of the House.

Privilege

Furthermore, the language in the minister's letter regarding the style of questioning is nothing short of offensive to the committee and also a breach of my privilege as a member of the committee, in that it claims the committee members harassed, demeaned, belittled, humiliated and embarrassed witnesses. All these qualifiers are grossly exaggerated.

In fact, in part of my presentation to the committee, I commended one of the witnesses, Mr. Davidson, rather than criticize him. I commended Mr. Davidson for pointing out to the committee that the previous Liberal government had budgeted \$20 million for producing a new updated Citizenship Act and how the Conservative government withdrew that funding.

The principle at stake is the ability of members of Parliament in a standing committee to carry out their legislative work and to fulfill their duties as members of Parliament, independent of the government of the day.

Upon reviewing the minister's letter and checking the minutes of the standing committee meeting of May 2, 2007, I am sure you will find a prima facie case for breach of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

I will table the letter in question with you, Sir.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to the point raised by the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

I begin my comments by saying that I am a new member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. This was in fact the first full meeting that I had attended of that committee. What I found at that committee that day was absolutely shocking.

First of all, I believe that both members have not presented a prima facie case for a question of privilege. What the minister has done is to instruct junior officials to be careful witnesses and to be careful in the information that they relay to parliamentarians to ensure that members on that committee get good information. Of course they are going to be very careful witnesses because members opposite made a big production about swearing in those junior officials of the department. It was an incredibly intimidating meeting for the junior officials that appeared before our committee.

The mood of the entire meeting was most distasteful. The junior officials were berated. If anyone is guilty of intimidation of a committee, it is the member for Scarborough—Agincourt. It is also the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country and also the member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, if you were to look at the blues from that committee meeting on that day, you would be shocked and amazed at some of the tactics used by members of the opposition to berate junior officials. These officials are good public servants who go to work every day and do their jobs and pay their taxes and raise their families.

At that meeting we dealt with lost Canadians. The only motives of these officials were to deal with this matter and to help to identify who falls within the realm of a lost Canadian. They are doing an incredible job, despite receiving tens of thousands of phone calls. I believe they are down to 75 individuals who are in dispute as to

whether or not they are lost Canadians. They are doing an incredible job.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to check the blues from that committee, the word "liar" was thrown out many times by members opposite. The member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country accused the officials of being guilty of a snow job. He said that he knew a snow job when he heard it and they were guilty of creating a snow job that day at committee.

Those poor officials were berated by members of the opposition. I want to commend the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for standing up for these good public servants, for standing up for these officials and saying to them that if they are not sure of their answer, to take some time, make sure they get it right and then get back to the committee.

There were only three people in that room that day that were guilty of intimidation. They are the members opposite that I have already mentioned. I want to congratulate the minister.

This clearly is not a point of privilege.

• (1525)

Hon. Jim Karyiannis: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, my colleague only joined the committee that particular day. He is not aware of what happened the first time that the minister came to the committee.

In the same vein, a question was asked of the minister and also was asked of a senior official, none other than the deputy minister, and the question was very plain, "Have you advertised?" The minister, not knowing, looked at the deputy minister and the deputy minister said, "I assure you we have advertised".

Later on the deputy minister sent out a letter apologizing for misleading us. He even sent me a personal letter because I put the question to him, apologizing personally for having misled me.

The whole thing on this file, and I did not raise the file here today on the report, I raised the request for you, Sir, to take a look at this letter and how it is intimidating.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to examine the blues. If the minister wants to examine the blues and my colleague from Palliser wants to examine the blues, do nothing else but examine the whole thing. This has done nothing else but to trample and infringe on the rights of the members of the committee.

The Speaker: I am prepared to deal with this matter immediately. I have heard enough. We are getting away off the point of a question of privilege and getting into what happened in the committee which in my view is irrelevant to this issue.

We have here a case where the minister has sent a letter to all the committee members from the copy that I have received. It is marked "copy" to all the members of the committee. It is addressed to the chairman of the committee. It is dealing with the giving of evidence before the committee.

It is not a matter of the privileges of the members of the House. It is a matter for the committee to decide whether this directive is something that is satisfactory to the committee. That discussion must take place in the committee and not here on the floor of the House.

It is not for me to decide what evidence committees hear or what restrictions the committee may put on members or what restrictions the minister may be allegedly putting on witnesses who are appearing before the committee.

The minister is entitled to give directions to her employees in the department. She is entitled to write to the committee and express her views and pass on to it what she is telling the people in her department. It is for the committee then to make decisions whether or not this is satisfactory to the committee and its members, and not for Speaker on a question of privilege in the House.

If the committee reports that in some way its ability to do its work has been restricted or impeded, that is another matter and it will be dealt with by the House if such a report should come to the House, as the minister has pointed out.

However, it is not for me today to make a decision on whether the minister's letter constitutes a breach of members' privileges. It does not, it cannot, unless the committee finds that in some way its ability to do its job has been impeded or impaired. We have had no such finding from the committee.

I am not going to hear a whole lot more argument about what happened in the committee in terms of answers to questions. That is simply not the business of the Speaker, nor in my view is it the business of the House at least until such time as the House receives a report from the committee indicating some problem.

I urge hon. members to raise this matter in committee. They can have a fulsome discussion there. The chairman of the committee has the letter. There is nothing secret about it. The discussion can take place in committee and in my opinion, that is exactly where it ought to take place.

Therefore, I cannot find a question of privilege here today.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that 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, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine had the floor. She has seven minutes for her remarks. She now has the floor to speak on this bill.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to resume where I had to interrupt my remarks. The Liberal Party of Canada is not against minimum sentences. However, it considers that they do not represent the best way to combat crime in Canada. That is why we believed that Bill C-10, as amended in committee, constituted an excellent compromise because it dealt in a serious and coherent manner with major crime in Canada. As I have explained, this compromise was destroyed by the deplorable union of the Conservatives and NDP.

Government Orders

Without trivializing crime and the problem of access to weapons, the bill, newly amended by the Conservatives and the NDP, serves to establish and reinforce the neo-conservative ideology that is trying to impose itself in this House. It promotes increases in mandatory minimum sentences, so generously used but really only effective in very specific circumstances. It is important to mention that the Liberal Party in no way opposes minimum sentences but like a majority of the stakeholders in the criminal law community, it considers that they must be limited in use to already existing offences. They cannot constitute a new response to crime management.

Finally, I must remind members that the Liberal Party proposed a multitude of amendments designed to improve the original bill during discussion in committee. We tried the same thing at the report stage. Unfortunately, this government and its loyal allies in the NDP obstinately voted against my party's initiatives on this issue. That is why the value of their joint bill is so diminished.

I therefore invite my fellow members to reject Bill C-10 at third reading, in large part, because of the amendments adopted at the report stage.

[*English*]

“The fight against criminals won't be won with more police officers and bigger jails”. That is not only my view and that of my Liberal colleagues. It is a quote from Ben Anderson, spokesman for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

If front line witnesses of crimes, victims of crimes, our police in Canada, consider that crime needs to be tackled through social development in large part, maybe it is time for this government to show leadership in that direction. I suggest that effective justice is more than just a slogan.

I would like to talk about what a new Liberal government would do.

We would immediately convene a round table meeting of the federal, provincial and territorial ministers, together with representatives of key organizations representing the police, to commence discussions on developing a long term, sustainable, cost-sharing arrangement for additional police officers. This is a step the Conservatives have refused to take despite their campaign promise to hire more police officers.

We, a new Liberal government, would give the RCMP money for 400 additional officers to help local police departments deal with guns and gang activity as well as organized crime and drug trafficking.

We would ensure that more money is made available to the provinces to hire more Crown prosecutors or Crown attorneys. We would continue to support, as we have done, the reverse onus bail hearings for those arrested for gun crimes.

We would establish a fund that would help at-risk communities cover the costs of security of their places of worship and other gathering places, whether it be schools, community centres, for instance, which was started by the previous Liberal government but which has been abandoned by the Conservatives.

Government Orders

We Liberals would strive to set up organized crime secretariats, like Ontario's anti-guns and gangs task force, in every province, ensuring that each of the provincial secretariats would be seamlessly integrated across the country, kind of like organized crime is. But the Conservative government does not seem to realize that.

A Liberal government would also strengthen legislation aimed at preventing Internet luring. While passage of the above-mentioned bill would assist law enforcement in tracking down predators who use new technologies, new offences are needed to address explicit online conversations initiated by adults with children that are intended to groom the child for future attempts at luring the child.

We would also act on the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner to update and toughen current legislation to deter and prevent identity theft.

There were almost 8,000 reports of identity theft in the past year, resulting in losses greater than \$16 million. Too often, the victims have been seniors whose lifetime of hard work and savings can vanish in an instant.

A new Liberal government would also amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA, to make it mandatory for organizations to notify people of data breaches involving their personal information. We would act immediately to implement all 22 recommendations made by the federal task force on spam, which have been completely ignored by that Conservative government.

These recommendations include: introducing legislation that would make it an offence to use false or misleading headers or subject lines, construct false or misleading URLs and websites for the purpose of collecting personal information under false pretenses, and the harvesting of email addresses without consent.

Those are just some of the initiatives that a new Liberal government has made a public commitment that it would implement immediately upon return to power.

However, I want to come back to Bill C-10. The Conservatives use retail politics when it comes to the fight on crime. They are not using effective measures that really would result in effective justice because were they doing so, they would be listening to the experts, and the experts, yes, include our law enforcement.

• (1535)

What does our law enforcement tell us, whether it be the Association of Canadian Chiefs of Police or the Canadian Police Association? They tell us one thing very clearly. They want the government to invest in our children and to invest more money in targeting our at-risk youth, and our communities, which are at risk of either being victims of crime or being perpetrators of crime.

One of the ways to do this is by actually investing in the organizations that deal with our youth in those communities where there is a high level of crime, where there is a high percentage of youth being swept up into street gangs or into organized crime. Investments, funding and opportunities need to be provided for the local law enforcement in the field to be able to work with those communities. We have seen it happen.

I urge every single member in this House to vote against Bill C-10 at third reading because it is not effective justice. It is simply sloganeering.

• (1540)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if those are all the wonderful things that the Liberals would do if they formed government again, then my question is somewhat rhetorical. How come they did none of those things in the 13 years when they were government, most of the time a majority government where they could have done whatever they wanted? They did not do it.

I have one daughter, a daughter-in-law and five grandchildren. I am thinking of the following situation. Someone assaults or rapes either one of my adult female children or one of my grandchildren and that criminal has a gun and/or a knife. Let us say that when the perpetrator was found, it was discovered that this was not his first, not his second, but his third offence. I do not know the family situation of the member opposite. I have never investigated whether she has a daughter or not. If this were her daughter who was brutally attacked by an individual with a weapon who had three previous offences, I wonder what she would do in order to address the situation.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite said that if a new Liberal government were prepared to do all of these things, why did it not do it when it was in power? Let me talk about some of the things the previous Liberal government members did when we were in office.

The previous Liberal government brought in the national strategy on crime prevention, which directed moneys into local communities that needed to work with their youth at risk and to ensure better levels of security. They were able to coordinate with the local law enforcement, community police officers, the health organizations and the schools to bring down to the grassroots real effective programs to ensure we had lower crime rates. That is an example of what a previous Liberal government did.

The previous Liberal government brought into being the dangerous offenders system. It was not a Progressive Conservative government, it was the Liberal government. It was a Liberal government that brought into existence the long term offender system. It was a Liberal government that recognized minimum mandatory penalties in very targeted areas could send a clear message and could be effective in the sense of removing the offender from the community and ensuring that the victim and the community were not re-victimized.

We are the ones who brought in minimum mandatory penalties for firearm related criminal acts. It was not a Conservative government. It was not a Progressive Conservative government. It was a Liberal government that brought into effect integrated law enforcement teams. Whether it was for the border enforcement, or for financial money laundering, or for whatever, it was a Liberal government that brought those into effect.

Government Orders

It was a Liberal government that brought into effect all the new provisions, which are no longer new, to the Criminal Code to create the ability for law enforcement to seize drug money and to define a criminal organization and organized crime.

The Liberal government did all of that.

I believe the member opposite should go back to the school benches, learn the actual history and cease taking the rhetoric and sloganeering of his party, which has tried to paint Liberals as not being tough on crime. Tough on crime does not do it. The supreme court of the United States of America recently ruled that its determinant sentencing, under the American federal sentencing guidelines, what it calls mandatory minimum penalties, was unconstitutional and should be used as an advisory only. In other words, in the United States federal mandatory minimum sentencing is considered to be unconstitutional and should only be used as a guideline.

I am appalled that the Conservative government would want to take a failed model, which is the escalating minimum mandatory sentence system that existed in virtually all of the states in the United States and for which 25 of the states since 2003 have eliminated or severely reduced, and impose it here in Canada.

Effective justice is not sloganeering. Effective justice is not retail politics. Effective justice means taking the time to educate people. It means putting the taxpayer money where it will reduce crime. It is not pandering. The Conservative government panders and it conducts retail politics. It is not too lofty for the government to stoop to the most base accusations, disinformation, untruths in its quest to try to portray itself as being tough on crime.

• (1545)

Being tough on crime means taking the effective measures that will actually make a difference on the ground. We had expert after expert come before the justice committee, whether it was on Bill C-35, or other bills, which the government has lauded to try to make Canadians believe they will make them safer. The experts have said that they could not really oppose them because it would not make any difference.

The de facto reality is that it already happens. Whether it be reverse onus for bail for gun related crimes, it already happens. If one is accused of a criminal offence and a firearm is involved, judges do not give bail. Therefore, we would simply be codifying an actual de facto practice.

That is one of the reasons why the Liberals are able to support Bill C-35, but we are unable to support Bill C-10. It is not effective justice. It is retail politics, and shame on the NDP for supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine might like to know that the question lasted two minutes and the answer six minutes, so there are two minutes left. Let us hope the question will take about 45 seconds and so will the answer.

The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the thrust of Bill C-10 has to do with the subject matter of mandatory minimums. It has been suggested by some members on the

government side that the Liberals are opposed to mandatory minimums. I do not believe that is the case. Could the hon. member inform the members of our history?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, it was a Liberal government that brought in mandatory minimum sentencing for firearm related crimes. There is a whole category of them where currently it is a minimum of one year. There is second category of designated offences where currently it is four years. In committee, and again at report stage in the House, the Liberal members attempted to increase the one year to two years and the four years to five years.

What we oppose is escalating mandatory minimum penalties. That is where if a person reoffends, the judge will have no discretion. The studies have shown and the experts have stated that it does not work.

• (1550)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the debate I have heard today is an interesting one. We are involved in a very serious and complex discussion.

The New Democratic Party is supporting the bill, with the amendments that our justice critic, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, brought forward.

I realize the Liberals and the Bloc are not supporting it. I heard an earlier comment by the member of the government that it must mean the people approve of criminals. In fairness, I do not think anyone who sits in the House approves of criminals, whether they support the legislation or not. It is not a matter of supporting criminals. However, I do think it is a matter of how we approach it.

First, I have asked myself some questions. How do I, as the member for Surrey North and as a member of the House of Commons, ensure that the public can have faith in our justice system? I can assure the House that much of the public with whom I speak do not have faith in the justice system. These people have not necessarily found that because someone comes before a judge on a firearms offence, that they are not released on bail. We would have many examples where this was not the case.

Second, we have to look at what is the appropriate use of this legislation on crimes committed with a gun. In all the debate this morning, if people were sitting at home listening, they would fail to recognize that we are not talking about a general discussion on mandatory minimums. It is a discussion about crimes committed with a firearm. By the way, firearms today are much more technical, much more deadly and much more powerful than the image people might have of firearms that may come from a different place.

Third, I have to ask myself is what are we doing, other than the sentencing, to reduce gun crime. I have heard many people say either one is tough on crime or soft on crime, depending on where one stands on the bill. I do not think that is the case at all. We talk very much about being smart on crime. It is not hard or soft on crime. It is being smart in the way we approach crime.

Government Orders

Think about this. When someone picks up a gun to commit a crime, they automatically know there is a risk of someone being killed or critically injured. There is not a question in anyone's mind that this is what a gun will do, unless we are talking about a child picking up a gun. Anyone who is going to commit a criminal act with a gun knows there is an extreme risk to the person who will be the victim of that crime, not that any crime is acceptable.

I come from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, from Surrey. Many of the things I have experienced around gun crime do not fit some of the things that I have heard about in the House. I hear people talking a lot about gun crime in inner cities. The gun crime I have seen, some of it certainly is inner city, but much of it has nothing to do with youth raised in inner cities. Some of it has to do with youth raised in affluence.

● (1555)

We must be careful not to stereotype this by saying that it is only inner city people who are vulnerable to being involved in a gun crime.

Over the last 10 or 11 years, 100 young men in the lower mainland and some in Surrey have been killed in a gun crime, which is not an insubstantial number. Is anyone behind bars? No. Was it the person's first offence? I do not know for sure, but I know with some it certainly was not their first offence.

We must remember that what we are doing is being smart on crime.

Although I am in support of the bill, with the NDP amendments, and having talked to the parents whose daughters and sons have been killed in a gun crime or critically injured, I do not feel that I have turned into a neo-Conservative. I do not know if anybody has ever called me a neo-Conservative before.

Mr. Pat Martin: You would remember.

Ms. Penny Priddy: My colleague said that I would remember. I am absolutely certain that I would remember and perhaps many things that were the opposite of that.

However, as I talked to the parents of a young teenager who was shot, is in hospital critically injured and no one knows what the outcome will be, they do not think this is a draconian measure.

There are some things I would say about it that I find interesting, some things we should do and some things we should acknowledge about the public. What does the public see and feel? There is a difference between what the public sees and what it feels. There is a difference between being safe in our community and feeling safe in our community. They are two quite different things.

I have read the statistics that homicides may not be up. Well, homicides actually are up in some of the groupings of people I am talking about, but the incidents of gun crimes are certainly up. People read about gun crimes in the newspaper about where, in a perfectly ordinary kind of community, a bullet suddenly comes through the living room window and lodges in the living room wall or a bullet comes through a bedroom window and lodges just above the crib of a child. That is random. This is not gang violence. The people in those houses were not even the intended victims. Those

were random shootings at the wrong houses, and that is not all that unusual. Those people actually are unsafe.

However, people also need to feel safe and therefore they need to see their governments, municipal, provincial and federal, doing something so they will feel safe in their communities. The member who just spoke actually talked about this.

In the last 13 years, 40 to 45 mandatory minimum sentences were created by the Liberal government so I do not think this is somehow a great step off the path the Liberals followed, which was, as I say, 45 more mandatory minimum sentences in the length of time the Liberals were in government.

I also heard earlier today from a number of parties about sloganeering, about people changing their minds because they were influenced by politics and not by what they believe.

● (1600)

Since I entered politics, I have been very clear on what I believe about crime. I talked about mandatory minimums in the last campaign, as did our leader, because we understand the devastating effect it has on our communities. This is not sloganeering and it is not pandering, and to suggest that we are sloganeering to a parent who is crying because of the loss of a family member is actually quite shameful.

We hear a lot about the conclusions that have been drawn in the United States about whether mandatory minimums work. As I said, some of the amendments we put forward at committee were accepted and now some of those mandatory minimums are not what they were when they were first proposed. Our justice critic worked very hard to get these amendments through and agreed to.

However, I think in the United States, it is missing a piece that I actually think the Conservative Party opposite is missing as well in some ways, because in any of the literature I have read which has concluded that it does not work, it has used the single-pronged approach, which is simply raising the mandatory minimums, sending people off to jail and then going back and saying that our prisons are about to explode and that they are hot spots.

I can understand how many prisons in the United States would be hot spots because many of them are quite appalling, but we cannot solve a problem with one single prong. Work still needs to be done in that area and I look forward to the government bringing forward what I would hope would be the second part of what needs to happen here.

People often say that mandatory minimums do not work and that there is no history of them working at all but that is not true. I want to take people back to when drunk driving became a much more top of mind issue in our country and to the early work by Mothers Against Drunk Driving. The flaw in the United States' studies and what the Conservative government still needs to do is to look into other things that we need to do to ensure this becomes successful.

Government Orders

I will use the drunk driving issue as an example. Yes, after a certain number of offences there is a mandatory minimum jail time, and people knew that, but that was not all they did. They increased the police resources to deal with drunk driving. In my province we called them BAT mobiles. I do not know what they were called in other places, but police set up to stop cars to see if the drivers had been drinking alcohol while driving. Many of those have been discontinued because the police do not have the additional resources to keep doing that.

It takes intensive awareness and education, not just doing it once in grade six or grade 10, but continuous awareness all through school about the seriousness of it and the consequences of it.

Often when I talk to 16, 17 or 18 year olds they know people in gangs who are using guns. Many of them have heard of a mom, a dad or a grandma and sometimes it is themselves who have been left quadriplegic and in a wheelchair as a result of either a deliberate or a random shooting, and when they tell their stories I can see people starting to think differently about the consequences.

• (1605)

We need to continue to inform and educate people but somehow we think that if we inform one group of people our work is done. Well, it is not. It does not matter whether we are talking about racism or something else, we must do it continuously. It is like putting a pamphlet on the dangers of alcohol in a doctor's office. If we do not keep putting them there for more people to read then we are not finished doing our jobs.

The job we have in front of us today is a continuous job. This is not just about passing the legislation. This is a continuous piece of work that involves additional police resources, intensive education and, yes, jail time when necessary. However, I would say, as others have, that this is not a blanket answer, which is why I talked about the other things that were not done in most of the U.S. jurisdictions, where they came to the conclusion that it did not work, and that have yet to come forward from the government.

I wait with baited breath to see those initiatives come forward because this is not a blanket answer. It is something that should be used sparingly, appropriately and in a focused fashion.

I will now move on to the part that is critical to all of this. We often wait until somebody gets involved with a gang before we begin worrying and trying to figure out how to get them out of the gang, which, by the way, is using guns. Our leader has talked about things like safe houses because it is very hard for a gang member to get out of the gang safely and to ensure his or her family is safe.

Let us look at the new baby that comes home wrapped in a blue or pink blanket. I unwrapped the blanket when I brought mine home and there were no instructions. By simply bringing the baby home did not automatically mean that I knew how to parent. It did not mean that I knew how to do all of those things to ensure that my youngster, in the zero to five years, would have the kind of support, education, choices, boundaries and all of those things that we do so that when children start school at five or six they are ready in all of the five areas that they are supposed to be ready in.

From the longitudinal research on this, we know that those children are far less likely to ever be involved in the criminal system.

That is the work that is not here. That is the work that is missing. If that work does not come into place then we will have a problem having this be successful. We need to put into place good child care programs, which we had but which the government slashed, to teach parents how to parent.

I do not assume that just giving birth makes one a good parent. Those programs have been cut by the provincial government in my province. The provincial government's child care was cut so it just downloaded it and cut the programs that support parents, those parents who are either in the workforce or parents who are parenting at home, who have no place to go for expert advice and resources on just about all those challenges that any of us face as a mom or dad in raising children. Without that, and without those kinds of additional multi-prong initiatives, this has far less chance of being successful.

However, I can support the bill because: first, I understand that our amendments are there; second, I know what people in my community have been telling me for a long time; and third, because I do have hope that the government will bring forward other initiatives to support this.

• (1610)

There is no such thing as a single piece of legislation that is narrow and does not have other issues to support it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. I gave the hon. member a full 20 minutes. I gave her a two minute signal and a one minute signal. Her time is up.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard from all sides of the House today and I would like to thank the member for Surrey North for bringing her views to this debate today and approaching this more from the victim's point of view and from the view of the faith people need to have in their justice system. I was happy to hear her say that at the beginning and move this debate that way.

I think that too often we look at this as a crime and punishment issue. I keep having to explain that I am not here to punish anyone. It is not that I want mandatory minimums to punish anyone, but as the member stated in her speech, anyone who picks up a gun knows what it can do and what danger it can inflict.

This is not about punishing the people who do this. It is about protecting those whom these people may victimize or have victimized. If these people are away for a minimum period of time, perhaps they will victimize no one else while they are away.

Government Orders

I would like to hear more from the member about the victims she has reached out to, just as I have had to speak to victims in my own riding. They are the victims that this type of legislation will actually help, rather than having them just hearing talk about how hard this will be on the criminals of this country.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, as probably many members in this House do, I see a variety of people who have been affected by gun crime. I must admit that I also talk to parents who, for a variety of reasons, have not even recognized that their sons or daughters are moving into that area. It is not a matter of blame. That is not a lack of caring or love or appreciation of their children. Sometimes it is simply circumstances. They cannot be with their children or their teenagers on a continual basis, as none of us can, of course, in order to always be aware of what is happening.

I have talked with those parents who blame themselves. They wonder where they have gone wrong. They wonder what they can do to help other parents so that other young people do not find themselves in the position of actually being the perpetrator.

For the most part, the people I see who are victims of gun crimes are younger people. I have talked with the parents of a young person who is in a wheelchair. He is quadriplegic and therefore will require full-day assistance, for the most part, for probably the remainder of his life. It was a random shooting. He was not even involved in what was going on. He just happened to be present somewhere.

As well, I have talked with those people whose family members have been, very deliberately, victims of gun crime. They have been murdered. Those parents and those families as well look to what could be done differently. They want to know that there is an appropriate sentencing mechanism that appropriately reflects the severity of the crime.

Nobody has said to me, "Put somebody away forever". But people do want to know and the parents I talk with want to know that this life that was lost or the critical injury sustained is not simply something to be brushed aside, with no mark or legacy left other than in the hearts and minds of that family. They worry very much about that.

Those are some of the victims that I have talked to. By the way, I do not have a chance to do this very often, and I am very glad I do not, but as well I talk with the victims who are police officers. Every day in our communities, RCMP or local police go out. They respond to a call and we know that certain calls are more likely to be dangerous. They actually have been victims of a shooting. Sometimes it is because there was not enough staff. Sometimes they did not know that there was a gun there. There is a variety of reasons.

However, I have talked to law enforcement people. We are telling people to please enter law enforcement because we need more people and we need them to be more diverse, including women, so that our police forces reflect our community. These police need to feel that they are backed up by the community, by the public and by the system.

These are some of the victims who have done me the honour of sharing with me or disclosing their experiences to me.

●(1615)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member is quite familiar with FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. She also knows that there is a prevalence of criminal activity among those who suffer from that mental disability and, indeed, mental disabilities in general.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on the fact that rehabilitation would not be applicable in terms of these particular persons who may be convicted of crimes. Exactly how do we help them if they are automatically subject to a mandatory minimum sentence to an institution, where rehabilitation is the activity that goes on during that period? Obviously there are cases where incarceration in the general prison population is not applicable. She may want to comment.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to do that. There are many pieces to this, but it goes back in part to the fact that appropriate supports need to be in place much earlier. I know that the member is very familiar with this and he knows this. Those kinds of appropriate supports for people with FASD, FASE and autism need to be in place much earlier.

I am still waiting for the autism strategy from the government and I am still waiting for a FASD strategy from the government, but surely we do not wait until those folks find themselves in a position of having picked up a gun. That is where those prevention programs are so critical.

That is why without those prevention programs this will not be a successful initiative. We must have those in place.

It does not mean that I will not support this bill, but I am very vocal in saying that we need those supports in place early on. We should never even find ourselves in the position of having someone with a severe mental disability, or with FASD or any of the other disabilities we could name, in front of a judge, with the judge having to think about sentencing for somebody who indeed may not be able to reason that out.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber has the floor. There is one minute left in the time allocated to the hon. member for Surrey North, so he has 30 seconds for his question.

●(1620)

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is a very simple one. The bill supported by the NDP calls for lesser minimum penalties, and in some case none at all, for crimes committed with firearms.

Can my colleague tell me why the NDP believes that a murder committed with a hunting rifle, a long gun, is less serious than one committed with a hand gun?

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Surrey North has half a minute to respond.

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Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I totally understand the question. I think that a murder committed with a handgun or any firearm is a heinous crime. I think it is somewhat less likely that people are carrying long guns as they are going about the kind of criminal activity that I see in my community, but obviously any murder is serious and any murder committed with a gun is serious.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, continuing on the subject of my question, the Bloc Québécois has opposed Bill C-10. In my previous question, I said that one of the aberrations of this bill is that the proposed increase does not apply to hunting rifles. This bill creates two classes of firearms. There are long guns, as they are called in English—hunting rifles—and then there are hand guns. Some clauses in the bill even refer to prohibited weapons.

This seems rather odd at the stage of defining offences in the Criminal Code. As legislators, normally it is our responsibility to establish the relative severity of each of these sentences.

In this bill, however, there are instances where minimal sentences will not be the same, depending on whether the crime is committed with a long gun or a prohibited or restricted firearm.

Let us take the example of section 239 of the Criminal Code, which deals with discharging a firearm with intent, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage-taking, extortion and robbery. Bill C-10 proposes to impose a minimum five-year sentence for a first offence, seven years for a second, and to leave it at four years if another type of firearm is used, namely, a long gun.

If this bill is passed, the message it sends is that it is considered more serious to commit an offence such as attempted murder or sexual assault with a hand gun than with a long gun. This is, in my opinion, completely ridiculous and totally baseless.

That was what lay behind my question to my NDP colleague as to why the NDP were, as legislators, backing a bill in which committing a murder with a hunting rifle is less serious than committing a murder with a hand gun.

I think this illustrates the approach taken by the Conservative government and its view of how to fight crime, to which the NDP has subscribed for the last few months. Under this approach, they take care of repression after the crime has already been committed but do nothing about prevention. This is not the first time under this government that we have seen this dichotomy between how hand guns and long guns are treated.

We saw it as well with the firearms registry. It was the same thing. To look good, the government says it wants to keep the firearms registry, but just for handguns and restricted weapons. They want to abolish it for long guns. What does that mean? Where did the Conservatives get the idea that long guns were less dangerous than other guns?

Give me a couple of seconds here to find a very interesting statistic showing that a good proportion of crimes are committed

with long guns. Unfortunately, I do not remember the exact figure, but it was not negligible.

The differing treatments depending on the type of firearm highlight the inconsistency in the message conveyed by the government and the NDP, which supports it. This inconsistency can be seen again in the supposed intent of the bill, where they say they want to be tough on crime and fight criminality.

• (1625)

As the minister himself admitted when he came to testify before the committee, there are no Canadian studies showing that minimum sentences are effective at fighting crime.

We could obviously debate it from the standpoint of vengeance or punishing people for having committed a crime. If that is the purpose of the government's bill, it should clearly say so and not try to make people think that the purpose is to make Canadians safer, when that is clearly not the case. Minimum sentences only apply after the crime has been committed. All the studies show, though, that minimum sentences do not have any impact on the commission of crimes. Some other studies have been done in Canada. One very large study showed that the recidivism rate hardly changed on the basis of the length of incarceration or whether the offender was given a prison term or a community-based sentence.

This is very interesting because it shows once again that the sentences criminals receive has no influence on the recidivism rate. Another study followed up on offenders. These authors even concluded that quite the opposite was the case and that increased prison terms led to a slight increase in the recidivism rate. I will provide a reference for this study so that my Conservative colleagues can read it.

I am referring to a study done by Paula Smith, Claire Goggin and Paul Gendreau of the Psychology Department and the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies of the University of New Brunswick entitled *The Effects of Prison Sentences and Intermediate Sanctions on Recidivism: General Effects and Individual Differences*. The study was delivered in Ottawa in 2002, and was written for the Solicitor General of Canada. The government will have ready access to it. The conclusion that I quoted is on page ii of the introduction.

I wanted to talk about this to show, once again, that there is no connection with the length of time a prisoner is incarcerated and serving a community-based sentence or a prison sentence. As well, there are certainly no automatic deterrent effects.

There are other useful statistics in this regard and the Conservatives would do well to consider them: there are three times more homicides in the United States than in Canada and four times more homicides in the United States than in Quebec. In Quebec, in fact, an approach based much more on rehabilitation than punishment has been adopted, and this is the part of Canada where there are the fewest violent crimes and the least crime.

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Apart from a particular kind of popular morality or the simplistic discourse that amounts to saying that we must punish criminals severely, that we must be hard on them and impose longer sentences, ultimately reality will catch up to us. Everywhere in the world where a jurisdiction has tried to fight crime with punishment, we see higher crime rates than in jurisdictions that place greater emphasis on rehabilitation.

Obviously a balance has to be struck, and in the Bloc Québécois we believe that punishment is necessary in many cases. We must keep that balance, however, so that we do not have to invest extremely large amounts of money in keeping people in prison. I gave the example of the United States, where the homicide rate is much higher, and the prisons are bursting at the seams because the incarceration rate is much higher than ours. The United States is using that money to put all those people in prison for longer times, rather than investing in fighting crime.

• (1630)

Some of our government colleagues rose in the House earlier to give some examples. They asked me what sentence I would like to see given to the guilty person if I were the parent of a person who was killed.

Personally, I would prefer that that individual not have committed a crime. It seems to me that it is essential, and more important, to prevent crimes than to console ourselves by saying that the person who committed the crime will go to prison for a long time and will suffer, because he or she will not like it there. That does not cancel out the crime. That does not mean that the families who have had members killed, families in which women have been raped, families of people who have been terrorized by home invasions or the like, are going to be able to turn back the clock.

Minimum sentences raise another problem, and I think that this should prompt us to use them very sparingly.

Minimum sentences have perverse effects. This is documented, and is a known fact. I would like to talk about two of those effects.

First of all, there will be instances in which judges will be forced to impose a minimum sentence that they find unwarranted. In such cases, they might acquit an individual entirely, rather than be forced to sentence that individual to a penalty they consider excessive under the circumstances, for cases in which a more appropriate penalty would be a conditional sentence, community service or a few weeks in jail.

This has happened in the past, and this should be a real concern to those people who wish to get tough on criminals. By trying to force the hand of judges, we would be creating situations in which judges could not sentence certain individuals to a minimum sentence that would be inappropriate. They would therefore acquit the individual instead.

Another problem is likely to arise, André Normandeau, a criminologist at the Université de Montréal, reminded us. With minimum sentences, lawyers often negotiate plea bargains for their clients in exchange for charges that do not require minimum sentencing. This involves some negotiation and ultimately does not lead to an appropriate outcome.

This measure leaves judges with no flexibility and, in certain cases, could lead to situations that are questionable, to say the least, because, when passing legislation, we could not possibly take into consideration all parameters and every case that could make its way to court. Judges are appointed specifically to consider these cases.

I would like to highlight the example of Robert Latimer, the father who killed his 12-year-old daughter, who was severely disabled, in an act of compassionate homicide. This is a subject that concerns us considerably and that many people are talking about. Mr. Latimer was convicted of second degree murder, which automatically forced the judge to sentence him to 25 years in prison, even though the jury that convicted him asked for a much more lenient sentence, given that it was an act of compassionate homicide.

The judge did not even have this option, because, quite simply, the law did not allow it.

• (1635)

In a future case, a jury could be faced with the same dilemma and could go to the other extreme by saying that it makes no sense to send someone to prison for 25 years for a murder committed out of compassion and that, in that situation, it would acquit him completely. In the end, that is what happens when we meddle in the judicial process.

I was astonished, because so often we hear the Conservatives complaining of judicial activism, which is when the judges—those who are close by, at the Supreme Court—use the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for example, to amend or to strike down laws and influence our judicial and legal system.

The Conservatives repeatedly complained about this state of affairs, whether in the case of same sex marriages, or abortion or other issues. After having said that it is not right for judges to get involved in politics, the Conservatives table a bill that does the opposite and where members of Parliament want to do the work of the judges. I am sorry but it seems to me that as legislators we should be concerned with the issue of the gravity of crimes, establish maximum penalties in the Criminal Code to put into perspective the relative gravity of crimes, compared one to another, and leave to the judges the task of evaluating each situation in detail and determining what sentence is the most appropriate.

Another important point should be emphasized, which is that there is a major issue of perception in this whole debate, with the explosion of the all-present media—especially a certain class of media—which puts out the news as performance. In fact, there really is a perception among the population that crime is increasing and that we are living in a society that is becoming more and more violent. It is unfortunate to see that government members, instead of doing the work of explaining the real facts to the population, will manipulate and use people's fears to advance their right-wing cause.

Government Orders

In general, I would emphasize that between 1991 and 2000, the rate of crime went down by almost 26% in Canada. That is true in almost every area: the rate of crime is in constant and general decline. To claim that crime is a growing problem and that, therefore, we need tougher penalties does not in any way correspond to reality. The proof is that the place where the fewest violent crimes per 100,000 population are committed in Canada—I referred to this earlier—is Quebec. The government, therefore, should focus on getting results, take inspiration from the Quebec model of combating crime rather than that of the United States, which I spoke about previously and which has met with a resounding failure.

I would like to conclude by saying that there is a little hypocrisy in what the government is proposing. In order to fight crime it should fully reinstate the gun registry and free up all the grants for programs to combat crime in all of our ridings that the minister has blocked and that are languishing on his desk. That would be a real campaign against crime rather than the appearance of a campaign.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech and it was very typical of the Bloc. He was all over the place. He was talking about different types of crime and what the government is doing. What he does not realize is that today we are debating Bill C-10 and what we are talking about are offences involving firearms, in other words, people who pick up a gun and go into a store or somebody's home and have every intention of using it. The only reason people would pick up a gun is because they have the intention of using it.

This is not talking about jaywalking. He mentioned how it may be too harsh for a judge to put these people in jail. Maybe they need community work or a few weeks in prison. We are talking about serious criminals, criminals who would be willing to use a firearm to seriously injure or murder somebody and hopefully we would be able to catch them before that act occurred.

He stated that in the United States violent crime rates are up, but what he did not mention is that states that have minimum sentences, compared to states next door, have fewer violent crimes because criminals are smart. They know that if they commit a crime in the state that has the minimum sentence they are going to go to jail automatically, so hence the state next door has higher violent crime rates.

What does the member suggest we do with violent criminals who cannot be rehabilitated? Should we be hugging them, according to the Bloc member?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing to hear my hon. colleague glorify criminals and say how smart they are. I think there is a problem when people commit crimes. I would not describe these people as smart. If they were so smart, they would not get caught.

If what the hon. member said were true, why do Ontario criminals not come and commit crimes in Quebec where we take a

rehabilitative approach? This kind of pseudo-psychology is just too facile.

When people commit crimes, there are two main kinds. First, there is the kind that is planned, organized and prepared. The people who commit this type of crime do not say to themselves that if they are caught, they will get 7.5 years in prison instead of 4.8. The people who plan crimes think that they will not get caught. That is why, as all the studies show, imposing minimum penalties on these people has no dissuasive effect. They are convinced that they will not get caught. The second kind, often committed with firearms, is crimes of passion which are not thought through. These are people, for example, who just lose it at some point, go crazy, take a shotgun they keep around the house, and go and kill their spouse. These people do not go down the stairs with their gun saying to themselves, "Gee, the new Government of Canada passed minimum sentences so I had better not kill my wife". That is not what they are thinking. This bill will not change anything here and this woman's life will not be saved.

What might help this woman, though, is a firearms registry that works properly, gun control, and a campaign to raise awareness that shotguns are no less dangerous than handguns. In the example I just gave, by the way, the minimum penalty would not be any greater under this bill because the minimum for crimes committed with shotguns stays at four years.

This government bill is not consistent. They want it to look good, but the reality is something else. When criminals commit vicious crimes and deserve long sentences, judges hand them down. What the Conservatives are saying is that sometimes and in some situations, judges look at all the evidence and decide that the maximum penalty is not warranted or a lesser penalty should apply. Some critics say that these judges are wrong, but how are we supposed to know? What study shows that they are?

Studies have been done which took members of the public and gave them the facts of a case, all the evidence admitted by the court was explained to them, and they were asked whether the judge's decision was appropriate. Most of the time, people who were well informed, who knew the facts well and who went beyond the news in the media concluded that the judges had made the right decision.

Personally, I am much more likely to have confidence in a judge who has listened to a trial for several hours and who weighs the evidence submitted to him or her before determining sentence than in a member who is talking about a hypothetical case, who does not even know the context and who says that the crime is less serious because it was committed with a shotgun or more serious because it was committed with a handgun.

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Where will it stop? Will we be saying that if the crime was committed between midnight and three a.m., it is more serious? Honestly, this makes no sense. I think we have to get back to basics, do our job as legislators—establish a legal framework that clearly defines the maximum sentences for various crimes so the relative seriousness can be determined. Most importantly, we have to do the work that is needed on prevention, through our social policy and crime fighting programs. Those programs exist now, but they are still sitting on the desk of the Minister of Public Safety. They are just waiting for a signature

We do not need a bill to be read three times in the House of Commons and three times in the Senate and be given royal assent to do this. We need the minister's signature. And we are still waiting for that.

• (1645)

This would be genuine crime prevention, it would help families in Quebec and Canada. Those families do not want criminals staying in prison for the rest of their lives, or for as long as possible. What those families want is for there to be no crimes and no criminals. So that is what we have to work on.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member has raised some matters for consideration.

There is no question that all members in this place want to ensure that our criminal justice system is doing the job that is necessary for the protection and safety of Canadians, and for the deterrence, rehabilitation and prevention objectives of the criminal justice system. However, the aspect of deterrence, the mandatory minimums, is really what we are looking at.

I would just note that the supreme court of the United States recently found the determinate sentences for mandatory minimum penalties found in the American federal sentencing guidelines to be unconstitutional and deemed them to be advisory only.

I wonder whether the member would maybe share some concern that even in Canada this particular serious escalation of mandatory minimums may in fact be challenged in the Supreme Court.

I note that the bill does not even come into force until there is a proclamation by governor in council, which means it is not going to be in force in Canada should it pass through all stages of Parliament. The government is going to have some discussions and I wonder if those discussions will reflect the fact that there may in fact be a constitutional challenge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to pretend to be a constitutional expert, nor do I want to anticipate whatever decision the Supreme Court may make, but the decision in the United States clearly illustrates where we can end up when we mix up our functions, when we mix the legislative function up with the judicial.

In all advanced societies based on the rule of law and governed by laws, everywhere in the world where people live in true democracies that protect individual freedoms, everywhere, there is separation of the legislative and judicial branches. Members of legislatures and elected representatives enact laws and define crimes

and the relative seriousness of those crimes. Judges apply the laws and determine sentences, and in my opinion, in this case, we should rely on this fine British tradition, which is a good thing.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to debate Bill C-10 at second reading before it went to committee. Question period today reminded me of the circumstances which existed at the time when the government House leader pointed out that it took some 220 days for Bill C-10 to be dealt with by the justice committee.

It is a perfect example of how in this place selectivity of the facts tend to paint a different picture unless all the facts are put on the table. Indeed, I can recall one member outlining in some glorious detail exactly what the facts were.

We know that at the time that Bill C-10 was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice there were 10 or 11 other bills already in committee for it to work on. I am not sure the public would fully appreciate the due diligence and kind of work that needs to be done by a standing committee when a piece of legislation comes forward, but many of these had to do with the Criminal Code. Some of them did not, but they were all part of the crime-related agenda that the government had spoken about.

The interesting thing is that when we talk about 220 days, it is not 220 sitting days of this place, it is 220 calendar days. I suspect any bill that gets introduced in mid-June is going to be languishing for about 100 calendar days but only because the House will not be in session. It is kind of disingenuous to describe things in terms of calendar days when it comes to Parliament.

There was a lot of criticism of the approach that the government made to the criminal justice bills. Instead of doing what has been done in the past, which is creating a so-called omnibus bill where a number of the areas that a government would like to propose amendments to the Criminal Code would be put together in one bill.

All of the witnesses that would be called for any one of those bills probably would be the same witnesses needed for the other bills and any others that might come along. They are representatives from the legal community, the justice department, stakeholder groups, advocacy groups, et cetera.

Members may not necessarily be lawyers. There are a number of members of Parliament who bring a lot of diversity to some of the committees. Being a lawyer on the justice committee is not necessarily the only prerequisite, so the committee must rely on expert testimony.

It was kind of interesting that the committee found itself bogged down in so much work with so many different bills that it had to deal with, virtually sequentially, simply because the continuity of the witnesses and testimony made it so. Even though Bill C-10 was sent to committee, it did not get dealt with for some time, that is true, but it was not because the committee did not want to deal with it or the opposition was being obstructive. It was because the committee was fully engaged in other legislation.

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Members will know that the Standing Committee on Justice along with the finance committee are the two most active committees. They meet several hours each week and have very detailed discussions of important legislation and other related matters.

I wanted to point that out in case someone suggested there was any deliberate delay. As a matter of fact, members may recall that the official opposition made an offer to the government on a number of those bills, I have forgotten at this time whether it was 8 or 10 of them, to deal with them summarily and pass them so they could go through the system.

• (1655)

The government rejected that opportunity to get legislation through this place quickly, to make compromises, which is important in a minority government. There are very few bills that ultimately get through here that have not had the rigours of debate, negotiation and some compromise. That is the nature of a minority Parliament.

We do have Bill C-10 before us. There are some issues. I find it kind of interesting that, depending on where our motivation is, some will say that we need these mandatory minimums and we have to have them a little bit higher because we have to get tough on crime.

First, we have to understand, and Canadians will understand, that we are talking about minimums. That does not mean that someone who has, for instance, robbed a bank and had a gun but did not use it did not commit a serious crime. Committing a criminal offence while in possession of a firearm is a serious offence.

The issue here is that minimums are established, but that the judiciary, the judges, have the discretion to set the penalties to fit the crime. We are not talking about the maximums. We are not saying, "Let us get tough on crime". So, Bill C-10 really does not fit with the explanation or the characterization of being tough on crime. It has to do with deterrents.

A balanced approach to the criminal justice system in any country around the world has three elements. First, there is prevention. In the bills that the government has brought forward, not one of those bills that I can recall is dedicated toward crime prevention.

The second element is deterrence. Deterrence does come from things like mandatory minimums, so that those who might contemplate committing a crime with a firearm, knowing that the offence may get them an automatic two year sentence in addition to whatever the judge may want them to have but it will be at least two years, that represents an element of deterrence.

What happens when we raise that from two to five or from two to seven or maybe two to ten? The expert testimony that came before parliamentarians was very clear. There comes a point at which the amount of time is irrelevant to someone who will be committing a crime, so the mandatory minimum, it does not matter how high it is, will not be a factor on whether or not they are going to do what they are going to do. That is why we have independence of the judiciary. That is why we have judicial discretion and on a case by case basis, the sentencing is dealt with by the court, by the jury, and by the judge to determine an appropriate sentence, given the circumstances of the case.

The final element in a balanced and responsible judicial system is rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is a very important part of our criminal justice system. People commit crimes and are sent to jail. If we did not have a program to promote rehabilitation, if we just put people away in a cell, slammed the door shut, slid the food through the door and that is where they stayed, we would basically be creating a situation where those people would come out of jail when their sentence was finished with a disposition that they would be very likely to be dangerous people in society.

The justice system does provide for every opportunity for rehabilitation for those who have committed crimes. That is important because once people come out, we want them to be able to resume their lives once they have served the time they had to serve.

• (1700)

Even within the system for good behaviour, the system provides for parole situations and early release. It is reflective of those who have shown the remorse for their crime or who have circumstances which would indicate they are not a further danger to society.

However, even under those circumstances, they also continue to have that sentence even though they may be on parole. If they violate any of their parole conditions, they will be immediately be back in jail. The sentence is the sentence. It depends on where one is serving it and in what form it is being served.

We have had some discussion about whether we have come to a point where mandatory minimums have escalated to an extent which brings into concern the issue of constitutionality. Earlier in a question, I advised the House about a note I had received about the supreme court of the United States. It recently found the determinant sentences for mandatory minimum penalties found in American federal sentencing guidelines to be unconstitutional and, therefore, deemed to be advisory only. I am also aware that about 25 states have eliminated the lengthy mandatory minimum sentences since 2003.

Why does the supreme court of the United States now have this problem? Why have a number of states backed off these very high mandatory minimum sentences? There must be a reason. They did not do it just because they thought it might be good thing to do. It is not a matter of handling it on a whim. It is handled on the basis of experience and evidence.

We know that the comparative penal systems between Canada and the United States are quite different. The penalty system within the United States is much more serious than it is in Canada. I think people's first intuition might be that if there are stiffer penalties and stiffer sentences, that will be good to reduce crime. It is not the case, and the United States compared to Canada is in fact the proof.

The sentencing is harsher in the United States, but the rate of criminal offences and incarceration of people is about 30% higher. However, that is not the only jurisdiction. There are others. The justice committee heard from expert witnesses to see what is going on. It had the benefit of this experience of tracking other jurisdictions and of what was happening in Canada.

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People want to suggest that somehow Canada is a crime haven and things like that. Sometimes some very bad things happen in our country, but they plot on the graphs the incidents of criminal activity from a broad range. In general, the crime rate has been going steadily down over the last number of years. Canada is doing extremely well in addressing crime, but it is not through the penalties or the deterrents. It is what I talked about earlier. It is through the prevention measures.

I will divert a little to a related matter. It has to do with how to deal with those who are mentally ill, or an example as we debated on Monday, those who have fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is a subject matter that I have been working on as a member of Parliament for at least 12 years. The subject matter at the time was referred to as fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects.

● (1705)

I was a member of the health committee. I had studied and researched what the health committee had been doing before I became a member of Parliament. I came across a report called "Foetal Alcohol Syndrome: A Preventable Tragedy". In brief, the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy causes brain damage to the fetus in a prenatal situation and that the child will be born with brain damage, with mental disabilities. Interestingly enough, if we look at the pattern, people who suffer from mental disabilities have a very high predisposition to run afoul of the criminal justice system.

This concerned me and I wanted to know more about it. I learned that because of the brain damage, people did not know the difference between right and wrong all the time. We can tell them a hundred times not to do something because it is wrong and they do anyway because they somehow think it is right.

I raise this because in our criminal justice system we have to deal with people who have, in some cases, mental disabilities. If a person has a mental disability and maybe had a gun when he or she robbed a bank, under certain circumstances in Bill C-10, this person could be put in jail with a mandatory minimum of say five years or maybe even seven year.

We have to ask if prevention, deterrence and rehabilitation are all elements of a responsible criminal justice system. How is it responsible to take people who suffer from a mental illness and who probably do not know the difference between right and wrong and put them away in jail, in a system which is based on delivering rehabilitation? In the case of someone who suffers from mental illness, rehabilitation is not applicable.

It is an interesting case, but I raise it because there are circumstances on a case by case basis where two identical crimes may get different sentences. Some may be lower, some may be higher. Why? Because there are sometimes mitigating circumstances, sometimes exacerbating circumstances. That is why we need judicial discretion. That is why we have the independence of the judiciary.

With regard to judicial appointments, I heard the Prime Minister say in this place that he would like to have judges who were more closely associated with his ideological thinking, people more attuned to the way he saw the world. Does this not attack judicial independence? Does this not affect our court system? It concerned

me that the Prime Minister was prepared to say he would start shaping the courts just as is done in the United States. The President of the United States makes appointments to the supreme court because of a person's history on a certain side of an issue.

It is a pattern that we have seen time and time again, not only on justice bills, but on other legislation. Canada seems to be more driven by what is happening in republican America, what is happening with George Bush and how does George feel about these things. We seem to be following blindly.

Canada has a responsible system. The Liberals brought in 45 different instances where mandatory minimums were proscribed. There is no question that we support mandatory minimums, but there comes a point, and I believe that is the issue in this bill, where the escalation has gone so far that it brings into question the constitutionality of it and whether there will be a constitutional challenge here. If there is, Canada will not be the better for it.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to my colleague discuss this bill. I would like to hear a bit more because the society bequeathed to us by our ancestors is a lawful society based on striking a balance between the crime committed and the punishment imposed. That is the choice our ancestors made in order to pass down a society that is different from American society. Too often we look at the Conservative government and see that it is moving closer to the system of repression established in the United States. That is not the system that our parents and our grandparents wanted to leave us.

I would therefore like my colleague to elaborate on the importance of maintaining a system of law where the punishment fits the crime.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. There are some principles and values which are built into our system, certainly starting with the charter and the protection for all under the rule of law. Even a serious criminal has rights under the charter and the rule of law.

The member is also right with regard to proportionality. It is a principle that the judicial system tries to ensure. If we were to take a particular crime and put it outside of the proportionality model, we may find that all of a sudden the integrity of the system comes into question. That is a very serious consideration.

The principle of the punishment fitting the crime, and I think the member would agree, is subject to certain elements or aspects in a certain case. No two cases are identical in all aspects. There may be mitigating factors. There may be exacerbating factors. They may warrant a more serious punishment or a lower one. This is with regard to people who we would consider lucid, who knew what they were doing, et cetera.

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As I raised in my commentary, we also have the situation where we have people whose knowledge or admission and their ability to understand what they have done all of a sudden creates a whole different situation. I do not know what happens to people who are put into the system. What I do know is it has been estimated that in some provinces almost half of the population in the jails of some of our provinces and in federal institutions suffer from some sort of mental illness or an alcohol related birth defect. This concerns me a lot.

The fastest growing industry in the United States is building jails, putting people away. It has done nothing to make the United States safer. We should learn from their experience.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is often criticized for not participating or for being very different. Today, however, it is aligned with the Liberal Party on the discussion of minimum sentences.

I would like to discuss a second aspect. The almost automatic nature of parole is at issue and not the entire system of penalties, or penalties in the Criminal Code. Therein lies the problem and I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

At present, criminals are released when they have served one sixth of their sentence. That is the problem. The fact that we impose minimum sentences is not at issue. When the sentence has been imposed, the individual or the criminal must serve that sentence. Nothing in this bill challenges the fact that parole is granted almost automatically. Does my colleague agree?

• (1715)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. When Bill C-10 is considered in isolation, there are a number of other elements related to an effective criminal justice system which are not reflected in this bill. There are some other bills, and I mentioned about 10 or 11 other bills that have been presented by the government, some of which could have come together. There could have been a more comprehensive approach. The Liberals absolutely agree with that.

In response to the member's question, here is what a Liberal government would do. We would immediately convene a round table meeting of the federal, provincial and territorial ministers, together with representatives of key organizations representing the police to commence discussions on developing long term, sustainable, cost-sharing arrangements for additional police officers. This is the prevention side of it. In terms of early parole, conditional release, et cetera, these are areas of concern which still continue to be discussed by parliamentarians.

There is no question that we need to continue to re-evaluate things. There has been some success, but the system must be responsive. I would certainly suggest that in a balanced system in which there are appropriate elements of deterrence, of rehabilitation and of prevention, the kinds of issues that the member talks about, whether or not the public sees someone getting out earlier and maybe reoffending, there are reoffenders, but statistically, they are not the majority. By far they are the minority of cases.

Is there a balance to be achieved? Is there more work to be done? Absolutely. The criminal justice system, much like our Constitution, is going to be as dynamic as a growing tree. I expect there will be more discussions, and there should be more discussions, in this place on the propriety of sentencing and release and parole provisions.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague about other initiatives that a new Liberal government would be prepared to implement immediately.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Immediately, if not sooner, Mr. Speaker.

We do have a published commitment of some of the initiatives. We would give the RCMP money for 400 additional officers to help local police deal with guns and gang activity. We would ensure more money was available for the provinces to hire crown attorneys. We would continue to support reverse onus bail hearings for those arrested of a gun crime. We would establish a fund that would help at risk communities cover the cost of security in their places of worship or other gathering places.

We would strive to set up organized crime secretariats like Ontario's guns and gangs task force. We would strengthen legislation aimed at preventing Internet luring. We would act on the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner. We would update and toughen legislation to deter and prevent identity theft. We would amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act to make it mandatory for organizations to notify people of data breaches involving their personal information. We would act immediately to implement all 22 recommendations made by the federal task force on spam which have been ignored by the current government.

There are many more, but I know the time is up. I am sure when we do form a government after the next election that all of these issues will be dealt with swiftly.

• (1720)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate. It seems to me that the agenda is a little thin and so the government has gone back to its law and order agenda.

I want to talk about my riding. In some respects this is the kind of issue that the government thinks it is resolving. I have a riding in the east end of Toronto. I do not know how well members know Scarborough or the east end of Toronto, but Scarborough is the centre of the universe. My particular section of Scarborough is interesting in that below Kingston Road are some of the nicest homes one can buy in all of Toronto. It is a lovely area. Some of the homes run upwards of \$2 million. North of Kingston Road, which is a rough dividing line, are some of the more impoverished areas in all of the greater Toronto area.

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One of the more impoverished areas is Markham and Eglinton. In a very small area are approximately 17,000 people in a series of high rises. Many of them are new to this country but certainly what they all have in common is that they do not have a lot of income. The United Way identified that particular area, which is called Scarborough Village, as an area that was in need of assistance. There were a number of other areas around the GTA that got special attention from the United Way.

The United Way comes into an impoverished area and what would be, statistically at least, a high crime area and says to the community, "This is a problem. The community is not functioning. What should we do here?" It does community assessment, assesses community needs and identifies community leaders.

In the process of working in that community for a year and a half to two years it has done the assessment. It has developed things like community events. It has developed a functioning community centre. The United Way has assisted the community in pulling itself up by the boot straps.

We have to bear in mind that a fair number of these 17,000 people are just desperate to make the rent. That is about as good as it gets for them. They have come from afar. They are struggling with the language. They are struggling with a diminished status vis-à-vis what it would have been like in their former countries. That creates social problems between spouses. It creates social problems between one generation and the next. Sometimes the kids adapt fairly easily and do not necessarily respect their parents who are having more difficulty adapting.

It is a bit of a fertile ground for crime. We as the larger community have been concerned, but the specific community of Scarborough Village has been concerned also.

I have gone to quite a number of meetings. I have met with folks who think that something needs to be done. The police are very involved in this process. They are very keen on seeing the community heal itself, have respect for itself and reduce itself from a high crime area. Not once did they ever talk about minimum mandatories. Surprise, surprise. They did not talk about minimum mandatories. They did not really think that there was that much wrong with the Criminal Code. I can see areas where we might want to do reverse onus on gun crimes, the guns and gangs task force and things of that nature which have actually been useful in terms of getting some of the bad apples off the street, but minimum mandatories is certainly not one of the things that they actually talked about.

That seems to me to be just about the classic statement of how wrong-footed this particular government is on the issue of security and safety in our communities. The Conservatives missed the boat.

• (1725)

The Conservatives missed the boat because they think that getting tough on crime, which means this kind of draconian sentencing, taking away the discretion of judges, eliminating the ability of a judge to shape a sentence to fit the crime under all the circumstances, is the way to go. They do not think that minimum mandatory is the way to go.

My colleague earlier talked about particularly disadvantaged people and how this kind of draconian one size fits all approach to the crime somehow or other would reduce crime. Unfortunately for the government, there is not a statistic, there is not a jurisdiction, there is not a study in the world that actually shows that. Minimum mandatories have virtually no impact on crime.

If in fact the government were seriously interested in doing something about crime, actually reducing recidivism, in fact getting criminals in particular back into a functioning element of society, it would get behind the guns and gangs initiative, it would get behind organizations like the United Way.

I have a suggestion, and I have suggested this in other instances. Of the enormous amount of money that is going to be spent on housing all these criminals by virtue of this minimum mandatory legislation, which I am told would be something in the order of about \$220 million to \$250 million over the next five years, I would suggest that my riding's portion just be directed to the United Way.

I have a little bet going with the government that if we were able to put that money into the United Way, we would have a lower crime rate. That money would be of more use than throwing folks in jail and throwing away the key. That does not seem to be a favoured view these days. People want to be tough on crime.

Our position in the Liberal Party is we want to be smart on crime. We want to do what works. What a strange concept.

It has been shown that having minimum mandatories does not work. In fact there are apparently something like 25 jurisdictions in the United States that have backed away from minimum mandatories because they have experienced it and it does not work. Recidivism is up and they are spending enormous sums of money on keeping people in jail.

I can see how this legislation works for those who are pro jail and for those who want to develop more and more jails so that we are housing more and more people. I guess it is some form of solution for homelessness.

My suggestion would be that the money be given to the United Way and organizations such as that to develop the community, to allow the community to develop. The best policing of the community is the community itself. Statistic after statistic, study after study shows that minimum mandatories fall disproportionately on disadvantaged groups.

I do not have a particularly large aboriginal population in my riding, but what I do have is a large black population in my riding. When we talk to the community leaders, they are very concerned about black crime, particularly black on black, and youth crime. What they need and what they are crying out for is community development, the ability to do some parent substituting, basketball courts, community centres, homework programs. They are asking for facilities where they can access the Internet, facilities where they can access all kinds of services that we tend to take for granted. They are not talking about amending the Criminal Code to get minimum mandatories, because they know that is just a useless exercise.

I respectfully say to the government that this exercise in minimum mandatories is frankly an exercise of hot air. The government could have allocated the money to facilities such as I am suggesting here.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you are standing for some very good reason.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, but it is 5:30 p.m.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

When we return to the study of Bill C-10, there will be 10 minutes left for the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should amend Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to extend property rights to Canadians.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the motion that I tabled on April 23. Motion No. 315 states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should amend Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to extend property rights to Canadians.

Let me begin by saying that this is not a new concept. I know that there have been many members before me who have worked on this, either through private members' legislation or additional motions. I know that the member for Yorkton—Melville has done much work in this area and I am grateful to him.

Sir John A. Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation clearly understood the importance of absolute property ownership for all Canadians. They wished to entrench in the institution of a self-governing Canada the primacy of property ownership.

Prime Minister John Diefenbaker established the Canadian Bill of Rights, which for the first time included "the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof".

As justice minister, Pierre Trudeau proposed the passage of a charter that would give constitutional protection to certain rights, including the enjoyment of property. As Prime Minister he again proposed entrenchment of the Charter of Rights, which would have guaranteed the right of an individual to use and to enjoy property. While the Charter of Rights and Freedoms became a reality, the inclusion of property rights did not make the final cut.

I am particularly happy to be able to move this important motion during the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As Canadians, we celebrate the charter. The charter, which is embodied in the Constitution of Canada, enshrines our rights and freedoms. We value these freedoms. We value the political

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rights guaranteed in the charter. We value the civil rights ensured by the charter.

It is for these reasons that we rightfully celebrate the charter, as it marks the progress we have made as a country, but as we celebrate this milestone for the charter and reflect on its meaning for Canadians, both collectively and individually, we should also ask whether there are areas that we can enhance to strengthen this living document.

To be certain, the charter guarantees specific political and civil rights of Canadians from policies or actions of all levels of government. It nobly seeks to unify Canadians around a set of principles that embody these rights. But in seeking to unify Canadians, the drafters of the charter also glossed over those fundamental rights that were excluded, rights of Canadians that also deserve to be guaranteed and protected.

The absence of property rights in the charter is one area where we as parliamentarians may wish to focus our attention when thinking of whether there are ways that we can enhance this document.

My Motion No. 315 urges the government to recognize the need to entrench property rights in the charter. The motion would amend section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to extend property rights to Canadians, with the intention of giving individual property owners the right to a fair compensation for their property, and to ensure compensation within a reasonable time period.

I believe in the rights of Canadians and specifically the need to strengthen the protection of property rights. Every person has the right to enjoyment of their own property and the right not to be deprived of that property unless the person, first, is accorded a fair hearing, second, is paid fair compensation, third, the amount of that compensation is fixed impartially, and fourth, the compensation is paid within a reasonable time period.

Exclusion of property rights from our charter violates convention, convention as captured in the 1960 bill of rights, convention as captured in common law, convention as captured in provincial statute, and convention as captured in the United Nations declaration of human rights. The importance of protecting property rights has long been recognized in Canada and around the world.

I know that my Liberal and NDP colleagues share an understandable and healthy respect for the United Nations and hold it in high regard, so they might wish to recall that article 17 of the 1948 United Nations declaration on human rights states:

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Although Canada ratified the UN declaration of human rights over five decades ago, Canadians continue to be deprived arbitrarily of their property, and we have willfully remained out of step with most other signatories.

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• (1735)

Other democracies have taken a lead in property rights legislation, including the United States, Germany, Italy and Finland. Several Canadian provinces, including British Columbia, New Brunswick, and previously Ontario, also have at various times indicated resolutions that support stronger protection for property rights.

Great Britain first introduced property rights in the Magna Carta of 1215. I know that the opposition loves to try to chastise the government when it comes to questions of rights. If all my colleagues are firm in their commitment to the rights of Canadians, they should support and embrace this motion. No document more ardently seeks to defend Canadian rights than the Bill of Rights.

In 1960 Prime Minister John Diefenbaker brought in the Canadian Bill of Rights. Part I of the bill reads:

1. It is hereby recognized and declared that in Canada there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely,

(a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;...

I know that all members of the House support such a principle as outlined in the Bill of Rights as it applies to property rights. There is, however, an arguable weakness in the bill. There is a flaw. While it mentions property rights, a guarantee of protection and compensation in those cases where private property has been expropriated is not explicit.

Such ambiguity dilutes the level of protection for property rights. Because it is a regular statute, it could be overridden by a new federal statute. Without the explicit mention of compensation, a new federal statute could rather easily restrict the right of Canadians to fair and prompt compensation.

Motion No. 315 would correct this by entitling Canadians to fair and prompt compensation in circumstances where it is necessary for an individual to surrender property to the government.

The Bill of Rights remains in place today, but our courts tend to refer to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While both have positively contributed to Canada and its people in the past, the emphasis on the charter severely circumscribes the rights of some Canadians.

Nowhere was this more clearly evident than in a ruling by the Manitoba Court of Appeal on February 4, 1999. The court ruled against a Manitoba resident's right to sell his own grain grown on his own land. The ruling stated that section 1 of the Canadian Bill of Rights, which protects property rights through a due process clause, was not replicated in the charter, and the right to "enjoyment of property" is not a constitutionally protected fundamental part of Canadian society.

No Canadian would become aware of this lack of protection for property rights, however, until it is too late, that is, until the government arbitrarily expropriates the property of a law-abiding, taxpaying Canadian without any compensatory measures.

This happens already with farmland, for example, where government may force farm families out of production for

government purposes. For example, approximately 97,000 acres of Quebec's best farmland was expropriated. In spite of the fact that 3,200 farm families were displaced, only 5,000 acres were ever used for the airport operation.

The essence of this ruling is echoed by Professor Peter Hogg, a pre-eminent scholar of Canadian constitutional law. In *Constitutional Law of Canada*, Professor Hogg writes:

The omission of property rights from s.7 [of the charter] greatly reduces its scope. It means that s.7 affords no guarantee of compensation or even of a fair procedure for the taking of property by government. It means that s.7 affords no guarantee of fair treatment by courts, tribunals or officials with power over the purely economic interests of individuals or corporations.

Further to this, he writes:

The product is a section 7 in which liberty must be interpreted as not including property, as not including freedom of contract, and in short, as not including economic liberty.

My motion would provide Canadian citizens with the protection they require but would not interfere with government's ability to continue its work. Canadians deserve to be reassured that the federal government respects their fundamental rights to own and enjoy property.

This motion, therefore, is an effort to continue the crusade started by our forefathers and the drafters of the 1960 Bill of Rights.

Motion No. 315 is consistent with our government's clear and unwavering commitment to introduce measures to promote rights in this country. Whether working to correct historical injustices like the Chinese head tax or dealing with the aboriginal residential school legacy, whether working to protect the rights of women and children from acts of criminality or endeavouring to extend to Canadians the right to vote for the representatives of the Senate in Canada, this is what our Conservative government has been doing.

• (1740)

Motion No. 315 is also consistent with the earlier efforts of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau. He was an ardent advocate for improved protection of property rights. He first argued this case in a 1968 paper entitled, "A Canadian Charter of Human Rights", tabled when he was the minister of justice.

He reiterated the case in his 1969 paper, "The Constitution of the People of Canada", and once again in 1978, when he introduced Bill C-60, the constitutional amendment bill. He attempted twice more to extend the scope of the charter to include property rights.

With such longstanding and diverse support, moving forward with such a motion as Motion No. 315 seems long overdue. Accordingly, I wish to urge the government and all of my colleagues to support the motion so that we can have measurable advancement on the promotion of Canadian rights.

Why would we seek to deny Canadians' intrinsic rights?

One concern that has been expressed about the inclusion of property rights in the charter is related to the complicated matter of the definition of the term "property rights", but protecting property is not just a conservative or a liberal value but a Canadian value, a value that every party can support. Through time, the term "property", not unlike the charter itself as a living document, has evolved to mean much more than simply real property.

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However, the fact that the term will have to be interpreted by the courts, which may interpret it very broadly, is not a good reason for excluding property rights from the charter.

If property were interpreted by the courts more broadly than in the traditional sense, the entrenchment of property rights also could have positive effects for those persons who do not own real property at this point.

The entrenchment of property rights in the charter could do more than simply protect those who own real property from expropriation without compensation.

In other words, if we were to ask who benefits from this motion, the answer is clearly every Canadian.

Property is not just land and buildings. It may extend to all forms of personal material property. Merely in order to preserve one's right to own property at some point in the future, government must restrain itself in the present. The right to own property is as much about potential ownership as actual ownership.

The best any government can do is work toward equality of opportunity. The right to own and enjoy property is pivotal to all other rights.

The idea captured in this motion embodies the principles of fairness and justice that Canadians hold dear. Our country was founded on these principles and values.

The prospect of new property in its various forms drew our ancestors to this country to settle land, in both the east and the west. They wanted to protect the property that they worked so hard to attain. Canadians are no different today. Our charter should reflect the right to own property and the right to not be deprived of it without due process of law and compensation that is both just and timely.

Whether it is the farmer who fears losing his or her livelihood due to greenbelt expansion, families who must be uprooted to accommodate a much needed mid-peninsula corridor in my riding, or the senior citizens who have worked hard and saved well to pay off their home only to be forced out because it is located near an endangered species habitat, every Canadian who owns and enjoys property should not be arbitrarily deprived of that property. That is precisely what this motion seeks to ensure by amending section 7 of the charter.

The 25th anniversary of the charter provides an opportunity to highlight all its merits and to see how we can improve the charter. I believe the inclusion of property rights is an important step in this direction.

All party support of this motion would demonstrate our commitment to enhancing the property rights of Canadians. The House has heard various debates over the protection of property rights. Indeed, the House has even witnessed widespread cross-party support for the enhancement and promotion of property rights on various occasions.

On one occasion, the Deputy Speaker of the House stated: "We must entrench the right to property in our Constitution. The right to

hold and enjoy property provides one of the checks and balances against undue concentration of power in government at any level".

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of property rights.

It is not hard to find examples in this country of the government unjustly expropriating property or forcing people to sell land and other material without compensation, without other options, and indeed, without any form of recourse to the courts. It is simply misleading to suggest that we have adequate protection of property.

Only when these rights to property are enshrined in the charter will our rights and freedoms no longer be in jeopardy. It is for this reason that I ask all members of the House from all parties to support the inclusion of property rights for Canadians in the charter.

To say yes to Motion No. 315 is to say yes to all Canadians.

• (1745)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that there is not going to be any opposition on this side of the House with regard to the importance of the charter, the need to protect and defend it and, indeed, to improve it wherever possible, and to protect the accessibility of all Canadians to the charter.

I would ask the member this question in view of his position on the charter and the importance of the charter and making it accessible to Canadians. Does he support his government's cancellation of the funding of the court challenges program, which in fact was established to ensure that there was accessibility for all Canadians to the rights and freedoms presented by the charter?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I realize his party from time to time has been accused of not supporting the charter. Here is a great opportunity not only to support the charter, but to enhance the it.

There has been all party support given at various times throughout the century of what that means. With the ability to enshrine property rights, this would go a long way to making the Charter of Rights and Freedoms even stronger.

I encourage all hon. members on the other side of the House to help me and support this motion.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a rural area. My question for the hon. member relates to property in rural areas and real estate.

What we see happening at both the federal and the provincial level, although in Ontario it is happening more at the provincial level than at the federal level, are restrictions on people's use of their property, usually in the service of perfectly defensible environmental laws. These laws impose the cost, for example, of ensuring we have clean waterways, with substantial setbacks for animals to graze on, or requirements that large holding tanks be built for liquid manure in order to continue existing farming operations or so on. These actions are taken so they cause the use and enjoyment of property to be restricted unless substantial costs are paid. Title is not effected, but in reality part of the value of the property is confiscated.

Does the hon. member envision this kind of restriction on people's property and de facto compensation as being covered in some form in this kind of partial expropriation?

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Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have seen, and that is a great example, is the restricted uses of property. I come from a rural area that has been designated greenbelt. There is not much in the member's particular example where individuals are required to do something. It may be more about what they are not allowed to do. That is one of the challenges our farmers face.

Farming has become increasingly difficult over the years. We know there is always a challenge in terms of what we ask from farmers in terms of environmental regulations, what they are allowed to grow or when they are allowed to grow it. One thing this would provide would be some certainty, as farmers move forward, with their property rights and rights to their land. Maybe there could be some compensation given for environmental restrictions.

More important, this would provide some security for our farmers as we move forward. In some of our rural areas it has become more difficult over time to suit the original purposes for which the land was intended.

• (1750)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to speak to the motion presented by the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook:

That, in the opinion the House, the government should amend Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to extend property rights to Canadians.

I listened with great interest to the impassioned speech of the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook. He spoke about certain rights being enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the importance of extending property rights to section 7 of the charter. This would ensure that governments could no longer repossess lands without due process. There would be fair and transparent systems put into place to ensure the owners of the property, whatever the nature of that property, if land was expropriated, removed or repossessed from them, they would get proper, fair and reasonable compensation.

I listened with interest to the member's response to a question asked by the Liberal member of Parliament for Mississauga South about his position on the court challenges program.

We know the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has rights that are already enshrined in it. We know we have three levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal, that have the authority to adopt laws and regulations and in so doing, they may violate the existing rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We also know that not everyone has the financial means to mount a challenge of what they believe is a violation of their charter right before the courts.

As a result of that, the federal government put into place the court challenges program. Let me mention how the Conservative government qualified the court challenges program: "inherently flawed in that it encourages special interest groups to promote issues not supported by Canadians"; "it's a waste of taxpayers' money"; "all laws will be constitutional and therefore there is no need for the court challenges program". Those statements were made by ministers and the Prime Minister of the Conservative government. They go in direct contrast to what the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook just stated.

He said that the reason why it was necessary to enshrine property rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was because we had situations right now where people's lands or other property may be seized or had been seized by governments or by government agencies without proper due process, without proper and reasonable and fair compensation. I find it interesting that I have not heard the member once rise to question his own government's decision to abolish the court challenges program.

Does the court challenges program actually encourage special interest groups to promote issues that are not supported by Canadians? Let us look at some of the issues that went before the courts in which certain individuals, groups or communities were able to benefit from the court challenges program to either intervene in a case or oppose a decision made by a government or a government agency.

• (1755)

I will go to *R. v. Prosper*, 1994, volume 3 of the *Supreme Court Reporter*, page 236. In this case the Supreme Court of Canada considered that whether an impoverished accused upon arrest had a right to state funded counsel. An intervenor in the case argued that depriving poor people of access to counsel would result in equality in access to justice that would be inconsistent with section 15 of the charter.

The court held that where an arrested person requested counsel, the police must desist from attempting to obtain a statement until counsel had been provided. Justice McLachlin, as she was at that time, now Chief Justice McLachlin, in a concurring judgment stated:

—the Charter right to counsel cannot be denied to some Canadian citizens merely because their financial situation prevents them from being able to afford private legal assistance. The poor are not constitutional castaways.

Let us look at another one, *R. v. Mills*, 1999. Mr. Mills was accused of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl and wanted to obtain records of visits she made to a counselling agency and a psychiatrist for use in his court case. He did not want to follow the procedures for accessing these records, which are imposed by Bill C-46. He argued that the Criminal Code violated his rights to a fair criminal process.

The victim, L.C., was able, through the court challenges program, to appeal a ruling of a lower court that said Mr. Mills was right, that he should be able to access that 13-year-old victim's records about her visits to seek counselling and psychiatric treatment and help. It was only because of the court challenges program that this young victim was able to appeal the ruling directly to the Supreme Court of Canada.

There were groups representing women, children, service providers and mental health consumers and providers who intervened in the case to explain why Bill C-46 was needed to protect the equality rights of sexual assault victims. A majority of the Supreme Court of Canada found that the provisions of that bill did not interfere with an accused person's right to a fair criminal process under section 7 and 11(d) of the charter.

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The court pointed out that the scope of these rights was not unlimited and must take into account the rights and interests of other people involved in the process, namely the survivors of sexual assault who must report the crime and testify in court. Sexual assault victims who are primarily women and children have historically been subject to bias and stereotype within sexual assault trials. The Supreme Court of Canada made it clear that equality was an integral component of the concepts of fairness and justice, particularly in the criminal law.

I would like to hear the Prime Minister say that this young 13-year-old victim of sexual assault was a special interest group representing an issue that most Canadians would not support.

We also have the case of *R. v. Williams*, 1988. This ruling is of particular importance to those who have experienced the effects of racism within the Canadian justice system. The central issue in *Williams* was whether perspective jurors could be questioned about their racial bias to ensure a fair trial before an impartial jury. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that where there was a realistic potential of bias, it was reasonable for the accused to have the opportunity to challenge the impartiality of the jurors.

I would like the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook to rise and to defend the court challenges program. Should property rights ever be enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadians of limited means, who may have worked all their life in order to obtain and possess and own certain property, will not have the financial means to contest an abusive repossession of their property. It is only through a court challenges program—

● (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in the House to the motion put forward by the hon. member from the Conservative Party. This is the third attempt at tabling this type of motion. In 1998 and 2005, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville put forward similar initiatives in the House.

In 1998, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, who was then in the Reform Party, introduced Bill C-304 to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights to include property rights. One of the arguments in support of this bill was that such reform would help protect handgun owners from laws to limit the use and possession of such guns.

I will try in all this ambient noise, which is being caused by a discussion between colleagues on the other side of the House, to quote what was said at the time.

In 1998, the mover of this motion said:

I have only time to cover one arbitrary taking of property by the federal government. I will use the example I know best. ...chapter 39 of the Statutes of Canada arbitrarily prohibited an estimated 553,000 registered handguns: 339,000 handguns that have a barrel equal to or less than 104 millimetres in length, about 4.14 inches, and 214,000 handguns that discharge 25 and 32 calibre bullets.

The original intention, which goes beyond the virtuous principle of protecting property, was, among other things, to weaken legislation and provisions that limit the right to possess firearms, because the right to property, as an unlimited concept, is quite broad.

In 2005, the same member, with the same idea, but now a member of the Conservative Party, put forward Motion M-227, which was worded as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should ensure that full, just and timely compensation be paid to all persons who are deprived of personal or private property or suffer a loss in value of that property as a result of any government initiative, policy, process, regulation or legislation.

This is not the first time that this issue has come before this House, and it is before us today by virtue of the motion that is before us. Obviously, it is well intentioned. In my opinion, few people are opposed to property rights in our society. Moreover, this protection already exists.

There are a number of sections of the Criminal Code pertaining to property, including section 346 on extortion, sections 343 and 344 on robbery and section 322 on theft. We could go further with more subtle references, such as section 430, which punishes mischief relating to property; sections 361 to 364, which pertain to false pretence; and section 380 on fraud.

The member who introduced this motion could also consult the Canadian Bill of Rights, a quasi-constitutional document whose first section reads as follows:

It is hereby recognized and declared that in Canada there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely,

(a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;

● (1805)

The civil laws in place on this in the various provinces would be too numerous to cite. Article 952 of the Quebec Civil Code, for instance, states as follows:

No owner may be compelled to transfer his ownership except by expropriation according to law for public utility and in consideration of a just and prior indemnity.

This relates to fair compensation in the event of an expropriation for public utility. This is, therefore, a concept related to arbitration and requires a degree of equilibrium already in place in the legislation. We fear that the proposed Charter amendment would affect that existing equilibrium.

The intent of the motion is perhaps not stated clearly but is certainly present: to institute property rights as an absolute right to which all others would be subject. The text offers no nuances or conditional applications for this property right. Also worthy of note are the perspective and location of this proposed addition of property rights as set out in the motion. Reference is made to section 7 of the Charter, which reads:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Private Members' Business

I would respectfully submit that putting property rights on the same level as the rights to life, liberty and security of the person strikes me as somewhat overdoing it. It indicates a certain lack of perspective. Everyone of course wants to see his possessions protected and is attached to his worldly possessions, but to claim that citizens place this right to material possessions on the same footing as their rights to life, liberty and security is completely unreasonable, ill-advised even.

In any state, a necessary balance must be maintained between rights and the administration of the state. Constitutional recognition of property rights in such an absolute manner without any nuances or conditions opens the door in the most unbelievable way to all manner of legislative challenges, thereby essentially benefiting the most well-off members of society. One might, for example, think of environmental legislation, which often places restrictions on how people can dispose of, or make use of, property in their possession. Or the Income Tax Act, which allows the government to appropriate assets which are the property of citizens. Would declaring property rights to be virtually divine, absolute and near-sacred mean that the government could no longer legally appropriate the assets of an individual by virtue of the Income Tax Act? I will leave hon. members to imagine the consequences this would have for our society, if such were the case.

This government ought to have a look at a few other rights it is diminishing at the moment: the right to be presumed innocent, the right not to be deprived of one's freedom arbitrarily, the right to live in a society that recognizes judiciary independence. All of these have been diminished by the present government. Legislation should be beefed up before rights—

• (1810)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address Motion No. 315.

This will be the last speech I will deliver that Dennis Young in my office has helped me prepare. I want to publicly say that I will greatly miss him, as will the Conservative Party and Canadians right across Canada. I will miss the tremendous work he has been doing and the fantastic research he has put together on countless issues for almost 14 years. He has helped me prepare many speeches over these years. I will miss him greatly and I thank him very much.

I will begin by thanking the hon. member for Niagara West—Glanbrook for introducing this motion. As everyone knows, property rights were intentionally left out of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was a big mistake and now this House has another chance to correct this major oversight.

I say that we have another opportunity or chance to change this because since 1983 property rights bills and motions have been debated 10 times in this House. I know that because five of those debates were on private members' bills or motions that I introduced. Sadly, Conservative MP John Reimer's property rights motion of 1987 was the only one that was passed by this House.

Now that China has put property rights in its constitution, I believe it is time for us to do the same. This is why I support Motion No. 315. And the vast majority of Canadians agree.

In 2005, the Canadian Real Estate Association commissioned an extensive survey involving almost 10,000 respondents. Ninety-two per cent of the telephone respondents thought it was important that the government fairly compensate property owners if their property was expropriated. Eighty-eight per cent thought it was important for the government to fairly compensate property owners if restrictions were imposed on how their property was used.

I am sure many Canadians are asking: "But doesn't that already happen?" Sadly, it does not.

We just need ask the grain farmers in the prairie provinces who grow their own wheat and barley but still cannot sell their grain to the highest bidder. When they try to take their grain across the border because they cannot sell it in this country, the federal government throws them in jail just for trying to sell their own crops. This is a fundamental economic freedom that grain producers in Ontario and Quebec take for granted, but not out west. By the way, the court challenges program has not helped these people one bit and all the examples that I will cite have not helped.

We just need to ask farmers who have had their land taken out of production by the Species at Risk Act. This federal law does not even guarantee them to be compensated for their own loss at fair market value.

We just need to ask the tens of thousands of law-abiding gun owners who have had their legally registered firearms banned, completely devalued by Bill C-68 in 1995. These owners never did anything wrong or unsafe with their property and yet it was banned anyway. They have also been denied permits so that they cannot even enjoy their property at the range. They have been denied compensation for the loss and value of their property, many of which are family heirlooms. In the case of a few hundred owners of section 12(6) handguns, the government is taking them to court because they want to register their firearms but the law that was passed, Bill C-10A, by the previous government was never implemented fast enough to take effect.

Finally, we just need to ask the 30,000 mentally disabled war veterans who were denied payment of the millions of dollars of interest on their pension benefits by the federal government when they lost their case before the Supreme Court of Canada in July 2003.

The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the government's amendment to the Veterans Affairs Act by stating:

Parliament has the right to expropriate property, even without compensation, if it has made its intention clear and, in s. 5.1(4), Parliament's expropriative intent is clear and unambiguous.

• (1815)

The Supreme Court went on to say:

Lastly, while substantive rights may stem from due process, the Bill of Rights does not protect against the expropriation of property by the passage of unambiguous legislation.

At that time I asked: "If property rights guarantees in the Canadian Bill of Rights do not protect an individual's fundamental property rights, what good are they?"

Proper constitutional protection of property rights by amending section 7 of the charter, as proposed by my hon. colleague, would prevent all of the above injustices.

It would also prevent a colossal waste of time and money by our citizens and by the federal government. It would also go a long way to protect the environment because people take far better care of our land and resources than the government ever has or ever will.

Section 7 of the charter states:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Section 7 needs to be amended to include property rights because the right to life and the right to property go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other.

I urge all members of this House to support this motion, so that we can give Parliament the opportunity to fix one of the major flaws in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Prime Minister spoke in December of last year in favour of adding property rights to the Constitution. However, if it were passed by this House, we would still need the approval of seven provinces and 50% of the population. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is high time we approve this and start that process.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force on April 17, 1982, and as has been mentioned, we marked the 25th anniversary of this. A striking omission is the absence of the right to own and use property, and that is why I would like to give the House three reasons why this must be included.

First, property rights are crucial for the building of a just and prosperous nation. The right to own property, to enjoy one's property, and the right not to be unfairly deprived of one's property, is fundamental to a free and democratic society. Property rights are essential to a Canadian way of life, to political freedom and autonomy, and to a well-functioning economy. These protections in themselves are not enough.

If property rights are essential for the well-being of our economy and our way of life, why do they have so little protection? The Bill of Rights is second best and it has been referred to already. We need to include these in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Second, property rights have been at the centre of the human rights movement from the beginning. Since the 17th century, people have understood that the right to own and use property is necessary for political freedom.

After the English civil wars, John Locke famously argued that the rights to life, liberty and property were natural, inalienable rights, and if the state was to have legitimacy in the eyes of the people, it had to secure these rights.

People are disillusioned with government today. One of the ways we can correct that is by adding these to the charter, so their rights will not be run over roughshod by government.

Private Members' Business

Against this background, the charter appears to be an anomaly. As a document that guarantees rights and freedoms in a free and democratic society, its silence about property rights is clearly an omission that has to be corrected.

There is a third reason why the absence of property rights in the charter is an omission. Property rights were originally supposed to be in the charter. Early drafts of the charter naturally included the protection of property rights. This is what we would expect in any bill of rights. The Conservative Party at that time supported including these property rights in the charter. I could go on and explain many other things that we need to do in regard to this.

I am hoping that all members in this House will not be distracted by some of the things that I have heard here in the last hour. We need to focus on property rights, why they are important, why they need to be included in the charter, and then work together to try to accomplish this.

I appeal to all members to have an open mind on this and not listen to some of the distractions that I have heard already in these arguments.

• (1820)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard all the speeches so far and it is a very good debate. I am a big fan of private members' items. I was interested to know a little bit of the history which was provided about the number of times this issue has come up. We have a history with regard to the charter and about, as the member who just spoke referred to, the early drafts in consideration.

It is not one of those cut and dry issues. There were reasons why those who drafted the charter felt that there were other considerations.

What prompted me to rise is perhaps to point out how sometimes things that are said in debate tend to be explained in a way or presented in a way which would paint a particular picture, but maybe not be totally reflective of the facts and in fact all of the facts painting another picture.

To give an example, the member who just spoke referred to some farmers who tried to sell their crop across the border and were arrested and thrown in jail.

I remember that case. I happened to be the parliamentary secretary at the time to the then minister of public works and government services who also had responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board. This happens to be under the Wheat Board and the House has dealt extensively with Wheat Board issues because the current government wants to disband the Wheat Board. It just wants to throw it away.

I did a lot of work to understand the history and why the Wheat Board was there. It was the fact that without a Wheat Board, that meant that those who had to transport their product a lot farther than others would not have the accessibility to the same kind of profitability from the existing markets.

Private Members' Business

The Wheat Board is an interesting issue. To be relevant to the debate in terms of property rights, the member did say that they tried to sell their grain in the United States and they were thrown in jail. That was not the case.

In fact, they were in violation of the rules of the game under the Canadian Wheat Board Act. They were charged with violations. They were charged, there were a number of them, and they were fined. The member will know that. They were fined for violating the rules of the Wheat Board. Two of them decided they wanted to make a demonstration and decided they would not pay the fine. Therefore, the consequence of that, if they did not pay their fine, was that they had to serve some time in jail. That is a little bit different than saying they tried to sell their grain and they were thrown in jail. That is not true; they were fined.

The member talked about the poor gun owners, for example, who have these legally owned guns and they did not hurt anybody, but the government comes up with Bill C-68 which basically identifies guns which are very dangerous, automatic weapons, and all the listed firearms which have absolutely no useful purpose other than to kill people. The member says, "This is my property right. I should be able to have an automatic weapon. I should have an Uzi".

When we twist it that way, the member knows that even under the existing gun legislation the firearms which are properly fixed can continue to be collector's items and so on, but now the member and the Conservative Party do not want to register long arms. They continue to defer things like that.

The big issue has to do with property in a sense, and maybe others would be considering this, but it would be things like one's land.

• (1825)

One of the members raised the issue of the species at risk and that land could be confiscated. I remember debating that bill. I remember being involved in doing the research, just like this member does with his staff. I do my own.

When we look at it and say here are the species at risk, there are certain habitats within large farms which in fact include designated species at risk. It means that there are protected habitats. It does not mean that the property is totally expropriated. It could be that there is a restriction on the use of certain parts of the property.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: It's completely devalued.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The member says it is completely devalued.

At what point in time do we decide that we are going to protect species at risk? The laws of the land are evolutionary. It takes into account important aspects.

There was never this idea, as was presented by the member I think very erroneously, that somehow all the land would be expropriated without compensation. That is absolute nonsense.

The final point I wanted to raise has to do with the court challenges program. The member's motion is suggesting that we want to enshrine something else in the charter. I think this is a good debate.

It is not a good debate when the starting point is that there is no guaranteed accessibility for all Canadians to the charter. If more things are put in, but the court challenges program is destroyed, how does that help? How does that help all Canadians?

The issue is that the government has abolished the court challenges program. That program was put in there to make sure that all the protections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms were accessible to all Canadians. If a person did not have the money to challenge a decision, whether it came from a municipal, provincial or a federal jurisdiction, the Federal Court, that individual would be able to defend his or her charter rights.

This costs money. Some people cannot do it. The members are suggesting and they have suggested on the public record that these are just a bunch of special interest groups. It really is sad when we look at something like the Montfort Hospital. This is a bilingual hospital that was trying to survive and is still there today because of the court challenges program.

I raise it because if we want to enshrine more things into the charter, then obviously accessibility is an important part. That is what is missing in this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the House will now go into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering votes under national defence in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

• (1830)

[*English*]

I now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

[*For continuation of proceedings see part B*]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, May 17, 2007
(Part B)**

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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[Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

NATIONAL DEFENCE—MAIN ESTIMATES 2007-08

(House in committee of the whole for consideration of all Votes under National Defence in the Main Estimates, Mr. Royal Galipeau in the chair)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Bourassa has 15 minutes. Will he be sharing his time with another member?

• (1830)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough Centre. We will each have seven and a half minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Bourassa.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, this evening is not a question period. We will be discussing supply.

I would like to begin by talking about respect. I think that this evening's exchange should take place in the spirit of respect for our troops and taxpayers. I will raise a number of questions about the costs of the mission, acquisitions and other items.

First, I would like to ask the minister what the mission in Afghanistan has really cost to date.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, the incremental costs for Afghanistan to date are \$2.6 billion.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, it seems to me that last year, on November 7, they said that the estimated total cost to the end of February 2009 was \$3.9 billion. Now it seems that these estimates have been increasing since the beginning.

What are the expected costs of the mission in Afghanistan from now to the end of February 2009?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the incremental estimates for the mission to the end of February 2009 are \$4.3 billion.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, can the minister tell us if that also includes equipment or if that is just the operating budget?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it does not include major equipments. Major equipments are calculated differently because they are retained by the armed forces and reused elsewhere.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, when we introduced Operation Archer in 2005, we were talking about \$280 million for equipment at the time.

What are the current additional operating budget costs for the mission in Afghanistan, taking into account all of the announcements the minister has made about the mission in terms of equipment?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am afraid the member will have to repeat the question. I do not understand what the member is asking.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I simply want to know how much it costs the taxpayers in terms of equipment. I know, for example that the minister has made an announcement about the tanks. I gave him as an example Operation Archer with all of the lists. Since I want to ask several questions, I will not go over that list again because he knows it.

At that time, in 2005, the requirements were estimated at \$280 million. In terms of equipment, if we put aside the operating budgets, how much did it cost for the equipment?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, 2005 was during the Liberal government's time. However, if the member wants to talk about the procurements that we have talked about recently, we have four C-17 aircraft. Both the capital and the support costs for 20 years are \$3.4 billion.

There are 17 tactical aircraft. Again, the acquisition costs and the 20 year support are \$4.9 billion. There are 16 medium to heavy lift helicopters. The acquisition and service for 20 years is \$4.7 billion. There are 2,300 medium trucks at \$1.2 billion and three joint support ships at \$2.9 billion. There are 100 Leopard C2 tanks. The capital acquisition is \$650 million and the support for 20 years is about \$650 million, about the same range.

Business of Supply

•(1835)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I know that our time is being counted. I thank the minister for his answers.

On the subject of the Chinook helicopters, the amount of \$4.7 billion is mentioned. It is clear in our minds, on this side of the House, that the Chinooks were purchased for the mission in Afghanistan. So the amount of \$4.7 billion will fluctuate because it seems that this transportation equipment will not be adequate. Boeing has been asked to provide additional shielding and to add equipment, as a result of which this equipment will not be ready before 2011 or 2012.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell us whether the amount of \$4.7 billion is the total budget and that there will be no increase? Does he expect that when this question comes up again the budgets will greatly exceed \$4.7 billion given the requirements of National Defence?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, just to clarify the issue, these equipments were not necessarily bought for Afghanistan. They are for restructuring the armed forces in the long term. That is why we are talking about 20 year support. At the moment our estimate for capital and support for 20 years of the 16 heavy lift helicopters is \$4.7 billion. That is 20 years into the future.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, is the minister, therefore, confirming that the Chinooks are not necessary for the mission in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the minister is confirming that they certainly could be used in the Afghan mission. They are important for the Afghan mission, but they can also be used in Canada. If, for instance, an aboriginal village is flooded or something like that and we have to move lots of people, we can use these helicopters. We can also use them to move troops elsewhere in the country or offshore if we have another engagement. These helicopters also lift artillery guns. They lift 15 or 20 tonnes, so they are used everywhere.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, in another vein, can the minister tell me what is the most useful item for a soldier, after a rifle?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, there is no single piece of equipment that is the most important for a soldier. It is part of a whole spectrum of equipment, depending upon what function one has within the battle group. Artillery need guns. Armour need tanks and reconnaissance vehicles. Infantry need APCs and trucks. There is a whole range of equipments.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I was speaking of a soldier as such. In my opinion, what is most useful to a soldier after a rifle are his or her boots.

It seems that the soldiers in Afghanistan are obliged to pay for the boots they need out of their own pockets, and even to look to our British allies to buy them. I have also learned that there will be a delivery but not until October.

What does the minister intend to do to ensure that our soldiers have proper boots?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, there is no requirement for any soldier to buy any boots in Afghanistan. There are sufficient boots for all soldiers.

There is another order of additional boots coming in, and when they come, that will just mean that they are more plentiful, but at the moment there is no shortage of boots.

If someone chooses to buy boots, it is their own decision

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I think he should reply to Mrs. Clarke.

[*English*]

She said that it is unfair that soldiers are buying their own footwear and why should a military man have to pay for his own gear.

Her son is working right now in supplies, so she knows what she is talking about. I hope that the minister will take a look at that.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I did notice that and yes, I did check and the answer is there are enough boots for everybody.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to pick up on what the member for Bourassa said, that this exchange be respectful. First and foremost, our men and women in the past, present and future have done their jobs so admirably. No matter how tough the questions are, it has nothing to do with our men and women in the military.

I want to ask the minister with respect to our heavy lift, what type of aircraft are we using now to transport our heavy equipment?

•(1840)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, at the moment heavy equipment can be moved by sea. It can also be moved by heavy lift rented from the Ukrainians or the Russians, I am not sure which country.

Mr. John Cannis: Both.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Both. Also the American air force use C-17s to move most of our equipment in when it gets close to Afghanistan.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, I want to ask the minister, are we not using any of our Hercules C-130s?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it is how we define heavy lift. The C-130 Hercules, I believe, is limited to about 17 tonnes. Anything that is heavier than 17 tonnes, we have to use another means.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, have we used the Hercules C-130 at all for the Afghan mission?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, yes, we have. In fact, I think we keep three on line for the Afghan mission. They operate out of one of our bases and they rotate equipment and people in, but they do not carry the heavy equipment. The heavy equipment, as I said, is carried by—

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

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, could the minister give us a brief description why they are able to use them today and he feels that they are safe today, when while in opposition he felt they were endangering our men and women? Could the minister give me an explanation, please?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not quite understand the thrust of this question. Are we talking about C-130s?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, that is correct.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I think there is a C-130 that arrives in Kandahar airfield every single day, so we use them, but we do not use them for heavy lift. They are incapable of doing heavy lift.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, I think the minister misunderstood my question.

The comments in the past were that they were outdated, worn out and endangering the lives of our men and women, no matter the use to which they were put.

My question is very simple. Why were they dangerous to our men and women then and why are they not now?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, now I understand the thrust of his question. We are talking about the wear and tear and the age of the Hercules fleet. In fact, three aircraft have already been taken off line. They are beyond use. We will continue to take them off line until we get the replacements.

There are about nine or ten younger Hercs that have a lot of hours left in them, but there are about 20 Hercs that are reaching the end of their life.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, I will move on to my other question. It has to do with the mission overall with respect to the caveats. I am glad that the general is here.

We know very well that a year or so ago we extended our mission to 2009. I believe it was in May when there was a vote taken in the chamber.

We know that these things are planned on a long term basis. Can the minister today commit at least to give notice to our NATO partners, given that we are committed to a certain date, so that they can plan ahead? We know that NATO, of course, often does plan ahead. NATO does not make decisions overnight.

Can the minister assure us that this discussion will unfold with NATO?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it happens that this is the first anniversary. May 17 last year we extended the mission to February 2009. The cabinet has not met to discuss this topic. I do not believe it will meet to discuss it, perhaps until next year sometime, at which time whatever comes out of that, if there is a desire to change

the mission, Parliament will be informed and it will be discussed in Parliament.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, can the minister assure the House that should that discussion unfold and should Canadians be asked to extend the mission, before the government commits to extend the mission, as we are faced with the so-called caveats today around the table, he will demand that these caveats be lifted and not restrict other members of NATO in their participation? Can he assure us that these caveats will be lifted?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I can assure the members opposite that if there is any significant change to the commitment in Afghanistan, Parliament will be informed and consulted.

With respect to caveats, we are working on a continuous basis to have caveats removed. Considerable numbers of them have been removed. There are still some remaining, but we are confident that over time all caveats will be removed.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Chair, I want to go on to the ITAR program which is the program that allows Canadian workers to participate in repair, maintenance and so on of our equipment. We know there is a blockage in terms of Canadians who were born outside the country with dual citizenship. Could the minister give us an update as to what is happening with that file?

• (1845)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, a partial initial agreement has been made between the defence department, DND, and the state department in the United States. The essence of the agreement is that they will accept any defence employee who gets the required security clearance to operate on American equipment. That is the short version.

Mr. John Cannis: The last question I have, Mr. Chair, has to do with a most recent event and that is when the wife of the Leader of the Opposition wanted to visit CFB Wainwright in Alberta. I am not saying it is accurate, but rumour has it that through DND, instructions were given that for Ms. Krieger, who is a former professor and is well acquainted with what she wanted to do, there would be no media, no publicity and basically to visit the families. I am not saying that the minister had instructed specifically but certain instructions were given.

Can he assure us when an individual or individuals who meet the qualifications and have a significant role to play that such a request will not be denied in the future?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I understand it, Professor Krieger is a professor at DND and that was the issue. I had no involvement in this at all. It was a decision by a base commander who has the right. If his base is too busy, he does not have to accept the DND professor, no matter who they are.

If Ms. Krieger came as the wife of the Leader of the Opposition, that would be a different matter. If she is coming in a political role, then my office would be advised of any politician showing up on a base. However, as a professor, which is my understanding of the arrangement that she was going under, it is strictly up to the military. I had no involvement.

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We will move on to the next round. The hon. Minister of National Defence will have a 15 minute slot now.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, as Minister of National Defence, I am responsible for a very big institution.

[*English*]

Canadians entrust us with billions of dollars of public funds, fully expecting that we will invest them wisely with the best interests of Canada at heart.

I am proud to say this evening that this government is doing exactly that. We have been an effective steward of public funds investing in the right things with the right results for Canadians. We have been an efficient steward of public funds making sure that with every investment we are getting the best bang for our buck.

As indicated in the main estimates for national defence, the 2007-08 program amounts to some \$16.9 billion. The department employs thousands of military members and civilian public servants.

[*Translation*]

The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces have a strong presence throughout this country, from Alert in the north, to St. John's in the east, to Comox in the west.

[*English*]

These thousands of men and women, military and civilian, are fulfilling a critical national responsibility. They are defending Canada, Canadians and Canadian interests. Whether their job is financial accounting in National Defence headquarters, servicing aircraft in Bagotville or patrolling the grounds of Kandahar province, each of these individuals plays an important role in our defence team. This government is doing its utmost to support them.

Our first priority goes without saying. We want the Canadian Forces to achieve success in every operation we ask them to undertake. Providing for the defence of Canada, Canadians and Canadian interests is a no-fail mission. This past year has highlighted why we need our Canadian Forces now as much as ever.

The mission in Afghanistan has been making the most headlines but do not forget the helping hand our forces gave to Canadians trapped in Lebanon last summer, or the 8,000 search and rescue missions our air force undertook, saving some 1,000 lives, or the thousands of kilometres that our Canadian Rangers patrolled in the north, or the assistance our military men and women are prepared to give right now in the event that flooding occurs in British Columbia, should that assistance be requested.

The Canadians in Lebanon and the families in the Fraser Valley know that success in operations is paramount. That is why supporting operations is a priority for this government, whether it means putting tanks into theatre in Kandahar or supporting Arctic sovereignty patrols.

Having said that, we cannot realistically expect the Canadian Forces to maintain this high operational tempo at their current capacity. The downsizing and downgrading that the Canadian Forces

suffered through the 1990s has left them with formidable challenges in human resources, in equipment and in infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

The fact is that we do not have enough men and women in uniform. They must manage with some equipment that is old and out of date, and some parts of their physical infrastructure are in need of repairs, or no longer meet current needs.

● (1850)

[*English*]

The Canadian Forces need the right people, equipment and infrastructure to achieve success in operations, not only today but also in the years to come. That is why the rebuilding of these core capacities of the Canadian Forces is critical for the defence of Canada and our national interests.

This government will continue growing the regular and reserve forces, and I am pleased with the progress that the Canadian Forces recruiting group has already been able to make. The number of applications for enrollment in the Canadian Forces is already up 25% from this time last year, and the recruiting group has been working hard to streamline the recruiting process to better serve applicants. As it now stands, 21% of new applicants are being enrolled within one week and another 32% within one month.

This government is also making significant headway in the area of equipment. In fact, under this government the budget for capital projects has now increased to 21% of the overall departmental program.

[*Translation*]

We are going forward with a number of procurement projects, including strategic and tactical medium to heavy lift helicopters, joint support ships, medium sized logistics trucks, and main battle tanks.

[*English*]

Our airmen and airwomen based in Trenton will see the impact of these major projects firsthand when the first of our C-17 strategic lift aircraft rolls onto the tarmac this summer.

Equipping the Canadian Forces is not only about buying the right things, it is also about acquiring them in a timely and cost effective manner. The fact that there will be a C-17 Globemaster in Trenton by this summer, just over a year after I made the initial announcement, is a testament to the progress that this government has made in modernizing defence procurement in Canada.

Our Canadian Forces should not and, in many cases, cannot wait 15 years to see a procurement project come to fruition. That is why, under the leadership of this government, the Department of National Defence is pursuing a number of procurement reform initiatives. In the future I do not want the C-17 example to be an anomaly. I want that kind of rapid procurement to be the norm, while also maintaining transparency and competitiveness through our procurement process.

Business of Supply

This government is also improving the infrastructure of the Canadian Forces. For example, before Christmas this government announced that the existing oil and electric heating systems in military housing at CFB Gagetown will be converted to natural gas. Last month I had the pleasure of announcing the consolidation of Canadian Forces Station St. John's into a brand new modern facility in Pleasantville by 2013.

Just recently my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that we will be upgrading the facilities at 12 Wing Shearwater to accommodate the new helicopter fleet it will be getting in two year's time.

Those are only a few of the recent initiatives this government has taken to ensure that the Canadian Forces have the living and working conditions they need here in Canada. These projects are for the Canadian Forces today and tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

When we consider the uncertain security climate these days, there is no doubt that the Canadian Forces will be needed for many years to come.

[*English*]

That is why implementing this government's Canada First defence strategy is another one of our priorities right now and it will make sure that the Canadian Forces are well positioned for the long term.

The initiatives I have already outlined, such as the major procurement projects, have been part of implementing the Canada first defence strategy, but there is more work to be done. The department plans to move forward on several new initiatives this year. These include improving national surveillance, increasing the military's presence at home and enhancing the Canadian Forces' ability to respond to emergencies on Canadian soil, rebuilding and strengthening our military across all services so that they are well placed to respond to future defence needs is a large effort.

The government's approach balances operations, expansion and transformation efforts in a measured and steady fashion to ensure success in operations, to ensure steady expansion and to ensure continued capability renewal. We cannot move forward too fast because then we would be neglecting the needs of today. This government is committed to implementing the Canada first defence strategy but at a steady rate that does not stretch the Canadian Forces too thin and undermine their current operations.

This government is acting as a responsible steward of public funds in defence. As members examine the cost estimates for defence in 2007-08, when they see a line item like the repair of roads at 4 Wing Cold Lake, they must remember that all these investments, both large and small, contribute to the broader goal of defending Canada, Canadians and Canadian interests. This is a complex and challenging job.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Fortunately, we have an extremely professional and competent team of Canadians, made up of soldiers and civilians who are prepared to work as long as it takes, and do everything possible to fulfil this country's defence mission. Sometimes they are far from

their families. Sometimes they put their lives at risk, and sometimes they make the ultimate sacrifice.

[*English*]

The least we can do as a government and as parliamentarians is to ensure our Canadian Forces have the right resources at the right time to do their jobs. I am proud to be part of a government that is doing exactly that.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Chair, our Canadian military has been neglected for a long time. The previous Liberal government irresponsibly allowed the state of our Canadian Forces to decline during its 13 year tenure.

The Liberals left our military's resources and equipment in an inadequate state for our men and women in uniform. It has been left to our Conservative government to correct this problem. As the member of Parliament with CFB Moose Jaw in my riding, this issue is obviously of great concern to me.

It is unfortunate but it is not difficult to come up with an example of deteriorating equipment in the Canadian Forces. We only need to look at the fleet of Hercules aircraft. They are aging rapidly and in urgent need of replacement. Canada's Hercules fleet has logged more flying hours than any other military Hercules fleet in the world. It is considered the workhorse of the Canadian Forces and they have been operating effectively for decades.

However, some of these planes, which have been in service since the early 1960s, will be grounded by the end of 2010. The tactical airlift capability must be replaced.

It is not only the air force that has been damaged by years of neglect. In my riding, the Saskatchewan Dragoons want to know about the tanks, the trucks and the ships. We should not forget that those are aging too. The fleet of Leopard 1 tanks are over 30 years old. We are in a situation now where the support and spare parts that are required to maintain these tanks will soon be obsolete. The tanks must be replaced.

The medium size logistics trucks for the army were fielded in the early 1980s. That was 20 years ago. This fleet needs to be replaced as soon as possible given its age and increasing maintenance problems. The trucks must be replaced.

Let us talk about the navy's replenishment ships. The HMCS *Protecteur* and the HMCS *Preserver* have done an exceptional job for the Canadian Forces but they are now over 35 years old and have become difficult and costly to maintain. The ships must be replaced.

We must also remember that this House voted on the mission in Afghanistan and committed our troops until February 2009. We cannot set them up for failure by neglecting their equipment needs. It is our obligation to provide them with the tools that they need to be successful. It would be irresponsible to send them into harm's way without agreeing to give them what they need and everything that they require.

The government needs to ensure that the Canadian Forces are well-equipped, whether or not Canada stays in Afghanistan longer than 2009. Without proper equipment, the Canadian Forces cannot accomplish their tasks at home or abroad.

Business of Supply

The Canadian Forces need to be self-reliant. It is the only way we can be more secure at home and have a greater impact abroad. The Canadian Forces have been underfunded, understaffed and under-equipped for far too long.

I would like to ask the Minister of National Defence or his parliamentary secretary for an update on the government's commitment to rebuilding the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, it has been said many times in the House that this new government is committed to rebuilding the Canadian Forces. By fixing, transforming, expanding and properly equipping our military, we will build a Canadian Forces that can effectively do the jobs that Canadians expect of them here at home and on the world stage.

We have worked hard over this past year to deliver on that promise. The government is doing its utmost to provide the tools our men and women in uniform need to succeed.

I think we can all agree that investment in the Canadian Forces is long overdue. Because of years of significant under-investment, we have a huge replacement backlog. Aircraft, trucks, ships and other important military hardware that should have been replaced years ago are still in operation.

Last June, the government outlined its plans to purchase joint support ships, strategic and tactical airlift, medium to heavy lift helicopters and trucks for our men and women in uniform. Almost one year later, we are making progress with these important projects.

The recent signing of the contract for the purchase of C-17s is a bold step toward providing the Canadian Forces with the equipment they need, when they need it. In the coming months, the first of these aircraft will arrive in Canada and the Canadian Forces will take delivery on the first of many new and urgently needed resources.

Acquiring strategic airlift will make for more effective deployments within Canada and significantly contribute to our "Canada First" strategy. It will also fulfill a top NATO requirement and show that Canada is taking leadership among our allies.

Finally, our forces will have the rapid, reliable and flexible capability to move troops and equipment quickly over long distances. We will ensure that Canada's military maintains a vital ability to respond to domestic emergencies and international crises.

Gone are the days when we had to rely solely on chartered strategic airlift. Our own planes will guarantee that during a crisis, the Canadian Forces will have the tools they need to respond.

This government is also in the process of replacing the aging Hercules fleet. This is integral to ensuring that critical resupply missions—

• (1900)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The time has expired for this time slot. We will have to move on.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would first like to thank the minister for being here. Nonetheless, I intend to be fairly hard on him with respect to the Conservative government's current defence policy. I think it is the role of the opposition to do this, and it is also the role of the opposition to stand up for taxpayers. So when it comes to Afghanistan and everything that follows—the purchase of military equipment—there has been a flagrant lack of control within the Department of National Defence. We have already been told that military spending, to the end of the mission, will be nearly \$5 billion, not counting equipment.

We have before us at present a list of military equipment totalling \$21 billion. And here is where the problem lies. Earlier today, the minister said in his speech that Canadians have confidence in him. I think that if Canadians and Quebecers knew that there is a bill for \$21 billion attached to the bill for \$5 billion, they would react very strongly. As well, when I have finished my 15-minute speech and my questions, I do not believe that my support from colleagues in the Conservative Party will have risen at all.

In my opinion, buying this much equipment, for \$21 billion, with no military capacity plan, is an absolute nonsense. It is outside the control of this House and the control of the public. I have some huge examples of this. I will not go back to the strategic airlift question, because the contract has already been signed. But I will come back to tactical airlift. The last time we talked about this, we asked questions and I am pleased to see that General Hillier is here. The last time, I told the media in Quebec that I had the impression that the entire matter of military procurement was in the hands of what I call the old boys.

These people I call the old boys are consultants. Look at the case of CFN, which includes Paddy O'Donnell—I believe Mr. Hillier was chief of staff for Paddy O'Donnell—and General MacDonald, who was formerly chief of staff of the air force. All these people are now part of CFN, and more specifically are lobbyists for the company. They are being paid by the taxpayers. I have an example here.

Listen carefully. For the Hercules 130, these are the prices paid for each plane. Remember that we are buying 17 of them. The prices paid in the United States are as follows: the air force reserve, \$44 million; the air national guard, \$52 million; marine corps, \$57 million; coast guard, \$59 million; department of defence, \$63 million; USA 95: \$33 million; USA 98, \$49 million; USA 2000, \$61 million; and it goes on like that. The price is between \$40 and \$60 million.

Do you know how much Canadian taxpayers will pay for the Hercules, probably thanks to CFN? They will have to pay \$188 million per plane. So if we were to pay the average of what was paid by other countries—Italy, Australia and the United States armed forces—we would probably save \$1.5 billion. I did the calculation. The overpayment will be \$88 million for each of the 17 planes, for a total of \$1.5 billion.

Can the minister confirm that he has completely lost control of his department and that he is no longer the one making decisions about military procurement? It is the chief of staff. There are big lobbyists whose ultimate concern is their companies' interests, and they are making off with the pot, with the chocolate bar, and it is the taxpayers who are left holding the bill. Can the Minister confirm that he has lost control of his department?

● (1905)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, first, there are some facts that are incorrect. The member has quoted a number of facts.

My belief at the moment is the capital cost for a C-130J, which is quite a different aircraft from all the earlier models, is about \$85 million Canadian. It is not the number the member quoted.

With respect to the integrity of the Chief of the Defence Staff, he is not influenced in any way by any lobbyists. We have a very rigorous system in the defence department, in public works and in the industry department. The basic requirement is made by the military. It does not say it wants Hercules aircraft or C-17s or anything. It defines in functional terms what it wants. Then teams get together to identify what equipment is available on the planet that could satisfy that. It happened in the medium transport requirement that the C-130 met the requirement.

The member's number are wrong. It is \$85 million Canadian.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to say a few words now about the Chinook helicopters. The Chinook is the famous heavy lift transport helicopter for which we are paying \$4.7 billion, I believe. I have two things to say about this.

First, what the government wants to acquire is the F series Chinook. There are almost no defences on this type of helicopter. The new generation of Chinooks, the G series, is currently being used by the U.S. special forces. These helicopters are not for sale. The F series does not have what is called a defensive package. This means that when the helicopter arrives, it will be rather vulnerable to combatants on the ground and will have almost no equipment to defend it. The government is not saying anything, but there are supposed to be escort helicopters that accompany these helicopters in theatres of operations.

I think it is important for Canadians to know this. In other words, the price that is quoted does not include the package to defend this helicopter in theatres of operations. It must be escorted by other helicopters. Does this mean that the government will be buying other helicopters? Does it mean that the government will insist that the Americans provide us with the G series? What is certain is that the price that was quoted does not include the defensive package I was talking about.

There is a problem, therefore, with the escorts for these helicopters. There is another problem with the delivery date. They have been saying since the beginning that these military purchases are for Afghanistan. However, the delivery date for these helicopters is 2012. Our engagement in Afghanistan should be normally be over by then, unless the government decides to extend the mission. That may be what it intends to do.

Business of Supply

There are two technical questions that arise therefore. How does the minister explain the fact that the F series, which is not equipped with a defensive package, will have to be escorted by other helicopters? How does he explain the fact that the delivery date does not coincide with our mission in Afghanistan, which is supposed to end in February 2009?

● (1910)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, first, the amounts of money the member keeps quoting are 20 year costs. For example, the \$4.7 billion for Chinook helicopters works out to something like \$200 million a year. These are 20 year costs. Not one year costs. We do not want the public to think we are paying these huge amounts of money in one year. It is the service for 20 years.

Second, the cost estimates we have for this include all the add-ons, including all the safety packages about which the member is talking. They are inside that money and we intend to acquire them.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to say a few words now about search and rescue aircraft.

The Bloc Québécois would be disappointed to learn that the only military equipment currently really devoted to search and rescue and Canada's internal policies is being asked to pay the price of all the government's other purchases. It seems, though, that the government is currently tempted to postpone this program until later because the financial commitments are just too great and they may not be able to pay for this plane.

I heard the minister and the Prime Minister say during the election campaign that this type of plane was absolutely essential for the people of Canada and that the government would purchase it. Now, though, they are saying that the program will be delayed and we may even have to work on the old Buffalos to extend their lifetime, which in my view is already over.

Could the minister tell us what the latest developments are in regard to search and rescue aircraft? It seems to me that this would be a more justifiable expense. It would not necessarily be just for Afghanistan but for Canadians and Quebecers too, who occasionally need to be searched for and rescued.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, to clarify a point, the major equipment we are buying is not only for Afghanistan. As I tried to say, this major equipment is for the 20 year future of the armed forces.

With respect to the search and rescue, the defence department spends about \$600 million a year on search and rescue because it is a no-fail mission for us. We have to ensure that we offer the best possible search and rescue service to Canadians. At the moment, we have a mixed fleet of Cormorant helicopters and Hercules and Buffalo aircraft employed on search and rescue.

Business of Supply

The air force is looking at options and it is up to the air force to come up with recommendations. The air force is looking at options for the future of the fleet. However, at the moment, the fleet is capable. It is doing its job properly.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to tactical aircraft.

I have just gone over the numbers again. Correct me if I have the wrong figures, but the total cost of the project is \$4.9 billion, \$3.2 billion of which is the cost of acquiring the equipment. Unless I am mistaken or my calculator is wrong, \$3.2 billion divided by 17 airplanes means that each one costs \$188 million.

Why does the minister insist on telling me that each one costs \$108 million when each one really costs \$188 million? That is the number I am getting. I do not want to repeat all of the figures given earlier, but according to those numbers, the acquisition cost of each aircraft varies from \$44 million to \$71 million, and depending on those who procured them before us, we will be paying three or four times the actual cost of the planes. That does not make sense.

I would like the minister to go over this again. There are the support costs, but those are separate. The cost to acquire the 17 aircraft is \$3.2 billion. I agree with him that we will not be paying for that in cash tomorrow morning. The cost will be accounted over the lifetime of the planes, which will be used again elsewhere. For now though, that is the price we will be paying and it looks to me as though it is three or four times higher than what other suppliers were paid.

• (1915)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we are paying the world price for these aircraft and not a penny more. When we start looking at the costs, and I do not have them all at the top of my head at the moment, we have to look at what kinds of training devices they need, how many spare parts to buy, what kind of personnel training system to set up, and how many bases we are on. It begins by applying all those costs, but the basic cost of the machine is \$85 million Canadian.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to discuss one last file with the minister, that of the multi-mission effects vehicles (MMEV). That file was also part of the army's plans, but suddenly disappeared. We know these vehicles can control the entire airspace of a theatre of operations. At one point in time, the army seemed very interested in acquiring these vehicles. The only fault I see with this file thus far is that it was announced by the Liberals. Perhaps that is why this government said they were not good vehicles.

I would like someone to tell me where we are with this file. I know these vehicles are going to be used during the Vancouver Olympic Games. However, at the present time, we have no counter-attack measures to stop a missile headed towards soldiers in the field.

Does the government still intend to equip our soldiers with a vehicle that will protect the airspace surrounding a field of operations?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member opposite is mixing up two different pieces of equipment. They may look the same, but they are different.

One is ADATS. It is an air defence anti-tank system, which we currently have right now and which is serviced by Oerlikon. The second is MMEV, which will take ADATS and morph it into another system.

At the moment, I am waiting for a recommendation. I have not received a recommendation from the Canadian Forces on what they want to do with MMEV, if they want to proceed with it. That is where it stands at the moment. For now we have ADATS and we are using it.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister for being here tonight to discuss the estimates. The official opposition gets to pick which two ministers do this and I guess he has been twice lucky with the Liberals. I have a number of questions for the minister and I hope that he finds them fair.

I am going to ask a basic question about the spending plans of the government with respect to Afghanistan, as a follow up to the last time the minister was in committee of the whole in November.

The minister stated then that the incremental costs for the mission in Afghanistan to date was \$2.1 billion. He estimated that there will be a further \$1.8 billion expended. He estimated that the cumulative incremental costs to February 2009 and also bringing the Canadian Forces home would cost \$3.9 billion.

In light of some of the purchases that have taken place, the tank purchases and other procurement decisions that the government has made recently, I want to ask the minister to tell us what the total incremental costs of the mission will be, and further to that, what exactly has driven up the total estimated costs to date?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the incremental cost as of today is about \$2.6 billion. By the end of February 2009, \$4.3 billion is our estimate at the moment including any costs in withdrawing.

What has changed the figures from the previous ones is that we have added some soldiers there. There are a few hundred more soldiers. They cost money. There are more machines there. We brought in a tank squadron. The operating costs while it is there add to these costs. That is the difference.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I take it the government is not including in those costs the costs of any equipment?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not include any substantive equipment. There might be minor equipment which would be included, but not substantive equipment because we are going to use it for 20 years: aircraft, tanks, trucks, whatever.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, can the minister give us the DND full cost of the mission then? This is the number that his department does track. Can he tell the House what that sum is?

Business of Supply

• (1920)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I can give the member the full cost as of today. That includes salaries of troops that we already have and will have no matter what. That is why, although we can give the full cost, it does not reflect the cost of Afghanistan because those full costs were absorbed in the rest of the department.

As of today, the full costs are \$6.1 billion. I do not have a figure for the future because we have to wait to see how it evolves.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, this House and the Canadian people have been promised a defence capabilities plan for a long time now, for at least six months, if not probably longer than that.

How far long is that plan? Is the government using that plan as it produces it to inform its own procurement costs?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces defence strategy, which is what we call it now, is well advanced in the government system. I anticipate it will be public within a month or two. Yes, we are using it as the guide for our acquisitions.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, in terms of the department's handling of the detainee issue in Afghanistan, I really have to say that it was the first question that I asked the minister in the House of Commons the very first day that this Parliament sat. I requested at that time, over a year ago, that the agreement be redrafted.

I said it was a deeply flawed agreement that was agreed to under the previous government. It did not have any provisions for follow-up by Canada. It had no veto on onward transfer of prisoners and it did not have the same strong provisions that other NATO countries had in their agreements.

I asked the minister about that in committee as well. I asked the CDS about it in committee, and I asked department officials about that agreement over the course of that year in committee.

The minister's response at that time was that there was no intention of redrafting the agreement. The CDS and the officials of the department really kind of brushed off my concerns.

Why did it take so long for the minister to acknowledge the deeply flawed agreement and the problems within that agreement? Why did the government have to wait until human rights activists took it to court before it acknowledged the depth of the problems and then did redraft it?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, let me say first that since I have been in the department, no defence official has ever informed me of any abuse or torture of any detainee. Zero, none. There are a lot of hints and things out there, but there has never been a case brought to my attention.

Rather than going into the past, I think we should appreciate the fact that we have now an extended agreement that is improved over the previous one signed in December 2005 by the previous government. This agreement guarantees human rights access. It guarantees officials from our government access. It also guarantees that the Afghan authorities will reduce the number of detention centres where Canadian detainees will be placed so we can track them better.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I understand that the minister was not given graphic incidents of actual torture that may have taken place. I do understand that.

The fact is, though, that the government's own Department of Foreign Affairs produced reports year after year of the potential of abuse and the knowledge that abuse and torture did take place in Afghan prisons.

The new agreement is much better than the previous one. In terms of the enforcement of the agreement, I would ask the minister to take time to tell us how that agreement is being implemented. I am particularly interested in section 7 where the agreement talks about detainees being held in a limited number of facilities by the Afghans. Can the minister give us an idea of how that section of the agreement would be implemented and monitored?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, this question is more properly in the domain of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I will try to answer her question, but just so the member understands the defence department is responsible to conduct operations, operate the PRT and assist with development. When and where our forces get individuals of interest who become detainees, they process them properly in accordance with all the rules of war. Then they hand them over to the legal Afghan authorities.

That is where the defence department's responsibility ends as a department. It is not where the government's responsibility ends but the defence department's. I answer for the defence department.

I do not know the details of how it is going to be done because that is within the domain of the foreign affairs minister, but we have officials working with Afghan officials now to ensure all these details are worked out.

• (1925)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I understand that, but I want to ask a few more questions on it. If the minister is unable to answer them, that is fair enough.

The new arrangement gives full access to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Canadian government and the UN human rights organizations. I would like to know who the government is considering to send in as monitors. Will they be fully trained as human rights monitors as there is specific training around that and, therefore, will they be able to spot signs of mistreatment?

Also, has the government used that right of access to date and how often is it planned that monitoring would take place?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the only part of that question I know for certain is that we have used the right of access. We used it in the foreign affairs committee the day I said we had a verbal agreement. We used it that day. I do not know subsequently because it is not within my area of responsibility. The member would have to ask the foreign affairs minister.

Business of Supply

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, section 5 is a very important provision in the agreement. It requires that the Afghan government notify us if it wishes to transfer a detainee to a third country. I am sure most people think that a third country would be the U.S., but given that there are Uzbek militants involved in the border areas, they could be taken as detainees as well and possibly transferred to Uzbekistan.

Would National Defence be involved in granting a request or would it be another department?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I believe foreign affairs is responsible for coordinating the Afghan effort and it would be through the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I will move on to procurement.

When the Standing Committee on National Defence first got involved in its study on procurement, the first question that I asked on February 6 was who the lead minister was and who had the final responsibility on defence procurement. The minister answered that there was no final responsibility on defence procurement. That is on the record.

Is the minister still of that view and who in cabinet would be responsible if there were a major crisis or a real problem with defence procurement?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, at least four ministers get involved in procurement: the defence minister is responsible for the requirement and the funding, the public works minister is responsible for the contracting, the industry minister is responsible for industrial benefits, and the Treasury Board President is responsible to make sure that the money is authorized to be spent.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I understand that, but I still want to know who has the final authority or responsibility for procurement in the Department of National Defence.

Pierre Lagueux, who was the former assistant deputy minister of materiel, appeared before the committee not long after the minister did. I asked him about the minister's response and he said, "I've read the transcripts, and I've been watching the committee with interest. To be quite frank, I'm a little surprised at that". Mr. Lagueux went on to say further that in his time at DND, "it was clear to me who was going to hang if things went wrong", namely the Minister of National Defence.

Would the minister agree that he is actually the minister with final responsibility for defence procurement?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I will admit that the Minister of National Defence, and that is me at the moment—

An hon. member: And for a long time.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: —and for a long time I hope, is responsible to ensure that the military gets the equipment, buildings or whatever it needs, so that if eventually the product coming out was not acceptable then, yes, I would step in because I have the money and he who has the gold rules.

• (1930)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, another issue that I have raised a number of times is the need to replace the fixed wing search and

rescue planes. It is something that is very important not only to me, but to the people in my province of British Columbia, because of the geography, the mountains, the ocean, for all of those reasons.

Their replacement was announced three years ago. Could the minister to tell us how long it will be before there are replacements for the 40 year old Buffaloes that are used in British Columbia for search and rescue?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I answered previously to the another member, the search and rescue project is being reviewed now for options. The air force requirements people, as I understand it, have not come to me with their proposal, but I think they have been recalculating and deciding perhaps on another approach.

However, I have been assured that the current fleet of aircraft will continue to operate until they have a solution.

Ms. Dawn Black: They are falling apart.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Well, that is what they say.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, why has this taken so long? Has the delay been from the air force? Has it been from the Chief of Defence Staff, or has it been from the minister's office? It is incredible to me that this file does not move.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the military comes up with the requirements. It defines what it requires. It even defines when it needs it. My part of the project is to ensure that it project makes sense, that it is within our policy, which it is, and that we have the funds for it.

At the moment, the air force staff have yet to come forward with its concrete proposal of what it wants to do in the future for search and rescue.

The Deputy Chair: We now move to the next round and the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence has the floor.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will allocate 10 minutes to this speech and five minutes for questions and answers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, the debate today is about the 2006-07 main estimates for the Department of National Defence.

We are examining the expenditures to ensure that the Department of National Defence can continue to operate and that the Canadian Forces can carry out their mission.

Over the past 16 months, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, I have had the opportunity to meet a great many members of the Canadian Forces.

[*English*]

I have come to know them. I have come to know their families. I have visited them where they have been posted, where they train and where they unselfishly risk so much to carry out the duties assigned to them. I have gained a great respect for the Canadian Forces and what they do every day, the very real and very human face to the pages and pages of seemingly abstract figures presented here tonight.

Business of Supply

Tonight we are discussing numbers. Canada has regular forces of just over 64,000 and a reserve force numbering 24,000. Approximately 2,500 Canadians are currently serving in Afghanistan. Last January, I travelled to Afghanistan to gain a better appreciation of the conditions under which our troops were living and working. I met soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen from all ranks, regular force and reserve force.

I spent time with our task force in Kandahar. I met with the provincial reconstruction team. I spoke with them about what life was like outside the wire and back at camp. They took me to visit their barracks. They showed me how they get needed equipment and they gave me a taste of what they did for fun and recreation.

I also visited the Afghan national army barracks and saw for myself the progress that we are fostering. I was impressed. Morale was high. Enthusiasm and pride abundant. Of course everyone misses Canada and their families, but many soldiers commented on their desire to return for a second or third deployment.

At the main base in Kandahar it was also plain. Keeping in mind the environment they are working in, some of the comforts of home our soldiers need to stay fresh and sharp were readily available, things like hot showers, regular mail delivery, a thriving ball hockey league, good food and phones to call home to keep in touch with loved ones. And they have a memorial, a place they can go to quietly pay their respects and remember their fallen friends and comrades.

Canadians can be proud of their professional and well-trained armed forces. Canadians should be proud of what they have accomplished in a poor and conflict-ridden country over a very short period of time. Our forces are making the world a better and safer place for Canadians and for those less fortunate than we are.

The job of this government is to support their efforts, and that is exactly what we are doing. With budget 2006, this government provided \$5.3 billion over five years to help rebuild and revitalize the Canadian Forces. Budget 2007 has further recognized the tremendous demands we place on Canadian Forces members and the unique needs of our veterans and military families.

This fiscal year the defence budget will increase by \$2.1 billion. Notably this fiscal year, the portion of the overall defence program, dedicated to capital projects, has increased to 21%. DND has increased the allowances of our soldiers. Veterans Affairs Canada has established funding for five new operational stress injury clinics across the country. We know we need to keep up our efforts, but let us look beyond the numbers and what our investment really means.

During my visit to Afghanistan, I stood at a medical clinic in Camp Sherzai where I met an Afghan man named Ramazan. One evening last fall, as he walked home in Kandahar city, Ramazan became the innocent victim of a suicide bomber. Having lost his left leg in the blast, he faces a difficult future made a little easier by the generosity of the Wheelchair Foundation of Canada, which has distributed 560 wheelchairs to ensure that Ramazan and others like him can retain their mobility.

This was a project initiated by an anonymous Canadian donor, a second world war veteran. Canadians kept this project going by sending donations large and small. Like the generous Canadians who have made an impact through their donations, the Canadian Forces

are helping to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan, doing their jobs quietly helping Afghans and making a huge impression. They are establishing a secure and stable environment to allow for much needed development and reconstruction.

● (1935)

[*Translation*]

This year's report on plans and priorities recognizes the important work carried out by the Canadian Forces.

The stated outcomes—within the program activity architecture—help to guide the men and women of the Defence team. They are:

First, Canadians' confidence that DND and the Canadian Forces have relevant and credible capacity to meet defence and security commitments;

Second, success in assigned missions.

Third, military forces have an impact, provide informed professional advice with respect to the decision-making of the Government of Canada, contribute to a strong sense of Canadian identity and heritage, and exercise Canadian influence in the global community.

[*English*]

To achieve these goals requires careful planning and prior organization, a step by step process toward success. Based on this, DND has established its priorities for fiscal year 2007-08.

Our priorities mean that the Canadian Forces must be capable of providing support to provincial and municipal authorities when in crisis such as a flood, or a forest fire or a catastrophic storm threatens here at home. They mean supporting other government departments and agencies in protecting Canada's borders.

Internationally, they mean making our mark in places like Haiti, the Sudan and Afghanistan and fulfilling our international commitments to the UN, to NATO and to our allies.

However, to be successful in operations Canada needs to ensure our regular and reserves have the training, the people, the financial and materiel resources they need to do their duties.

This government is making the Canadian Forces an employer of choice, ensuring that benefits for our men and women in uniform are commensurate with all they offer Canada. This government is also working to implement its "Canada First" defence strategy. This is dependent upon not only good people, but also good equipment. Therefore, we are moving ahead with major capital acquisitions.

Business of Supply

In the past year alone we announced plans to acquire or signed contracts for strategic and tactical airlift, medium to heavy lift helicopters, medium and heavy trucks, joint support ships and Leopard 2 main battle tanks.

At the same time, we are strengthening our key defence relationships through active participation in the United Nations, NATO and Norad. Of course the foregoing priorities require an administrative efficiency. That is why the Department of National Defence is making the procurement system more responsive. We are doing so by buying more off-the-shelf products and by reducing the requirement for costly prototype development and customization.

In conclusion, the goals and priorities of the Department of National Defence allow Canada to take up its leadership role in the world.

• (1940)

[*Translation*]

Canadians wish to be world leaders. This spirit of leadership spurs a young man or woman to don the Canadian Forces uniform in order to protect their fellow citizens or to help stabilize and rebuild a distant country. The Canadian government's responsibility is to ensure that the Canadian Forces have the means and the capacity to carry out these responsibilities.

That is why, Mr. Chair, the main estimates presented this evening are so important.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canadian reservists in army, navy and air force reserve units of the Canadian Forces are an integral part of Canada's defence mission. Together with the regular force counterparts, they have selflessly committed themselves to defending Canada and Canadians in North America and helping Canada ensure that we live in a peaceful and stable international community.

These reservists are exemplary citizens and they make us all proud. Not only are they serving Canada in the Canadian Forces, but as citizen soldiers, they are also representatives of the Canadian Forces to their communities and to the Canadian public. In many respects they are ambassadors of the CF to their families, neighbours and civilian co-workers.

In domestic crises, whether it may have been wildfires in British Columbia, flooding in Manitoba or ice storms in Quebec, these reservists have answered the call. In our current mission in Afghanistan reservists have answered the call and are serving with distinction alongside the regular force and our NATO and Afghan allies.

I remind the assembled members that, under the terms of service of a reservist, all of these deployments are voluntary. Reservist who respond to a domestic crisis or international deployment have to balance their civilian lives, their career, family and other civilian responsibilities with their service and dedication to Canada and Canadians.

Like their regular force counterparts, they have made the choice to serve Canada. It is an admirable one that all members here respect and pay tribute to.

This service is invaluable to Canada. That is why Canadians are pleased to hear that the Government of Canada has announced a modernized pension plan for the Canadian Forces that, for the first time, extends pension coverage to reserve force members.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence provide the assembled members with details on how this modernized pension plan will benefit our men and women in the Canadian Forces, both in the regular force and reserves?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I am happy to answer the member's excellent question.

This government was pleased to introduce a modernized pension plan for the Canadian Forces that benefits regular and reserve members of the Canadian Forces. This modernization was recommended in 1998 and now we are following through and getting the job done for the Canadian Forces.

All members of the Canadian Forces, regular and reserve, will benefit from the modernization of the pension system. These changes will improve the quality of life of our members. They will encourage Canadians to join the Canadian Forces. They will also encourage our regular and reserve force members to continue their service to Canada and Canadians.

For the regular force, the changes to current pension arrangements include a broader range of pension benefits.

The reserve force is the last large federal public sector workforce without a pension plan. It is estimated that in excess of 21,000 reserve force members will now be entitled to coverage under the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act.

Implementation of the new pension arrangements will give all CF members pension coverage comparable to the pension plans provided to other federal public sector employees, and the coverage will still take into account the exigencies of military service.

For example, the new pension arrangements include an immediate pension payable after 25 years of service in the CF and also provide an expanded opportunity for the portability of members' earned pension entitlements. This means that pension credits will not be adversely affected by members' military service and Canadian Forces members will have greater financial flexibility and security in planning their future.

The modernization of this pension plan is of benefit to all Canadian Forces members, both regular and reserve, but as the member has pointed out, it is also a historic recognition of the service of reservists. Their contribution to the defence of Canada and support of Canada's role in the world are appreciated by all Canadians. Canada's new government is pleased to extend pension benefits to our brave men and women in the army, navy and air force reserves.

Business of Supply

•(1945)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, improvised explosive devices are one of the most deadly things that our men and women in Afghanistan have to deal with. They have been a scourge for many years. They show up unpredictably. They take their toll in lives and injuries, not just for Canadians but for Afghan civilians as well.

This government of course is moving to give the Canadian Forces the capability to deal with devices like this and to keep our men and women safe. The government is rapidly moving to make sure the Canadian Forces have what they need to get the job done in this area. Canadians know this and support it, and they know it is the right thing to do.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to describe to the assembled members how the plan to acquire a new detection and route clearing system is coming along.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, this responsibility is being fulfilled by acquiring a new detection and route clearing system for the Canadian Forces. This new vehicle-based system for detecting, investigating and disposing of explosive threats such as improvised explosive devices and mines will provide Canadian soldiers with the protection they need.

This is an urgent operational requirement and these proven systems will ensure that it is met.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the member for Halifax West, I will ask him how he intends to package his time.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Oakville and the member for Richmond Hill. We each will ask questions for approximately five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): You have a block of 15 minutes. It is all yours.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, I appreciate your kindness.

My question is for the minister. The government ordered tanks that will not arrive until after February 2009, but the minister said tonight that the government has a responsibility "to make sure that they have the right resources at the right time to do their jobs".

Does this mean, in fact, that contrary to what we have heard, the government has in fact committed to have our troops in southern Afghanistan after February 2009?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the 20 tanks that we are leasing from the German army should be in Kandahar sometime in July or August, and the 100 tanks we are buying from the Netherlands will be here in October or November of this year.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, these tanks, I understand, cost in the range of \$650 million. That is the amount set aside for them. Of those dollars, the government has taken \$368 million from the navy to pay for these tanks. Is it the minister's view that the navy is overfunded? Is that why he pulled out \$368 million from the navy?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not know where the member opposite gets those figures. Not a dollar has been taken from the navy. In fact, if he checks, he will see that the navy actually got more money this year than it got last year and it will get more money

next year than it got this year. There is no money being taken from the navy at all.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, I guess the question is, then, how does the government pay the rent for all these tanks? Where did the money come from?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the money came from the increased budgets that the Conservative government has given the defence department, from the \$5.3 billion extra the defence department was given. Also, we are into accrual accounting. As I said, the costs of capital are spread over 20 years.

•(1950)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, from the point of view of the navy it seems more like cruel accounting than accrual accounting.

In fact, we have a situation whereby the government is cutting one destroyer and retiring the navy's two refuelling and resupply ships, which will be gone two years before the three new ones that the Liberal government ordered will arrive. There will be a two year gap and yet he is saying there is no loss to the navy whatsoever, that the navy obviously has enough funding.

How can the navy have enough funding if there is going to be a two year gap before the new resupply vessels arrive?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, again the member opposite has incorrect information. There is not going to be any gap. The current support ships will continue in service until they are replaced.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, although the minister says it is important to have the right resources at the right time, the evidence is that the government is not providing the right resources at the right time.

In fact, in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* on Wednesday, we saw a report from a woman who is a mother of someone who works in the forces. Ms. Pauline Clarke of Kentville, Nova Scotia, does not think they are being supplied at the right time. I will quote from the story, which states:

Her son, who works in supplies, told her that soldiers have been waiting months to get their boots replaced...

[She says,] "They do a lot of walking and those boots just wear out, (but) they have to wear the old boots because they have no other choice".

I see members across the way smiling and joking about this because it is about boots. They seem to feel that is not important to soldiers. They are making a joke about the fact that soldiers' boots are wearing out.

Is this what the minister means by the right resources at the right time?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when I was made aware, through a newspaper article, of this mother saying that her son reported there were not enough boots in Afghanistan, I checked it out immediately.

Business of Supply

There are enough boots for everybody in Afghanistan. As I said earlier in answer to a question, there is no need for anybody to buy boots. There are sufficient boots for everybody. Also, a new contract has just been let for additional boots, so there is no shortage of boots.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the minister said in his formal estimates statement tonight that he wants Canadian soldiers to achieve success in operations. May I ask what he is measuring success by in his operations in Afghanistan?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the success of operations has many aspects to it. One is that when our troops engage the Taliban, they succeed every time. One is that when our PRT does its job, it actually improves the life of the local Afghans with development projects. Another is that when our team called the OMLT trains the Afghan army, over time the Afghan army improves, and its numbers increase. That is the kind of success we are talking about.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Chair, I am wondering whether the minister approves of the aggressive and high risk combat style that is being used in Afghanistan, a style that has resulted in the highest percentage of troop loss and injury of any NATO nation involved, including those fighting by our side in Kandahar province.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, our government did not choose Kandahar province to be the area of operations. The Liberal government chose Kandahar province and Kandahar province is among the most violent provinces in Afghanistan.

Therefore, when we went in there with our troops, we had to make sure that our troops were equipped and trained to deal with the insurgency. They have been doing an excellent job. They are the best troops in the world. We can ask anybody. They have been doing their job there.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Yes, Mr. Chair, and the Canadian army still has the highest rate of injury and death among those three nations. I am wondering if this is part of his success in operations.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I think members will notice this year that the much announced Taliban spring offensive is not happening in Kandahar province. The reason it is not happening in Kandahar province is that our troops are doing their job because they are keeping the Taliban under control.

• (1955)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Chair, under the new detainee monitoring agreement, what plans has the minister activated to ensure that sufficient resources and sufficient personnel are available for the regular monitoring that this agreement envisages?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the defence department is not responsible for the monitoring of detainees. The defence department is responsible, once they have a person of interest in custody as a detainee, to process them properly in accordance with the rules of war and to hand them on to the Afghan authorities.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, with regard to Afghanistan and the detainees, having been in Afghanistan last year, I first of all want to salute the good work that our troops do. Because I am concerned about our troops, as is everyone on this side, I want to ask the following questions.

At any time in the past month has the minister raised the issue of mistreatment of detainees with his counterparts at NATO? Could he be specific?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when I had a meeting in Quebec City of the ministers from the south, who were all involved in serious operations with the Taliban, we discussed the various ways that they are handling detainees.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, this is obviously not just a Canadian issue. Can the minister tell me what thought, if any, has gone into a NATO-wide solution to this issue of the detainees?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I think, Mr. Chair, the member will have to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs. That is within his realm, not mine.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, I hope that the minister does talk to the foreign affairs minister and, in that case, shed some light on this particular issue.

Has any thought been given to establishing a NATO-wide detention facility so that we can deal with all of the detainees and ensure they are not tortured or mistreated by Afghan authorities?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am not aware at this time of such a proposal. I know that NATO headquarters is investigating some of these claims of abuse. I do not know what the outcome of that will be, but I am not aware of such a proposal.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, I do not think that answer sits very well. Could the minister again respond with regard to the issue of an overall approach to the detainee issue? Obviously Canada is not alone in dealing with this type of issue.

Have any constructive or useful comments been made by the minister's counterparts with regard to how to deal with this? Obviously the question in mind that I would like to go to is with regard to the Geneva convention and its application to the Canadian Forces in the field.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, my previous answer may not have made the member happy, but it is the answer. The foreign affairs minister is responsible for the area of detainees and the member will have to talk to him.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Minister, what is your understanding of the Geneva convention and its application to detainees by Canadian Forces in the field?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that legally the detainees are not entitled to Geneva convention treatment, but Canada decided that we would treat them in accordance with the Geneva convention.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Chair: I would like to caution the hon. member for Richmond Hill to address his questions through the Chair, in the third person, to the minister.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that detainees and those who have been proven to be Taliban are entitled to the Geneva convention given the fact that other allies do?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, our government does. The previous government did. I am saying legally they do not necessarily have an entitlement because they are not combatants in the sense of a war.

• (2000)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, minister, have you ever requested from JAG or the justice department a full—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Richmond Hill, does the minister—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, has the minister requested from JAG or the justice department a full legal analysis of the possible exposure of our Canadian Forces to any kind of action under international law as a result of allegations of torture taking place in Afghan facilities?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said previously, I have never been made aware of any specific case of abuse or torture. I must note that our forces over there treat detainees with the highest standards of the rules of war. In fact, our people have received accolades from the human rights organization and the Red Cross.

In fact, for the last few weeks there have been aspersions cast on the Canadian Forces that somehow they have been involved in or tolerated abuse. This is totally untrue.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, a question for the minister, I have not and our side has never cast aspersions about the actions of our soldiers in the field.

An hon. member: About the government.

Hon. Jay Hill: You had better check *Hansard*.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: About the government in terms of its application. There is a major difference and I would have thought that the minister would have known that and would respond accordingly.

Mr. Minister, can you tell us how many people have in fact been detained by Canadian Forces within the last month?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, this is an operational matter. I do not discuss operational matters.

The Deputy Chair: If I can be of help to the hon. member for Richmond Hill, using the third person instead of the second would make it a lot easier.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, I am asking for numbers. I am not asking for places, not asking for names, just numbers. Is it one? Is it five? Is it 10? Or does the minister not know?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, my answer is the same. It is an operational matter. I do not discuss operational matters on television in Parliament.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, the question arises, how are numbers in any way national security? We are not asking where. We are asking for numbers.

In fact, minister, at the foreign affairs committee a motion to this effect was put forward asking the department to provide us simply with the numbers.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, my answer is the same. It is an operational matter. I will not discuss it.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: We will now proceed to the next 15 minute period. Once again, I would like to remind all members that the easiest way to address a speech to the minister is to use the third person. This way, no mistakes will be made.

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to acknowledge all the members present for this committee of the whole.

Mr. Chair, I ask you to indicate when my first 10 minutes are up, so that I may put a few questions to the parliamentary secretary.

It is a privilege to participate in today's discussion on Department of National Defence spending. First, I would like to highlight the exceptional contribution of the Minister of National Defence, for the remarkable reconstruction efforts of the Canadian Forces after, and it must be said, years of inactivity and inaction.

As the minister explained, the success of our troops' operations is one of our government's priorities. He often says that we want the Canadian Forces to succeed in every operation we assign them. Even when we have the best soldiers—Canadian soldiers—we must still ensure that they have everything they need to accomplish their mission. This includes planning, training, logistical support and first-rate equipment. This is why the Department of National Defence must meet their needs. It knows that it must use its resources wisely if it wants to keep its Canadian security commitments.

Why is it important that we succeed in our missions? Because lives depend on it. I will give two examples of situations where lives can be saved here in Canada: search and rescue and natural disaster response.

Operational success is also crucial for other reasons. These operations enhance our international image and influence, as they have done in the past. They demonstrate our leadership role and help uphold our values in the rest of the world.

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Keeping that in mind, I would now like to talk specifically about Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which is currently employing a large proportion of our troops. In fact, it is the main operation of the Canadian Forces. Our presence in Afghanistan serves Canadian interests. Why? Because it helps prevent international terrorism here, which poses a threat to our national security. We saw that last year in Toronto and in the rest of the world as well. Failing states, which are in disarray, are breeding grounds for terrorism. Before we and our allies were present in Afghanistan, it was a source and centre of terrorism. We are there to support our friends and allies.

As hon. members know, we are part of an operation in Afghanistan involving 37 countries, led by NATO and mandated by the United Nations. Like the other members of this international force, we are in Afghanistan at the invitation of the Afghan government to help the Afghans rebuild their country. Our efforts are improving the lives of millions of Afghans who have suffered through decades of war. Using a three-pronged approach—development, diplomacy and security—we are helping them take charge of their own future.

All these initiatives are part of a plan known as the Afghanistan compact, which involves nearly 60 countries. The compact sets benchmarks for security, governance and development in Afghanistan. Our Canadian troops are making an invaluable contribution to this compact, because we know that without security, there is neither governance nor development. These three areas of activity are closely linked and reinforce each other.

Let us talk a little about security. Since 2002, more than 18,000 men and women of the Canadian Forces have served in Afghanistan. The work Canada has done and continues to do there with the international community contributes to the relative stability that reigns in most of the country. In Kabul, the economy is flourishing and the streets are filled with people tending to their daily activities. The north and west of the country are also relatively stable. However there is still a strong Taliban presence gripping the south. Success in this region is essential to the entire NATO mission.

● (2005)

That is why our country has committed up to 2,500 soldiers to help stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan. Next August, our soldiers from Valcartier, Quebec, will relieve their fellow troops in the great Quebec military tradition.

Most of these troops are deployed in the south of the country, in the province of Kandahar. Twelve Canadian Forces members from Lévis—in the riding I represent—who are members of the 6th Field Regiment, are currently serving in Afghanistan. We are not the only ones in southern Afghanistan. Other countries are there with us. There are nearly 12,000 troops on the base in Kandahar. We are there with our NATO allies and our partners in order to provide assistance to this region of Afghanistan that needs our help.

When the Canadians arrived in Kandahar in February 2006, it was one of the most dangerous places in Afghanistan. Every one of us here today knows the burden this mission has placed on our troops and their families. However, their sacrifices in Kandahar are paying off and in just a year they have made impressive progress. They have driven back some of the Taliban's strongholds in order to make room for development and reconstruction.

We know that the Afghans want to ensure their own security.

The Canadian Forces are working tirelessly to help create Afghan security capabilities. They are involved in joint military operations with the Afghan national army. The skill and professionalism shown by that army as it joins forces with ours in the operation are in large part attributable to the guidance provided by Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, which are nicknamed “omelets”, from their acronym, OMLT. Despite their English acronym, a number of them come from Valcartier. I had the opportunity to meet them during my January visit over there with the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Thanks to the improved security, projects can be stepped up and extended to development and reconstruction projects. With long term security, the Afghans are able to take control of their country and their lives, which means rebuilding the essential institutions and infrastructure we take for granted here.

In Kandahar, these reconstruction efforts are being coordinated through the combined efforts of the PRT, or provincial reconstruction team, and local Afghan leaders. This 330-member team is made up of members of the Canadian Forces, a contingent of civilian police officers under RCMP direction, and representatives of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Correctional Service of Canada, and the Canadian International Development Agency. The horizontal nature of this mission is evident.

Together, they are delivering highly useful services to the local population on behalf of the Afghan government. These services in fact help to beef up the presence of the Afghan government in the Kandahar region. The PRT distributes food and delivers immunization programs. In addition to its numerous development activities, it carries out demining operations.

The following are some of the concrete projects that have been carried out by the provincial reconstruction team: 55 km of canal; two dam bypasses; restoration of 120 km of rural roads in order to provide Afghan villagers with access to the market; installation of 7 km of high tension power supply lines; construction of 1,100 shallow wells and 13 deep ones in order to provide the decent drinking water essential for any human activity. These projects are part of the Afghan government's national solidarity program, which is giving rural Afghans a say in development via elected community development councils.

These successful reconstruction and development projects will help to gain the confidence of the rural Afghans.

Warrant Officer Dean Henley is one example of a master confidence builder. In Kandahar province, in the town of Bazar-e-Panjwayi, he is known as the “Prince of Panjwayi”. On pay days he turns up with a suitcase packed with money for the locals working in “money for work” projects. Like many other members of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, he has a strong belief in the work our troops are doing there, which is why he has even asked for an extension of his deployment.

Then there is the whole governance aspect.

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• (2010)

In Kabul there is a 15-member strategic advisory team helping the Afghan government put in place a fully democratic government with administrative and responsibility centres at all government levels.

Clearly, this is an extensive and complex mission and an excellent illustration of all the strengths of our Canadian troops and the reasons we are so proud of what they have done and continue to do.

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry to tell the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse that his time has expired, although I did give him a signal.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, my question is for the hon. parliamentary secretary.

I talked about the mission in Afghanistan to describe the extent of the improvements that have been made, the importance of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and how much our troops have contributed, within NATO, particularly by opening schools for young girls.

My question is very simple. What progress has been made so far in our reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan?

• (2015)

[*English*]

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question and his excellent speech on the progress that is being made in Afghanistan.

He tried to point out, and I will elaborate a little, the progress that has been made in Afghanistan during these past five years.

We are making a tremendous difference. In the five years since this international mission began, we have witnessed a turnaround in the mood of Afghanistan, from one of despair to one of hope. Afghans want security. They do not want to live in fear. They want to look forward with hope to a brighter future. This is exactly what we are doing in Afghanistan. We are bringing them hope.

We are working with the Afghan people to rebuild their society. A society can rebuild only if its citizens feel secure. Development is only sustainable if security and stability are firmly established. The first step for reconstruction in Kandahar is to create a secure environment. It is our troops on the ground who are helping to open up the opportunities for the goals of the Afghanistan Compact to be achieved. They are creating the safe spaces where Afghans can begin to rebuild their lives.

Now, despite the decades of war, the years of extremist rule, the lack of basic infrastructure and public services, the extreme poverty, the harsh environment and the corruption, these people have hope. They can see the possibilities for the future, for their families and for their villages.

We are seeing life return to the streets of Afghanistan. Last month the Kandahar amusement park reopened. That is a sure sign that the people are beginning to feel like they can go out again and feel safe.

Six million children, one-third of them girls, are now getting an education for the first time, compared to only 700,000 boys in 2001.

Twenty-five hundred villages now have access to electricity. Six thousand kilometres of roads have been built and repaired.

On that note, I want to talk a little bit about the Route Summit that was built by our Canadian troops. This is a new two-lane road that will connect the Panjwai district to Highway 1. Route Summit is only about four kilometres long but its impact is immeasurable. This road means that a farmer can get his produce to bigger markets, finally earning a reasonable income for his family. It means doctors from the major urban centres can now visit villages where they had no access to medical services before. It means the police and the army can respond to the crises where and when they are needed. Most important, the road is a symbol of the Afghan government providing for its population and unifying the country.

Canadians played a very important role and we should be very proud of our role in the Route Summit. It was our combat engineers who worked with local construction crews to build the road while our soldiers protected them.

I just want to quickly quote President Karzai from when he was here to remind us of the progress that is being made. He said:

Afghanistan today is profoundly different from the terrified and exhausted country it was five years ago.

Afghanistan's democracy will continue to grow, will continue to develop, will continue to gain the confidence of its people – but only with patience and with the continued support of Canada and other members of the international community.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, for a period of 15 minutes.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister for being with us to answer our questions.

My questions have to do with my region and my riding, first of all. As a member of the opposition, I will assume my role with respect to a number of questions that concern Quebeckers and Canadians. Before asking my first question, I would like to express to the minister my appreciation concerning his willingness to take our questions.

Unlike 4 Wing Cold Lake, 3 Wing Bagotville does not have a firing range for CF-18 training. It trains in various firing ranges in eastern Canada, especially at Valcartier. The Minister of National Defence, through the air force commander, authorized derogation for CF-18 training at Valcartier. A note from the defence minister indicates the modifications that must be made to the firing range. The work was expected to cost an estimated \$2 million. This derogation for CF-18 training expires in October 2007.

Does the minister intend to authorize the work to meet the standards at Valcartier?

• (2020)

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I know the hon. member has raised the issue of a range for aircraft in the Bagotville area. However, as I have told him on a number of occasions, it is up to the air force. If the air force decides that it requires a range in the Bagotville area, it would identify it, start it up as a project, find the money and then execute it.

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However, the air force's current position is that it has a range in Goose Bay, one in Valcartier and other ranges throughout the country and those meet the requirements at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, still on the subject of training for Bagotville CF-18 pilots, which takes place mainly in Valcartier, will the Minister of Defence renew the derogation that expires in October 2007?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, there are two situations, so I do not know which one the member is talking about. If he is talking about Valcartier and the air force recommends it, I will. I think that answers his question.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the minister really answered the question. A derogation was signed by the commander of Canada's air force, and it expires in October 2007. I would have liked to have received an answer to the question. Will the derogation be renewed, and for how long? Perhaps the minister cannot answer the question. If that is the case, I will go on to my next question.

With respect to the eastern Canada firing range, we know that a study is currently underway. The minister has confirmed this. In June 2006, military officials stated that an analysis of potential sites was underway and that proposals would be presented shortly. I am sure the minister is aware of this because the correspondence was addressed to him. With regard to the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, elected representatives are in agreement and are waiting for a proposal from the Department of Defence concerning the location of this infrastructure.

I do not want the minister to give me the same answer he gave in the fall of 2006. Can he tell us when this file will be made available and when we will have access to the report's conclusions?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I spoke to the member about this before and I told him that it was up to the air force. If the air force, through the Chief of the Defence Staff, forwards a recommendation to me to create a range, and it has found the money, then it would probably proceed with that activity. However, to date the air force, through the Chief of the Defence Staff, has not come to me with any recommendation whatsoever about a range in the Bagotville area.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I have one more brief question about this. We know a report will be submitted. Can the minister assure us that the report will be made public?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, if the report is not classified, it can be made public when it is available.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, in less than one month or so, the government has insulted francophones at least four times: by paralyzing the Standing Committee on Official Languages, by

decreasing the number of bilingual positions, by appointing senior officers who do not have an adequate knowledge of French and by insulting the memory of francophones who died at Vimy. We wonder if the minister has decided to establish a second front against francophones.

My question is simple. Does the minister believe that francophones have a place, a rightful place, in the Canadian army?

• (2025)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I certainly believe there is a place for francophones within the military. In fact, the number of francophones within the military exceeds the national average.

Our government and this department is committed to the Official Languages Act and to meeting its objectives.

The department has had a problem over a number of years with the plan that it had and year after year it failed. This year, when I took over and it was being reported again that it was failing, I insisted that the department come up with a plan that will achieve those objectives.

As of April 1, a month and a half ago, we instituted a new plan in the Defence Department and I am hoping that by next year and the following years we will start to see the fruits of that plan where we will meet the objectives of the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, is the minister satisfied with the program transformation model with regard to the French fact, and why?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, no, I am not happy, which is why I have instituted a new plan to try to achieve the objectives of the Official Languages Act.

As I said, year after year the Defence Department has failed to meet it. It has made considerable changes and I believe that we will start to see substantial improvements over the next few years.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages stated that the best a unilingual francophone soldier could hope for is to be an infantry soldier at Valcartier. What can the minister say to francophones to prove that the Commissioner of Official Languages was wrong?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am not going to contend what the commissioner said or did not say. The career possibilities for francophones in the military is the same as anglophones. The member can check throughout the entire structure and he will see francophones right up to the top of the armed forces.

I will also point out that the language commissioner gave us an A for our plan and, on radio yesterday, he commended our efforts.

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[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak about the Bagotville base. I also spoke briefly about the Cold Lake base.

At present, two military bases, Cold Lake and Bagotville, have F-18s. The Cold Lake base is responsible for western Canada, as far as Winnipeg. The Bagotville base covers the remaining territory or eastern Canada. The two bases must cover roughly the same area but do not have the same number of aircraft. The Cold Lake base has 58 F-18s whereas the Bagotville base has 24.

Given that there is a training facility at Cold Lake, and that the Bagotville base is far away, would it not be better to balance out the F-18 fleet to better protect Canadian territory?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the reason that there are more aircraft in Cold Lake is that the training squadron is there. Both operational squadrons meet our Canadian air defence needs. In fact, they have over the years had outstanding performance and they are a pride to us when we meet with our American compatriots in Norad.

● (2030)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I do not want to bring up bad memories for the minister, but could he talk about the situation of the detainees handed over to Afghan authorities?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I mentioned earlier that the defence department, once it has processed detainees and handed them over to the Afghan authorities, that is where the defence department's responsibility ends.

Other agents of government will be involved in the monitoring. However, for every detainee who is handed over to the Afghan authorities or for every detainee who is released by us, the human rights commission is informed and we inform the Red Cross so that they can monitor them.

As members know, under the new agreement, the human rights commission will have full access to all our detainees.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I have some more specific questions for the minister. How many detainees have been transferred since 2002? How many detainees have been transferred since 2005 inclusively? How many detainees were transferred in 2005, 2006 and 2007?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier to another questioner, these are operational matters and I do not discuss operational matters on TV.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, my next questions also deal with detainees. Where are these detainees? How many detention centres are they being held in? How many detention centres will eventually be used for Canadian detainees?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I can answer part of the question in the sense that I do not provide details on prisoners. That is operational. However, on the other part of the question dealing with the number of detainee centres and the number of detainees who are in the hands of Canadians, the member will have to ask the foreign affairs minister. I think his officials are working on that now.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, this will be my last question to do with detainees. Have they been visited? If not, when will they be?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member is bringing up the idea of monitoring prisoners and I have said that it is not within the responsibility of the defence department.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with 10 minutes of speaking and leaving five minutes for questions and comments.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which includes Canadian Forces Base Petawawa, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the 2007-08 main estimates for the Department of National Defence.

I am proud to be a member of a government that strongly supports our men and women in uniform and more particularly, to serve with a Prime Minister who has so clearly demonstrated his compassion and respect for the women and men of the Canadian armed forces.

Last Friday, the town of Petawawa held a Red Friday rally in support of our troops. Little did I know that when I invited the Prime Minister to join us in Petawawa, we would also be hosting the Minister of National Defence and the chief of defence staff. Their presence meant a lot to the soldiers and their families. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them. I would also like to thank Lisa Miller and Karen Boire, the organizers of Red Fridays across the country. Their heart and passion does their community proud.

I am full of pride to be part of a national government that strongly supports our women and men in uniform. These Canadians serve our country with incredible professionalism, dedication and courage. There are none more deserving of our support than the very people who are willing to put their lives on the line for their fellow citizens and their country.

The exceptional commitment of some of our military members was recently recognized at a ceremony at the Chateau Laurier. I would like to draw this committee's attention to that event because I think it speaks volumes about the men and women who make up our military.

Back in 1993, Her Majesty created a series of new decorations to recognize military valour: the Canadian Victoria Cross, the Star of Military Valour and the Medal of Military Valour. For 13 years none of these medals had been awarded, given the distinction that they represent. None of them had been awarded that is until last fall.

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The first presentation of these medals was right here in Ottawa in February. They were awarded because the soldiers who were the recipients exhibited the highest degree of valour in the most dangerous of situations. Those acts of courage happened in Afghanistan.

Our military members have not been exposed to such deadly combat situations since the Korean War. Their stories, and others like them, need to be told. All Canadians need to be reminded of the incredible work our armed forces are doing for our country.

The recent experience of Hannah Doyle of Pembroke, who had the opportunity to go to France as a member of a group of young people who participated in the anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, is an example of how important it is to impart the stories that contribute to our shared heritage of nation building.

In particular, we as elected representatives need to be reminded of the exceptional service both veterans and currently serving members and their spouses have made to this country. When the time comes to review our defence spending, as this committee is doing today, we need to be prepared to do our utmost to support our military members and their families.

When I refer to supporting military spouses at this time I make special mention of the widows of our soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country. I recognize Jackie Girouard, Charmaine Tedford, Darcy Mitton and Kelly-Ann Dove, just to name a few of the spouses I have had the pleasure of meeting. The widows tell me that the honourable way to respect their sacrifice is to continue the mission, recognizing the noble cause that Canada is involved in.

One way that we as parliamentarians can preserve the memory of our fallen soldiers is to ensure that their serving comrades continue to receive the support and the financial resources they need to get the job done.

● (2035)

As my colleagues gather here today, the Department of National Defence has a budget of just under \$17 billion for the 2007-08 fiscal year in recognition of the role a credible military presence plays in demonstrating nationhood and sovereignty, recognition that has been lacking until our government took charge in budget 2006. The department received a much needed boost of \$5.3 billion over five years to help rebuild and revitalize the Canadian armed forces.

As a result, for the fiscal year, the defence budget will go up by \$2.1 billion and under the government, the budget for capital projects has now gone up to 21% of the overall department program. We are investing some of the funding in new equipment because the government recognizes that our military personnel need to have the right tools to do their jobs.

I had the privilege recently of taking part in a plant tour of Pacific Safety Products, an all-Canadian company located in Arnprior, Ontario. This company manufactures a safety vest that protects our soldiers in places like Afghanistan. Canadians are proud to be able to assist in providing the right equipment to keep our soldiers safe. It is made here in Canada right here in the Ottawa Valley.

Some of these funds are being used to recruit and train Canadian Forces members, so that the military has enough people to meet the current and future demands, but this government has not forgotten that we also need to allocate sufficient resources to provide for a good quality of life for our military members and their families. It is important to the families, the spouses and the dependents to keep the home fires burning.

I would like to provide this committee with some recent examples of how this government is making a difference in the lives of our armed forces.

First of all, just last month, the government announced plans to construct a new multipurpose facility in St. John's. This new facility will bring together operational training space, offices, classrooms, special medical and dental services, and a warehouse space in one location. Quite simply, the facility will better support our troops and it will also stand as a sign of this government's commitment to maintain a vital military presence in the region.

Also in Atlantic Canada, this government announced plans last October to improve the heating systems at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, to make it more cost effective and environmentally friendly. The department is spending just over \$1 million to convert all heating and hot water tanks in the military housing units on base to natural gas.

This money will be put directly back into our soldiers' pockets, saving them around \$200 a year in home heating costs. Moreover, it will make a significant contribution to improving the air quality of New Brunswick and the surrounding region.

However, it is not only through infrastructure improvements that we are taking care of the Canadian Forces. We have also provided pay and allowance increases across the ranks.

Furthermore, just this past spring, the Minister of National Defence announced the implementation of modernized Canadian Forces pension plan arrangements. Now, all eligible Canadian Forces members, both regular and reserve, have pension coverage that is comparable to the pension plans of other federal public sector employees. This means that for the first time our reserve forces are entitled to coverage under the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act.

We have also made it possible for reservists to contribute and earn benefits from the Canada pension plan. They too should be able to collect a pension that will allow them to prepare for retirement and provide their families with basic financial protection.

There is no question that Canada asks a lot of its military and their families. In addition to their regular burdens of military service, there are times when our Canadian Forces members have to put themselves in harm's way to defend our country, so we also have a responsibility to look after our Canadian Forces members when they get wounded in combat or fall ill from the conditions in an operational theatre.

The new allowance for loss of operational allowance, or ALOA, which the Minister of National Defence announced in December 2006 will ensure that those military members who have to return to Canada because of injury or illness continue to be compensated adequately. Let me explain.

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Members serving in a theatre of operations, like Afghanistan, receive special deployment hardship and risk allowances. This new allowance will make sure that if the deployment of military personnel is cut short due to injury or illness, they will not be financially penalized.

● (2040)

Now they will receive this new allowance in place of their special deployment allowances up until the last day of their planned tour of duty. For example, if a soldier is deployed on a six month tour and is wounded after one month, he would receive the ALOA for the five remaining months. This new allowance will mitigate the burden faced by members and their families when other operational allowances cease.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I will stop the hon. member there. Her time for her statement is over. If she has a question that she wants to move on to, we can move into the question period of her time slot.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair. I am very proud that this government continues to stand firmly behind our armed forces. They deserve nothing less.

My question is for the parliamentary secretary of defence. Canadian Forces Base Petawawa has provided important contingents of Canadian troops to the Afghanistan mission. To date, some 2,000 troops from base Petawawa have been deployed to Afghanistan: 1,500 recently returned; another 500 began a tour of duty last month; and another 1,000 are due to go in August 2008.

The Ontario ombudsman launched an investigation in March, after receiving a complaint from the executive director of the Phoenix Centre, the only children's mental health centre serving residents in Renfrew county, and that includes CFB Petawawa, that the provincial government was failing to provide adequate mental health services for military children. The Phoenix Centre reported that the demand for psychological counselling had grown from just 2% of its cases to 20% since August 2006, and children were being forced to wait four to six months for treatment.

As the Phoenix Centre struggles to help children traumatized by their parents' deployment, an issue Canada has not had to deal with since the Korean war, many health staff at Petawawa worry that the challenge has just begun, not only in their community but for the military families and communities across the country.

What the Ontario ombudsman recommended was for the federal and provincial governments to sit down in an attempt to determine what was needed and how the costs could be split up instead of leaving it entirely up to the province. If this does not happen, the ombudsman has already warned the situation could easily revert to its initial stage and this would spell disaster to the Petawawa community. I am sure all members will agree we have a moral duty to provide the best health services possible for our children in support of their parents in uniform.

Would the parliamentary secretary of defence please inform the House of what the federal government is doing to assist provincial governments with military communities, especially with regard to the Phoenix Centre for Petawawa, and could he elaborate more generally on what support is being provided to military families?

● (2045)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces have worked hard to support our troops and to ensure they have what they need both physically and emotionally. Our troops are deploying in record numbers and we know sometimes all too well, how that affects their families. The health and well-being of our military families is a top concern of our government and that is why the families of the Canadian Forces members are active and contributing citizens in the communities in which they live and we want to keep them that way.

Military families are entitled to access all the health, social, educational and recreational services available to all individuals in the local community, including the use of the mental health facilities. Military family resource centres are the primary source of services and programs designed to assist and support families of Canadian Forces members during deployments. Where services specific to the needs of the military community are inadequate or unavailable, the Department of National Defence will work with the military family resource centres in the local community to meet those needs.

Specific to the situation with the Phoenix Centre in—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am afraid the hon. parliamentary secretary has run the clock out on that time slot, so I will have to move on to the hon. member for Labrador.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and the member for Mississauga—Erindale. We will each be asking questions for five minutes.

I come from a military town, Five Wing Goose Bay, which has over 65 years of history in the Canadian armed forces. The minister made many promises to the town of Happy Valley Goose Bay and Five Wing Goose Bay during two elections.

The Conservatives promised Canada's first strategy for Arctic sovereignty would include a deepwater port, armed naval icebreakers and a long range squadron for CFB Goose Bay. The deepwater port has been deep-sixed and the icebreakers were cancelled.

Is there anything left of the Arctic sovereignty platform, including the Goose Bay component? If there is, when will the plan be tabled?

● (2050)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we will be meeting our commitments to the north. Like everything else, once the government has considered it and once it is approved by government, announcements will be made.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, On November 8, Major General Ward told the defence committee that there really had not been specific action taken on the Goose Bay initiative.

Why is DND, under this minister, doing absolutely nothing to implement its 650 RRB and 100 UAV squadron in Goose Bay?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said previously, we will be meeting our commitments. However, I point out that the previous government was planning to close Goose Bay. It put in a few sops to try to get itself out of the problem.

Business of Supply

We are maintaining Goose Bay.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, I would ask the minister to table any documentation he has to that effect instead of his innuendo.

Lieutenant-General Leslie said at the defence committee that the Goose Bay organization would be focused mainly on range of support. Is this range of support on top of the UAV squadron and RRB or is this a replacement for them?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when the government makes the decision on precise commitments, the announcements will be made.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, the minister made precise commitments. It was an RRB and a UAV squadron for Goose Bay. He said that the creation of these units would take place over as short a period of time as possible.

Even though it has been over a year with no action on Goose Bay, could the minister define what he means by "as short a period of time as possible"?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we have a great challenge. We inherited it from the previous government. We are rebuilding the entire armed forces, the air force, the army, the navy and all the base structure, and things have to be done in sequence.

We do not have enough money to do everything at the same time. We will be meeting our commitments to Goose Bay.

Mr. Todd Russell: No answer again, Mr. Chair, and the people of Happy Valley Goose Bay want answers.

Why did the minister cancel \$25 million in upgrades for the practice target area, including threat emitters at Five Wing Goose Bay?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, that was a promise made by the previous government to cover the closing down of Goose Bay. There is no requirement for the emitters. As no fighter aircraft fly there, there is no need for the emitters.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, the minister promised to encourage increased flying training operations, which means foreign military training, at CFB Goose Bay.

What has he done to encourage this, which would have included the threat emitters? Have flying training operations at CFB Goose Bay increased since he took office, or decreased?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, in fact flying operations have been maintained in Goose Bay as opposed to the plan of the Liberal government, which was to close the base.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, will the minister table the documents that the Liberal government was to close Five Wing Goose Bay?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said, the plans of the Liberals were to close Goose Bay. They also had plans to close other bases. That is where it stands.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, in the calendar year 2006, what was the net gain in CF personnel, that is recruits minus attrition?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, 1,015.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, it took 25 years to get to 13,000 regular force personnel and 10,000 reservists.

The minister or his office has given people in Happy Valley, Goose Bay the idea that they would now make the base an operational requirement. When I wrote the minister about this, asking for documentation on this operational requirement, he sent me a copy of the Canadian Forces organization order for the base of —

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I will have to stop the hon. member for Labrador there. We have run out of time for the question.

I will allow the Minister of National Defence 15 seconds for a response.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I find it the height of hypocrisy for the Liberals to be talking about building the armed forces. They allowed the armed forces to run down year after year.

•(2055)

Mr. Todd Russell: You have done nothing.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: We have done nothing? I have news for the member. We have made incredible changes.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You have done nothing. You are the minister. We are still waiting.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, if they would give me a minute or two, I will explain them all.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Chair, could the minister tell the House how much the Canadian Forces spent on its advertising blitz that took place earlier this year?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it was in the range of \$15 million.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, I am speaking about the recruitment advertising blitz.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, that is the answer.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, according to the public documents it in fact was \$4 million for an advertising blitz that took place January 8 to March 31. I would suggest the minister may wish to further consult with his defence public affairs.

Could the minister tell us what percentage were TV ads, what percentage were newspaper ads, how many were in English and how many were in French?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the amount is \$15 million for the advertising for recruiting this year. If the member wants all those details, I will have them sent to her as quickly as I can acquire them.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, I think the minister is mistaken. The documents actually show a \$4 million plan for January 8 to March 31, which included—

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You said for the year.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: No, I did not. I said at the beginning of the year, the first quarter of the year.

Mr. Chair, what was the objective of this recruitment advertising blitz, which took place in the first quarter of this year?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I will get these detailed answers for the member as soon as I can.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, I am happy to tell the House that it was to recruit new applicants to the Canadian Forces, the regular forces. The key target group was men aged 18 to 24. How many new applicants were there during the first quarter of this year?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member opposite may think she is smart. She is asking detailed questions that will take some time for me to provide the answers.

I do not maintain every figure in my head for every detail in the department. We have about 110,000 employees and we spend \$17 billion.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, the minister is accompanied by experts from the armed forces and from his ministry. They are there to provide him with every detail that he requires. If they do not have them, then they are not properly prepared.

I can tell the minister how many new applicants there were according to his own department documents. There were 11,600 in the first quarter of this year.

Would the minister be in a position and is he smart enough—

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Come on.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: He just said he thought I thought I was pretty smart, so I am turning it back on him. Is he smart enough to tell us what percentage of those 11,600 new applicants were visible minorities?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I must point out that there may be staff representatives here, but they were asked questions within 30 or 60 seconds and we cannot immediately get the answers.

When I can, I will provide the member with the answer.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Am I then to presume, Mr. Chair, that the minister is also unable to tell us what percentage of these 11,600 new applicants were aboriginal, what percentage were women and what percentage were from the official language minority, which is francophone?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when I can, I will provide the member with those details.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, is the minister in a position to tell us just what was the enrolment for regular forces in the first quarter of this year?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when I have these details, all the details that the member opposite has asked for, she will be provided with them.

● (2100)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Chair, can the minister tell us when will defence public affairs unveil its comprehensive communications plan to inform Canadians and expand their understanding of the Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, this is not the primary responsibility of the defence department. It is a government-wide communications plan.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I know the minister is aware of ITAR. ITAR is an American

regulation that prevents Canadians who were born in certain countries from working on contracts that were paid for by Canadians through the Canadian government.

We heard reports that the federal government had signed a deal with the American government to exempt Canadians who work with the department. Is that accurate?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, today I announced that an arrangement has been made between the defence department, DND, and the U.S. state department that controls the ITARs in the United States. Under that arrangement the Americans will accept any person that DND declares has the proper security clearance for receiving information without caveats.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Chair, does that also include Canadians who work in the private sector?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, this is the first step. We are working on a process with the Americans where step by step, department by department and then into industry we are getting the Americans to change their approach to ITARs. This is the very first step. The defence department now has an arrangement with the U.S. government.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister agrees that ITAR violates our Constitution which guarantees equal rights to all Canadians. ITAR currently creates two classes of Canadian citizenship.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have this arrangement starting with the defence department which will eventually solve this entire problem.

We agree that it is a problem. We agree that it violates our charter. We are working now in a practical way to make sure that this goes away.

The primary department that is responsible for ITARs is foreign affairs, so if you want more details on ITARs and what is going to happen, you will have to talk to the foreign affairs minister.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Minister, ITAR covers contracts that were signed by your department. It includes employees—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. I have let a few of these slip by so far, but I am going to remind both the minister and the member to address their comments through the Chair.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Chair, it includes employees who work for the minister's department, employees who work for contractors who are working for his department. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the defence minister.

I am curious. If he is admitting that it violates our Constitution, why is the minister ignoring the needs of those Canadians who work for the private sector?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we live in a world of practicalities. We live in a world where we have to make things better and we are making things better.

At the defence department now, all employees of the defence department, if they have the proper security clearance, will not be subject to the limitations of ITARs.

Business of Supply

The Government of Canada is working to try to overcome the situation. By the way, this did not just appear this year. This has been with us for decades. Your government through 13 years of reign never did anything to correct it.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Again, please address comments through the Chair. The hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Chair, this problem has arisen by the large amounts of contracts that the defence department had signed over the last year.

If the minister is admitting that it violates the charter, there is no practicality in violating our charter. You cannot tolerate breaking our charter, so why are you leaving Canadians out in the cold who are working for the private sector, for contracts that are paid for by them? Canadians paid for those contracts and the government must protect their rights.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it is not true that it is as a result of recent acquisitions. It has been around for decades and the previous government ignored it for decades. Year after year the Liberals ignored it. They should be answering for this, not us.

We are cleaning up the mess. We are getting the job done.

• (2105)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Chair, I can say that we would be happy to solve this problem if they would step aside. When we get back in government we will solve it. The problem is that the Conservatives are the government and they are responsible to all Canadians, for protecting their charter rights and ensuring that they have equal employment access.

Minister, what are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. There is 10 seconds left for the minister to respond but I am going to ask all members to maintain some order because I am having trouble hearing.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said, we made a significant move today. We are getting the defence department so it cannot be subject to ITARs anymore. We are going to move on the rest of the government operations and then we are going to move on to industry and within a few years we are going to cure this problem.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I plan to speak for 10 minutes and then ask insightful questions for five.

Tonight I would like to contribute to the debate on the 2007-08 main estimates for the Department of National Defence.

[*Translation*]

This budget reflects our government's commitment to rebuilding and revitalizing the Canadian Forces. At the height of the most demanding combat operations our forces have faced since the Korean war, we have worked hard and kept our promises. Our commitment to the mission in Afghanistan has shown how essential it is for the Canadian Forces to have good equipment in order to do their important work.

[*English*]

But we are not just focused on our abilities in Afghanistan. We have to plan for future international operations and future domestic

requirements. Our Canadian Forces have had to do battle against underfunding, cope with personnel shortages, and work with obsolete and aging equipment for far too long.

I found some quotes from a document called "A Democratic Society Taskforce Report on Security". The task force was chaired by the hon. David Collenette, a former minister of national defence. One quote is:

Over the past thirteen years Liberal governments have cut back resources for the Canadian Forces...because a philosophical choice was made to diminish the military's place in Canadian society and invest in other priorities. However, this has come at a price.

That is a good quote from a Liberal. In fact, we might call the last little while a decade with an absence of light.

This government is standing up for the Canadian Forces, making sure that those who commit themselves to defending Canada and Canadians have the essential tools they need to protect themselves and to do their jobs effectively.

Another interesting quote that may be of interest to one of the members is:

Our traditional allies have questioned the commitment of one of the world's wealthier societies to roll up its sleeves to take on the tough jobs required to make the world safer and a better place. There is reason to believe that this perception has manifested itself in the impact of Canada's opinion being somewhat diminished and our military not being taken into full confidence by our allies.

This is what led to our losing our favoured status under ITAR, and do not be mistaken about it.

We have taken a number of steps to reverse years of neglect and to assure that Canada regains its rightful place as a force for good in a troubled and dangerous world.

Budget 2006 provided \$5.3 billion over five years to help rebuild and revitalize the Canadian Forces. For this fiscal year alone, the defence budget will increase by \$2.1 billion. Under this government the portion of the overall defence program dedicated to capital projects has increased to 21%.

When it comes to procurement, this has been an unprecedented year for the Canadian Forces. Last June the Minister of National Defence outlined plans to purchase tactical and strategic airlift, joint support ships, medium size logistics trucks, and medium to heavy lift helicopters.

Members will recall that just in the past month our government has responded to a need identified by our soldiers in theatre for more modern tanks. The Minister of National Defence announced that Canada will borrow 20 Leopard 2 main battle tanks from Germany to meet pressing short term needs this summer for the protection of our soldiers. The minister also outlined the government's intentions to purchase up to 100 Leopard 2 main battle tanks from the surplus stock of the Netherlands. These are to meet Canada's long term requirements.

Business of Supply

Mr. Chair, I was in Afghanistan at a place called Masum Ghar with a whole bunch of infanteers at Christmastime and they were there with the Leopards as well. I can tell you that the infanteers sure appreciate having the Leopards around.

We have also provided our troops with other modern equipment, the XM777 gun and the Nyala mine protected vehicles, and the forces will soon take delivery of new fully armoured heavy logistic trucks.

We are undertaking the biggest re-equipping of the Canadian Forces in decades. These procurements represent the government's commitment to the Canadian Forces' current missions, domestic and international. They reflect careful forethought about the uncertain security environment that will ensure the Canadian Forces can meet the challenges our country will face in the decades to come.

I could not agree more with our Minister of National Defence who said when he appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence in February, "These are essential purchases, and time is of the essence. Failure to take action today to replace equipment will create serious problems for our military units in the near future. Investments in defence are investments in our future".

It is not just new equipment that is needed. It is the procurement process itself that needs improvement. On average, it has taken 15 years from the initial identification of the need to the delivery of new equipment. Clearly this is unacceptable. Ensuring that our men and women in uniform have the tools they need to succeed is why we must have an efficient and reliable procurement system. This government, keeping in mind our duty to be open, accountable and financially responsible stewards above all else, has taken steps to speed up and improve the purchasing of essential equipment.

• (2110)

[*Translation*]

I know that members of this committee will agree with me that our military personnel, which have already waited far too long, cannot wait another 15 years for the essential tools they need today.

However, we are also determined to do better. The Department of National Defence is eliminating the need for the costly development and adaptation of prototypes. It is ensuring that the procurement process is more flexible. It is procuring more commercial products and the emphasis on efficiency will pay off.

[*English*]

In June 2006 we announced our intentions to acquire a strategic airlift capability. I will quote from a Liberal paper. It states:

The air force must have varied strategic lift capability that would allow it to transport troops, material and supply infrastructure for deployed troops...the recent government commitment is welcome.

That is from December of last year or thereabouts.

In February 2007, only eight months later, we announced that a contract had been signed for the purchase of C-17s from Boeing. This August, a little over a year after that first announcement, the first of four C-17s will land at 8 Wing Trenton. A process that previously took years, and in some cases more than a decade, has been reduced to four months.

Again from December of last year, here is a quote from the Liberals that I really like:

In providing new resources for Canadian Forces the Liberal Party must not shy away from using sole source procurement in order to avoid the long delays in the normal tendering process.

I had no idea the Liberals had so much common sense. They should let it out more often.

At the ceremony held at the Boeing plant where the four major sections of the first four aircraft were joined together, Sue Hale, project manager for the C-17 project, spoke about the improvements in the process. She said:

—we are here to celebrate the collaborative efforts of everyone involved in getting the members of Canada's military a proven platform in 15 months, and not 15 years.

But efficiency is not just about ribbon cutting ceremonies and numbers on paper. To quote one of our aviation technicians, Master Corporal Desaulniers:

The first time that big plane lands in Afghanistan to bring our ground troops their supplies is going to be a really great day.

That day is approaching quickly. This summer our military will begin to have an independent, reliable and flexible capability to move troops and heavy equipment quickly over long distances. The first crews are training right now. They are full of pride and enthusiasm. Again, Master Corporal Desaulniers put it all in perspective when he said, "The future is looking so bright for us".

This is what we asked for, now we have it, and that is very good. It is also a good day for Canadian industry. On this acquisition and others, contractors are required, under the industrial and regional benefits policy, to invest an amount equal to the value of the contract in the Canadian economy. Dollar for dollar, money spent on this new equipment will be matched by spending right here in Canada.

Canadians will also reap ongoing benefits through long term, in service support contracts, which will bring jobs and investment to Canadian industry, economic investment in our communities, and jobs for Canadians as we work to create a well-equipped armed forces.

By providing much needed equipment, our government is ensuring that the Canadian Forces possess key capabilities needed to produce combat capable forces. This reinforces the confidence of Canadians in their relevant and credible capacity to meet Canada's defence and security commitments.

We are providing the tools they need to operate effectively and to be successful in operations in Canada, North America and internationally.

[*Translation*]

We are ensuring that Canada has the necessary means to have a multipurpose, combat-ready military and the ability to provide leadership throughout the world. Our government is enhancing Canada's ability to meet today's challenges and prepare for tomorrow. We are preserving the fairness, openness and transparency of the procurement process, in accordance with the Federal Accountability Act.

Business of Supply

We are ensuring that contracts are granted, equipment is delivered and services are provided in a timely manner, in order to meet the needs of the Canadian Forces while obtaining the best possible value for Canadian taxpayers.

• (2115)

[English]

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a couple of questions now, if I may. First, if he would not mind, I would like him to finish answering the tremendous question that the hon. member from Renfrew asked previously with respect to the Phoenix Centre.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, with regard to the Phoenix Centre in Petawawa, this government is dedicated to working with the Ontario provincial government in supporting the children's mental health centre and ensuring that the services provided are expanded and improved upon.

We already have approved a one time funding allotment of \$100,000 to CFB Petawawa's Military Family Resource Centre to help them contract services in conjunction with the Phoenix Centre. It is in the federal government's best interests to help since the mental health crisis at home affects the morale of our soldiers overseas. If soldiers feel their families are not being cared for, they will not be able to perform their duties well.

I want to say that this government has done more than any previous government to provide comprehensive support to military families. We are not content to sit back on our successes. We will continue to seek proven methods of assisting the families of our brave soldiers.

We are committed to working with provincial governments to elicit more areas in which the local and federal governments can collaborate in improving health services available to military families.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, we know that the 1990s were a dark period for the Canadian Forces. Irresponsible decisions by previous Liberal governments left the Canadian Forces unable to replace critically important equipment, resulting in a loss of capabilities. As if this was not bad enough, the Liberals cut funding while increasing operational tempo, further stretching the Canadian Forces.

I think all of us in this House tonight can agree that we owe it to our brave men and women in uniform to provide them with the equipment they require to perform their jobs both safely and effectively.

I proudly stand here today as a member of a Conservative government that, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, has recognized the dire situation of the Canadian Forces and has taken drastic action to restore Canada's military.

One of the things I found so disheartening about the neglect shown to the Canadian Forces in the 1990s was how these cuts limited Canada's sovereignty. That is ironic, as the Liberals like to talk about Canada having a strong, independent role in the world, yet the cuts they oversaw in the 1990s left the Canadian Forces

increasingly dependent on other actors for mobility, be it our allies such as the United States or other allies or corporations.

How can a strong and independent Canada exist if we are dependent on other actors to move our military where the Government of Canada deems necessary? How can the Canadian Forces respond in a timely manner to disasters and crises if we are facing competing interests and queues to rent equipment?

My question is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. Could he please inform this House of what action the government has taken to increase the independence of action of the Canadian Forces?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I will try to answer these questions as quickly as possible in light of the time constraints we have experienced, but I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

As he said, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, this government has undertaken a major effort to increase the independence of action of the Canadian Forces.

I think its most notable development thus far has been this government's decision to acquire four C-17 Globemaster III strategic airlifters. They will be delivered later this year, as was noted. A dedicated strategic lift capability is absolutely pivotal toward restoring the operational independence of the Canadian Forces and, consequently, our foreign policy.

Strategic lift, with its capability of transporting outsize equipment—and by that I mean assembled heavy equipment such as disaster assistance response team hospital equipment or water distillation equipment, or the new Leopard tanks—is integral toward sending properly equipped response teams to troubled areas, whether the response is military or humanitarian.

Furthermore, dedicated strategic lift capability means we can transport whatever amounts we need of personnel and material whatever distance we need, when we need to do it. This makes a truly rapid response now possible without relying on others, as the member said, such as other nations or corporations.

We can say that it expands the Canadian Forces' core capabilities by giving them the ability to react faster, to take the equipment they need to get the job done, to travel where they need to, when they need to, and in the numbers necessary for the mission.

Although this obviously increases the potential independence of the Canadian Forces, it also helps us in fulfilling multilateral commitments. Rather than relying upon our allies, we now can help them transport their equipment and personnel. Developing our strategic lift also helps us to fulfill our obligations like the ones we have with regard to NATO and to better carry out our UN missions as they arise.

Business of Supply

I am going to try to answer the second question as quickly as I can. By possessing an independent and dedicated capacity for strategic lift, Canada will have less need than ever before to rely upon foreign nations and corporations to transport its men and women, its equipment and its emergency humanitarian aid. We will have the capability of operational independence, with all the implications that brings.

• (2120)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to continue on from where I was in terms of search and rescue aircraft. I want to notify the Chair that I will be sharing my time. I will use the first 10 minutes for questions and answers. My colleague, the member for Halifax, will take the last five.

It is clear that there is no real champion for search and rescue aircraft in the Department of National Defence. I said at committee that it appears that search and rescue really is the orphan child of the defence department, so I want to ask the minister about this.

Will the department champion our domestic needs to have adequate search and rescue, or should it, in the opinion of the minister, be moved to another government department?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned earlier, defence spends about \$600 million a year on search and rescue. It is one of our vital missions. We maintain a number of fleets to meet that mission.

The member has asked me about what our intentions are in the future. As I said, the air force staff are looking at options for the future in terms of what they will replace the current fleets with. That option analysis is not complete, or at least it has not reached my desk yet.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I know that the minister realizes that the Buffalo aircraft on the west coast are 40 years old and that many of the parts needed for replacement have to be manufactured individually because they are no longer available. It seems to be past time for them to be replaced.

I want to return to the question of the CC-130Js that was raised earlier, the aircraft that Canada is buying. The figures we have been given say that we will spend \$3.2 billion to buy 17 of the aircraft and an additional \$1.7 billion for a 20 year service contract for the planes.

Earlier tonight the minister indicated that he thought the cost of each plane was \$85 million Canadian. When we have \$3.2 billion for 17 planes, it works out to \$188 million each. I want to ask the minister, if it is his contention that they are \$85 million Canadian each, what is it that we are buying besides planes? What else are we getting for our \$3.2 billion for 17 aircraft?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as the member said, the estimated total project cost for the 17 aircraft is \$3.2 billion. That includes the actual cost of the aircraft, which are \$85 million Canadian each. It also includes spare parts and infrastructure, that is, buildings and whatever they have to do, and salaries of people involved in the aircraft.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, that would indicate that the fly-away cost of each CC-130J is \$188 million Canadian.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: No, Mr. Chair, the cost is \$85 million. It is as if someone bought a car, then bought the spare parts for 20 years and put the cost of driving the car into the car. That is how DND calculates these costs.

As for the actual cost, if one is a very rich person and has saved money, one can get one of these aircraft for about \$85 million Canadian.

• (2125)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I had the privilege, with other members of the defence committee, of visiting Kandahar in January. Along with all of my other colleagues on the defence committee, I was incredibly and profoundly impressed with the men and women in the Canadian military.

In October, Canada sent Leopard tanks to Kandahar. I have here a photo from the Department of National Defence from the November 22 issue of *The Maple Leaf*. It shows Leopard tanks rolling off C-17 transports in Kandahar. I also have a document that was released to me under access to information by DND showing the contract for transport of Leopard tanks via Antonov 124 from Edmonton to Manas Airport just outside Bishkek in Kurdistan. I want to ask the minister why most of the flight was made by an Antonov and only the short end of the trip by a C-17.

Further, on October 4, Major General Daniel Benjamin was at our Standing Committee on National Defence and said that the Antonov cannot land in Kandahar. Is this also the minister's understanding? Will we continue to use Antonovs to do most of the transport of heavy equipment?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I believe the information the member has is correct. Antonovs were used to get somewhere close to Afghanistan. Then the equipment was moved onto C-17s, which were fully equipped to go into a hostile zone. They have defensive measures and all those sort of things, which the Antonovs do not. The Antonovs are pure commercial aircraft.

When we acquire our C-17s, which will start in August, we will use our C-17s to their fullest to support not only the mission in Afghanistan but other missions. However, I anticipate that from time to time we will still have requirements to rent Antonovs when our C-17s are fully committed.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I want to move on to the issue of the Arctic. The decision of the cabinet priorities and planning committee regarding Arctic patrol vessels has been discussed recently in the media.

We do not have very much information about what precisely is involved with the proposal that was talked about but are we talking about a corvette type of ship, a frigate or is it something larger? Could the minister tell the House where this plan for Arctic patrol vessels, the six that were mentioned in the media, is in the planning stage and what part of the process is it at now?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier today, we will be meeting our Arctic commitments because we consider enforcing our sovereignty in the Arctic is one of the key planks of this government and of the Department of National Defence.

An article that came out recently was full of errors but once the government makes a decision on a specific piece of equipment, an announcement will be made.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, if the media report is full of errors I would appreciate it if the minister would clarify. Certainly from that report it is different than the Conservative election promise of icebreakers for the defence of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and in the north. Perhaps there may be good reason for that kind of a change to the six smaller ships.

When the minister was sworn in, it was the view of the department that because of climate change the Arctic would be largely ice free by 2015. Does the department have an understanding of how climate change is affecting the Arctic? Does the minister believe that the effects of climate change will mean that we will need to find new ways to defend our sovereignty and defend the north?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, whatever is causing it, the ice is melting in the north. I do not know when the Northwest Passage will open up but that is one of the key considerations for our sovereignty. Our government and this department are fully committed to having air, land and sea forces available to deploy into the north, as well as satellites. We are going to enforce our sovereignty along with other government departments.

• (2130)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I know that the U.S. is taking the issue of climate change and security in the north seriously. Recently at the senate hearings in the U.S., retired General Anthony Zinni, who was the former commander of U.S. Central Command, raised concerns about Canada's ability to defend the north and, as the minister knows, the United States has never agreed with our claim of sovereignty in the Northwest Passage. They have raised—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I need to stop the hon. member there to allow the minister enough time to respond.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it is not so much a matter of defending the north but of imposing our sovereignty. We need to ensure that other nations respect our laws and respect our claim to the waters and the lands, and we intend to enforce that.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chair, the minister may be aware that here on Parliament Hill about a year ago, the ambassador to Canada from Afghanistan participated in the launch of a campaign to achieve a global ban on cluster munitions. Could the minister tell the House whether any NATO members or other Canadian allies, to his knowledge, have used or are currently using cluster bombs in Afghanistan?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am not aware of any use of that and I can assure the House that the Canadian Forces do not have cluster munitions and have no intention of acquiring them.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, that is a positive note. I think Canadians will be very pleased to hear that is the position the government has taken. However, I hope, consistent with that, we will get confirmation from the minister that objections are being made with any other nations in Afghanistan that possibly are violating this

position because, of course, 90% of the victims of cluster bombs are civilians.

I represent the riding of Halifax and I am very proud to represent that military town with a proud military history and incredible support of our troops in their many roles in today's world. The minister will be aware that the largest munitions explosion, in fact I think the largest man-made explosion in the history of the world before the detonation of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, took place at Halifax Harbour, the Halifax explosion.

I think he will, therefore, understand that the people of Halifax are particularly committed to the nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament commitments that Canada has endorsed. I am wondering if the minister could indicate whether his government has any policy, particularly DND, that takes objection to the stated objectives and the policies of the Mayors for Peace movement, which actually has 1,632 member municipalities in today's world, and growing all the time, because of the renewed threat in today's world of nuclear arms.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am not aware of the specific reference that the member has made. However, the position of the Canadian government is normally enunciated and enforced by the Department of Foreign Affairs. If the member talked to the Minister of Foreign Affairs he could probably bring her up to date on that.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that he has directed me to foreign affairs to find out what its position is, but I am also asking specifically whether National Defence has a position on Mayors for Peace because it has been suggested to me that there may be a difference of opinion between the two departments.

If he is not able to indicate that at this moment, I wonder if I could ask him to undertake whatever necessary research he must undergo to give an answer to that question.

• (2135)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, in a few words, could the member tell me what this group represents or what it stands for because I do not know what it stands for?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, the Mayors for Peace organization, which is a global movement, is committed to the fulfillment of the obligations set out in the non-proliferation treaty.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, again, this is a foreign affairs domain, but to my knowledge we support the concept of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Business of Supply

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, non-proliferation and also disarmament?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we are a member of NATO and we stand by NATO's policies. NATO, at this stage, has no policy of disarming from nuclear weapons.

As the member knows, Canada chose, back in 1945 when we participated in creating the nuclear weapons, not to have nuclear weapons. That is our national stand.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am going to have to stop the minister there and move on to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the members for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country and Laval—Les Îles. We will each be asking questions for five minutes.

The decommissioned Kapyong Barracks site in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre has been vacated for over five years. The government chose a two-phased disposal process for the land transfer and the military buildings to be followed by that of the personnel married quarters.

Could the minister tell me when the lengthy process for the transfer of lands and buildings to Canada Lands will be completed?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not have the date when that will happen. In fact, and I may be wrong, it was my understanding that Canada Lands already had control of those buildings. However, I will check that out.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, indeed, Canada Lands does not have the lands or buildings.

Would the minister know whether the Treasury Board submission for the transfer of the homes has been completed and has it yet been reviewed by Treasury Board?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not have an answer to that either.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, my next question concerns the personnel married quarters at Kapyong. Over 150 houses have been sitting empty for two years. In April of last year, we were told that the cost of maintaining these homes, heat, maintenance, security, whatever, has been over \$.25 million annually. How long does the minister expect these maintenance expenditures to continue?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member opposite has confirmed for me that we are still in the process of handing these over to Canada Lands. If that is accurate, once they are handed over to Canada Lands it is up to Canada Lands to take up any costs.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, I would remind the minister that it is a two phase process: the lands first, the homes second.

The disposal of the land at Kapyong Barracks to Canada Lands was negotiated for a sum of \$8.6 million. The price appears to be fair but if the houses remain empty for two more years the maintenance costs will be approximately \$1 million.

Would the minister consider the loss of \$1 million from an \$8.6 million sale as being focused, as the finance minister has declared?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not have these numbers immediately available to me. I do not know if they are an accurate reflection of the costs and I do not know if they are an accurate reflection of our ownership of these houses. However, I will check them out and get an answer back to the member.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, I would ask the minister if he would consider or commit to fast-tracking the disposal process of the empty homes at the Kapyong site to Canada Lands. These houses can be put to good use in relieving the current lack of rental homes in Winnipeg.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I will investigate this. I need to speak to our officials to find out what all the implications are.

● (2140)

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, I raise these questions this evening because I have written to the minister's office twice asking for 10 minutes of his time to come and discuss these matters but I have not had a reply.

The 2006 budget stated in the defence section that the government will increase the DND budget over five years to increase the base infrastructure of housing for our forces.

Let me cross the river in Winnipeg. Could the minister tell us what increases are scheduled for 17 Wing in Winnipeg?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, that is too detailed a question for me to immediately answer. I will get the answer for her.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, in the last election, the Conservatives promised to improve the air force squadrons at CFB Comox, CFB Winnipeg and throughout the west by deploying new fixed wing search and rescue aircraft at those two sites and upgrading fighter aircraft at Cold Lake.

What steps has the minister taken to implement this promise? How much will it cost to carry out the promise? Has the money for this promise been booked in either of the last two budgets?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the CF-18 fleet has been upgraded and it will continue to be upgraded for a number of years more. That has already been processed and, in the member's terms, the money is booked.

With respect to search and rescue aircraft, as I have said on a number of occasions, the air force is looking at their options of what they want to do to replace their current fleet of aircraft in the future and they have not arrived at a conclusion at this time.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Chair, before I begin my questions I would like to acknowledge and salute the hard work our brave men and women in uniform are doing in Canada, in Afghanistan and throughout the globe. All Canadians are deeply grateful for the tremendous sacrifices our soldiers and their families make on a daily basis. On behalf of the people of my riding of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, I thank them.

Business of Supply

On May 7, the government announced that it was purchasing six Husky, five Buffalo and five Cougar 6x6 vehicles in order to better equip Canadian troops to address the threat of improvised explosive devices. However, on May 4 Force Protection Inc. issued a release announcing the purchase.

Would the minister please tell us why Canadians first learned about this purchase through the American firm instead of the Canadian government?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not think it matters how it was learned. It is a matter of government processes. However, I think the benefit to the forces of having these five teams of vehicles, they run in teams of three to find IEDs and save lives in Afghanistan, is an excellent acquisition. We acquired them because the American forces pulled out their vehicles and we had to replace them with ours.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, it does matter how Canadians find out about this. I would like to ask the minister this. Why did the government not compete this \$29.6 million procurement and why was there no call for a tender?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we had an immediate operational requirement and there was only one company that could meet that requirement. We are talking about the lives of soldiers. We are not going to go into a five-year process when the lives of soldiers are immediately on the line. We needed devices that would find IEDs to save soldiers, so we would have less soldiers coming back to Trenton.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us what the delivery date of these vehicles will be?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not have the precise date. It is going to be relatively soon, within a few months. I will have to get back to the member and give him the answer.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, I look forward to the minister's response.

Will the minister's former client, BAE Systems, profit from the purchase, as it did from the Nyala purchase last year?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, when we acquire any piece of equipment anywhere, I assume that if it is from a private enterprise, it will have profit. So, everybody that sells equipment to DND or any other government department, if it is a private enterprise, it will have profit.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, then why were these purchases handled by the U.S. navy and not by the Government of Canada?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, it depends how they are acquired. If they are acquired through FMS, foreign military sales, then it depends who acquires these vehicles. It is done through foreign military sales in many cases. That gets the equipment rapidly to the Canadian Forces.

● (2145)

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, in order to get this equipment rapidly to the Canadian Forces, how much did the U.S. navy charge Canada for handling these purchases?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not have that figure at hand. I will get that answer to the member.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, as the minister knows, the federal government is responsible for providing security for the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games in Whistler and Vancouver. What steps has the minister taken to meet these security requirements for the 2010 Olympics?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, first of all, security at the Olympics is the primary responsibility of the provincial government of British Columbia. In federal terms, it is the public security ministry. The defence department is in support of the public security ministry. Our people are talking to the public security ministry and we will provide whatever resources are needed by public security.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Chair, is the minister telling us that he has not been briefed by VANOC, he has not been briefed by the province of British Columbia, and he has no idea what is going on for the security of the 2010 Olympics? Is that what he is saying?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, what I am saying is that public security is the lead in the federal government. Our officials and other officials of other departments of the government are working with public security. As public security and the provincial government agree on what they require, we will provide it.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I too would like to salute the Canadian Armed Forces. As someone who was not born in this country, I had the very great honour of spending some time with the 22nd Regiment in Valcartier and later, with that same regiment in Bosnia. I must say that during the weeks I spent with them, I learned a lot. Most importantly, I learned to respect our armed forces and our young Canadian men and women who are working so far from home in situations that are often very dangerous.

I would like to ask the minister a few questions. First, the minister recently stated in this House that he intended to change the policy on bilingualism in the armed forces. I find that the change amounted to lowering the standards and reducing the level of bilingualism in the armed forces. Can the minister explain to the House how the new system works and can he tell us about the new percentage targets for the armed forces?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I believe that the course we are on now is better than it was in the past.

Year after year the department failed to achieve the objectives of the Official Languages Act. The department and the Canadian Forces have developed a new plan. They have abandoned universal bilingualism. They will not train every member of the armed forces to be bilingual.

They are identifying all the jobs that have to be bilingual and all the people who have to be bilingual, and they will put all their money behind those people to make sure they achieve the language levels they are supposed to achieve to ensure that people are served in the language they require.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, according to the minister's answer, that means that within the Canadian Forces, some units would be French-speaking and others English-speaking because people cannot understand one another, especially at some levels of the army.

I would like to know how these people can communicate among themselves in complete safety, especially considering the very dangerous situations the armed forces often find themselves in.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, there are three kinds of units in the Canadian Forces: French language, English language and bilingual units. Each of the services operate slightly different as well.

With respect to the senior members of the English language units and the French language units, headquarters would ensure that they have enough bilingual people to guarantee that orders are passed back and forth.

However, by having French language units and English language units it means that those people who are unilingual have a full chance at a career in the armed forces. That is true of the Vingt-deux. The three battalions of Vingt-deux are French language units and the three battalions of the RCR are English language units. They are all outstanding infantry and they do their jobs in their own language.

• (2150)

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, I have a hard time believing the minister's explanation. As I understand it, young francophone soldiers could find themselves in a unit that speaks English only. I am not talking about a situation on a military base, but a war situation, where people have to react very quickly. I would like the minister to explain how two unilingual people could communicate quickly to keep safe on the ground, with bombs falling all around them.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces have operated for decades with French language units and English language units. As a former military person, I lived in that regime and it works. We can have units operating in French and units operating in English. They are combined at a headquarters level, which is bilingual, and it works.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, in the last election the Conservative Party promised to station three new armed naval heavy icebreakers, to be made in Canada, in the area of Iqaluit, which would include 500 regular force personnel for crucial support.

I would like to hear from the minister what steps he has taken to implement this promise.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions tonight, we intend to meet all our commitments to the Arctic. When each of these commitments is processed properly through the government, announcements will be made.

[Translation]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal

Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Chair, it gives me great pleasure to take part in this debate on the 2007-08 main estimates for the Department of National Defence.

The main estimates reflect the commitment this government has made to rebuild the Canadian Forces. Since we came to power, we have made major progress toward that goal. In the 2006 budget, we injected an additional \$5.3 billion over five years to help rebuild the Canadian Forces. That represents an increase of \$2.1 billion in this fiscal year.

We have invested in new equipment for the Canadian Forces, such as aircraft for strategic and tactical airlift, tanks and medium to heavy lift helicopters.

We have also supported our soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, who are doing a tremendous job despite difficult conditions.

[English]

Afghanistan is not only a priority for national defence. As the minister said in his speech in Australia last September, there is a "home game" and an "away game". This means that we are defending our country and its citizens right here at home and also in distant lands like Afghanistan.

Today I would like to talk a little bit about the home game. That is because I believe that no debate on the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces can be complete without considering what our military is doing here at home or talking about our important and enduring defence partnership with our neighbour and friend to the south, the United States.

Defending Canada and North America is an integral part of the defence mission and it is at the heart of this government's "Canada First" defence strategy.

I would now like to talk about Norad and its importance to continental defence in the post 9/11 world.

Norad was established in 1958 to monitor and defend North American airspace against Soviet aircraft and missiles.

The events of September 11, 2001, underscored Norad's continued relevance. That day also highlighted the need to further enhance our cooperation and adapt to the evolving threat.

Norad no longer just monitors aircraft coming into North American airspace, but it now monitors civilian aircraft within North American airspace as well. That is exactly what Norad has done.

In May of last year, Canada and the United States renewed Norad indefinitely. The Norad agreement was also enhanced. Norad has a maritime warning system and Norad processes intelligence regarding maritime threats or potential attacks against North America and disseminates it to national authorities.

The national commands, Canada Command and U.S. Northern Command, are then responsible for supporting civil authorities in response to these threats.

Business of Supply

Norad is not the only organization that has adapted to this new security environment. Canada and the United States have introduced new commands to focus specifically on domestic security and defence.

Canada Command stood up in February 2006 as part of the ongoing transformation of the Canadian Forces. Its mission is to detect, deter, prevent, pre-empt, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at Canada.

With the creation of Canada Command, the Canadian Forces awareness of events of national significance has been enhanced.

The Canadian Forces have also improved their preparations for natural disasters and man-made threats, and their ability to respond effectively to these events.

While Canada Command and U.S. Northern Command have a domestic focus, both of our countries recognize there are threats that cut across borders and are of concern to us both.

That is why Canada Command has been working closely with the United States to monitor and defend our maritime interests. That is also why both commands are also closely connected to each other and to Norad through staff interaction and through the exchange of liaison officers.

This close relationship enables all three organizations to be prepared to respond to any emerging situation in support of our other departments and agencies who have the lead responsibility for domestic security.

To increase our readiness, Norad, Canada Command and U.S. Northern Command take part in many cooperative land, air and sea training exercises each year.

Some of these exercises are designed to ensure that our maritime approaches and airspace are protected from terrorist threats. Others are designed to strengthen the arrangements that we have made with the United States to support civilian authorities during emergencies.

I would like to tell members about one such exercise that was designed to ensure that Canadian and American military personnel work together effectively if a disaster ever occurs.

It was a bilateral exercise called Ardent Sentry/Northern Edge involving Canada Command, U.S. Command and Norad, and a host of government departments and agencies.

As a part of this exercise, Canada Command coordinated responses to threats to infrastructure, as well as air and maritime security threats. The Canadian scenarios took place in Alberta, British Columbia and Northwest Territories.

The aim of this exercise was for the Canadian Forces to practise military assistance to civil authorities, including bilateral planning, communication, information sharing and coordination with U.S. Northern Command and Norad.

Our "Canada First" defence strategy includes many initiatives aimed at strengthening Canadian defences. In the decade following the end of the Cold War, the Canadian Forces focused a lot of attention on deployments abroad.

● (2155)

With the continuing terrorist threat to North America, the Canadian Forces are being called upon to play a greater role at home. Several initiatives this government has undertaken in recent years reflect this increased commitment to defending Canada.

For example, we have established marine security operations centres on both our coasts to detect, assess and provide a coordinated approach to marine security threats. These centres bring together civilian and military resources from the Departments of National Defence and Public Safety, the Canadian Coast Guard, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Transport Canada.

The centres facilitate information sharing between departments and agencies, allowing them to build a more complete marine security picture. The centres combine and analyze data from all sources. The results of this analysis are then given to government decision makers who have the authority and mandate to act on it.

In some cases the Canadian Forces can be asked to come to the assistance of other federal departments and agencies. For example, if a ship is suspected of carrying illegal drugs destined for Canada, the RCMP can ask the Canadian Forces for help. That is what happened last year when the HMCS *Fredericton* supported an anti-drug operation off the African coast. HMCS *Fredericton* and its crew supported police officers and served as a command post throughout the operation, in which the RCMP seized a 22.5 tonne shipment of hashish that was intended for the Canadian market.

The Canadian Forces can also be asked to help provincial or territorial governments with natural disasters. Last spring, for example, the residents of Kashechewan, Ontario had to be evacuated because of flooding. Thunder Bay's reserve units were there to help. They prepared local arenas, brought in cots and helped create a hospitable environment to receive the people of Kashechewan in their time of need.

The Canadian Forces will continue to be ready to help in years to come, whether it is in response to floods, forest fires or other natural disasters.

As part of our "Canada First" defence strategy, the Canadian Forces will continue to step up their training exercises and sovereignty patrols in defence of North America.

Members might have heard of our most recent training exercises in the Arctic, Operation Nunavut. Last month, Canadian Forces members travelled thousands of kilometres across some extremely challenging terrain in the high Arctic. This exercise illustrated the government's commitment to defending the Canadian Arctic.

Business of Supply

The Canadian Forces of course take part in search and rescue activities. This critical and often dangerous service takes them to every corner of our nation and the surrounding oceans. The air force, for example, did about 8,000 search and rescue missions in 2006 and saved some 1,000 lives.

Defending Canada and protecting Canadians is at the heart of the "Canada First" defence strategy.

• (2200)

[*Translation*]

I would like to conclude my remarks by reminding my colleagues that this government is determined to rebuild the Canadian Forces so that they can continue their important work here in Canada and alongside our partners in the south.

[*English*]

The 2007-08 estimates reflect this commitment and deserve the support of this committee.

I now have a question.

Much has been said in the House about the overseas deployments and operations of the Canadian Forces. This is important work and it is work that our men and women in the Canadian Forces accomplish day in and day out with professionalism, excellence, and commitment.

While we applaud these efforts, however, let us not overlook the important work that the Canadian Forces are doing here at home. I will take this opportunity to remind the assembled members of the fundamental mission of the Canadian Forces.

As I just mentioned, the Canadian Forces work in concert with their allies and our friends and partners to ensure international peace and stability. However, they also work in partnership with our American friends in the defence of North America.

First and foremost, the Canadian Forces are tasked with the defence of Canada and Canadians. This is primarily their responsibility and naturally it overlaps with the other two I mentioned. However, what does it mean in the domestic context?

I need not remind the representatives from Manitoba, British Columbia and Quebec. When a flood or forest fire or ice storm has threatened our communities, the Canadian Forces were ready and able to respond to requests from the provinces for assistance. Likewise, in the event of a terrorist incident, pandemic or earthquake, the Canadian Forces stand ready to come to the aid of Canadians.

Could the Minister of National Defence, or his parliamentary secretary, provide an example of how the Canadian Forces are continually developing this capacity to carry out this primary duty?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, this is a most timely question. Earlier this week, the Canadian Forces personnel arrived in British Columbia to plan for the potential flooding of the Fraser River. We all hope that this will not happen, but we know they are there in case an emergency happens. We would hate to see that occur.

However, today, Canada Command concluded a bilateral national level exercise with the United States Northern Command and the

North American Aerospace Defense Command. Canada Command is the Canadian Forces organization responsible for the defence of North America, in cooperation with the United States Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command. Canada Command is also responsible for routine and contingency domestic operations. This would include providing support to civil authorities, like municipalities and such, for such events as natural disasters.

Canada Command's aim in this annual national level exercise is to practise the role of military assistance to civil authorities, including bilateral planning, communication, information sharing and coordination with the United States Northern Command and its subordinate formations in Norad.

The Canadian exercise scenario involved threats to infrastructure, air and maritime security. The key objective of this exercise was to validate plans that support military assistance to civil authorities. Canadians can be assured that Canada Command is prepared to provide assistance to provincial authorities if and when requested.

• (2205)

Mr. Rod Bruinoog: Mr. Chair, ensuring the safety and security of our north has always been a challenging endeavour for political and military leaders in Canada. It is understandable. Just look at the size of the territory, the complexity of the potential threats and the challenging climate.

Ensuring the security of the Arctic region is a daunting task, however, this does not excuse the actions of the previous government. While we were all aware of those challenges, the previous government adopted a do nothing attitude during its time in power. Its lack of political will for securing the north resulted in a slow and steady deterioration of the resources necessary for the area. Unfortunately for Canadians, this led to a decline in the military resources that were required to sustain operations and activity in the north.

The policy of the previous government was simple. It simply reacted to the actions of our neighbours. It underestimated and ignored the potential threats in the Arctic and acted as though no protection was necessary. What is worse, the maintenance of many of our installations in the north has been seriously neglected. Consequently, the capacity of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic has been dangerously reduced.

Despite considerable changes in the geostrategic situation, security in the north still depends on a sustained presence and activity by the Canadian Forces. Indeed, the intensification of air and maritime traffic and the potential for transnational criminal activity are among the new challenges facing the Canadian Forces and their partners.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am going to stop the hon. parliamentary secretary because we have to allow the other parliamentary secretary enough time to respond.

We will go to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence for about 15 seconds.

Business of Supply

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, it is going to be difficult to answer in 15 seconds. If the member was going to ask about the two operations that were occurring in the Arctic, I can assure him that they were successful. They were very helpful in demonstrating our ability to successfully operate in this very complex theatre.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to come back to some questions I have already asked, which the minister managed to sidestep very skilfully. The minister is very good at stick handling his way around a question, but I do realize that the minister cannot answer all of the questions.

Does the minister make a commitment to provide me with answers once he has consulted with his people on the range for eastern Canada?

Can the minister give us a progress report on the range for eastern Canada and tell us when he plans to table the findings of the report and to make them public?

The minister is not obliged to answer this question because he gave me an answer earlier. I got the same replies a few months ago, and I want an answer that is more current. Can the minister give me an answer?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, on the matter of the range, I understand the air force is studying it or has been studying it. I have received no information from it on such a topic. When I get a conclusion, if it is not classified, I will inform the member of the result.

However, to date I have had no indication from the air force that it has a requirement for the range.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I would like to also revisit a question concerning French in the armed forces.

What does the minister intend to do to ensure that francophones have a place other than on the front lines?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not quite get the tenor of that question. Twenty-eight per cent of all general officers are francophone and 24% of the officer corps is francophone. The francophones for many decades have enjoyed a full career in the armed forces. Many of the recent chiefs of the defence staff were francophones.

Therefore, I do not understand the tenor of the member's question. Francophones have the full ability to enjoy the benefits of the Canadian Forces.

• (2210)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, the minister's replies concerning the prisoners handed over to Afghan authorities have zigzagged skilfully. I asked how many prisoners had been transferred since 2002. That strikes me as a precise question which the minister could make an effort to answer.

Can the minister tell us how many prisoners have been handed over since 2002?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions, details concerning prisoners are operational and I will not discuss operational matters.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, of course the minister is going to say these are questions of an operational nature. I would still like to ask my questions on the prisoners handed over to Afghan authorities.

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. Where are these prisoners and in how many centres?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I do not know if the member is asking for the number of detention centres in Afghanistan or the number of detention centres that the Afghanistan government eventually wants to concentrate any detainees that we may have handled.

However, if the member wants those answers, he will have to talk to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, does the minister know how much it would cost for a detention centre run jointly by NATO countries and Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the department is not considering, in fact it is not even in its mandate to consider, detention centres in Afghanistan.

I am not aware of any consideration, but if there were any consideration, the member would have to check with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, the minister says that this is not in his department's mandate. However, I would like to ask another question on the same subject.

Since he is the Minister of National Defence and he was once a general, does the minister have an idea of how much it costs and how many people it takes to operate these detention centres?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I must clarify again, as I did earlier, the responsibility of the defence department. Beyond operations and assisting in the development of Afghanistan, when it comes to detainees, the responsibility of the defence department, should it have detainees, is to treat them properly, in accordance with all military laws.

When they are processed, recorded et cetera, they are handed over to the Afghan authorities, and the International Red Cross and the human rights commission are informed of the transfer. That is the responsibility of the defence department. It has no responsibility beyond that point.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, does the minister think that some Canadian soldiers could be prosecuted for turning detainees over to the Afghan authorities, knowing that they would be tortured, and how can he be so sure?

•(2215)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I have said, I have not been made aware from the department of any abuse or any torture of any detainee. I have never been informed of a case, period.

Our Canadian Forces operate to the highest standards. As I have said, they operate to the standards of all the international laws governing war, including the Geneva convention, and there is no basis for thinking that the Canadian Forces are doing anything improper.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, in the event soldiers were prosecuted, what would be the Canadian government's position?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, that is a hypothetical question that is beyond my ability to answer at this moment.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, in 2006, the Conservative government announced sweeping changes that would see several thousand more people hired over the next five years. The Canadian Forces indicated that such an increase was vital if they were to be able to meet operational requirements.

In May 2006, the Auditor General reported that in four years, National Defence had succeeded in recruiting 20,000 members, but that its ranks had grown by only 700 soldiers who were trained during that same period. The Auditor General added that recruitment and attrition problems were putting the Canadian Forces' expansion plans at risk.

Can the minister say how personnel are being recruited at present?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, rebuilding the armed forces from a manpower point of view is a challenge because of the gutting of the military strength in the 1990s, when the forces lost many officers and NCOs.

We are rebuilding the training system and the recruiting system. We have added many efficiencies over the last year in the recruiting system. In the last year there have been more than 5,000 members lost through attrition because of age or other reasons, but beyond that, the regular force grew by approximately 1,015.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, the government promised to recruit more soldiers. How does he intend to assure us that this promise will be kept?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we are rebuilding the recruiting system and rebuilding the training system.

As time goes on we become more and more efficient and we can recruit at a higher rate.

We have had to deal with manpower deficits. We are overcoming that. As I said, last year we increased by 1,015.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government promised, in the last election campaign, to establish a certain number of battalions.

The Conservative government promised to establish a battalion in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, in Bagotville to be exact. Can the minister advise us of the schedule for establishing this battalion in Bagotville?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we will meet our commitment to Bagotville. The details of that option are being worked out at this moment.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to have had more information, such as the budget and the infrastructures, but I see that the minister says that that will come a little later. I will finish up now to give my colleague an opportunity to ask other questions.

•(2220)

The Deputy Chair: We will now move on to the next series of interventions reserved for the official opposition.

[English]

The hon. member for North Vancouver, might he also want to tell me how he plans to share his time? We will close in 10 minutes, at 10:31.

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the members for Newton—North Delta, Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, and Bourassa; two and a half minutes, two and a half minutes, one minute and three minutes. I believe that adds up correctly.

Let me begin by saying that the residents in North Vancouver appreciate the dedication of our men and women in Afghanistan. We would like them to come home sooner than later, safely.

In the last election the Conservative Party promised to provide new territorial battalions with 100 regular and at least 400 reserve force personnel each to be prepared to respond to emergencies in Canada's major urban centres, with battalions in the west to be stationed in areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Regina and Winnipeg.

Particularly in light of the predicted high risk of a major earthquake that is expected for the lower mainland of British Columbia and the recent world natural disasters, I would like to know how prepared we are. In particular, I would like to ask the minister what steps he has taken as minister to implement this promise. I would like to know what it would cost to carry out this promise. Has the money for this promise been booked in either of the past two budgets?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we will meet that commitment. The money is in the budgets that I have today. This is a serious commitment. You remember in the last election when your party ran ads about soldiers in cities, well, you are going to get them.

The Deputy Chair: I would like to caution members from both sides to do the debate through the Chair and to refer to each other in the third person and it will all go a lot easier.

The hon. member for North Vancouver.

Mr. Don Bell: Mr. Chair, in the last election the Conservative Party promised yet again to restore a regular army presence in British Columbia with a new rapid reaction army battalion of 650 regular force personnel that will be air deployable to be stationed at CFB Comox.

I would like to know what steps the minister has taken to implement this promise. How much will it cost to carry out this promise? Has the money for this promise been booked in either of the two budgets?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, we will meet this commitment. The money is in the budget. As to the matter of timing, it is like everything else. As I said before, we are rebuilding the army, air force and navy at the same time. We have huge amounts of equipment to acquire. We have reorganizations to take place. We have new units to create. It is on the list and it will be done.

Mr. Don Bell: Mr. Chair, very quickly, I would ask if the minister could provide the actual costs, not now, but at some point in the near future so that I can have that part of my question answered.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member will get the numbers when the model is completed and it is announced by the government. He will then have a number.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am very proud of our women and men in uniform. They are doing an incredible job in heroic circumstances. I along with the people from Newton—North Delta salute the forces. It is shameful that the government is trying to shield itself from criticism by invoking their good name.

Earlier today we heard in the ethics committee, after the shameful filibustering by Conservative members, that the access to information requests have been met with unusual resistance from both the minister's department and DFAIT.

Was the minister aware of these difficulties? Was the minister's staff updated and if not, why not?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, unfortunately, I do not know what the member is talking about. If he would identify what document he is talking about, I could answer the question.

• (2225)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Chair, this is all about the detainees in Afghanistan. I am sure the minister is well aware.

When I look at this communication, this is all about accountability. What does this say about the communication or lack of communication with his own department officials? Is this how Canada's new government functions? What is the minister going to

do to fix it and how is he going to ensure real accountability? Canadians, like my constituents, want to know.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am still not clear but I will take a stab at it.

If there is information about detainees, this is operational information which the government does not release. If that is what the member is talking about, it is operational information about detainees. If it is something else, I would have to know.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Chair, I will give it another try.

Last year, when the hon. Minister of National Defence misled Canadians by telling them that the International Committee of the Red Cross was monitoring the treatment of detainees, was the minister aware that it only had to report to the Afghanistan government and not the Canadian government?

Was it a question of the minister not being briefed correctly or did the minister simply not understand that his responsibility was to the detaining power?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said when I made a statement in the House, I provided the information based on my best knowledge at the time.

I would like to make another comment. I have a quote from a member that says:

I have been in places of Afghan detention myself and have seen the work that the International Committee of the Red Cross does, and I believe it is the best guarantee of their safety and freedom from abuse.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Who said that?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: The deputy leader of the Liberal Party. So he believed it.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would first like to say how proud I am to be the member of Parliament for the 9 Wing Gander in Newfoundland and Labrador. At this point I would like to send a big congratulations and a bon voyage to our outgoing base commander, Lieutenant-Colonel James MacAleese. I am proud to say that our next base commander will be Lieutenant-Colonel Tammy Harris who is the first female base commander in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Swirling rumours have been going on for quite some time about the fact that 103 Search and Rescue, a proud and big part of 9 Wing Gander, one of most active search and rescue squadrons in the country, is being moved from Gander to St. John's. I was wondering if the minister could clarify the position that it will indeed stay in Gander.

Also, he mentioned earlier that he was awaiting information from the air force about fixed wing aircraft search and rescue. I was wondering how he personally feels about the necessity of fixed wing search and rescue and the valiant efforts shown by our members of search and rescue across this country.

Business of Supply

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I am not aware of any plan to move the search and rescue from Gander. It would need to cross my desk, I would need to approve it but I have not seen it. To my knowledge, there is no intention at all of moving that group from Gander.

With respect to fixed wing search and rescue, I think it is one of the most vital requirements of the Canadian Forces. At the moment we are operating with a variety of aircraft that are successfully doing the job. As I said, the air force is working out options for the future on what it determines is the most appropriate way to replace this capability in the future.

However, for now it is a very good service run by very professional people and it has saved many lives.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, unfortunately, all good things must come to an end. A great deal has been said here this evening, and, I think, a review of the blues would show that this discussion could go on. In closing, I would like to revisit a few points.

First of all, I would like to talk about the Chinook. It came to our attention, and to that of certain journalists, that the F series Chinook helicopters need to be more heavily armoured and need added elements of protection, because they are not capable of protecting themselves.

Yet, according to Boeing itself, the base model Chinooks cost \$40 million U.S. However, because of the way we want to use them, they will cost \$80 million.

How can we possibly stay within the \$4.7 billion budget, if the price of the helicopters doubles?

● (2230)

[*English*]

The Deputy Chair: I would just like to advise the hon. minister that this is the last question and that he has one minute to reply.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, as I said before, the Chinooks, when they arrive, will have all the latest defence devices on them and that is included in our budget.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: It being 10:31 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported.

[*English*]

The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 10:32 p.m.)

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