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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[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)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to one petition.

* * *

PETITIONS

HEALTH

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table a petition today, with over 275 signatures, about the need to improve food and product safety in Canada. The petitioners are concerned that “a product of Canada” need not have been grown, raised, caught or in any way begun its life in Canada. Canadian regulations require only that the last substantial transformation of the goods must have occurred in Canada and that at least 51% of the total direct cost of producing or manufacturing the goods is Canadian.

This is particularly troubling to the petitioners because they note that Canada's failed trade policy limits safety standards and sends jobs overseas. As a result, tainted imports from China and other countries have in recent months led to the recalls of thousands of toys, food products and pet food products. Instead of acting to effectively deal with this trend, the federal government is proposing trade agreements with countries such as Peru and Panama, which already have been cited for food safety concerns.

For all of these reasons the petitioners call upon the Parliament of Canada to ensure that all Canadians can be assured of food and product safety by passing the motion that I had the privilege of tabling in the House, Motion No. 435.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members and friends of TOPS ON 40 and the Catholic Women's League in

Hamilton Mountain for sending me this petition and for engaging in the important struggle to ensure food and product safety for all Canadians.

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am once again very pleased, honoured and humbled to present petitions in the House that have been brought here by thousands of people. I now have well over 20,000 names on petitions in support of Bill C-484. These people recognize that there is a difference between a woman who wants to end her pregnancy and one who does not and wants to have the right both to have the child and to have her choice protected in law.

These people, around 1,200 of them today, are asking that Parliament enact Bill C-484, which provides protection for women and for their unborn children, which they want.

CANADA POST

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition signed by a number of people in the Toronto area and Etobicoke North who believe that this newly implemented community mailbox system is not the appropriate way to go.

They believe that it poses an environmental hazard and a safety hazard for citizens and they do not feel that adequate notice was given. They would like Canada Post to eliminate these community mailboxes and move back to door to door delivery across all neighbourhoods in Canada.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present yet again another income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a large number of constituents of mine in Mississauga South, who remember the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors. I see that this is agitating the government but this is the truth. The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Government Orders

•(1005)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, they are still agitated, but I know that I am on the right track.

The petitioners want the government, first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as demonstrated in the finance committee; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and, finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

* * *

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 Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from April 14 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-13 today. Again, it is another piece of legislation that I think is important when we look at trying to modernize the justice system in Canada and make various changes. It is also good to have time in our ridings to discuss these issues and get the support of our constituents in advance of being able to speak to them.

Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal procedure, language of the accused, sentencing and other amendments), will clearly take us in another direction to ensure that our justice system in Canada is as modern as can be. Hopefully, the bill will modernize the system to make it also more efficient and more effective, something that we also hear complaints about in our judicial system. Lawyers, crown attorneys and so on talk about how slow the system is and how there is a need to update a variety of areas in our judicial system.

Some of these amendments make certain processes more effective through greater use of technology and by consolidating and rationalizing existing provisions. The amendments relating to criminal procedure in Canada provide for, among other things, the use of a means of telecommunication to forward warrants for the purpose of endorsement and execution in the jurisdiction other than the jurisdiction where the search warrant was obtained. This clearly will save time and will be far more efficient. It is a logical step that needed to be taken.

The amendments also provide for changes to the process with respect to the challenge of jurors to, among other things, assist in preserving their impartiality, which again is very important; summary dismissal by a single judge of the court of appeal when

an appeal has erroneously been filed with that court; an appeal of a superior court order with respect to things seized lying with the court of appeal; a summary conviction trial with respect to the co-accused that can proceed where one of the co-accused does not appear; and the reclassification of the offence of possession of break and enter instruments into a dual procedure offence to allow the Crown to determine whether this offence should be prosecuted by way of indictment or by the more expeditious procedure of summary conviction, which again could save hours of court time and allow for much faster determinations.

Amendments related to sentencing provide for, among other things: the power to order an offender not to communicate with identified persons while in custody, and the creation of an offence for failing to comply with the order, thereby enhancing protection of victims, which for some time has been called for; clarifications with respect to the application of impaired driving penalties; an increase of the maximum fine that can be imposed for a summary conviction offence from the current \$2,000 to \$10,000, which is a significant increase and hopefully would work to some degree as a deterrent; the suspension of a conditional sentence order or a probation order during an appeal; and the power to delay sentencing proceedings so that an offender can participate in a provincially approved treatment program.

We often have heard about the lack or insufficient number of treatment programs for people who find themselves with a serious drug problem. There are just not enough programs. There was an article in yesterday's paper and a symposium held yesterday in Toronto which talked about the very issue of there not being sufficient drug treatment programs for many people. That also results in many people are finding themselves in the judicial system.

Further amendments include: in the case of a person serving a youth sentence who receives an adult sentence, to clarify that the remaining portion of the youth sentence is converted to an adult sentence; and the power of a court to order, on application by the Attorney General and after convicting a person of the offence of luring a child by means of a computer system, the forfeiture of things used in relation to that offence.

Clearly this legislation is reflecting the ongoing concerns of Canadians and parliamentarians with regard to many of the things that are going on through the Internet and the luring of young children, an issue that has been discussed at length here in the House. Again, it is all part of the modernization of our justice system's ability to reflect these kinds of things that did not happen many years ago.

•(1010)

Other amendments will allow for better implementation of the language right provisions in the Criminal Code. These amendments will improve the means through which an accused is informed of the right to be heard by a judge or a judge and jury who speak the official language of Canada that is the language of the accused, or both official languages of Canada. The amendments also codify the right of the accused to obtain a translation of the information or indictment on request. Other provisions clarify the application of the language provisions of the Criminal Code in the context of bilingual trials.

Government Orders

Although this bill may not seem as exciting as some that we have been debating lately, I think it is nice to get something that is not charging each and every one of us up but goes on to modernize the system. These justice bills are important. As the responsible Liberal official opposition that we are, we will be supporting this legislation.

The legislation might seem familiar to all the people watching at home. There is good reason for that. This bill was originally introduced as Bill C-23 in the first session of the 39th Parliament. It passed all stages of approval in the House of Commons and had been sent to the Senate, so if anyone thinks this is familiar legislation, clearly it is. It died on the order paper, unfortunately, when the minority Conservative government decided to prorogue the House and start fresh with a Speech from the Throne. This is catch-up time on good legislation.

That Speech from the Throne was another ploy by the government to try to raise its poll numbers, not unusual for the Conservatives, nor was it unusual for other people who had assumed the same role in government, but sadly for them Canadians saw through the strategy and were not fooled. Canadians know how much good work the Liberal government did to protect our cities and our communities and how much progress we made on our justice agenda.

Notable achievements by my government included the creation of a national sex offender registry to protect Canadians from violent sex offenders, and we introduced legislation to restrict the use of conditional sentences for serious and violent offences. We also introduced a package of measures to crack down on violent gun crime and gang violence to assist communities at risk.

Much of that legislation is currently being used in cities across Canada, in particular my city of Toronto, which continues to work on areas of crime prevention, enforcement of the sentences that are there and reaching out to at risk youth and at risk communities. Some of the initiatives included a new \$50 million gun violence and gang prevention fund, legislative reform for stricter sentencing for gun crimes, and social investments to prevent those at risk from following a life of crime and to provide them with hope and opportunity for tomorrow.

Canadians know that the Liberal Party continues to be committed to protecting our homes and our rights, as they have always known. It is a priority for us. That is why we have committed to appointing more judges, and it is why we are supporting that legislation, and to putting more police officers on our streets and more prosecutors in the courts, as I mentioned earlier today. We also have worked very hard to toughen laws on Internet luring and identity theft to protect Canada's most vulnerable citizens, including children and seniors.

In his many comments, our leader has also committed to establishing a new fund that will help preserve the safety of ethnic and cultural at risk communities across Canada. This safety being put at risk is something that unfortunately continues to happen more and more in many of our communities across Canada. This fund would, for example, cover the costs of security in their places of worship and gathering places.

I am pleased to support Bill C-13. I encourage my colleagues to do the same. I also encourage my colleagues to exercise their privileges as members to be on the record as speaking out on behalf

of their constituents on important pieces of legislation before the House. I am glad to have had the opportunity to get my points of view on the record today. I look forward to questions.

• (1015)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, much discussion has been going on in the Toronto area, led by the mayor, David Miller, about the need to ban handguns. In our last election platform our party promised to eliminate handguns.

What disturbs me in the debate on this issue is that it is being characterized that if we ban handguns this will solve the problem. I do not think anyone would be naive to purport that.

While many of the handguns that are used to commit crimes in Toronto come across our border, we also know that 30% to 50% of them are sourced from within Canada. Handguns are stolen from people who legally own them and then a black market develops for these handguns. Many people in Toronto have been victims of crimes committed with legal handguns, not just black market handguns smuggled across the U.S.

I wonder if the member supports a ban on handguns and if she sees a ban on handguns as part of a bigger array of responses to the crime that we see in some of our cities.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I need to put on the record that I am sorry that the member will not be running in the next election. I have met the young woman who will be seeking to assume his position and she certainly would bring a lot of great qualities to the House of Commons. I wish her a lot of luck.

The whole issue of guns is a very sensitive one. My understanding, from being involved a fair amount in these issues, is that most of these guns are being stolen and smuggled across the border. I know that we had committed x amount of dollars for further border security. The current government is following up on those kinds of commitments to tighten the border.

We also hear about the amount of times that guns are being literally ordered and delivered through Canada Post. This is an area that we all need to work on with Canada Post to ensure that it checks out items being shipped to various homes to ensure it is not passing guns or anything that could be used as such.

One of the issues we do not talk about is the number of killings committed with knives and items like that, not only the guns. As we focus on getting guns off the street, especially in our large urban regions, we need to keep in mind that other instruments are used as well.

As someone said, yesterday, members of gangs used to get into fist fights and today, unfortunately, it is gun fights, which is clearly not acceptable. We need to work with our communities to decrease that but we also need to work with young people in my community and other communities who feel the need to belong to gang.

Government Orders

Our real focus is to ensure that all our kids, from day one, have an opportunity for early learning and great education from zero on, that they have hope for tomorrow, that they do not need to join gangs, get into the gun fights and all the rest of it.

Unfortunately, many of our youth feel they do not have any hope for the future. We need to be focusing our efforts on education, opportunities and hope for them for tomorrow.

• (1020)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member, who has roots in New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in Canada, and roots in my community of Moncton, the first officially bilingual city in Canada, some questions with respect to language and the Criminal Code. Perhaps she could also comment on the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada on Friday in the *Paulin* case which underscored the need to respect official languages, the languages used by the actors in the justice play for the accused, and how Justice Bastarache basically took a shot at the current government, the Attorney General and the Prime Minister for not caring enough about the fight for the entrenchment of official languages in our justice system. As we know, that case dealt with the RCMP at roadside in the Woodstock area of New Brunswick.

There is a segue here. How important is it to the member, who is now from Toronto not New Brunswick, and for Canada, the Attorney General, the Prime Minister and the Conservative government to respect the nature of our country in serving the justice system in both official languages?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we should not even have that discussion. Frankly, there are two official languages in Canada, period. Throughout Canada, regardless of what community, individuals have the right to be serviced in either language.

Yesterday we dealt with Bill C-31, which was the appointment of judges. The issue of finding bilingual judges was raised several times. I know it may be easier to find anglophone judges and so on but we have two official languages in Canada. It has been a strength for Canada.

As Canada grows, I think we will find that two languages are much more positive than any barriers. We need to work to overcome those barriers and encourage the whole issue of bilingualism as a strength for our country.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for York West for her continued input on criminal justice issues.

Yesterday, there was a great deal of discussion about judges, particularly the fact that there are 31 vacancies already and another 20 are sought to be authorized by Bill C-31. It also came out that there had been no analysis or projections done on the demand for the court system. Now I see in Bill C-13 that we have even more elements of whether there will be greater demands placed upon our courts.

I wonder if the member would care to amplify on the fact that the government has delayed this legislation. It could have been passed easily enough had it not prorogued and introduced a different type of bill, effectively to do the same kind of thing.

We saw that yesterday as well. A number of bills in the first session were already well advanced and yet the government decided to consolidate them in an omnibus bill, thereby requiring that the whole process start all over again.

It seems that the government is not committed to ensuring that our criminal justice system is proceeding in an efficient fashion.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that we now have Bill C-13 to debate today, as we had Bill C-31 yesterday.

I like to think that governments live and learn. None of us are perfect and I would suggest that neither is the government. When it decided to prorogue it may not have realized the implication to the many bills important to Canadians that would be hindered by that decision.

We all live and die by the decisions we make here in the House of Commons. It will be up to Canadians to decide whether we are fast enough or the government is fast enough at producing legislation. There has been a lot of justice legislation tabled, some of which we have supported, and we will continue to move forward in the best interest of Canadians.

• (1025)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there further debate on the amendment to Bill C-13? Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Accordingly, the division will take place tomorrow at 5:30 p.m.

Government Orders

[Translation]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The first speaker is the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant. She has 13 minutes to finish her speech.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have 13 minutes. Last time, I was interrupted in the middle of my speech, so I will continue where I left off.

Before the debate on Bill C-26 was interrupted, I was saying how heavily this bill relies on harsher minimum penalties and I was talking about the supposed deterrent effect of these penalties. I will repeat that this has more to do with the Conservatives' repressive ideology than with the rehabilitation approach preferred by the Bloc Québécois.

Now, to resume debate, I will speak about the one positive element in Bill C-26. This bill enables a judge, with the consent of the prosecutor, to order the offender to participate in a drug treatment program. If the offender successfully completes treatment, the court is not required to impose the minimum punishment. This can be found in subclause 5(2) of the bill.

This approach seems promising, and is a change from the Conservative government's approach of wanting to deal with crime using harsher minimum penalties.

If drug offences must be harshly punished, we must also consider alternatives to minimum penalties, since this approach does not allow for rehabilitation. This is why we must carefully examine Bill C-26, so we can be sure that the principle of rehabilitation is still there and that it is effective.

For example, I found out from some Statistics Canada data that adult offenders who have served their time under supervision in the community are far less likely to return to the correctional system within 12 months of the end of their sentence than offenders who have served their time in a correctional institution. That fact must be taken into account.

But my analysis does not end there. We have to consider the fact that illegal drug convictions typically affect young people. About 2.5% of those between the ages of 15 and 24 are addicted to illegal drugs, compared with less than 0.5% of people over 35.

As a result, Bill C-26 could end up punishing relatively more young people. As legislators, we have to ensure that our young people can benefit from effective rehabilitation options. Why? Because prison has always been and will always be crime school. Prison is the kind of place where young people cannot help but become deeply resentful of society. That is why this clause in Bill C-26, which opens the way to rehabilitation, is so important.

That is why we have to study this bill and its new mechanisms thoroughly to ensure that the principle of rehabilitation remains intact and effective without undermining the fight against drugs.

In conclusion, I believe that Bill C-26 is not without merit. However, there are legitimate concerns about what it seeks to achieve. For example, when I read the text of the bill, I was very concerned about some of the aggravating factors, such as when the accused has used a building belonging to a third party to commit the offence. Why would the same offence be that much more serious when committed in a rented house than in a house belonging to the accused? Why would it be more serious in an apartment than in a condo, even if the two are located in the same building?

Despite the fact that we are against this bill in principle for the reasons I mentioned earlier, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-26 at second reading so that it can be studied in committee. In my opinion, as I have said several times in this House, if we really want to fight crime, the first thing we have to do is fight poverty, social inequality and exclusion.

● (1030)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said at the beginning of her comments that maybe there was some hope in this bill because it has a diversion program, or what is called a drug treatment court.

I wonder if she has examined what drug treatment courts do. I am quite familiar with them because we have one in Vancouver. One of the problems with the court is that it allows for late intervention. People need to be provided with intervention, treatment and assistance before they get to the point of being incarcerated.

It also creates a backlog in that it allows people to jump the line. We all know that treatment beds are very limited, maybe not in Quebec but they are elsewhere in Canada, so people can be coerced into treatment by a drug court and that happens at the point of conviction where so-called choice is offered.

Most of the studies and analyses that have been done on drug courts have shown them to have very low success rates. The intervention needs to come much earlier, right on the street, right in the local community, rather than waiting until someone is involved in the justice system and at the point of being convicted.

I wonder if the Bloc is looking at this question because it is part of the bill. The Conservatives have put this in the bill to give the illusion that they are being a bit more progressive, but in actual fact, the evidence about drug treatment courts shows that they are ineffective. I wonder if the member would comment on that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my distinguished colleague for her question and especially her comments. This bill does reflect a certain openness, because if offenders complete their treatment, this could be considered a mitigating factor and reduce their sentence.

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My colleague is concerned that this bill increases penalties, that the war on drugs is punitive and repressive and that, in terms of treatment, these people do not have the physical, financial or other support they need to overcome their addictions.

Clearly, this is a question of approach. The Bloc Québécois and Quebec very much favour rehabilitation over repression. As you know, Quebec has the lowest crime rate of all the provinces.

Our track record shows that we try to attack the source of the problem. When problems arise, we try to put in place mechanisms to help and support our young people and inmates so that they can get the rehabilitation they need. We prefer this approach to repression.

Our track record in Quebec shows that this method works. When a method works and has proven beyond any doubt to be successful, with statistics to back it up, when a model is this effective, I do not understand why others do not use it.

I invite the Conservative Party to look at Quebec's approach. The Conservatives could see where they should be investing money, instead of building prisons, increasing minimum sentences and bringing in all sorts of repressive measures.

This bill does open the door to rehabilitation, and I congratulate the Conservatives on that. However, the Conservative ideology is truly a repressive ideology that is not a recipe for success, in my opinion. In countries such as the United States that have used crime repression methods such as building more prisons and increasing minimum sentences, the crime rate has not gone down.

Logically, we need to invest much more in mechanisms to help young people in particular, because this bill targets them. They are affected most by drugs. That is where we need to invest our energies. That is our responsibility as parliamentarians.

•(1035)

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity today to speak at second reading to Bill C-26, which deals with minimum mandatory sentencing for drug crimes.

I have to begin by saying that it is not really a surprise that we are debating this bill, although in my comments I hope to show that the bill itself is seriously flawed and very ineffective. However, it is not a surprise that the Conservative government has brought forward this bill because it is very much a part of its core agenda where it is trying to give people the illusion that it is dealing with a serious problem in our society, in this case drug use, by coming in with a very repressive and heavy enforcement regime.

My riding of Vancouver East has often been in the media and it is a community that has been at the epicentre of a drug crisis not only in Canada but in North America. I have become very involved in this issue over the course of being a member of Parliament for 11 years. I have become very involved in looking at drug policy, what works, what does not, and what kinds of reforms are taking place not only in Canada but around the globe.

In my community of East Vancouver, we are very proud of the fact that we are home to North America's first safer injection facility called Insite. In fact, just yesterday in the House, I questioned the

Minister of Health to find out if finally the government would acknowledge the dozens of studies that have been done which show that Insite is a very effective program that has reduced drug use and improved safety, and finally make a decision to allow Insite to remain open.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Health, as on previous occasions, did not respond to that question and did not make it clear whether or not Insite will continue.

However, I want to say that in Vancouver, there have been many amazing advances in terms of our understanding of the drug issue, how it impacts people and what kinds of public policies need to be developed. In fact, two former mayors of the city of Vancouver, Philip Owen and Larry Campbell, were very involved in setting the stage through their leadership for a changed policy around drugs. Groups like VANDU, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, have been instrumental in transforming the debate.

So often this debate is about dividing people, of saying there are good people and there are bad people. People who are drug users are automatically labelled as traffickers or dealers. We have seen a history in Canada, as we have in the United States, of this issue being used in a way to create fear. I call it the politics of fear and this is something very much that the Conservatives have picked up on, but in East Vancouver, and in Vancouver generally, we have rejected that kind of model.

We believe that the issue of substance use, drug use, has primarily to do with public health. It has to do with ensuring that people make good choices, that people are supported in prevention, treatment and harm reduction when they need it. The more we criminalize drug users, the more we create further harms, as I hope to show in the debate today.

I do want to say that for the NDP, one of our overall concerns is that there is absolutely no proof that mandatory minimum sentences are effective and an appropriate measure to reduce drug use and crimes related to drugs. In fact, most evidence shows the opposite.

This bill does not address the core issue of why people use drugs. In fact, what it does do is increase an already imbalanced and overfunded enforcement approach to drug use in Canada without reducing crime rates or drug use. What this bill further does, in the whole program that we have seen from the Conservative government, is to abandon successful measures, such as harm reduction and grassroots education programs.

What we are most concerned about is that this bill is moving Canada toward an expensive, failed, U.S.-style war on drugs that we know spends tens of billions of dollars a year on enforcement and incarceration while crime rates soar and drug use soars as well.

Greater incarceration rates place a greater burden on the courts, police and prisons, and in fact the bill leaves it open to enforcement. This is one of the real problems of this bill, as it in effect goes after low level dealers, even for marijuana infractions. The fact is that selling one joint or growing one plant can constitute trafficking under this bill.

● (1040)

Just looking at the situation in Canada, we know that Canada spends about 73% of its drug policy budget on enforcement. Only 14% goes to treatment, 7% to research, 2.6% to prevention, and 2.6% to harm reduction. So when we look at that picture and see where the money has gone and where the emphasis has gone, it presents a very troubling situation. Yet, we also know that drug use has continued to rise in Canada.

In 1994, 28% of Canadians reported to have used illicit drugs. By 2004, this number was 45% and we know as well that a Department of Justice report from 2002 concluded that mandatory minimum sentences are the least effective in relation to drug offences. It said:

MMS do not appear to influence drug consumption or drug-related crime in any measurable way. A variety of research methods concludes that treatment-based approaches are more cost effective than lengthy prison terms. MMS are blunt instruments that fail to distinguish between low and high-level, as well as hardcore versus transient drug dealers.

In addition, we have many other people speaking out about this bill and I would like to read into the record some of the key organizations which expressed grave concern about the bill. Certainly, one notable group, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, has done extensive research, analysis and review on drug policy. In some of its background material, it picked up on one very important point and that is that the Conservatives are peddling this bill as a bill that will deal with drug dealers, that is who they are really going after.

Yet, in the HIV/AIDS Legal Network backgrounder, it makes the point that:

This distinction between drug dealers and drug users is artificial, particularly when harsh minimum sentences are mandated for dealing in any quantity of drugs.

The real profiteers in the drug market—those who traffic in large quantities of illegal drugs—distance themselves from more visible drug-trafficking activities and are rarely captured by law enforcement efforts. Instead, it is people who are addicted and involved in small-scale, street-level drug distribution to support their addictions who commonly end up being charged with drug trafficking—

That is exactly what is going to happen with this bill. If we go into the downtown east side in my community, it is the low level folks on the street who are dealers, it is part of the system of how they support their habits. Those are the people who are already most at risk from a health point of view and who are very vulnerable. They are the ones who will be targeted by this bill in terms of the minimum mandatory sentences.

There is further evidence. Judge Jerry Paradis is a member of LEAP, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition. This is quite an incredible organization of former police chiefs, police officers, drug enforcement officers in the United States and Canada including

Government Orders

former judges, who are speaking out against the war on drugs. Former Judge Jerry Paradis said: “The evidence unequivocally showed that minimum mandatory sentences have no effect on crime and they carry with them a grab bag of unintended consequences. The true kingpins are the ones who, as the legal network says, are the ones who are able to distance themselves and not be caught by this kind of legislation”.

Retired Quebec Judge John Gomery, someone who we are very familiar with in this House, has also spoken out against this bill and said that “Judges view this kind of legislation as a slap in the face”. He said that judges find that it is an implied criticism when Parliament imposes these mandatory sentences. This is from someone who is very well respected saying that this bill is the wrong approach.

We have a very important organization called Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy. Its members were on Parliament Hill a couple of months ago doing their first policy and the leaflet that they put out and spoke to us about says “not in our name” because they know again that the propaganda that is being put out by the Conservatives is that this is about helping young people with drug issues. This organization understands that it is really about criminalizing young people.

● (1045)

The organization says in its leaflet:

While criminalizing drugs and drug users continues to be justified as necessary to protect our youth, it is our responsibility to eradicate this harmful approach...

It further states:

The current criminal justice approach to drug use is failing our generation, and our society, and leading to increased harm from drug use.

Young people are speaking out in their own voices with their own experience about what they believe needs to be done.

There is further evidence that this approach put forward by the Conservatives is a failure. The Health Officers' Council of British Columbia, which consists of all the public health officers across B. C., wrote a very important paper in 2005, “A Public Health Approach to Drug Control in Canada”. The council states:

Criminal enforcement strategies do not seem to have achieved long-term reductions in either the supply or demand for illegal drugs.

In this paper the council argues:

The harms attendant upon a criminal-prohibition framework for drugs are significant and the benefits modest, at best. A change in policy to a public health approach, where production and distribution can be wrestled from criminal interests and a range of effective harm reduction strategies can be implemented and evaluated, is overdue.

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Further afield, a new report just came out from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in the United Kingdom. This is a group made up of business people, elected representatives and professionals. It concludes that the current regime, the so-called war on drugs and the emphasis on enforcement are an absolutely failed approach. It has called on the British government to change its policies in regard to drug policy reform.

There are many people speaking out.

What I fear most about this bill is that it is taking us down a very dangerous road. It is a road that has already been experienced in the United States where, for example, 2.1 million people are now in U.S. prisons. Eighty per cent of the increase in the federal prison population in the U.S. from 1985 to 1995 was due to drug convictions. By 2004, drug offenders made up 54% of sentenced federal prisoners, up from 25% in 1980. That is what is happening in the United States. That is the direction in which the Conservative government is taking us.

In the United States, ironically, many jurisdictions are now moving away from minimum mandatory sentencing. They can see what an utter failure it has been economically, politically and in terms of dealing with the crisis of drug use in our communities. For example, the U.S. Sentencing Commission concluded that minimum mandatory sentences have failed to deter crime. It reported that only 11% of federal drug defendants are high level drug dealers. In 2000 California repealed its minimum mandatory sentences for minor drug offences. In 2004 Michigan also repealed its mandatory minimum sentences for minor drug offences. Delaware and Massachusetts are considering doing the same thing.

I find it incredible that the government is about to go down this route when in actual fact what it is modelling it on in the United States has already been shown to be a colossal failure in terms of the rate of incarceration. Drug use is still going up. The crime rate is still going up. Therefore, this model of prohibition and enforcement is clearly a failed model.

What we know about this bill, however, is that it is really designed to appeal to the core conservative base. It is really an oversimplification of drug use in Canada. It uses scare tactics to bully people into thinking that marijuana and other substances are the root of violent and organized crime in Canada and that somehow enforcement is going to address that.

In reality, this bill would do absolutely nothing to address either of those problems. We believe very much that the Conservatives are taking Canada in the wrong direction. It is a direction that is very expensive. It has no effect on drug use. It will only increase the prison population, creating a new set of issues about overpopulation, health, safety and crime within the prison system.

• (1050)

In British Columbia we have had very difficult situations emerge, such as overcrowding and safety problems for corrections officers. We have seen that just very recently.

In fact one of the consequences of this bill, because we are dealing with minimum mandatory sentences, is that we may see an increase in incarceration. The burden of that will be borne at the provincial

level. I wonder if the minister has had any discussion with his provincial counterparts that what he is doing with the bill is basically loading the cost on to the provincial systems that are already overcrowded and overburdened. This is a totally failed strategy.

We in the NDP believe that Canada must have a balanced approach to drug use. We have supported the four pillar approach which includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and yes, there is a role for enforcement, but not the kind of imbalance that we have seen in past history with previous governments and which is now being exacerbated by the current government.

There are many successful models that have worked in Europe. The big city mayors in Canada have adopted this four pillar approach. It began in Vancouver. It has shown to be successful.

Why would we not be investing in that? Why would we not be investing in grassroots harm reduction strategies like Insite, like needle exchanges? Why would we not be investing in real education for young people which actually gives people real information about their bodies, about making good choices?

I always find it very ironic that we have police officers going into schools doing drug education. Would we send the police into schools to do sex education? I do not think so. They only do drug education because these substances are illegal. What we need to do is focus on a health based approach, because that is the real information that needs to get to young people.

Mandatory minimum sentences, as we see from the evidence and reports both in the United States and Canada, are least likely to work on drug crimes. It begs the question, why is this bill coming forward? If we know it does not work, if we know it is the wrong approach, if we know it is actually going to create a worse situation in the prison system, if we know that it is not going to in any substantive way or even a minimum way deal with drug use and in fact incarceration and crime will probably continue to rise, then why is this bill coming forward?

We have to come to the conclusion that very regrettably, the bill is about a political optic. This is all that the Conservatives have left. It is about creating a climate of fear.

I do not doubt that people are very concerned about drug use in local communities. People are very concerned about the dealing that takes place, the impact on schools and so on, but this bill will not address that.

We have had more success in my community when the police sat down with the drug users, with community representatives and actually worked out a strategy on how to deal with individual situations in our community. That did more good. They were called the Tuesday meetings at the Carnegie Centre at Main and Hastings. The police, the drug users themselves, community representatives, the city of Vancouver would sit down and work out these issues in terms of what was happening on the street and what the impact was in the community. That produced more dialogue and results than anything else.

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We think that this is a terrible bill. The bill will not solve the problems with illicit drugs. It will only create further harm.

I really hope that the opposition parties will defeat this bill. We are going to be voting against the bill at second reading. We do not approve of this bill in principle.

If the Conservatives want to fix something, maybe they should look at the medical marijuana program which is in absolute chaos right now. There are huge problems with that program. If they want to actually make some sensible decisions and help people, then they should actually do some good and take a look at what is happening with the medical marijuana program and how people are being severely and negatively impacted by the way the program is run.

I call on the other parties to examine this legislation and defeat it, as it is absolutely the wrong direction for Canada to take.

•(1055)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am actually very surprised at the hon. member and the approach she has taken. Usually I get this from the Liberal Party, quite frankly. We have had more success in trying to convince the New Democratic Party to support the government's tough on crime agenda.

Among other things, the hon. member asked whether we had talked to provincial politicians about this. I was in Manitoba yesterday, in the last 24 hours, and had a discussion of our crime fighting agenda with the premier of Manitoba, who is a member of the New Democratic Party. Mr. Chomiak, who is the attorney general of Manitoba, has told me on many occasions how supportive he is of our crime fighting agenda. Why? Because they had some major problems in Winnipeg and in the province and they actually want help on these things.

The member said we should be concentrating on the medical marijuana problem or improving the needle exchange program, that somehow these are the things that will fix the drug problem. I can tell her, I have been in Vancouver on a number of occasions and I have had people continuously tell me that we have to send out the right message to the people who are trying to destroy other people's lives. That is who we are talking about when we talk about people who want to sell drugs around schools.

The hon. member may disagree about mandatory minimum penalties for those people, but I do not have a problem with it. The government does not have a problem with it. I am surprised that she has a problem with it.

In addition, we have mandatory jail terms for people who want to import or export narcotics. Who is in favour of these people? Who wants to get on side with them, or send a message saying do not get tough with those poor people importing narcotics into Canada; be nice to them; understand them; they are misunderstood.

We understand these people very well and we are sending out a very clear message to them. If they want to get into that business, if they want to exploit children or they decide to get into a new business cultivating marijuana plants in their living rooms and dining rooms, we are sending out a message to them as well. Do not

go into that business, but if they go into that business, they can expect jail. Most Canadians will back us up on this.

I hope when the hon. member talks to some of her provincial counterparts she will join us in that mission.

•(1100)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Justice thinks that the bill will solve the issues that he has just identified, he is fooling himself, or else he is deliberately putting forward a program that we know will fail. I actually do not think the Conservatives really care what the consequences are. The fact is that this bill, with minimum mandatory sentences, will not solve any of those issues that he just identified. I agree we have to send the right message, but it sure as heck is not this bill.

In terms of Manitoba, obviously there are elements of the Conservatives' legislation that have come forward which the province of Manitoba and likely other provinces have supported too. That is not at issue here.

At issue here today is this particular bill that is advancing the proposition that somehow minimum mandatory sentencing will address the incredibly serious problems that we have in our local communities. I just want to blow the whistle on that, because this bill is absolutely the wrong direction to take.

Look at what is happening in the United States. Have they lowered the rate of drug use? Have they lowered the crime rate? Have they lowered the impact on local communities? Communities are torn apart as a result of incarceration. It has not changed there. It has only gotten worse. That is what the government is now embarking on.

It is an absolutely disastrous course to take. It will not work. That is why this bill should be defeated.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great attention to the hon. member's speech on Bill C-26, which will evoke a lot of discussion. I respect where the member comes from both geographically and philosophically, but I cannot agree with everything she said.

I am open to ongoing debate with respect to issues of harm reduction treatment and prevention, and I agree that not enough has been done by the government in this regard.

I have children in the school system in New Brunswick. RCMP officers are in the schools teaching kids about the D.A.R.E. program, and I endorse that. I endorse the good members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in my community. I realize all politics is local, as Tip O'Neill said, but I believe the RCMP has done a wonderful job in the community of greater Moncton in teaching the D.A.R.E. program. This leads me to my question and my disagreement with her in that regard, but perhaps I can tie it together with a question that leads us to a common front.

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The Conservatives talk about a law enforcement agenda. They put out bills that need to be enforced, but they do not back them with the actual troopings of our police forces across this country. They make speeches about hiring 2,500 more police officers across the country. In fact, they have made the same speech for two years in a row. They talk about upping the numbers in the RCMP, which is systemically unable right now to grow its numbers because of age, seniority issues and so on. There is an age issue in the force in Codiac as well as an issue with respect to disability, burnout and overwork, all those sort of things.

Will the member give us her and her party's views on the Minister of Public Safety's complete ignorance in putting aside promises with respect to the deployment of community police officers?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, community policing is a very important aspect of this issue. As the member has pointed out, the Conservatives have broken their promises in bringing in new officers across the country. They should be directed to community based programs. This is another thing they have put out and then have abandoned.

I want to pick up on the member's comments about education.

If the member spoke to the Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy, he would learn that police carrying out drug education programs has been shown to be the least effective way of communicating with young people. The idea of scaring people, telling them that if they use marijuana, they are going to become a crack cocaine addict does not work. Young people know that will not necessarily happen.

We have to face the reality that young people experiment with drugs. The most important thing is to get real information to them about what they are doing is harmful, what choices there are and what they can do to protect themselves to remain healthy.

I do not believe that information can be delivered by police officers. It needs to be delivered by people who have a clear understanding of the issue. The idea that we scare people based on enforcement has been shown not to work. In many communities the D.A.R.E. program has been discredited.

I am concerned as well about the direction of the Conservatives' so-called education program, which they unrolled a couple of months ago. It is more propaganda that really does nothing to engage young people about this serious issue. The government would be much better off to work with Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy and devise a real education program that involves young people, a program that deals with these issues in a realistic way.

• (1105)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in my community of Hamilton Mountain are also worried about things like grow ops, drug use and the crime that is often associated with them.

I listened to the comments of the Minister of Justice with great care. He is absolutely right. The NDP has supported some of the government's so-called crime bills, but only when they made good public policy sense. All his rhetoric today cannot turn Bill C-26 into legislation that reflects good public policy, especially for a

government that constantly talks about wanting evidence based research.

The member for Vancouver East has done an admirable job of laying out precisely why our party will not support Bill C-26 and the minimum sentences that it would impose.

My constituents are much more concerned about effective programs for prevention and for deterrence. An excellent example of one such facility in the riding of Vancouver East is the Insite facility. The member for Vancouver East has been a tireless champion for sustainable funding and for a sustainable future for that facility.

I want her to know that it is not just people in her community who care about this, but health care professionals, people who are committed to treatment and prevention right across the country, also care. Could she give us an update on the future of that site?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, there is very strong support in downtown eastside Vancouver, and indeed, across the country, for Insite, the safe injection facility. It comes from the local police, local businesses, the city council and even the B.C. government. We are very concerned the government is refusing to make it clear whether Insite will continue.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with legislation that focuses on the drug crime that is plaguing our communities across Canada. Bill C-26 would impose tough new mandatory minimum sentences on the most serious of drug crimes. At the same time, it would provide hope to those who want to escape their drug addictions. This is a balanced approach to addressing drug crime in our country.

I can say with absolute certainty that Canada's drug problem is one of the most important issues to the residents of my community of Abbotsford.

I have called my community of Abbotsford home for some 26 years. My wife Annette and I have raised four daughters in that community. It is a community that fashions itself as a city in the country.

Statistics Canada has declared Abbotsford to be the most generous community in the country when it comes to charitable giving. It is a city of volunteers and it is a community of families with strong traditional values and a strong work ethic. We have a very low unemployment rate. It is somewhere around the 3.7% mark. We are also an incredibly diverse community, one of the most diverse in the country. We have a very strong farm economy. In fact, Abbotsford generates the largest farm gate revenues for the province of B.C and with that, comes prosperity. We also have a significant urban presence and with that, comes some of the problems that face big cities, problems of crime.

Neighbourhoods in Abbotsford are experiencing drive-by shootings on a regular basis. Marijuana grow ops and crystal meth labs proliferate in Abbotsford. In fact, drug related violence and even drug related murders are not uncommon for the average Abbotsford resident. It happens in their neighbourhoods and it concerns me.

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I will point out how critical this problem is. I will read from one of our local newspapers, the *Abbotsford News* . from a few months ago, and this is typical. It states:

A wheelchair bound man was arrested after the drug squad raided a home in north Abbotsford and discovered a large grow and loaded firearms Tuesday evening.

Abbotsford drug squad officers seized 850 plants...and three firearms after executing a warrant...A loaded rifle was found near the front door of the home and two loaded hand guns were discovered in a bedroom.

"Guns and drugs are a continued threat to officers and the public", said Const. Casey Vinet....

Another marijuana grow operation was shut down the day previous after a hydro bypass was discovered and led officers to a home...Police found 630 plants growing underneath the living area of the residence housing a family with school aged children...

That is the problem facing communities across our country. Despite the efforts of our dedicated Abbotsford Police Department, citizen complaints to city council about escalating drug activity in their neighbourhoods are increasing.

As I speak, the lives of thousands of Canadians and families are being ruined by illegal drugs. They have become victims of criminal enterprises, the victims of drug dealers who make obscene profits off the misery of others. Time and time again drug traffickers rob young people of their future and sell them a lifetime of heartache. Too often such a future leads to an early death.

The good news is, after years of inaction by the previous Liberal government, our Conservative government is finally taking action. We are taking concrete steps to rein in organized crime and drug dealers, who have ruined so many lives without facing any real consequences.

It is almost as if previous governments were hoping that the problem of drug crime would simply go away. In the meantime, drug criminals have continued to use our revolving door justice system to evade real and certain justice. That is why we have taken decisive action.

Last October, Prime Minister Harper unveiled—

• (1110)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I think the hon. member was about to catch his mistake. It would be best to use riding names or titles.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his anti-drug strategy provides almost \$64 million over two years to prevent illegal drug use, treat people who have drug addictions and fight drug crime. The strategy proposes a two-track approach, one which is tough on drug crime and one which focuses on the victims of drug crime, including the drug addicts themselves.

Our action plan to fight the production and distribution of prohibited drugs focuses on providing strong penalties that will act not only as a deterrent to others, but will put out of commission the really serious drug traffickers in our communities. That is the context within which our Bill C-26 has been introduced. Moreover, the bill follows up on one of the five key priorities that we identified for Canadians during the last election, namely to get serious about tackling crime. As with so many others of our promises, we are getting the job done. We are actually fulfilling our promises.

Let me tell the House what Bill C-26 would achieve.

The bill proposes a series of mandatory minimum prison sentences that ensure that criminals who commit serious drug offences face appropriately long sentences. I want to emphasize that the bill is not about applying mandatory minimum penalties to all drug crime. It is not a wide net that catches all drug users. It is not a bill that goes after the recreational users of drugs. Rather it introduces targeted mandatory minimum penalties for the most serious of drug crimes and ensures that those who carry out those crimes will be harshly penalized. It bill clearly sends a message that Canadians do not accept drug trafficking as a legitimate business or violence associated with drug trafficking and production.

As members know, the production and trafficking of illegal drugs present serious health and public safety hazards. They create environmental hazards, pose significant cleanup problems for city councils and endanger the lives and health of our neighbourhoods. I know that from experience, having served on Abbotsford's city council for some nine years.

Drug trafficking is a lucrative business and attracts the most insidious of organizations, the organized crime groups and drug gangs. Huge profits are available with little risk to drug dealers, and these profits are in turn used to finance other criminal activities.

It has become very clear that the penalties and prison sentences for drug trafficking and drug production are considered by many Canadians to be too lenient and not commensurate with the level of harm that such drug crimes impose on our communities.

Our Bill C-26 is specifically tailored to target the most pernicious of these crimes, primarily the trafficking, production, importation and exportation of larger amounts of prohibited drugs. The prohibited drugs that would be covered under our bill are drugs such as cocaine, heroin, crystal meth and marijuana. I want to make it crystal clear, again, that mandatory minimum penalties will not apply to simple possession offences or to offences involving less serious drugs such as Valium. They also do not apply to the trafficking of small amounts of prohibited drugs for personal use.

As I mentioned earlier, our approach is fine-tuned to target the most serious offenders and would operate as follows. Members will have to bear with me because I want to explain exactly how these penalties would be implemented. It may take a couple of minutes, but it is important for Canadians to understand what the bill really involves.

For the trafficking of the hardest drugs, we propose a one year minimum prison sentence where certain aggravating factors exist. I am talking about drugs such as heroin, cocaine or crystal meth. The aggravating factors that would attract mandatory minimum penalties of one year would be where the offence involves organized crime, or where the crime would involve violence or weapons or perhaps a threat of violence or weapons, or where the crime would be committed by a repeat drug trafficker. These are the really bad guys.

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• (1115)

If youth are present or the offence occurs in a prison, the minimum jail sentence would be increased to two years.

If someone imports or exports prohibited drugs, the minimum penalty would be raised to two years if the crime involves more than one kilogram of a drug such as heroin, cocaine or crystal meth.

If someone produces or otherwise manufactures cocaine, crystal meth or heroin, a minimum of two years in prison would apply.

Then there may be additional aggravating factors, which would attract a three year prison term. For example, these factors would include a situation where a drug producer uses somebody else's real estate, such as a house, to produce that drug, or where the drugs are produced in a location where children are present. If someone is growing or producing drugs in a home and there are children living in that home, there would be a minimum penalty of three years in prison.

Three years would also apply where the drug production constituted a potential public safety hazard in a residential area or where the drug dealer sets a trap to injure or kill others if they enter the premises. This is quite common with marijuana grow ops. The drug dealers will actually booby-trap the house to make sure that intruders cannot get in. Those booby traps are intended to maim, injure and kill and often impact our police officers.

For lesser drugs such as marijuana, the proposed mandatory minimum sentence for trafficking, importing or exporting would be one year if certain aggravating factors such as violence, recidivism or organized crime are present. If a drug dealer is trafficking in the presence of children or in an area frequented by children, such as a schoolyard, the minimum prison sentence of one year would be increased to two years.

We are also going after marijuana grow ops. If a grow operator produces up to 200 marijuana plants, he or she would get a minimum of six months in prison. If a grow operator produces up to 500 plants, he or she would get one year in prison. If he or she grows more than 500 plants, he or she would spend at least two years in prison. There would be no more slaps on the wrist. There would be no more revolving door justice system.

Getting tough on marijuana grow operators will be especially welcome in Abbotsford. Marijuana grow ops and crystal meth labs have been a blight on our city, jeopardizing the safety of our neighbourhoods and families.

At this point, I want to give special credit to Abbotsford's city council. Faced with a former federal Liberal government that refused to get tough on grow ops and other drug crime, and faced with a police force reluctant to bust grow ops due to weak federal anti-drug laws, my city council responded by finding creative new ways to use municipal bylaws and regulations to shut down those grow ops.

For example, sophisticated heat sensors are used to determine whether a house is producing more heat than would normally be expected. The city identifies a house that is perhaps a marijuana grow op. Of course there are other telltale signs such as foil on the windows and an odour emanating from the house, and often there is suspicious activity going on. Then the city posts a 48 hour notice of

fire and safety inspection. It cuts off the water and the electricity, so of course the plants cannot grow any more. After 48 hours, city staff or the police return and typically find the premises abandoned.

On top of that, the city files a notice against the property advising prospective purchasers that the house has been a marijuana grow op. That of course reduces the value of the property in many cases, as people do not want to purchase a home that has been used for illegal drug activity.

I commend the Abbotsford city council for taking these steps, but I have to ask the members of this House, is it not our job as federal parliamentarians to protect our communities? Why was it left to the Abbotsford city council to deal with this problem? Why, over 13 years, did the former Liberal government not get it done?

Our Conservative government is getting it done and there is much more. Bill C-26 also introduces tougher penalties for trafficking in what are commonly known as date rape drugs. These drugs are used to drug unsuspecting women to allow predators to sexually assault them. Protecting women against violence has been one of our top priorities.

• (1120)

I also fully expect the usual response from the Liberal and NDP members of the House. We have already heard some responses from the NDP this morning. Some will tell us that deterrence and denunciation do not work. Others will tell us that the focus should be on rehabilitation and social reform, not tougher sentences. I am absolutely certain that they are going to tell us that mandatory minimum sentences do not work. They will also try to convince Canadians that our hands are tied and that Bill C-26 might violate the legal rights of the drug pushers.

However, there is one group those members almost never mention. Can we guess what it is? It is the victims of drug crime, the victims across the country who are crying out for redress. They are crying out to be heard. They have not been listened to. I have been in the House for over two years now and I have observed how seldom the opposition members of the House actually take heed of the cries of victims across our country.

Last Sunday I spoke in Burnaby, B.C. at a rally recognizing National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. The rally was sponsored by organizations I really respect: Mothers Against Drunk Driving and F.A.C.T., Families Against Crime & Trauma.

It is quite clear from the sentiments expressed at that rally and at other similar rallies that many Canadians feel outraged. They are outraged that for decades it has been the defence lawyers and the prisoners' rights advocates who have had the ear of government and that victims of crime have been all but abandoned. I am here to say that today victims of crime do have a strong advocate in our Conservative government.

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Some members of the opposition will also tell us that Canada does not have a crime problem. They will point to statistics which seem to indicate that crime is down, not up. There is a wealth of material in the House from the opposition members. I went back to the words of the member for Scarborough—Guildwood. When speaking on another bill, he said the following:

In fact, by any and every standard of measurement, crime is declining in every category. That is the truth.

He went on to say:

We have crime rates declining in all categories in virtually all communities.

Those are the words of the Liberals.

What are the facts? I believe it was Mark Twain who referred to “lies, damned lies, and statistics”. I would suggest that some members of the opposition could learn from Mark Twain.

There is always a grain of truth in what the opposition says about crime, but it is just not the whole truth. The real truth is that while the overall crime rate has gone down marginally, due to fewer petty crimes being committed, Statistics Canada reports that rates for almost all categories of violent crime have gone up, not down.

I encourage my Liberal friends across the floor to actually review the latest statistics from Statistics Canada. It is as simple as going to that website. I am going to quote from those statistics.

For example, crimes such as attempted murder, aggravated assault, assault with a weapon, robbery, kidnapping and forcible confinement are all up. Drug offences involving cocaine are up by a whopping 13%, while other serious drug offences, including those involving crystal meth, were up by 8%. Of even greater concern is the fact that Statistics Canada reports that youth crime has increased by 3%, the first increase since 2003, and in fact the rate of young people accused of murder was the highest since 1961.

Clearly the violent drug crime problem that plagues our nation calls for solutions, not excuses. That is what Bill C-26 does: it takes serious action against the scourge of drug crime in our streets.

We are getting the job done. It is time for the Liberals and NDP to stop dithering on the issue of drug crime and join our Conservative government in passing this bill. Canadians are demanding change. It is time to deliver that change.

• (1125)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the hon. member, who did a very good job at describing the technical matters. He got a little out of hand when he started to get partisan, but the technical areas were very well explained.

When we look at what is going on out there with the trafficking, the production, the import and the export of drugs, we find that without argument people want to see all of that end, and they want to see tougher sentencing and tougher actions taken. I do not think we will get any argument on that.

When we see laws like Bill C-26, we see another tool, a tool that will help law enforcement officers do their job and get more encouragement.

I also have to comment on what is happening in Abbotsford. As the member mentioned, the city council is using many different ways of trapping and catching drug producers, whether they have grow ops or manufacturing areas. I commend the council for that.

However, that brings me back to the police associations and their frustration. One of the things the Conservative government said it would do was bring on more police officers. There would be more funding for police officers to hire more people so that they can take these laws and actually do something with them, not just stand there and say that they have these laws but do not have the men and women out in the street who can actually enforce the laws.

Where is the funding that was meant to hire more women and men as police officers?

• (1130)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I sense that my hon. colleague is inclined to support our legislation. I commend him for that. We do support Bill C-26 because it addresses the scourge of drug crime.

With respect to his question about policing, we promised that we were going to provide an additional 2,500 police officers across Canada. Guess what? In budget 2008, which was just passed with the help of the Liberals, we actually have provided the funding for that. Police forces across Canada can expect that there is going to be a significantly enhanced police presence available to implement the drug legislation we are discussing today, to actually enforce the laws we have in Canada to make sure that the real bad guys, the drug kingpins, the drug lords, the high level drug dealers, are taken off the street and incarcerated so they cannot continue to peddle misery.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the member for Abbotsford. He said that drug offences in certain categories have gone up by 13% and that he believes, and the public believes, that sentencing is too lenient.

I would ask him to actually provide evidence of that and evidence of whether this bill will affect that in any way. We have tried to find research in terms of what are the average penalties across the country. It is very difficult to find out. The member is making these assertions, so I would like him to bring forward the evidence to show where penalties have been too lenient.

I certainly will agree that there are particular cases where there have been big disputes in the public and articles in the newspapers which may show that people believe that for a particular offence the sentence of incarceration was not adequate. That certainly happens, but overall he is making the assertion that penalties have been too lenient and that somehow this bill will fix that.

One of the problems with minimum mandatory sentences is that it is more likely that people who are charged would fight those charges because they know that a minimum mandatory will apply, so it will actually tie up more court time and more lawyers, whom he does not seem to like.

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I wonder if he can actually show this House and Canadian people the evidence behind what he is saying, not just his opinion, not an anecdote, but hard evidence on the penalty side, and also if he can actually show that this bill will impact the fact that drug offences have gone up by 13%. Where is the evidence that the bill will change this?

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage the member to get out on the streets and talk to the people and the victims of crime. They will say that the sentences are way too lenient. In fact, some of the key drug criminals in our communities are getting a slap on the wrist if they are even penalized in the courts.

The member should talk to people like Sandra Martins-Toner and Nina Rivet of FACT. The member will know these people because they work in her community. They will tell her that the penalties are way too lenient and that it is time for the federal government to step forward, do the courageous thing and start imposing a regime of escalating mandatory minimum penalties, which are targeted, by the way. We are not talking about all of the drug users in Canada being subjected to mandatory minimum penalties. We are focusing on the worst of the worst, getting the bad guys off the street.

Quite frankly, when we talk about mandatory minimum penalties, they are tailored because of their prophylactic effect. We are trying to take these guys off the street for longer periods of time and we want to disturb their criminal enterprises. We want to interfere with them to ensure they cannot function properly.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want the member for Abbotsford to know that this is an issue not just in Abbotsford but also in my riding of Burlington.

I sent out a questionnaire to my constituents asking them for their response to our getting tough on crime and drug dealers. It was the biggest response I have received from any mailing to my constituents. By far, the response was that we need to be doing something, that we are on the right track and that we are making things happen.

As a member of Parliament, I visited the local police chief for the region of Halton and he clearly indicated to me that getting tough on crime, particularly drug crimes, is the way to go.

This is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and he did a great job in terms of highlighting how important that is. Could he tell the House who he considers to be the victims in the drug crime business and how this would affect them?

• (1135)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, that is easy for me to answer. There are two groups of victims in my mind. We have those who are the innocent victims of drug violence, the ones who are hurt, injured, maimed or even killed, such as Ed Schellenberg from my community.

Members may recall that in October of last year, six men were gunned down in an execution-style gangland slaying. Four of them were known to police as being involved in the drug industry and two were not. They were innocent victims. One was from my riding of Abbotsford, Ed Schellenberg. Those are the victims of the violence of drug crime.

The other group of victims are Canadians who, for one reason or another, through difficult circumstances, have found themselves in a life of drug addiction and, to feed their habit, they sell drugs. I believe it is the will of the House that we would focus on them and provide them with a way of getting off their addictions and freed from that slavery. Our bill would do that because it is a balanced approach.

We are not only imposing mandatory minimum penalties. We are also providing an option for judges to sentence offenders in a way that would allow them to undergo a court approved drug treatment program and, if that program is completed satisfactorily, the mandatory sentence would not apply. If they do not complete it satisfactorily, a mandatory minimum sentence would be applied. Those are the victims we are addressing in our crime bill.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of disagreeing with a colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood said that crime was decreasing. We know from breaking news that there is a bit of a surge in crime today in that the RCMP is executing a warrant at Conservative Party headquarters. I would like my friend's comment on that aspect of crime increasing.

As a former city councillor, he knows or should know that it is universal for city councils that there is a lot of pressure on police budgets. The Conservatives have been in the job for two years and four months. If getting the job done is waiting two years and four months for more police officers, which has been called for throughout the cities of this country, then what is not getting the job done?

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, when I was a member of the Abbotsford city council, we did our very best to provide our police with the resources they needed to address drug crime. In fact, Abbotsford has its own police force. It is not part of the RCMP system.

The residents of my community were more than willing for us to provide the resources through taxation to our police to ensure our neighbourhoods were safe. In fact, we had numerous community organization that would appear before our council regularly to ensure we had the police presence in the neighbourhood that was required.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss a very important issue to my constituents of Newton—North Delta: our society's approach to illegal drugs. It affects my family, neighbours, businesses and constituents across Newton—North Delta. I say my family because, along with my wife, Roni, we are raising three children from school age to university. I run my own business in my own riding.

When I talk to parents and to the businesses, marijuana grow-ops are a problem that is affecting people across society.

Last year, when I was talking to Chief Superintendent McRae, he told me that last year the RCMP handled 7,000 drug related incidents in Surrey, an increase of 11% from the year before. Chief Cessford from Delta tells the same story.

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Addictive, destructive drugs can ruin lives and often the lives of our children. Crystal meth, for instance, is extremely hazardous to the brain. Particularly when smoked, meth rapidly damages the brain, killing portions of it. It makes the brain of users in their early twenties look like the brains of sixty or seventy year olds who have suffered from minor strokes.

Not all drugs are as dangerous as crystal meth. As responsible legislators, we must keep things in perspective.

Bill C-26 is welcome in many ways, although it has limitations. Before considering the bill, we should be clear on what principles should govern our approach to illegal drugs and other criminal activities.

Canadians are a fair and generous people. We have never been as harsh as our American neighbours. We recognize that many social forces push people toward crime: poverty, poor education, unstable childhoods, social isolation and many more.

We believe that people are fundamentally good but we recognize that good behaviour is not automatic. People need to be encouraged.

Canadians also know that it is not enough to try to prevent people from becoming criminals. We must also deal with those who commit crime. People who break the law must be punished.

A government that serves the needs of Canadians must be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to make the most of life but people should not get away with committing crimes.

Canada's crime policy should not be just reactive. It should be proactive. Our goal should also be to prevent crime. How do we prevent crime? Do we hire more police, prosecutors and judges? Do we set longer sentences or minimum sentences? I believe the best way to prevent crime is by ensuring criminals get caught and convicted.

Earlier, I was listening to my hon. colleague from Abbotsford talking about 2,500 new police officers that the government promised in its platform. However, when it comes to those figures, that corresponds to \$32,000 a year for a police officer for only four years.

• (1140)

This is a long term, serious problem that we need to deal with. Funding needs to be stable for those 2,500 new police officers and it needs to be a reasonable amount so we can hire and get more police officers on the streets.

Beyond that, we need to provide positive activities for our youth so that they do not fall into drugs.

Yesterday, I was talking with people at the Muslim Youth Centre in my riding. Organizer and volunteer, Zeynel Azimullah, and his associates are providing tremendous volunteer efforts to play a constructive role in the lives of city youth. The aims and objectives of this organization are to protect our youth from doing things that are unlawful and illegal, to provide learning opportunities for character building, to mould our youth to be committed and dedicated citizens, to offer physical, spiritual, moral and social educational programs, and to promote peace and harmony.

When it comes to government, it can be a force of good in people's lives. For the last four years, the Muslim Youth Centre has been running based on donations. This is the type of work that is really appreciated in my riding. However, when the organization went to the Revenue Canada Agency to get a charity number it did not qualify as a charity organization. This is the type of organization that needs to be encouraged and needs the resources to be put in place.

Similarly, two years ago I was introduced to another gentleman in my riding by one of my constituents who is a multicultural coordinator with the city RCMP detachment. She introduced me to a young man named Rob Rai. He works with youth at risk and teaches them skills through sports and keeps them off the streets. Similar to the Muslim Youth Centre, Rob Rai's organization is also run by donations from businesses.

It is the people who are playing a role in the lives of our youth but I am sure the government can do much more on this. Every social worker or child care provider with whom we talk say that the first six years in a child's development is very important. However, when the government cancelled those child care agreements, it showed how serious the government was in providing the prevention needs.

When the government cancelled the Kelowna accord, it showed that it was not committed to improving the lives of our youth.

I appreciate the government bringing in this bill and I, along with my colleagues, will be supporting this bill in principle.

In Canada, the use and abuse of illicit drugs is a serious problem that is increasing. The number of Canadians who have used an injection drug during their lives increased from 1.7 million in 1994 to 4.1 million in 2004. According to the RCMP, the number of secret labs seized increased from 24 in 2000 to 53 in 2005. Because growers use volatile materials and frequently obtain their electricity illegally, marijuana grow operations pose a threat to public health and safety, especially to their neighbours and children.

• (1145)

Production of ecstasy is also on the rise in Canada. The United States has expressed concerns about ecstasy being smuggled into the U.S. from Canada.

The increase in drug use, trafficking and production threatens our safety. These activities have serious impacts on our communities, such as increasing rates of petty crime, prostitution, increased violence, and increased risk to law enforcement officers. Proceeds from the sale of drugs are used to finance other criminal activities.

What we want to stop above all is violence. We need to recognize the problems that are caused by small producers and the biggest dangers from the big operations. We need to define where the problem is and where we need to get tough.

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We also need to be smarter on crime. The city of Surrey's innovative electrical fire safety initiative has been so successful at shutting down grow ops that the city is doubling the program. It investigates houses with unusual power consumption and cuts off power if there is dangerous wiring, typical of grow ops. The program has sent a strong message that grow ops will not be tolerated in Surrey, and it is working.

Tougher penalties are an important part of our strategy to fight crime. Bill C-26 proposes several measures on drug crime. It would create a one year mandatory jail term for dealing drugs while using a weapon, or for dealing drugs in support of organized crime. It would create a two year mandatory term for dealing cocaine, heroin or meth to young people, or for dealing near places young people frequent.

Bill C-26 proposes to increase the maximum sentence for date rape drugs. It would create a mandatory six month sentence for growing as little as one marijuana plant for the purposes of trafficking.

I welcome the measures in Bill C-26 to target large scale growers and traffickers, organized crime groups, and people who push drugs on our children and teenagers. These people are ruining the lives of our future generations. We hope that this bill will help. Our hopes should be focused more on our youth, and I personally feel that this bill is a step in the right direction.

The Conservatives' approach, however, has problems. They see that drug abuse is a criminal matter, but they do not see that it is also a health issue. They are not focusing on the more serious criminal problems, especially gangs and guns.

We could talk to the police chief or any police officer in my riding and they would tell us that we need to focus our resources on organized crime. For instance, right now we only have a 16% conviction rate for homicides. This is appallingly low. It used to be much higher, but it is harder for the police to get convictions now because more homicides are being committed by organized crime.

Those are serious problems, but they are not getting the attention from the Conservative government that they should be getting.

• (1150)

We do not even know where all the new prisoners will be jailed. The British Columbia provincial corrections department says that if Bill C-26 were to pass, it would probably have to find room for about 700 more marijuana growers per year. Nobody is sure where they can go because 80% of the provincial prisoners in B.C. are already double-bunked and the rest are either in protective custody or are too violent for a cellmate.

Even the *National Post* is critical of these issues, and when the *National Post* agrees with *The Globe and Mail*, we know something must be seriously wrong.

Just like with the economy, the Conservatives had a fantastic opportunity to change Canada's drug policies for the better over the past two years, but they have once again wasted the opportunity.

Now, I request that this government, if it were to implement Bill C-26, should also be focusing on preventive measures and

education, particularly among our youth and aboriginal communities. That is very important.

I will be supporting this bill as I have on every crime bill that has come before this House. I have always stood up to be tough on crime, but at the same time, I have always been an advocate of preventive measures, education and social benefits, so that we can keep the social justice, so we can keep the balance when it comes to making laws and providing resources in our communities.

• (1155)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S.-style war on drugs has failed in the U.S. and it is failing in Canada. I notice that in Canada we spent 73% of our drug policy budget on enforcement, whereas we spent only 14% on treatment, 7% on research, even less, 2.6% on prevention, and 2.6% on harm reduction.

We have seen many Canadian families whose teenagers are trapped in a cycle of addiction. It really should be seen as a health issue not one of morality. We know there are many parents who are desperately trying to seek drug treatment programs for their teenagers and their children, but they have not been able to find them in Canada.

There are hardly any long term drug treatment programs. There are very few community-based treatment programs. Those that are available are private and very expensive. There are some treatment programs in the U.S. where parents end up having to send their kids but of course the travel costs, et cetera, are not covered.

We know that drug treatment programs work very well as they deal with young persons in a holistic manner. We know that many of them who are taking drugs use them to mask the pain that they have experienced when they were young, whether it was physical or mental abuse.

I do not understand how this bill would actually work because it would end up throwing more people in jail and as a result we would end up with more hardened criminals and certainly we would end up spending more money dealing with them on the enforcement side. We know that to put a young person in jail, for example, would cost at least \$100,000 a year, whereas a drug treatment program would be a lot cheaper.

My question for the hon. member is, how could one even begin to support this kind of very wrong-headed, ineffective, non-science-based approach war on drugs that has proven to be a complete failure in the past?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Trinity—Spadina for the statistics she gave with which I could not agree more. If the hon. member was listening to my speech, in fact the numbers she gave, the 73% on enforcement, and 7% on prevention, I also mentioned that there are certain aspects of the bill that have to be tough on crime because if we are not tough on crime we cannot deal with the problems we have in our society.

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At the same time, I mentioned that the Conservative government is not looking at this as a health risk. I do agree with the member that we need to put more resources into preventive and treatment measures.

The member asked, how can I support it? It makes total sense to support this bill and send it to committee so that members of the committee can discuss the pros and cons of the bill and come up with a constructive, healthy bill that will put resources into prevention but at the same time be tough on crime.

The committee will have this responsibility and then we can bring in experts at committee to deal with this situation and put their input into the bill so when the bill comes back to the House it will be a more effective bill.

On the other hand, we all know how committees are functioning under this Conservative leadership. Basically the government does not even want to hear the input from members of the opposition. It is forgetting that 66% of the people elected the opposition. That is why it makes sense to send the bill to committee and allow the committee to work on this, so the bill will be more effective in every way.

• (1200)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned that the Conservatives had a great opportunity to make good changes to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. We think we are making good changes.

Liberal Party members had the authority and opportunity for 13 years in this House to make changes, but they did not make any critical changes in this area. As a member of the Liberal Party, how does the member feel about the performance of the Liberal Party for the 13 years that it did nothing on this file?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to serve on the access to information, privacy and ethics committee with the member for Burlington.

He asked about the 13 years. Maybe the hon. member was not aware of those 13 years. Maybe he is not aware that Brian Mulroney left this country with a \$41 billion deficit. When the previous Liberal government came to power, it balanced eight consecutive budgets. It brought in the Kelowna accord to improve the lives of aboriginals.

We brought in landmark child care agreements that the Conservatives cancelled. The member can talk to child care providers who will tell him what the Liberal government had done and what the current government has messed up.

Regarding the economy, *The Economist* said that the Liberal government of this country was one of the best, and that in fact Canada was the second best country to invest in. We were the top country to live in, but under the current government we are heading into deficit right now. These are the achievements that we made and these are the mess-ups of the current government right now.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member to table some of those things, but I will not. We will try to get back on the topic of how justice in this country has gone downhill.

I am not sure if the hon. member has heard some of his colleagues talk about the banning of hand guns, but I want to make a comment

and then ask the hon. member a question. I am getting sick and tired, as constituents in my riding are, of politicians who have no solutions to the problem, but come out and say that we should ban hand guns, which for all intents and purposes are banned anyway.

I wonder if the member knows that crack cocaine, crystal meth, and all of those things are also banned. How does that work?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to crime with guns, I would refer to the headline, "More youths in gangs. National trend. Drug trade behind gunplay, author says".

In fact, less than 48 hours after Toronto Mayor David Miller launched a national push to have hand guns banned by the federal government, his city recorded three more shootings. It is self-explanatory.

The other issue the member raised was for me to table those things I was talking about. It is on the public record.

I hope the member can put his team forward to do the research. It shows in the economy in one budget after the other. The Canada pension plan was ruined by the Mulroney Conservatives. It was a Liberal government that put the Canada pension plan on a strong footing. I forgot to mention that.

When it comes to banning these drugs, as I have already said in my speech, I want to make sure our youth are protected from these drugs. We have to have tough laws, but at the same time we have to have preventive measures and the resources to support those youth.

• (1205)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River.

It is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-26, which is an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The Minister of Justice recently tabled Bill C-26 which proposes a number of mandatory minimum penalties to ensure that appropriately high sentences are imposed on those who commit serious drug offences.

The bill is not about applying mandatory minimum penalties for all drug crimes. The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act contains a complex offence and penalty structure. Penalties depend on the nature of the prohibited activity and on the type of substance involved.

The most problematic and dangerous substances such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and morphine are listed in schedule I. Offences involving these substances attract the severest penalties, up to life in prison.

Cannabis is a schedule II drug and attracts lesser penalties. It is only if at least three kilograms are involved that trafficking and possession for the purpose of trafficking are punishable by up to life imprisonment. Production of cannabis is punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment.

The least severe penalties, up to 12 months' imprisonment on summary conviction, are reserved for offences involving substances listed in schedules IV and V.

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It should be noted, however, that most of the prohibited activities in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act are legal if committed by someone possessing the proper licence, permit or exemption.

For example, the marijuana medical access regulations that came into force on July 30, 2001 provide a comprehensive scheme for sick individuals to apply for licences to possess or grow marijuana for medical use with the support of their doctor, or in some cases with the support of a specialist. There is also a process to apply for a designated person production licence if the individual is unable to grow the marijuana himself or herself.

As such, there are individuals in Canada who are exempted from the production offence contained in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act who are growing marijuana within their residences or in their yards.

The amount of plants that the individual is permitted to produce is derived from a formula tied to the amount of dried marijuana product which the individual holder of the permit requires on a daily basis. The amount of plants that the permit holder is authorized to produce can be quite significant. For example, it can be in excess of 50 plants.

Some members of the House may be of the view that serious drug offences do not require a response such as the one contained in the bill. However, serious drug crime is a growing problem in Canadian cities and towns and a serious legislative approach is required.

According to Statistics Canada's Juristat "Crime Statistics in Canada, 2004", the rate of marijuana cultivation offences has more than doubled over the past decade from approximately 3,400 offences in 1994 to 8,000 in 2004.

According to a study on marijuana grow operations in British Columbia in 2003, 39% of all reported marijuana cultivation cases, or 4,514 cases, were located in British Columbia. Between 1997 and 2000, the total number of these cases increased by over 220%. Although the number of individual operations in British Columbia levelled off between 2000 and 2003, the estimated quantity of marijuana produced increased from 19,729 kilograms in 1997 to a seven year high of 79,817 kilograms in 2003, which was due to the size and sophistication of individual operations.

• (1210)

Recent investigations by B.C. Hydro indicate the existence of up to 17,000 possible marijuana grow operations. The increase in the illicit production of marijuana has occurred not just in British Columbia but all across this country. There is no available national data on synthetic drug production.

Other RCMP data indicates a steady rise in these production operations. The RCMP seized 25 synthetic drug production operations in 2002, 51 in 2003, 60 in 2004, and 50 in 2005. Of the 60 operations seized in 2004, 17 were producing ecstasy and 40 were set up to produce methamphetamine. Of the 50 labs seized in 2005, 60% were producing meth and 30% were producing ecstasy. Ecstasy seizures and precursors increased between 2001 and 2006 from 1.5 million tablets to in excess of 70 million.

Unlike other better known drugs of abuse such as heroin, cocaine or marijuana, methamphetamine presents some unique challenges.

Methamphetamine is a synthetic drug. It is not dependent on the cultivation of a crop. Its production requires no specialized skill or training. Its precursor chemicals are relatively easy to obtain and inexpensive to purchase. These factors make production attractive to both the criminal trafficker and to the addicted user.

Methamphetamine also presents a threat to law enforcement authorities. They must simultaneously combat small toxic labs and super labs, which are primarily controlled by drug trafficking organizations. The small labs produce relatively small amounts of methamphetamine and are generally not affiliated with major drug trafficking organizations.

A number of factors have served as catalysts for the spread of small labs, including the presence of recipes easily accessible over the Internet. Indeed, widespread use of the Internet has facilitated the dissemination of technology used to manufacture methamphetamine in small labs. This form of information sharing allows wide dissemination of these techniques to anyone with computer access.

Aside from marijuana, methamphetamine is the only widely abused illegal drug that is capable of being easily produced by the abuser. Given the relative ease with which the manufacturers or cooks are able to acquire recipes and ingredients, and the unsophisticated nature of the production process, it is easy to see why this highly addictive drug is spreading.

Methamphetamine use has a number of impacts on users, on our communities and on society generally. The quality of life among users of methamphetamine is generally greatly diminished. Addicts may experience dissolution of relationships, social isolation, altered personality, difficulty with academics, loss of employment, involvement in crime, exacerbation of pre-existing mental illness, drug related psychosis, brain damage, health risk behaviours, including risky sexual encounters and declining physical fitness.

Furthermore, individuals may be unmotivated to seek help as methamphetamine can create seemingly high levels of energy and productivity. Communities can become vulnerable to petty crime, social disorder, associated risks to health, increases in violence and increases in large scale labs and drug trafficking.

Methamphetamine production operations also pose serious public safety and health hazards to those in and around production operations. These operations can result in serious physical injury from explosions, fires, chemical burns and toxic fumes. They produce environmental hazards, pose cleanup problems and endanger the lives and health of community residents.

•(1215)

The collateral damage of methamphetamine includes impacts on families, school staff, students, law enforcers and fire department paramedics, health care practitioners, businesses and property owners. These individuals experience second-hand symptoms of methamphetamine use. First responders may experience exposures to production byproducts, fire explosion or hazards and may be subject to violence from addicts or frustrations and stress from inadequate resources or judicial restraints from preventing them from taking action.

Parents may also experience emotional and financial stress, strain from missing work, fear and embarrassment, guilt and shame, as a child goes through treatment. A family may also encounter gang related crime, contamination, violence—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member did not seem to winding up or he did not bother to pretend he was, so the 10 minutes has expired.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Dufferin—Caledon's review was enlightening to me and I am sure others who heard him speak on the production of drugs, how that happens and how easily it can be done. He indicated that access to a computer could give one the knowhow and that the ingredients were easily found.

This week is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, during which we celebrate everything we try to do to help victims of crime. In getting tough on drug dealers, could he give us his opinion on what the bill would do to help victims of crime?

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Speaker, it is an issue that has affected our society in an incredible number of ways. There are the issues of gangs, problems in schools, businesses, the breakups of families and it goes on and on.

The member for Newton—North Delta and the member for Trinity—Spadina, along with other speakers, raised others issues such as health, education and all these issues are most relevant.

Something has to be done about the way these drugs affect our society. We will put people in jail. The public needs to be protected. The victims of crime, the families that have been affected by the crime committed as a result of these drugs need to be assisted. This legislation will help them.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with considerable pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-26. From my constituency, I hear great concern with regard to the impact of the drug trade and the drug fueled crime that results from that trade.

With crystal meth, the date rape drug, the marijuana grow ops and clandestine labs proliferating in our communities from coast to coast, Canadians are demanding that the Government of Canada take some action.

In the last election we promised to crack down on drug crime. We promised that we would "introduce mandatory minimum sentences for designated drug trafficking offences to ensure that serious crime results in serious punishment", and that we would, "end conditional

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sentences or house arrest for serious crimes, including major drug offences". We also promised that we would support results oriented community based initiatives for addiction treatments, training and rehabilitation of those who were in trouble with the law.

With Bill C-26 and our national anti-drug strategy, the government is fulfilling these promises.

With the proposed legislation, I am particularly pleased that we will take strong action to combat marijuana grow ops. Why do we need these mandatory minimum penalties for grow ops? We need them because sentences for these offenders amount to little more than a simple slap on the wrist.

Professor Darryl Plecas did a study of all the drug files opened by the police of British Columbia from 1998 to 2003. His findings underscore the need and the urgency for these criminal law reforms.

Professor Plecas found that between 1997 and 2003 indoor grow operations increased in average size from 149 plants to 236 plants. It should be noted that hydro bypasses, which allow for theft of hydro, were seen in approximately one in five grow operations. Also the number of fires associated with grow operations increased from 32 in 1997 to 80 in 2003.

These numbers are important because it draws a picture. Among the suspects, 57% had at least one other drug conviction, 41% had a prior conviction of some form of violence, 22% had a previous conviction for production and 27% had a previous conviction for possession for the purpose of trafficking. On average, suspects had seven convictions occurring over a thirteen year period.

What kind of sentences are the courts imposing? Members may find it hard to believe that Professor Plecas found that only 27% of offenders with nine or more non-drug convictions were imprisoned. For offenders with nine or more drug convictions, only 54% were sentenced to jail time. Moreover, cases in which prison sentencing was the most serious disposition dropped from 19% in 1997 to 10% in 2003, while conditional sentences, as the most serious penalty, increased from 13% to 46%. When a prison sentence was imposed, the average length was only 4.9 months.

Clearly, existing sentences are not deterring individuals with multiple convictions from participating in grow ops over and over again.

I believe all members will agree that these sentences are insufficient to deter persons from being involved in marijuana grow ops. Certainly, I do not think they are appropriate. These sentences do not adequately reflect the serious nature of these crimes.

The issue of grow ops, and specifically crystal meth superlabs, is something in which I have taken a personal interest. My private member's bill, Bill C-428, which is currently being dealt with in the other place, deals with raising the penalties for those who produce and traffic in this dangerous drug.

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I have heard from people from coast to coast who are concerned about the illegal drug use. They are concerned especially about the deterrents that are in place for those who produce and distribute these dangerous drugs, which have such a horrific impact in each one of our communities. It is time that Parliament send the needed message as to what we think is the appropriate range of penalties within which a judge can craft a sentence, taking into account the particular circumstances of the offender.

• (1220)

Bill C-26 would set that new range. At present, there is no floor and the ceiling is only seven years. Under Bill C-26 there would be a new maximum of 14 years, indicating clearly to the courts how seriously parliamentarians take this type of crime. More important, there would be mandatory periods of imprisonment that would reflect the number of plants. Those mandatory minimums would be increased where: the production constituted a potential security, health or safety hazard to children who were in the location where the offence was committed or in the immediate area; the production constituted a potential public safety hazard in a residential area; a trap was placed or set; or the offender used real property that belonged to a third party to commit the offence.

Under Bill C-26, the penalties would be: six months for the production of up to 200 marijuana plants where the production was for the purpose of trafficking and nine months where the offence involved safety and health aggravating factors; one year for the production of 201 to 500 plants and 18 months where the offence involved health and safety aggravating factors; and two years for more than 500 plants and three years where the offence involved health and safety aggravating factors.

Clearly these proposed mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment are a measured response and fulfill the promise "ensure that serious crime results in serious punishment". Moreover, the proposals fulfill the promise to support addiction treatment, training and rehabilitation of those in trouble with the law.

I remind members that where the accused has a previous conviction for a serious drug offence but there are no other aggravating circumstances with respect to the offence before the court, the legislation will allow the court to suspend the imposition of sentence if the offender participates in a drug treatment court program. If the person successfully completes the drug treatment program, the court can impose a lesser sentence.

Drug treatment courts are fairly new to Canada, but they are very promising. I understand that at a press conference on Bill C-26, Joe, the first graduate of Ottawa's drug treatment court, spoke eloquently and emotionally about how the court had helped him to be clean for 16 months. Joe has turned his life around and now he can contribute to society, whereas before he used to commit crimes to get money to feed his drug addiction.

I urge all members of the House to support Bill C-26.

• (1225)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Peace River for highlighting the penalty side of Bill C-26. I also congratulate him for his personal work on justice issues

that deal with drugs and for his private member's bill, which is now in the other place for review.

The member did an excellent job of highlighting the changes the bill would make to increase penalties for those involved in serious drug crime and in the production and sale of drugs to others.

Could he tell the House what the bill will mean to his community of Peace River and his young family with respect to making it a safer place to live?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, as I have had the opportunity to work with my colleagues on both sides of this House, including the member for Burlington, I appreciate the support each one has given me.

In terms of this bill and the bills that we have brought forward, there is no question that in my riding of Peace River and the ridings from coast to coast people are asking that parliamentarians step in and do the work of protecting our young families and the people in our communities who are the most vulnerable.

Because of my work on the crystal meth front, I get calls on a regular basis from people in Vancouver and in the Maritimes who are concerned about the way we deal with it. We need to ensure that we go after, first and foremost, the people who are producing and distributing these drugs, specifically to the most vulnerable.

In the past, attempts have sometimes been made to go after the most vulnerable and criminalize their behaviour. We do want to continue to ensure that people are not being encouraged to possess drugs, but we also need to get to the root cause, which is the networking, manufacturing and distribution of these drugs.

Canadians have asked us to go that route and, clearly, that is where this government is responding and getting tough on the real serious crime of producing and distributing the most serious drugs. This bill would take us that much further.

• (1230)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to offer the member my congratulations on supporting such a great bill for Canadians. I can tell members that people in my riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries cannot wait any longer for the tightening of these types of crimes.

I do have a simple question requiring a very simple answer.

On my own street in my riding we had a grow-op pretty much across the street from my home that was operating without anybody knowing it was there, obviously. The operation was turned in by a real estate agent. When the people were arrested and the whole thing went to court, it turned out that one individual owned about five of these homes but had somehow figured out how to rent them to the bad guys. As a result, none of the properties were seized and only one person ever ended up in court and, to my understanding, was fined \$20,000.

Government Orders

If people can produce marijuana in a home for a year where \$1 million in crop is produced, I think a \$20,000 fine is the wrong message for Canadians. I am just wondering if the member agrees with that. Would this bill help solve that problem and send a better message to Canadians about the safety of their communities?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the efforts of the member for Cambridge to reform the criminal justice system and to have stronger penalties for those people who would go after the most vulnerable in our society.

One of the things I have been concerned about, which he mentioned, is the ownership of the properties in which these criminal acts often are committed.

He is talking about a \$20,000 fine as a result of having been involved in a grow-op. As a contractor, I have seen the damage caused from some of these grow-ops and \$20,000 is a drop in the bucket when we consider the landlords who hope to rent out their homes and get a decent return. However, at the end of the day they are left with hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages to their property because it was used as a grow-op.

The government and this Parliament need to send a signal that we are getting serious about protecting not only those people who are being sold drugs, but also the people who are victimized through grow-ops as well, the people who, in good faith, rent out their homes.

We want to encourage a good rental market but, by not getting tough on the people who rent and destroy these homes and then go on to another home, we do not encourage a rental market, which contributes to the issue of low income housing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be taking part in this debate on Bill C-26. The Bloc Québécois wants to see the bill sent back to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights but the committee chair must be able to fulfill his responsibilities properly. The Bloc Québécois wants to see the bill sent back to the committee once it returns to normal. Even then, that does not mean that we will automatically support this bill after studying it more closely. We want to hear witnesses and do a comprehensive and thorough job because we obviously have questions.

Let us put all this in context for our fellow citizens. Bill C-26 introduces a minimum one-year prison sentence for trafficking of drugs, particularly marijuana, when undertaken as part of organized crime and involving the use of a weapon or violence. Certainly we agree that drug-related activities, especially those that profit organized crime, deserve a penalty. The Bloc Québécois has not changed its mind about minimum mandatory sentences.

I have said it many times, just as a number of my colleagues have: there are no conclusive studies showing that a minimum mandatory sentence in a bill necessarily works as a deterrent. Quite the opposite, a minimum mandatory sentence can lead to plea bargaining, a game of negotiation between the defence counsel and the Crown where they agree to other charges that are not subject to minimum mandatory sentences.

A second offence is contained in this bill. A minimum sentence of two years will be imposed for trafficking drugs such as cocaine, heroin and amphetamines to young people and, of course, for trafficking drugs near a school or near any other public place usually frequented by young people, like a youth centre.

We are in favour in principle of the legislator taking a closer look at people wanting to traffic drugs in places frequented by young people. In fact, that was a recommendation of the special committee created in 2002 in which I took part. I will come back to that later. Nonetheless, we are not convinced that this offence requires a mandatory minimum sentence.

Third, this bill contains a minimum sentence of two years for the cultivation of more than 500 marijuana plants.

Fourth, the maximum sentence for the production of cannabis will go from 7 to 14 years imprisonment. The Bloc Québécois does not have a problem with the maximum sentences, as this respects the judicial discretion that judges hearing witnesses should be afforded. They are aware of the circumstances and are well placed to determine the best sentence for each individual case. The Bloc Québécois has always defended the idea that sentences should be handed down on a case-by-case basis. A judge must receive and look at each case by bearing every factor in mind.

Finally, punishment will be more severe for trafficking in GHB, which is commonly known as the date rape drug. We do not have any particular problem with that provision.

There is another aspect of the bill that is a little more on the positive side. Clause 5 states that if the offender successfully completes a drug treatment program—and every one of our provinces and communities offers one—the court is not required to impose the minimum sentence, as the treatment will be seen as a mitigating factor in sentencing.

• (1235)

I understand that a government member has already introduced a similar bill.

We are in favour of clause 5 of the bill, but we have a number of concerns about the rest of the bill.

I would also like to mention that the bill establishes a list of aggravating circumstances that would rule out the possibility of a minimum sentence. These factors are considered serious enough to encourage judges to lean towards harsher sentences, rather than more lenient ones.

This bill addresses offences committed for the benefit or at the direction of a criminal organization. These provisions already exist, since they were passed when we dealt with the whole issue of organized crime. The House will recall that there are three offences under sections 467, 468 and 469, I believe. Committing an offence for the benefit of a criminal organization, whether drug related or under other circumstances, is still considered an aggravating circumstance.

Government Orders

Also, when violence is used in the commission of an offence, naturally, that is considered an aggravating circumstance. The same is true for offences committed in a school or on school grounds, offences committed in a prison and offences committed using the services of a person under the age of 18 years. Those are all examples of aggravating circumstances that would rule out the possibility of a minimum sentence.

The drug issue is very worrisome, of course. We in the Bloc Québécois are aware that drugs can destroy families, have a profoundly negative impact on communities, contribute to the formation of criminal networks and lead to violence. Thus, we are not complacent about the issue of drugs.

We can be somewhat critical of the bill. In 2002, I participated in a study on drug use. At the time, there was a member by the name of Randy White. I can mention his name because he is no longer a member in this House. I am sure you will remember him because he held office for three terms. He was a staunch Conservative. We could use more colourful language to describe him but I will refrain. He was a fairly opinionated Conservative. He had introduced a motion that the House establish a committee to study the non-medical use of drugs.

We worked for about two years on this committee, together with the former member for Burlington, Ms. Torsney, who was the chair. Other members who are still in this House were also on the committee and we invested about two years travelling around Canada and Quebec to hear testimony.

I was very surprised at the time—it was the early 2000s—when we were informed that the Canadian government was allocating \$500 million to the drug issue. Of this \$500 million, \$380 million—which is not small change—went to the RCMP and Correctional Services Canada, organizations responsible for enforcing the law.

These organizations are not very likely to engage in prevention or early intervention. They do not work with the youth in our communities and inform them of the terrible consequences of drug use in order to deter them.

It is very worrisome that, as recently as the early 2000s, we picked a prohibitionist approach and one that was very clearly and predominantly associated with elements of repression.

● (1240)

It is even more troubling—and we need to think about this—that for at least 80 years, Canada has had provisions in the Criminal Code that prohibit the use, import, export, possession and trafficking of drugs. Anything to do with these five things has been prohibited in the Criminal Code for decades. Obviously, this was moved into the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act a few years ago, but the Criminal Code has been used for a very long time to deter people from taking drugs.

I say this with complete detachment: I have never taken drugs in my life. Anyone who knows me will know this, and even those people who find me hopelessly relaxed. Nevertheless, I have to wonder something. For 80 years, we have had a prohibitionist strategy, and in survey after survey, after examining the realities and the current situation, we find that one quarter of Canadians take

drugs. I should clarify that, of course: 80% of those people use marijuana.

Should we invest as much in social resources to deter young people as we invest in the Criminal Code? We should allocate \$500 million to explain to young people that marijuana, although it is perhaps less harmful than other drugs, is not part of Canada's food guide. A person does not need to use marijuana to be happy in life or to be successful. This is not to pass judgment on those who do use marijuana, but it is certainly not something that should be encouraged.

Conversely, does society really want this system, in which a young person gets a criminal record for using marijuana? When we examined this in committee, we realized that there were very serious consequences to having a criminal record, affecting many things, from bail hearings to job searches. In fact, when a person declares to a potential employer that he has a criminal record, it is still quite a stigma.

Is this the right strategy when we know that, despite the prohibitionist approach that has been in place since the creation of the Criminal Code in Canada, one quarter of Canadians report using marijuana or other drugs more or less regularly? We need a more nuanced approach. Is the Criminal Code the best way to achieve these goals?

Let me go over the list of stigmas associated with having a criminal record. First, it can influence a police officer's behaviour during an arrest because it creates a negative prejudice. Of course, it justifies denying bail and can influence the crown prosecutor's decision to proceed with an indictable offence—which means fingerprinting and so on—or by summary conviction. It also undermines the credibility of testimony given in court. Having a criminal record makes it difficult, if not impossible, to cross borders—certainly the American border. It compromises access to citizenship and, as I said, can have a detrimental effect when job-seekers get to the interview stage.

This does not mean that we should not pass the bill. I am not suggesting that the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act should not include provisions for drug traffickers, particularly for those who get young people involved, who profit from it and, by the same token, make money for organized crime. However, does cannabis really deserve such a hard-line approach?

Government Orders

When the committee studied this issue, I was surprised to learn that Canada produces about 800 tonnes of marijuana per year. That is a lot; Canada is known as a marijuana producer. This phenomenon has been on the rise in British Columbia, where growers use hydroponic greenhouses.

• (1245)

Do you know approximately how much the RCMP and law enforcement agencies seize each year? According to the latest statistics presented to the committee in 2002—more recent statistics would be better—of the 800 tonnes produced in Canada, 1.2 tonnes were seized. Some \$500 million was spent. One thousand RCMP officers in Canada are policing the borders and taking part in drug investigations. Despite all of these resources, this law enforcement infrastructure and all of the money that we invest in that infrastructure, 1.2 tonnes out of 800 tonnes was the total seized.

It is therefore not obvious that repression is the way to go. It is not obvious that it is good to insist on giving law enforcement organizations more resources. As a society, would it not make more sense for us to turn to the school system, youth centres, adults who play a significant role in the lives of children or youth? We need to explain the negative effects of marijuana and try to understand why people use these substances.

By the way, when we studied marijuana and the non-medical use of drugs in committee—Senator Pierre Claude Nolin also headed a task force that spent several years looking at this—no one concluded that marijuana was a gateway drug. People are not going to get hooked on heroin or other drugs because they use marijuana regularly. I am not promoting marijuana use. What I am saying is that when we heard the witnesses and did our work, no one was able to provide scientific evidence to back the claim we sometimes hear that marijuana is a gateway drug that inevitably leads to hard drug use. That is what we need to say about marijuana.

The Bloc Québécois will work seriously. Once again, I want to remind this House that my committee chair has unfortunately dug in his heels and is refusing to do his duty and hold a vote on a motion by our colleague from Beauséjour that would allow us to hold a hearing concerning the Cadman affair. Regretfully, I must say that my chair is refusing to comply with the rules.

Mr. Speaker, you and the table officers could attest that when a motion is introduced in a committee and we do not accept the chair's ruling, all the members of that committee have the prerogative to challenge that ruling. Ordinarily, a vote without debate should automatically follow. But my chair is refusing to comply with the rules, and that is creating an unusually tense situation in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Everyone has worked collegially. We have done quite a lot of work. Hon. members can imagine the uncomfortable situation we are in. I urge my chair to come to his senses and regain his sense of fairness.

I believe I have a minute left, so I will conclude by saying that the Bloc Québécois will examine this bill seriously in committee. We have some concerns about the scope of the bill, but we will be happy to hear witnesses and to invite the committee chair to report to the House on Bill C-26 in due course.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon in the debate on the government's Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

This is an important piece of legislation, because the issue of drug use in our society is one that affects many Canadians and is important to many of our communities.

I know it is important in my community, where people are affected personally both by the issues related to drug addiction and by issues of crime related to drugs in our community, not only the trafficking and production but also the property crime that results from this. Police have told us that in the Vancouver area probably 80% of the petty property crime is related to the needs of drug users who resort to crime to deal with their addiction. It is a very serious problem that affects many people in our community.

Unfortunately, I have to say that I believe this legislation from the government is absolutely the wrong direction to take. It is the wrong approach to take when it comes to dealing with the serious question of drugs in our society. In fact, it borrows so heavily from the American style war on drugs that it has to be seriously questioned.

This approach has been shown to be a failure, a dramatic failure in the United States and a dramatic failure all around the world. The war on drugs has not resulted in greater success. More people are in jail because of drug infractions. Drug use has gone up. Drugs are more potent. Big crime associated with drugs has increased around the world. The problems of drug-producing countries have also increased.

The war on drugs has yet to prove successful after years of taking up huge resources. The huge expenditures by government on the war on drugs in the United States have not gone unnoticed. As for the failure of this money to produce any tangible result that has actually led to a lowering of drug crime, a lowering of addiction and those sorts of determinants that might be an indicator of some success, this money seems to have been wasted on a plan that has not proven successful.

After so much analysis of those kinds of programs, I am not sure that at this stage Canada should be going further down the road on the war on drugs in this American style, Bush style campaign that has proven to be so unsuccessful around the world.

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A cornerstone of this legislation is the provision of mandatory minimums and increased minimums for drug related crimes. That is a particularly flawed piece of the war on drugs. We know, particularly when it comes to drug crimes, in fact, that mandatory minimum sentences are very ineffectual. They have never lived up to the hype that surrounds them.

In fact, many jurisdictions in the United States that went down the road of implementing mandatory minimum sentences have backtracked significantly from them and have undone that kind of legislation. They found that it only ended up putting more people in jail, with increased prison populations and increased dislocation in families and communities. It targeted racial minorities. It targeted the low end of the drug chain, whereby the neighbourhood traffickers got the sentences but the big guys were missed completely.

Mandatory minimum sentences have proven to be highly ineffectual. In fact, the United States Sentencing Commission concluded that mandatory minimum sentences failed to deter crime. It reported that only 11% of federal drug defendants in the United States are high level drug dealers and that 59% of crack defendants are street level dealers compared to the 5% who are high level crack dealers. This seems to be targeting absolutely the wrong people when they are going after the root of trafficking problems in the United States.

In 2000 California repealed mandatory minimum sentences for minor drug offences. In 2004 Michigan also repealed mandatory minimum sentences for most drug offences, including what it had been proud to call the "harshes drug law in the nation": life without parole for dealing more than 650 grams of cocaine.

● (1255)

Even elected leaders in a state in the United States who had proclaimed to have gone farther down that road than anyone else, had proclaimed their commitment to a harsh mandatory minimum sentence, had to backtrack significantly from that and undo that law because it had proven to be so ineffective and actually the reverse, so harmful to the overall campaign to deal with drug issues in that state.

Other states, like Delaware and Massachusetts, have similar legislative reviews already in process to reduce mandatory minimum sentences.

The American Bar Association's Kennedy commission called for the repeal of mandatory minimum sentences. It stated, "mandatory minimum sentences tend to be tough on the wrong people".

We cannot any longer pretend that this approach to dealing with drug use, drug crime, drug addiction is an effective approach to dealing with that problem. It is so clearly proven that all it does is increase the population of prisons and increase dislocation. It does not solve the problem of drug related issues at all.

In Canada we have depended heavily upon enforcement measures to deal with the problems related to drugs. Seventy-three per cent of the money that is spent on drug issues in Canada is spent on enforcement. That is a significant percentage of all the money that we spend on drug policy in Canada. We spend 14% on treatment, 7% on research, 2.6% on prevention and 2.6% on harm reduction. Those other key elements that most people concede are absolutely crucial to a sensible drug policy, a sensible attack on dealing with the issues in

a positive way, are dramatically underfunded in Canada, when 73% goes to law enforcement proceedings related to drug policy.

The legislation that we have before us would do nothing to significantly overturn that imbalance. In fact it would continue the undue emphasis on enforcement by taking us farther down the road of mandatory minimum sentences in Canada. This has been effectively proven to be the wrong way to go. It clearly has been shown to be an ineffective way of dealing with the core issues of why people use drugs and how we can change those patterns that have such detrimental effects on society, families and communities.

This bill also puts a greater emphasis on drug treatment courts. There is significant concern about drug treatment courts in many quarters, because many people believe that it is impossible to coerce somebody into drug treatment. The coercive effect of a drug treatment court is fairly plain when we look at what they are really about. What they try to do is defer somebody into a treatment program monitored by the courts, by medical professionals, by social workers, to keep the person out of the criminal justice system, to keep him or her out of jail. The person has had to plead guilty to a drug crime but has opted for this treatment program and the person is monitored throughout that process of referral into a treatment program.

The reality is that the most successful drug treatment programs are ones initiated by the person who has the addiction issue when the person is ready to take that drug treatment, when the person wants to go into that program, not for other reasons such as to avoid going to jail.

The reality, too, is that there is a real lack of evaluation of the effectiveness of drug treatment courts. They have not been effectively evaluated. The reality is that we do not know that they produce a significant difference in, for instance, someone who goes to jail for the same kind of drug crime. There does not seem to be a significant correlation between a lowering of the kinds of criminal activity that people who go through a drug treatment court would be involved in and the kind of activity that people who go through the justice system and who might end up in jail participate in either during the time they are waiting to go on trial, or the time they are in treatment, or subsequently, when they have completed their treatment program and/or are released from jail. There just does not seem to be a significant improvement in the results for people who go through a drug treatment court.

● (1300)

The book is still yet to be written on the effectiveness of drug treatment courts. It sounds like a good idea. It sounds like a great idea to keep people out of jail and get them into treatment, but there are significant problems with first coercing people into a treatment program as a way of escaping that. We have seen in the United States that people often are offered a drug treatment court as a way of avoiding jail even if they really do not need to be in that kind of treatment program.

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Here in Canada spaces in treatment programs are still very limited. The need for those still far outweighs the number of positions that are available. Without a significantly increased commitment to treatment programs, it makes it difficult for this kind of program to succeed. There are still very serious problems about that.

It is far beyond time. We need to look at significant research into the effectiveness of drug treatment courts. I am going to talk later about Insite, the safe injection site in Vancouver. It is ironic in that it has been the subject of 24 studies about its effectiveness, almost all of which have been positive and yet the government will still not commit to its continuation beyond June of this year.

Here the Conservatives are introducing a bill to further support drug treatment courts when the available research on them is very inconclusive and very scanty to put it mildly. I do not understand how the government can choose to support this option and dismiss another one that has been studied and studied and shown to be effective. There is a very significant issue around this other aspect of the bill before us in its support for drug treatment courts.

There is something to be said for a four pillar approach to dealing with drug policy in Canada. Harm reduction, prevention, treatment and enforcement all need to be pieces of how we approach dealing with drug issues in our society.

Harm reduction measures such as safe injection sites and needle exchanges have been shown to be very effective both as public health measures and as places for ensuring that people who are ready to deal with issues of addiction get the kind of assistance they need when they are ready to do that.

Places like Insite, the safe injection site in Vancouver have broad public support. Certainly people in Burnaby—Douglas are broadly supportive of Insite and the approach it takes to reducing harm in our community. We know that lives have been saved. We know that diseases have been prevented from spreading further because of Insite and the people who make that facility work so very well. It has been a significant new institution both as a public health institution and as a component of a positive drug policy in our community.

Prevention programs are crucial. I do not think anyone is going to dispute the need for continuing education programs that ensure people, and young people in particular, are aware of the problems associated with the use of drugs. None of us wants to see that kind of program stopped, but we also want to make sure that there is increased funding so that the job can be done more effectively.

We know how crucial treatment programs are, but we also know how few places there are in reality. When someone makes the decision to go into treatment for drug addictions, we know how crucial it is that the space be available when that decision is made, because putting off that kind of decision lowers the effectiveness, lowers the success rate very dramatically. We need to make sure that there is an increased commitment to treatment.

Enforcement is a piece of all of this. Unfortunately, I believe that the over-emphasis on enforcement has not served us well. The resources that go into enforcement policy, into law enforcement have not served our society well. Canadian society has shown different attitudes around recreational drug use that often throw these kinds of measures into some disrepute. For the police who are required to

enforce them, it has affected how people view police forces in many of our communities as well. There are serious issues around the emphasis on enforcement. All of those are key to how we proceed on drug policy in this country.

• (1305)

I noted a few minutes ago that Insite, the safe injection site in Vancouver, has been studied. I think there are now 24 studies, including most recently, just last week, the government's hand-picked panel that looked at Insite and came to the same conclusion as so many others, that it has had a very positive effect in terms of saving lives. It has reduced the spread of disease. It ensures that people deal with their addictions in a context where they can get help and where the risk to their lives is significantly reduced.

Moving drug injection out of the back alley and into a safe clean facility has a number of positive effects for the community. All of us who have witnessed people injecting drugs on the street have felt very uncomfortable and unsure of what to do in that kind of circumstance. Knowing there is a place where people can go and deal with their addiction in a safe controlled environment is a very significant improvement.

What I really want to talk about in many ways today is the failure of how we approach the use of drugs in our society. There is a lot to be learned from the past and the United States' experience with alcohol prohibition in the 1920s and early 1930s. Alcohol was prohibited in very similar ways to the way drugs are prohibited in our society today.

Alcohol prohibition was a massive failure in the United States. It led to the same kinds of problems we are experiencing in our society today with drug prohibition. We saw in the 1920s and 1930s an increase in family dislocation because of rampant alcoholism. We saw an increase in the inability of people to get assistance for the kinds of alcohol dependency issues they had because alcohol was a prohibited substance and therefore was illegal. Therefore, barriers were put up to people getting the kind of help that would improve their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

We saw the problems associated with backyard and basement stills. They caused problems in neighbourhoods, fires, explosions and all those kinds of things. We see that in parallel today with grow ops that exist in homes across Canada and the kinds of problems they cause for tenants in buildings and for neighbourhoods where those grow ops are located.

In the case of alcohol prohibition we saw a very significant period of growth of organized crime in the United States. Some people see the roots of organized crime in North America in the period of alcohol prohibition. Gangs became very powerful and organized. They had significant resources to use because of their involvement with rum running and the illegal sale and distribution of alcohol. This is a very similar situation to what we are seeing today with the involvement of organized crime in drug production and distribution here in Canada.

Government Orders

There were very significant problems with alcohol prohibition. Society in the United States decided in its wisdom that this was a failed program. It made more sense to regulate the use of alcohol, ensure there was access to it, and put resources into all of those other programs that were so significant. Serious problems did arise from the use of alcohol in society, but the outright ban of alcohol was a complete and utter failure.

Canada never went down that road. We decided with regard to alcohol that regulation and legal use of that product was the way to go.

We should have learned something from the experience of alcohol prohibition. We are seeing exactly the same problems in our society related to drug prohibition. Many people who have studied this issue have noted that very clearly.

One organization in particular that is doing excellent work on this is LEAP, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition. I would invite anyone who is watching to look at LEAP's website. People will find many resources from law enforcement officers who themselves have decided they can no longer support prohibition of drugs in our society. They can no longer support what it does to society, what it does to law enforcement officers, what it does to public policy. They see it clearly as bad public policy that needs to be overturned.

● (1310)

I believe the bill takes us down the wrong road. It furthers the failed war on drugs. It puts forward mandatory minimum sentences as a solution when all over the United States similar legislation has been shown to be a complete failure and most jurisdictions have moved to undo such legislation where enforced or coerced treatment, such as drug treatment courts, is still unproven as a policy.

There are significant problems with this legislation and I hope we can have a serious debate about it in this place.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the end of his speech, the member talked about the prohibition of alcohol saying that it did not work and that he prefers regulation. He talked about a leap. I think it would be a big leap off a short pier for us to be doing this.

I want to be clear. Is it his opinion or is it the NDP policy that all drugs should be legalized and regulated and that there should be no laws making the use of illicit drugs illegal? I was not clear whether it was just his opinion or a policy of the NDP.

● (1315)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I was speaking personally when I said that we should be learning from the experience of alcohol prohibition, and I feel that very strongly. When I hold community meetings, I often have discussions around drug policy and the rate of crime in the community related to the use of drugs and drug addiction.

I believe there is strong support in my community for reviewing, in a very determined and complete way, the kind of drug policy, drug enforcement and drug law regime that we have before us. People in my community appreciate that there are very serious problems with the kind of approach that is in place. I think they believe there are lessons to be learned from alcohol prohibition, which is something we in this place and in our communities need to take very seriously.

The NDP has said on several occasions that we believe in the decriminalization of marijuana, for instance, because we recognize the injustice that is done in relation to the use of marijuana, especially the possession of small quantities. Far too many people are ending up with criminal records for the use and possession of this substance, the effects of which are considered by many in our society not to be significantly harmful. This would be a good example of a place where a significant change could be made to our laws.

The NDP has been very clear that mandatory minimum sentences are not the way to go in dealing with drug crime. As well, we have been clear in our support for a comprehensive, four pillar type approach to dealing with drug policy in Canada that includes harm reduction, prevention, treatment and enforcement. All of those issues are part of NDP policy.

The part of my speech dealing with the whole issue of drug prohibition and the need to look at it very seriously were my contributions to this debate and ones that I will continue to make because I believe there is much that is instructive in both the history of alcohol prohibition and in the need for a comprehensive review of drug policy.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas for outlining some clear problems with this deeply flawed legislation.

Last November, the *Ottawa Citizen* had a lengthy editorial dealing with this bill stating that this was a bad law in pursuit of bad politics based on non-existent science, and Parliament should not go along.

The member for Vancouver East has put together some numbers. She said that Canada spends 73% of its drug policy budget on drug enforcement and only 14% on treatment, 7% on research, 2.6% on prevention and 2.6% on harm reduction. We have examples like Insite, for which the government is failing to announce any extension beyond the current time limit of June.

I wonder if the member could comment on some of the important elements around treatment and harm reduction that are simply missing in the drug policy we currently have in Canada.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely shocking that the government has not gone forward to extend the life of Insite, the safe injection site in Vancouver.

It is a facility that has broad, strong public support across the community in Vancouver. Vancouverites are proud that people came together from all levels of government, the community and the drug user community, to come up with a new approach to public policy that would actually save lives, prevent the spread of disease and get drug use off the streets and out of the back alleys into a safe location where professional health care workers could offer advice and get people into treatment programs when they are ready to take that important step.

I think there is widespread recognition across the community that Insite has been an important step forward in how our society deals with drug abuse.

Government Orders

In report after report, the Conservatives continue to say the same thing. However, these effects are known, they are provable and it is happening at Insite. Even the government's own hand-picked panel, which, apparently, has just reported, said exactly the same thing, that this was worthy of the government's support and that the goals it set out to achieve were being achieved.

We need to move forward with that. This kind of facility needs to be introduced into other communities where there is interest to do it. There are other communities across the country that want to follow that example and go down that same road because they know it is a positive way of affecting the lives of people who are drug addicted. It is a positive way of affecting the community to ensure something is being done to help people get the assistance they need and to save lives.

We need to see an expansion of this kind of project, not constantly having to worry about the short leash on which the government seems to have that project. The sooner we can extend this project and ensure it has a permanent place as one of the strategies toward dealing with drug addiction and drug use in Canada the better.

It is not the only policy but it is certainly one piece of the puzzle that is absolutely crucial. A measly 2.6% of drug policy money going toward harm reduction is absolutely inappropriate. We need to restrike the balance of how we spend money on drug issues. We need to ensure that treatment, harm reduction and prevention receive a significantly larger piece of the pie. We know those are the areas that have proven to make real change in the country, in the lives of Canadians, in the lives of people who are addicted to drugs, in the lives of drug users, in the lives of families who care about them and in the life of the community around them. Those are the things that have done it effectively.

The research and the experience is all there. The negative experience of our neighbours to the south is there. All that information is before us and we should be finally putting that into a public policy framework in Canada. We need good public policy. The *Ottawa Citizen* has said that the kind of route that the government is on is just bad public policy. I think that has been proven time and again. We need to turn that around. We need to get down the right path and show support for things that actually do work in this regard.

• (1320)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member about the importance of the four pillars approach: treatment, prevention, harm reduction and enforcement.

In many of the big city caucus meetings, attended by mayors from across the country, they have talked about how the four pillars approach would be comprehensive and how it would be effective. In Toronto, for example, there have been many studies and consultations. Whether it is between the families, the chiefs of police, the people who are working with young people who have drug addiction problems or the many doctors and scientists, their four pillars approach has proven to be effective.

The bill in front of us only deals, by and large, with enforcement but we know that enforcement alone would not assist in the situation at all. In fact, it would just put more people in jail and they would come out as hardened criminals.

Perhaps the hon. member has some opinions on how treatment, prevention and harm reduction would work coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, we have talked a lot in the debate about the four pillars approach and how, not only in metro Vancouver and the city of Vancouver proper but in those communities, like Burnaby, that surround it, it is a broadly accepted approach to dealing with it. It is a new approach and one that merits consideration by many other communities. Some are already going down that road.

We have seen the effectiveness of many of those policies. I remember, probably 20 years ago, when the first needle exchange started in Vancouver. Ingrid Robinson, the sister of my former boss, Svend Robinson, was one of the first workers in the needle exchange program and became very well acquainted with drug users on the downtown east side of Vancouver, on Hastings Street and Main Street. She saw directly the effectiveness of that kind of program, how it saved so many lives, how it prevented the spread of disease and how important it was. The program was very controversial at the beginning but it is now broadly accepted in many communities across Canada and around the world.

The harm reduction approach has had a significant and positive effect on the lives of many people. It has saved many lives and the communities. It is something that we need to ensure has a permanent place in our repertoire of measures to deal with the effects of drug use in our society.

If we continue to have an overemphasis on the criminalization of drug use, then we will keep beating against the wall where we are trying to meld two very different approaches. When people are engaged in something that is contrary to the Criminal Code, there is very little reticence to deal with the effects of that and to seek the help they need because their fear is that they will be sanctioned criminally for that.

We know that drug use and drug addiction is a health issue and that it should be treated that way. It is very important that we put less emphasis on the criminal approach to this and get back to dealing with the issue of drugs and drug addiction as the health issue that it truly is.

• (1325)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak about this issue of drugs.

Just yesterday we heard a mother pleading for her two teenaged daughters who have been having a really hard time trying to find drug treatment programs. The mother ended up spending tens of thousands of dollars to send her daughters to a drug treatment program in the U.S. that is comprehensive and long term.

She is speaking out about and lobbying for a drug prevention program and also a treatment program within Canada. Everywhere she goes she hears about thousands of middle class Canadian families who have been told that there is just not enough funding to support drug treatment programs, yet somehow the Conservative government seems to have a lot of money to put people in jail.

Government Orders

I want to talk about what Bill C-26 is all about. This bill ignores the root causes of drug use and the problems relating to drug use in Canada. It would give mandatory minimum sentences, but science and studies have shown many times that these kinds of mandatory minimums just do not work on drug crimes.

Many statistics in the U.S. have shown that it has failed in the many years of its war on drugs. More people are in jail and many are trapped in a cycle of violence in their neighbourhoods. The majority of this violence is caused by drug use and drug dealing.

In 2004 the American Bar Association's Justice Kennedy commission called on the U.S. Congress to repeal mandatory minimum sentences, particularly with respect to drug crimes. Interestingly, the report said, "Mandatory minimum sentences tend to be tough on the wrong people".

We want to jail the kingpins, but the kingpins and the drug lords are most likely to get off. The people who are going to be jailed and who are most likely to get harmed by mandatory minimum sentences are the folks who are the small fry, which is what they are called on the street.

We also notice that the U.S. Sentencing Commission concluded that mandatory minimums fail to deter crime and reported that only 11% of federal drug defendants are high level drug dealers, the kingpins I was talking about. It also reported that 59% of crack defendants are street level dealers compared to 5% of defendants who are high level crack dealers. Yes, we need to crack down on all crack dealers, but why are we not going after the high level ones? These are the people we really need to go after.

Just nabbing the small folks on the street will be a recipe for exploding prisons, courtroom backlogs, and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. Research has shown that it costs at least \$100,000-plus per person for a year in jail, whereas if we used that money for a prevention program, an effective counselling program and effective drug treatment programs, we would actually see results.

• (1330)

That is not where the Conservative government is going. The Conservative government is ignoring what works and is of course going forward with the failed, George Bush, Republican style war on drugs that has been waged for many years. We have not seen many results.

In fact, we have seen a lot of handguns illegally imported into Canada from the United States. These illegal handguns are making the drug situation in big cities such as Toronto even more dangerous, as these folks who are on the streets protecting their turf are buying these illegal guns and causing havoc in our communities. We believe this legislation will actually make it a win for organized crime, because we are going to take the small players off the street, push up the price of drugs and leave the door open for organized crime, making the situation worse.

However, I want to spend more time talking about the four pillars approach, about what actually will work. I have noticed that even this House of Commons in 2002 had the Special Committee on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs.

The House special committee, the Office of the Auditor General and the Senate committee have brought forward four areas, including, first, strengthened leadership, coordination and accountability, with dedicated resources.

Second is enhanced data collection to set measurable objectives, evaluate programs, and report on progress. We do want to know what we are doing and how we are spending taxpayers' money in trying to be effective. Without evaluation programs, we do not know whether these programs are effective or not.

Third, we need a balance of supply and demand activities across government.

The fourth one, which is the most important, is that we absolutely need to increase our emphasis on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

We know this balanced approach is not happening right now. How do we know? We can just follow the money trail. I have noticed that for every \$100 Canada spends on the war on drugs, \$73 goes to enforcement, i.e. catching the people doing the drugs. Only 14%, which is \$14 out of every \$100, is spent on treatment programs. Research gets a tiny amount. Researching whether any of these approaches will be effective gets only \$7 out of \$100. That is hardly anything.

To see what is even more outrageous in terms of our approach, let us look at the figures for prevention, which is the most important. We know it is the most important because it deals with the root problems of drug addiction. For prevention, we spend \$2.60 out of every \$100. Of the money that we spend on the war on drugs, 2.6% is spent on prevention. That is really quite shameful. For harm reduction is the same thing, at 2.6%, so for every \$100 we spend, only \$2.60 goes to harm reduction.

It is no wonder that this war on drugs is not working.

Let me point out, however, that in other parts of our country people are taking leadership. In Toronto alone, there are the drug strategy recommendations. Many of the recommendations actually deal with the federal government. It calls on the federal government to establish a national framework for action and take leadership. Of course it is not doing that. The Conservative government is actually going the other way right now.

The Toronto drug strategy report calls for a holistic family approach. It says that we absolutely have to support funding for "family-based support services" to help families that are dealing with substance use, because often it is not just one person doing it.

• (1335)

That one person doing the drugs and who is addicted actually has an impact on all the family members. The report says that we need to provide a support and counselling strategy for family members as to how they will deal with that one family member who is addicted. By and large, the approach is one of health. When one is addicted, one needs to have the tools to be able to get out of the addiction.

Government Orders

The report also calls for support for parents who want treatment programs and the provision of “on site childcare at treatment facilities”. That is a very common sense approach, because one cannot take one's young child to many of the treatment facilities. As a result, because they do not have child care support, some of the folks who are addicted end up not going to these treatment programs.

For young people, says the report, we absolutely must have “comprehensive prevention programming” for young people on how they can avoid getting addicted to drugs. It states, in fact, that this should be a comprehensive mandatory drug prevention program for young people. Often they are missed. We are beginning to do this with regard to tobacco. I have seen it. It has been effective. By the way, tobacco is also a drug. We have seen that the prevention program is effective. We are noticing, for example, that fewer young teenagers are smoking. We know that if we put our minds to it, we can do it. We have seen programs that work.

The recommendations also say that it is important to train people on the front lines, whether they are teachers or front line workers, so that they can detect a person who is addicted to drugs and so there would be “early intervention, counselling and other supports in place” to assist these young people.

Of course, we need to deal with the root problems. Many young people in particular do drugs because they need to have drugs to mask the pain they are experiencing. Some of the pain could be physical abuse, sexual abuse or mental abuse that they experienced as children. Unless we provide the kind of counselling support they need, it is very difficult for them to get out of the cycle of addiction: being addicted, going to treatment, and then getting trapped again.

There are also other recommendations, which state that we have to work with the people who are abusing substances in order to come up with some kind of comprehensive approach. This is not what is happening in many places.

There are also service barriers. We have seen drug addicts who want to get out of street life and a life of violence. They want to escape that cycle, but because they cannot find affordable housing they cannot get their lives back in order. That is the result. They are trapped with people around them who are doing drugs.

We have seen programs where there is supportive housing. We might ask what supportive housing has to do with drug use and the war on drugs. Actually, having decent, stabilized, affordable housing, with some kind of supportive network around the person, is very effective. We have seen it work in downtown Toronto. Former drug addicts will say that they have turned their lives around, not because they went to jail, which may in fact make the situation worse, but because they found stable housing. They were able to feel that they could begin to contribute and participate in society in a meaningful manner.

That is a way to deal with our young people or with people who are addicted and have been on the street for many years. That is the way to crack through this, because drug users occasionally have mental health problems, and until there are programs to deal with that, they will continue to use drugs.

●(1340)

We have also noticed that many of the drug users are more involved in the cycle of violence and we need to enhance neighbourhoods, whether it is working with the community to provide alternatives or with the police to target high level drug traffickers, importers and producers of illegal substances. We need to work with the police in a holistic way. Having minimum sentencing is not going to do it.

The city of Toronto has said that there are parents, unfortunately, who occasionally use their children as runners for drugs, which is quite unfortunate. One way to deal with it is to work with the police and find ways to protect these children, possibly to pull them out and have their parents punished properly.

All in all, the NDP is proud to say that it does not want a very simplistic approach to control drugs and substances and that we have to have the four pillar approach. Sending people to jail for extensive periods of time for marijuana use, for example, will just not be effective. The U.S. has failed in its war on drugs. It has, for example, spent tens of billions of dollars a year on enforcement and jailing folks while crime rates and drug use have soared.

I hope the other parties will not send this bill for second reading. If that happens, there will be a tremendous amount of amendments at committee, so that the bill does not return to the House of Commons in its present form because we certainly cannot see any reason to support it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was happy the member mentioned the four pillars. I would like her to comment further on the pillar about other activities that would reduce the use of drugs, especially among youth.

While she thinks about that, I will talk about a project in my riding. Young aboriginal carvers who have exceptional talent but have problems with employment or substance abuse have been funded for this program. Some of them are now master carvers. It is an excellent use of their talent and gets them into a positive activity. It has been a great project, but I think the funding is running out. I hope the member would support more funding for it. She might have ideas of other projects similar to that so that the total answer is not simply incarceration.

●(1345)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, yes, I too have seen from small towns to big cities the fact that we need to believe in our young people because they are our best allies against illegal drug use in order to keep our streets safe. I have seen very effective holistic approaches that deal with drug addictions.

I have seen young people living on the streets who are trapped in a cycle of addictions and violence, yet their lives completely turn around when they discover self-confidence, when they discover, in the case of the hon. member's riding, being able to carve.

In downtown Toronto there are programs to teach young people art, whether it is mural painting, making music, or sketching or even small things like making jewellery so they can sell it. It gives them a sense of self-confidence.

Government Orders

Once they have that sense of self-confidence and a feeling of pride of who they are and that they are no longer living in a cycle of poverty, that they have some means of employment or some hope so that they can go back to school or return to their families, then we see their lives turning around.

They feel they no longer need drugs in order to feel that they are important. I have seen young people who abused themselves and abused drugs because they did not feel important. They did not feel loved but once they found the power within themselves it liberated them to have the confidence to say no to drugs, to say no to that cycle of living on the streets and living in violence.

However, these kinds of programs are very holistic. They are not cheap because they deal with the people as individuals, as human beings rather than as criminals to be removed from society, thrown away in jail or locked up so we will never have to look at them again. This approach of locking them up and throwing away the key, and these young people do come back out on the street and they become hardened criminals, makes the entire matter far worse.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the police in my riding say that without a solid harm reduction strategy, they are really helpless in dealing with drugs. What they are dealing with is essentially, and I quote a public statement that some police made, “a social and health issue”.

My colleague has explained very well the inadequate response of the Conservative government, providing very minuscule amounts to prevention, detox and treatment. I see the leadership is really coming from local community groups. I see groups in Victoria like the Cool Aid Society and Our Place Society, and there is another group wanting to start a therapeutic community to help young people. They are all struggling to make ends meet to deal adequately with this issue.

I am wondering if my colleague would like to comment on the kinds of difficulties that such groups have in their communities because they are underfunded by the federal government.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, there really is a complete lack of funding, whether it is a drug prevention program or a drug treatment program or an enhancement for the community so that it has the capacity to come up with innovative solutions.

We know the answer lies in strengthening a family, strengthening a community, strengthening a neighbourhood, but they often find the funding is short term.

It goes from project to project; it is project-based. Once the project is finished, even though it is tremendously effective, creates a lot of goodwill in the community, brings lots of hope and excitement and is in the community, maybe after a year, perhaps after two years, all of that goodwill, all of those effective strategies completely go to waste. Five years later maybe the community is offered yet another pilot project funding.

There is absolutely no opportunity for administrative support, to learn from successes, and to take the best practices of all these wonderful neighbourhood and community-based successful programs. They are not used collectively to create a permanent long term strategy. That is not done because of a complete lack of

leadership in drug prevention programs and strategies here in Ottawa.

There are also many other things, even something as simple as a 24-hour crisis hotline for people who are abusing drugs. If I notice that my teenage daughter or my teenage son may be abusing something and getting into dangerous territory, what do I do as a parent? Am I able to call a 24-hour hotline? Is there a crisis intervention strategy across the country? No. So parents are often left alone, struggling to figure out what to do.

If there were mandatory minimum sentences, we would see some teenagers, because they just got caught up with the wrong groups of people, gangs or whatever, facing huge criminal charges, and these could be first-time young offenders. They need an opportunity for a second chance. Once they go to jail, they learn to become hardcore criminals. They have a criminal record. They graduate from jail and become completely trapped in that cycle of poverty, drug use and violence. That is a completely wrong approach.

● (1350)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this important debate today.

The bill is being introduced to further the Conservative tough on crime agenda. It is clear, with the number of justice bills the Conservatives have introduced over both sessions of the 39th Parliament, that this will be one of the major focal points of their re-election campaign.

The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act regulates certain types of drugs and associated substances. The new legislation would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, focus on drugs in schedule 1, which includes opiates such as opium, heroin, morphine, cocaine and methamphetamine, and schedule 2, cannabis related, including marijuana.

Currently there are no mandatory prison terms under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, but the most important serious drug offences have a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Under the proposed legislation, anyone found guilty of a serious drug offence would automatically receive a mandatory term of imprisonment. For the purposes of this initiative, serious drug offences mean production, trafficking, possession for the purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting and possession for the purpose of exporting.

The bill would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to include mandatory prison terms for drugs listed in schedule 1, such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine, and in schedule 2, such as cannabis, marijuana. Generally the mandatory sentence would apply where there would be an aggravating factor and would also be increased where the production of the drugs would constitute a potential security, health or safety hazard. Also, the maximum penalty for the production of schedule 2 drugs, for example, marijuana, would be increased from 7 to 14 years.

Commonly known date rape drugs include GHB and Flunitrazepam and will be moved from schedule 3 to schedule 1 and it will provide access to higher maximum penalties for illegal activities involving these drugs.

Statements by Members

The legislation would allow the drug treatment court to impose a penalty other than a mandatory sentence on an offender who has a previous conviction for a serious drug offence where: (a) the offence involves no other aggravating factors; and (b) the offender successfully completes the drug treatment court treatment program.

As we can see, this is a very important debate. It is certainly a conversation or dialogue that Canadians are having from coast to coast to coast. We heard members speak to the bill today. Liberal members have said that they are supporting the bill going to committee because of the importance of the dialogue Canadians are having.

We agree there must be a balanced approach. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina spoke extensively about the four pillars approach, which includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement, on the war drugs.

The Conservatives are taking a hard-nosed approach, which does not seem to be designed to encourage the four pillars approach. It is very reminiscent of the Republican approach with its war on drugs. The Conservatives are tagging this as a war on crime. The problem with this is it is not a balanced approach. As Canadians are engaged in a dialogue about the increase in crime and the types of crime, the increase in gang violence and the increase in serious offences related to drugs, there absolutely has to be a dialogue.

When we look at the drug policy budget in Canada, 73% of it is spent on enforcement, and rightfully so, but when there is not enough money budgeted to begin with, only 14% goes to treatment, 7% to research, 2.6% to prevention and 2.6% to harm reduction. The budget is not adequate. We need to be resourcing all sectors of these strategies.

● (1355)

When we talk about the Conservative approach, it is a war on crime and a war on drugs. I will quote Dan Lett, a writer for the *Winnipeg Free Press* in response to the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday in Winnipeg to battle auto theft. He said, "Harper's pledge Monday was to introduce tougher laws to crack down on the trafficking—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows she should be using the quote in such a way as to not mention the Prime Minister by name. Perhaps we will end it there. The member has 14 minutes left.

We will move to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CTV

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome anchors from CTV and A-Channel who have travelled to Ottawa from across Canada to mark their long-standing commitment to local and national news.

It was not fancy, but it was over 50 years ago that the first images, originating from the little log cabin, flickered across TV sets in

northern Alberta. CTV Edmonton has been the overwhelming choice for local news and information ever since. Thousands of constituents in my riding tune in every night for the information they need.

Local newscasts from CTV and A-Channel stations have been a vital part of Canadian communities like Edmonton since the 1950s, telling stories that matter to millions of Canadians and supporting the causes that contribute and build our communities. Distinctive local and national news continues to be a vital element of Canadian cultural fabric.

On behalf of the Conservative caucus, I congratulate CTV as it marks its long-standing commitment to local and national news.

* * *

● (1400)

WOMEN FOR AFRICAN GRANDMOTHERS

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to praise a constituent who is leading the Toronto chapter of Women for African Grandmothers. Beverly Britz is spearheading the effort to ensure that affordable drugs reach the developing world for the treatment of HIV-AIDS. Right now in Africa more than 11 million orphans are being raised by their grandmothers.

This group is currently working to have Canadian law allow the free flow of affordable drugs to developing countries by pursuing legislative changes to Canada's Access to Medicines Regime in the House of Commons. Parliamentarians must come together with the political will to save lives and eliminate suffering. Legislative measures should be taken now by the Minister of Industry to improve access to medicines for the developing world.

Beverly Britz and her group are doing their part. I urge all members of Parliament to support Women for African Grandmothers in this noble cause to help those suffering and dying from HIV-AIDS in Africa.

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[Translation]

HEC MONTRÉAL

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Standard Life—HEC Montréal fund team took first place at the eighth Redefining Investment Strategy Education (RISE) Forum. Created in 1999 with a \$2 million donation, the fund now has a market value of nearly \$4 million, making it the second-largest student fund in Canada.

The students managing this year's fund were awarded this prestigious international prize as part of an annual competition organized by Dayton University in partnership with the United Nations Global Compact program.

Statements by Members

The funds are evaluated on the basis of their performance, and the HEC fund came out on top in the international category, with a 10.83% annual return. The students manage the fund through a management committee and act as portfolio analysts and managers.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to extend our most sincere congratulations to the HEC students for this top prize.

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[English]

CTV

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember the first time I was invited to a TV newsroom. Like most ordinary Canadians, I found the experience slightly overwhelming. A whirlwind of cameras, cables, lights, microphones and a lot of people with big hearts keep it all together with the help of plenty of duct tape, of course.

CTV News is celebrating 50 years of providing Canadians with the news they need. When CTV World News first launched it was broadcast from Ottawa and was hosted by three anchors, names we recognize today: Charles Lynch, Peter Stursberg and Peter Jennings.

Since then CTV has been home to Canada's longest running morning show, *Canada AM*. The CTV weekly news magazine *W5* has been a Canadian investigative news powerhouse since its first broadcast in 1966.

Where would we be in places like Winnipeg without the CKY super hour news? Where would we be without that constant voice in our local communities? I want to thank all those involved in Winnipeg, the technicians, the journalists, the anchors, the administrators, everyone who has brought us such a powerful local news network.

Now calling itself Canada's #1 network, I would suggest that CTV News—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

* * *

[Translation]

MONIQUE LEROUX

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “In the near future, a woman will become president of a major Canadian financial institution”. This was the prediction made in 2006 by the woman who was elected, on March 15, as President and CEO of the Desjardins Group.

Ms. Monique Leroux is the first woman to hold the highest position at the largest financial cooperative movement in Canada in 108 years.

A talented musician and exceptional businesswoman, Ms. Leroux is already introducing some dynamic views on decentralization while maintaining her cooperative convictions. Established in Lévis, the cradle of the cooperative movement, Desjardins is the largest private employer in Quebec. Its 6 million members, 40,000 employees—including 8,500 in the Lévis and Quebec City areas—and assets of

\$144 billion, make Desjardins a strategic force in the Canadian economy.

Ms. Leroux is following in the footsteps of Alphonse Desjardins, who worked here in this House and who dedicated himself to the movement. I wish her all the best in her mandate at the service of the cooperative movement in Canada and abroad.

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[English]

VAISAKHI

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week the Sikh community celebrates Vaisakhi, the 309th anniversary of the founding of the Sikh fellowship, Khalsa. Vaisakhi is one of the most important dates in Sikhism and is marked by cultural and religious events across Canada and around the world.

Each year since I was first elected to the House of Commons, I have hosted a Vaisakhi ceremony in my Ottawa office. I wish to thank all my colleagues who were at this morning's event, including the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. opposition House leader, and the hon. chief opposition whip. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for attending every Vaisakhi ceremony on Parliament Hill since 1994.

To all the people who attended today's ceremony, I give my most sincere thanks.

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● (1405)

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Recreational Vehicle Dealers Association of Canada's members, along with industry partners from Campgrounds Campings Canada and other RV stakeholders, are on Parliament Hill today as part of their annual industry advocacy day.

Representatives will be meeting with a number of MPs to discuss the growing RV trend and the important role that the RV industry plays in exploring this wonderful country that we live in.

According to its national ownership survey released in 2007, 14% of households own an RV and 90% of RV owners say that their number one priority is exploring Canada. In fact, a 2007 survey on vacation patterns revealed that RV owners were more than twice as likely to spend their vacation time and dollars in Canada as compared to non-RV owners.

I am sure my colleagues in the House will agree that with the strength and continued growth of this family friendly industry, recreational vehicles will continue to play an essential role in showcasing Canada as the beautiful country that it is.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

RURAL MAIL DELIVERY

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is currently conducting a review of rural mailboxes. A number of citizens have already been informed that their mail will no longer be delivered because the location of their mailboxes is dangerous. Canada Post is making a unilateral decision to deliver mail to community mailboxes without first consulting the citizens concerned, causing much anger in the rural communities.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers is calling for a moratorium on rural mail delivery. The Bloc Québécois supports this request. Canada Post must stop making decisions on rural mail delivery without consulting the citizens concerned and the labour leaders representing the letter carriers working outside urban centres. Every possible delivery avenue must be examined with the public and the workers concerned, who are the best placed to find solutions that are acceptable to all parties. I am also asking that the review of the rural mailboxes already underway be done again in consultation with the public through their municipality.

* * *

[English]

VEHICLE THEFT

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a stolen car can be devastating to a hard-working Canadian family. Beyond the loss of the vehicle's dollar value, which is a devastating loss in and of itself, the degree that families rely on their vehicles only becomes apparent when that vehicle is no longer available. Whether it is driving to work or dropping off kids at school or at doctors' appointments, the lives of honest Canadians are severely disrupted thanks to the criminals out to make an easy buck.

Tragically, car thefts often lead to deaths or serious injuries to innocent bystanders or motorists. Thefts of cars and trucks are not simple property crimes. They are dangerous acts that put the lives and safety of all of us at risk.

That is why I put forward my private member's bill to make auto theft a separate offence under the Criminal Code. It is why I would like to acknowledge the Insurance Bureau of Canada for all its work in bringing attention to this important issue.

I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice for announcing yesterday in Winnipeg tough new laws to crack down on the trade in stolen vehicles that enriches organized crime at the expense of hard-working Canadian families.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a recent meeting of the natural resources committee, we learned of a further emergency regarding the availability of rail transport services for the forestry industry. Witnesses testified that pulp cars are being artificially restricted by both national rail companies. The resulting shortage is inflating transportation costs and strangling product distribution.

The Minister of Transport has the power to step in to assist during this crisis. He can utilize the tools that were passed in Bill C-8 and force the railways to free up their railcars that are hidden in storage.

On behalf of suffering forestry workers in my riding and across the country, I call on the Minister of Transport to stand up for these workers and use all available means to ensure availability of rail services for the forestry industry.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every three minutes a car is stolen in Canada. This is, of course, unacceptable. Yesterday under the leadership of the Prime Minister and our Minister of Justice, our government took action with the introduction of new legislation to crack down on car thieves.

Unlike the Liberal Party, we are taking action to strengthen Canada's justice system. There are now tough new laws on the books that will properly punish gun-toting criminals, impaired drivers and sexual predators.

While our government was acting to protect Canadians, where was the Liberal Party? It was once again missing in action, nowhere to be found. Its recent actions are strikingly similar to the 13 long years in which the Liberal Party did nothing on justice issues. This is what happens when there are no policies, no direction and no vision.

Unlike the Liberals, our government is committed to strengthening Canada's justice system. We have introduced a number of bills that will take on drug pushers, combat identity theft and overhaul Canada's outdated youth justice laws.

When it comes to strengthening Canada's justice system, we are just getting started.

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● (1410)

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the media reported that the government wants to ditch Bill C-21, the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, because it does not like the amendments passed at committee.

The Conservatives do not agree with the amendments that the Canadian Human Rights Commission asked for to guide the commission in making decisions. The Conservatives do not agree with amendments that would allow first nation band councils a transition period equal to that offered to provinces when the Canadian Human Rights Act was originally passed.

Statements by Members

Why do they not agree with those amendments? Because the Conservatives do not believe in collective human rights. That is why they have refused to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Once collective rights are protected by law, it is up to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, not the government, to decide when they are a legitimate defence. The tribunal has already started to limit when those rights can be used by rulings on employment issues with band councils.

The minister should accept the will of the committee and bring the legislation back to the House for a final reading immediately.

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CTV

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to welcome anchors from CTV and A-Channel from across the country who are here to celebrate local and national news.

[Translation]

CTV plays a very important role in my region, Atlantic Canada, because of its commitment to our communities. Each week, CTV Atlantic produces an impressive 27 hours of local programming.

[English]

Over the past 50 years, reports from CTV and A-Channel stations across Canada have played an important role in helping Canadians understand the pivotal events of modern history.

It is good to see CTV Atlantic's Steve Murphy here today. He and his team from Atlantic Canada have covered all the major stories. From royal visits to the Swissair tragedy at Peggy's Cove, they have been there to tell Atlantic Canadians the story.

[Translation]

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I would like to congratulate CTV on its 50 years in local and national news, and highlight the importance and vitality of this institution in Canadian culture.

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NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week highlights the importance of public awareness towards victims of crime. Communities across the country will hold meetings on the effects of crime on victims and will discuss the most effective ways to help them.

Victims often feel hopeless after a crime has been committed against them. Parliamentarians must respond with legislation, but we must also have cooperation from the public to make our actions effective and to support our fight against crime.

I therefore reaffirm the Bloc Québécois' unfailing support for victims of crime. Unlike the Conservatives, who simply want to stamp out crime through repression, we believe in the established benefits of rehabilitation and awareness. It is through such means that we will, I hope, achieve greater social justice for all of society.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has clearly abandoned Brenda Martin.

It began with Ms. Martin's own MP, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West. When asked in February 2007, he said that he had reviewed her case and that Brenda Martin belonged in jail. Shameful, Mr. Speaker. He is the same person that the government later sent to Mexico to advocate for Brenda Martin, the person whom he believes should be in jail.

Then we have the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade who travelled to Mexico, but who did not even bother to visit Brenda Martin. The secretary of state, though, did make her cocktail party that evening. We are told that the secretary of state has been removed from the Brenda Martin file due to her incompetence and neglect. We can only hope that she has not done irreparable harm to Brenda Martin's dire situation.

When is the government going to take concrete action to really help Brenda Martin?

* * *

● (1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are finding it increasingly difficult to understand and trust the Liberal Party's divergent positions on almost every issue. Despite claims it is united, all evidence points to a number of different factions within it, all with extremely varying positions.

What is more remarkable is that the Liberal Party's own leader changes his position on issues from day to day and week to week. Who can believe anything he says when one week he is against the budget and the next week he supports it, one week he does not agree with our immigration reforms, and the next week he is supporting the government?

The Liberals voted in favour of Bill C-10, the same measure announced by the previous Liberal government in 2003, but have now changed their minds.

It is the Liberal Party that has trouble sorting out its policy. Riddled with division and frustration, the Liberals have become the party of no policy, no leadership and no credible plan for Canada.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the Prime Minister confirm that the RCMP was at the Conservative Party headquarters today because of its in and out election advertising scheme, or its attempt to bribe Chuck Cadman or Terry Kilrea, or the laundering of money through the University of Calgary to affect elections in Ontario? Which is it? What is going on?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Conservative Party initiated court action against Elections Canada some time ago on the advertising issue. I also would observe that tomorrow, Elections Canada officials were scheduled to be examined by lawyers from the Conservative Party. While today's actions may or may not delay that somewhat, we remain extremely confident in our legal position.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the Prime Minister, who is also the leader of the Conservative Party, it is about him and his government.

Elections Canada has already ruled that the Conservative Party broke the law. Now, the RCMP, Canada's national police force, is raiding Conservative Party headquarters.

What will it take for the Prime Minister to finally admit that the Conservative Party broke the law?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House leader has said many times, that is completely false.

This is the reason that the Conservative Party itself has initiated the court action and, obviously, we will abide by whatever the courts decide. However, in this case, our legal position is rock solid.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for six months now, the government has been systematically obstructing the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to prevent it from looking into the Conservatives' in and out advertising scam during the last election.

Considering the RCMP raid on the Conservative Party offices this morning, will the Prime Minister finally promise to fully cooperate with this Parliament, with Elections Canada and now with the RCMP, or will he continue to cover up the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, this case is before the courts and it was the Conservative Party that initiated judicial proceedings. In fact, Elections Canada officials were scheduled to be examined by Conservative Party lawyers tomorrow. Whether or not there are delays because of today's events, we remain completely confident about our legal position.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how did it get to this? An RCMP squad raiding the offices of the Conservative Party, shredders working overtime in some back room and spinners in frantic damage control. How did we get here?

Oral Questions

Why did Elections Canada need to get a search warrant and the help of the RCMP in the first place? Why did it need to pry information from the government's clenched fist? Why did we get here?

• (1420)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party asked a very good question because we have been cooperating fully. We have provided every document that has been requested by Elections Canada as a consequence of the lawsuit which we initiated with them over an interpretation of the law. So his question is a very good one. We do not understand why this was necessary.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what one gets when one plays fast and loose with election law. This is what one gets when one stonewalls Elections Canada. This is what one gets when one cheats and gets caught.

This is what we get with the Prime Minister. He sets the tone. Will he finally admit that this is about his character?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is about no such thing. It is about the fact that we have initiated an action against Elections Canada over a difference of interpretation in the law. That is an action we have taken to the court because we are very confident of our interpretation.

The fact is that Elections Canada initiated today's action. We do not believe it is necessary. We have always been forthcoming with any documents that have been requested, which does pose the question that the deputy House leader asked at the start, which was a very good question.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government truly has a problem with coordination, consistency and transparency. Since 2006, there has been a high turnover in Ministers of National Defence and Foreign Affairs. Yesterday, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs committed a huge blunder. Today we learn that the chief of the land staff, General Hillier, has tendered his resignation for some unknown reason.

Is General Hillier's resignation directly tied to the Minister of Foreign Affairs's blunder?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, General Hillier has worked well with the government. He has done an excellent job rebuilding the Canadian Forces. He is a great Canadian and we are proud to have worked with him.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not so long ago, General Hillier said he was satisfied with the governor of Kandahar. The Minister of Foreign Affairs wonders about the governor, saying, “Is it the right person at the right place at the right time?”

Was the Minister of Foreign Affairs referring to himself or the governor of Kandahar?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is a good Quebecker and a good Canadian who is working for Canadian interests internationally. Canadians and Quebeckers are very proud, not only of this minister, but of the role Quebec plays in Canada and in the world.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, when the Bloc Québécois was concerned about the allegations of corruption and torture brought against the governor of Kandahar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that the situation in Kandahar had greatly improved. Yesterday, this same minister short-circuited the diplomatic efforts now underway by openly asking President Karzai to replace the governor of Kandahar.

Are these blunders and contradictions not enough to prove two things: this government's lack of transparency and the incompetence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan is its own state and it makes its own decisions about government appointments.

Canada is helping Afghanistan to become a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state so it can never again serve as a haven for terrorists threatening global and Canadian security.

Since 2006, Canada's efforts have been guided by the Afghanistan Compact. We are there to do our business. As the Prime Minister said, we have full confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

•(1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is the same old story: lack of transparency in the matter of Afghan detainees, lack of transparency with regard to current or future NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, lack of transparency with regard to the commissioner's inquiry into complaints against the military police.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his government lacks transparency, that his ministers are acting like amateurs and that these are additional reasons for leaving Afghanistan in February 2009?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is evident that the Bloc Québécois does not support the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Its members are acting like rank amateurs in the debates in the House of Commons. The Bloc Québécois contributes nothing at all to the real debate in this matter.

It does not support the mission in Afghanistan. This government supports the Canadian Forces and supports international aid efforts

in Afghanistan. We will continue to support our mission as well as the men and women in the Canadian Forces.

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ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberal Party activities resulted in several RCMP investigations into the sponsorship scandal and tax leakage from income trusts. During their campaign, the Conservatives called for greater transparency and criticized Liberal scheming. They were right to do so. However, when the Prime Minister says that he will keep his hands perfectly clean, then proceeds not to do so, we have a problem. As it happens, there is a problem: RCMP officers are at Conservative headquarters.

Why did Elections Canada have to ask—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the case that is before the courts, the Conservative Party provided all of the information requested by Elections Canada. We are impatiently awaiting the resolution of this matter before the courts because we have a great deal of confidence in our legal position.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me as though the Prime Minister is suggesting that the RCMP has gone on a fishing expedition, prompted by Elections Canada, in the offices of the Conservative Party.

In actual fact, what the government is doing is closing the doors to the transparency that it promised the Canadian people. The Conservatives campaigned that they would be as pure as the driven snow. It turns out that it is not much different over here than it was over there and the RCMP has had to be called in again. The question is, why? What do the Conservatives have to hide?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, in this particular case, a case that is before the courts because the Conservative Party initiated the case, the Conservative Party gave Elections Canada all the documents it asked for.

As the House leader said, it is unclear in our mind why exactly Elections Canada is undertaking this action today. Its officials were scheduled to be examined by our lawyers tomorrow. In any case, that will go ahead at some point. We remain extremely optimistic and confident about the public resolution of this matter.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for eight months, the Conservatives have been stonewalling attempts by a parliamentary committee to investigate the in and out scandal. The Conservatives even took Elections Canada to court in a phony attempt to delay the investigation. Now the Conservatives have stonewalled so long that the elections commissioner has had to call in the RCMP.

Will the government now, at long last, with its pants on fire, admit the truth and tell Canadians why it covered up this scandal?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the visit by Elections Canada today to the office is related to the issues of the court case that we initiated because of our difference of opinion with Elections Canada, and we are very optimistic about that.

As for the procedure and House affairs committee effort, which members of the Liberal Party initiated, let us be honest about why they are doing that. There is legislation waiting to be studied at that committee that the Liberal Party demanded, legislation on the visual identification of voters, which their leader stood up and told Canadians that he wanted to see passed, but guess what? He has changed his mind and is against it. He does not want Canadians to know about that flip-flop.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives deny having offered compensation to Chuck Cadman. They refuse to hold an inquiry into the Mulroney affair. The RCMP is going through their offices to investigate election financing irregularities. The mayor of Ottawa is the subject of a criminal investigation because of the Minister of the Environment.

Will the man at the centre of all of these scandals finally stand up and take responsibility? My question is for the Prime Minister.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party, for some time, has had no substantive policy. There has been a vacuum of leadership. When its members take positions they change them.

As a result, without any vision for the country, all they can do is focus on and create imaginary scandals.

The imaginary scandal they are chasing today is actually on a court case initiated by our party, the Conservative Party, to advance our interests because of a disagreement we have with Elections Canada. That is hardly a scandal. It is a question of a solid interpretation of the law as a result of the fact that we do follow all Canada's election laws, a stark contrast with what we saw in the past from that party.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, documents filed in the Federal Court by Elections Canada make it clear that one of the architects of the illegal in and out scheme was Conservative Party executive director Mike Donison. Another was Conservative past campaign chair Tom Flanagan.

Mr. Donison is now the senior policy adviser to the Minister for Democratic Reform. Given today's RCMP raid, will Mr. Donison be stepping aside from his current role?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Elections Canada is in a dispute with the Conservative Party, for which the Conservative Party has taken Elections Canada to court.

We are very confident of our grounds. We have based them on our interpretation of the law, an interpretation that is not only consistent with our view but consistent with the conduct in the way other parties have interpreted the law through their own spending practices. They had better be hoping that we succeed in our court case because that would mean they have been doing things right too.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Donison is the minister's chief advisor on democratic reform despite the fact that he was involved in the Conservatives' illegal in and out financing scheme. The RCMP was forced to seize Conservative Party documents related to that illegal scheme.

Will the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons ask Mike Donison to submit his resignation this very day?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated several times, this is flowing out of the disagreement with Elections Canada that the Conservative Party has brought to the courts.

For some reason, Elections Canada has asked the RCMP to assist it with its warrant. The RCMP has made it clear, contrary to what we have heard from over there, that it is simply assisting Elections Canada in its process. Why that is necessary in advance of a process where we have indicated a willingness to disclose every document it asked for, I do not understand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is reasonable for us to suspect that the scheme whereby the Conservative government illegally spent \$1.2 million in 2006 is behind the RCMP searches. The Prime Minister is telling us that it is normal for the RCMP to conduct a search. Next the Prime Minister will be telling us that the RCMP is paying a courtesy call to the Conservative Party.

We know that it takes a warrant to be able to conduct a search. Will the government commit to immediately making the RCMP warrant public?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our election financing activities are legal. We know that they are legal because they are upheld by the law. We are not the only ones. Other political parties have used the same practices for years without any problems.

• (1435)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has just spoken about all of the parties. I would remind the leader of the government that only the Conservatives' election reports are being challenged, not those of the other parties.

If this government, champion of transparency, has nothing to hide, let it table the search warrant in this House. That is what we want.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he puts it very well, the hon. member does, when he points out that it is only the Conservative Party that was singled out by Elections Canada, which is odd when all political parties use exactly the same approach. That is why we went to court to have the matter cleared up—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is too much noise. I cannot hear the answer.

The government House leader was asked a question. He has the floor to respond and we will hear his response. Order, please.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, that is why we have the same situation at the procedure and House affairs committee. It wishes a study only of Conservative spending practices in this regard. We have asked that the identical spending practices of all the parties be studied, which those members are all refusing to have done.

We believe all parties should be treated equally. All parties should be held to the same standard in the law. That is why we have taken Elections Canada to court. That is why we want the procedure and House affairs committee to be balanced.

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*[Translation]***MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in July, the 540 employees of Golden Brand, a manufacturing firm in Montreal, will lose their jobs as a direct result of potentially unfair competition from China in the clothing and textile industry.

Does the Conservative government realize that its lack of leadership at the WTO is costing jobs, including the jobs at Golden Brand, and that this is destroying the social and industrial fabric of Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when something like this happens, it is sad, of course, for a region and also for the employees and their families, who will go through difficult times.

That is why we are putting measures in place to support regional economic development. That is also why we have to continue working so that we can provide the necessary tools for entrepreneurs who want to start or expand a business or access new markets.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is a totally ridiculous answer to give the employees. In recent years, Chinese textile and clothing imports have increased eightfold. During that time, the Bloc Québécois has urged the government to use temporary safeguards to protect the clothing industry against this sudden, damaging increase in Chinese imports, as other countries have done.

What is the federal government waiting for to protect the employees of Golden Brand and the 100,000 workers who depend on the textile and clothing industry in Quebec and Canada?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the textile industry, we have established the CANtex program, which provides up to \$100,000 in non-repayable contributions for companies that want to purchase new equipment and expand. In addition, we can offer loans.

The tools are there for entrepreneurs who want them.

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*[English]***AFGHANISTAN**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 17 months now this government has failed to address allegations of torture and evidence of corruption in Afghanistan. Now, at a very delicate moment, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has made an extreme clumsy mistake that undermines international efforts in Kandahar.

Both the Minister of Defence and General Hillier have spoken warmly in public about the governor, but behind closed doors, apparently, it is another message and another tune from the government. Then the minister makes the colossal mistake of babbling in front of the media. What does the Prime Minister intend to do about this mess?

● (1440)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan is a foreign state that makes its own decisions about government appointments. I can assure members that Canada fully respects this and is not calling for any changes to the Afghan government.

Members need to know that Canada is in Afghanistan to help it become a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state so that never again can Afghanistan become a haven for terrorists threatening both global and Canadian security.

As the Prime Minister said, we have full confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs because he is doing a great job for Canada.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the response from the Prime Minister's stand-in.

[Translation]

The diplomatic efforts of the men and women in Afghanistan have been thwarted by this government's incompetence.

With one careless comment, the Minister of Foreign Affairs sabotaged months of diplomatic efforts and effectively crushed all international efforts in favour of human rights and against corruption.

The Prime Minister claims to be a champion of responsibility and transparency. Will he ask his minister of—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Liberal stand-in leader.

Afghanistan is a foreign state that makes its own decisions about government appointments. I can assure members that Canada fully respects this and is not calling for any change in the Government of Afghanistan. We have full confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is doing a great job for Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could have asked a question today regarding the incompetence of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, who says one thing in private and the opposite in public concerning Bill C-10. That is real minor league stuff. I could also talk about the incompetence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who embarrassed us in Afghanistan. Actually, he embarrasses us everywhere.

However, considering that General Hillier, the real National Defence minister, has just announced his resignation, can the other Minister of National Defence tell us why he insists on muzzling the military police complaints commission and literally destroying over a year's worth of work on the torture investigation? What does he have to hide?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to welcome the hon. member who is once again the defence critic. Clearly, just as the Prime Minister said, General Hillier had our full confidence. He worked very hard for our country and to rebuild the Canadian Forces. Unfortunately, the hon. member did not share General Hillier's opinion. I would nevertheless like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank General Hillier for his service to Canada.

[*English*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even the military police complaints commissioner himself has said how disappointed he is that the government will not show transparency and accountability. Its court application will not only prevent public hearings but would kill the whole investigation that is going on, for more than a year.

The Minister of Defence can try any excuse he wants, but his actions and the actions of the government are clear. They want to stop anyone from investigating allegations of torture. What does the government have to hide?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary, I think we have seen a historic effort in transparency. We have given the police commissioner access to over 1,300 documents, with 38 witnesses. We have had 17

technical briefings. That is 16 more than the members opposite when they were in government.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: We'd prefer to have a real investigation.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I know that Foghorn Leghorn across the way does not want the answer, Mr. Speaker, but let me continue. We have had debates in the House of Commons. We have had votes in the House of Commons, which again is something the members opposite refused to do. We have had unprecedented cooperation with the armed forces. We support the men and—

The Speaker: Mercifully, I am unfamiliar with all these names.

The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

* * *

• (1445)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and his trade minister stated that human rights were a federal matter and it was not the province's role to get involved. This week, after a trip to China, trade minister Pupatello suggested that Canada should nurture a dialogue with China regarding human rights in Tibet.

Could the justice minister please tell the House the government's view on who should be advancing the issue of human rights?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was only a few days ago that the Ontario government was trying to pass off human rights as solely a federal responsibility. Now it is suggesting that there should be dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama and that Canada may be able to help. I am glad it finally figured out that human rights are the responsibility of all levels of government.

This government is interested in promoting human rights. We continue to encourage dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama and the full respect of all human rights.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Chief of the Defence Staff will announce his resignation today. This will have an effect on our troops, our international relationships and the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

General Hillier has shaped the conduct of the war in Afghanistan for both Liberal and Conservative governments. Can the defence minister explain what steps he has taken to ensure a smooth transfer of leadership at the highest level of the forces? Will Canada's next chief of the defence staff be subject to approval of the Standing Committee on National Defence prior to the appointment?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat ironic to see this new-found interest in the Canadian Forces by that member and the NDP.

However, again returning to the subject of General Hillier, this is a man who has overseen an unprecedented period of growth within the Canadian Forces. He spoke of “a decade of darkness”. That reversed with the coming to office of the Conservative government. We have seen investment both in our personnel and our equipment. We have seen General Hillier preside over a period of time in which the esprit de corps of the Canadian Forces has reached historic heights.

We will continue to work with the Canadian Forces to see that the forces have that leadership in the future.

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AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was forced to repudiate his Minister of Foreign Affairs's suggestion yesterday that the governor of Kandahar should be replaced. This has actually squeezed President Karzai by making the actual replacement of Asadullah Khalid practically impossible.

Quite frankly, the foreign affairs minister is becoming an embarrassment to all Canadians.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that putting a flat tax poster boy in charge of Canada's affairs abroad was a very bad idea? Does he not realize that the conduct of our Minister of Foreign Affairs has to be more than just a photo op?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said, and as I am repeating, Afghanistan is a sovereign state that makes its own decisions about government appointments. I can assure the member that Canada fully respects this and is not calling for any changes in the Afghan government.

As the Prime Minister has said, everybody has full confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is doing a great job for Canada, for his constituency, and for Quebec.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FEDERAL ELECTION

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Barry Cooper is a good friend of the Prime Minister and Tom Flanagan. Mr. Cooper was the head of Friends of Science, a group being investigated for defrauding the University of Calgary by circulating anti-Kyoto ads during the last election campaign. Worse yet, it seems that Mr. Cooper's lobbyists were working for the Conservative Party and they were the ones deciding where those ads would be circulated.

What did the government offer in exchange for Barry Cooper's help during the last election campaign?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, average Canadians are concerned about our mission in Afghanistan and concerned about the quality of health care offered to Canadians. People have real concerns about the economy and what is going on in the United States.

All we have opposite is a party with no policy, a party with no leadership, a party with no vision, and a party following these made up scandals. Those members should concentrate on the priorities of hard-working Canadians.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a research trust at the University of Calgary was misused to fund illegal advertising during the last federal election campaign. The group involved, Friends of Science, is now advising the minister on his climate change policy.

We have the likes of Flanagan, Cooper and Paulsen involved in yet another scheme to break election advertising rules. They ran climate change denier ads in five markets in Ontario. Does the House know who oversaw that? It was the environment minister.

Who is responsible for yet another attempt to cheat the electorate and buy the election?

• (1450)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, blah, blah, blah. The member for Ottawa Centre puts on his tinfoil hat and develops these great theories.

There are two reasons why this government is in office. One is because of the leadership of the Prime Minister of Canada and the other is because of the support of the Liberal Party of Canada.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a Prime Minister who is willing to speak to Mr. Cadman's words and Mrs. Cadman's, and what they mean, but who is not willing to speak to his own words and what they mean. Why?

His own words. He knows what he said and why he said them. Instead, silence. Day after day.

To the Prime Minister, it is time. Just look up, just stand up, just explain.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for York Centre is setting an indoor record here for missing the point.

The simple fact of the matter is it did not happen. The Liberals have made an accusation that a \$1 million life insurance policy was drawn up and offered to Chuck Cadman. It did not happen. The accusations by the Liberals are false.

The member for York Centre should be embarrassed for repeatedly asking these embarrassing questions rather than asking substantive questions that are of interest to his constituents.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing. Nothing. The Prime Minister just sits there with every question, slinking lower into his seat, deeper into his papers, hoping it will all go away. Well, it is not going away.

To the Prime Minister: just look up, just stand up, just explain.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to standing up in the House of Commons, we are the people who stand up and vote in this place for a better future for this country. We are the political party in this country. We have the lowest taxes in this country in 50 years and the largest investment in infrastructure in this country in 60 years.

There is new support for new Canadians, support for our farmers, and the cutting of the landing fee for new Canadians in half. We are standing up for Canadians day in and day out.

The Liberals can sit there with their imaginary scandals and their imaginary problems that they continue to put before the House of Commons because day in and day out Canadians can rest assured that the Prime Minister and the government will continue building a better Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

CBC

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, in his attempt to justify cutting all francophone artists from the edited version of the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame Gala, the vice-president of CBC/Radio-Canada, Richard Stursberg, provided totally unacceptable explanations for someone representing a crown corporation.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages repudiate those comments?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that CBC missed a good opportunity to present francophone talent when it rebroadcast the edited version of the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame Gala.

As the hon. member knows, the Standing Committee on Official Languages and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage have both invited CBC/Radio-Canada executives to appear before them in order to answer some difficult questions.

* * *

METALLURGY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, I will attend Rio Tinto's annual shareholders' meeting in London, and I will ask the board of directors about the future of the aluminum industry and its jobs in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region.

Does the Conservative government realize that by refusing to impose conditions on the sale of Alcan to Rio Tinto, it has abandoned the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region and made a lot of people very worried?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the company in question continues to fulfill the obligations that it has given to both the government of Quebec and the Government of Canada. It continues to make investments and to make the industry stronger. I expect that this industry will continue to flourish, both in this region of Canada, as well as elsewhere.

* * *

● (1455)

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to fool Canadians. It began a bogus civil lawsuit to try to get refunds from Elections Canada to which it was not entitled.

The RCMP never executes search warrants in civil cases and the minister knows that. We have here a quasi-criminal investigation that was begun by a former crown prosecutor, the Commissioner of Elections.

The minister knows the difference. Why will he not just admit it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from the quasi-official opposition for that question. I think we have dealt with this issue many times.

In terms of the election financing approaches, we comply with all aspects of the election laws in question. We have a disagreement with Elections Canada on how it should be interpreted. That is why we initiated an action in the courts and we are content to have it settled in the courts.

I know he would like to have parliamentary committees settle all legal matters. We believe the courts are the right place to do it.

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[Translation]

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it may seem unbelievable and unlikely—even crazy—but once again, people are trying to cast doubt on our desire to stand up for supply management at the WTO. That is even crazier in light of the fact that the Bloc, which voted against supply management in the Speech from the Throne, is not present at the WTO. The Bloc is absent from power; the Bloc is not there for Quebec.

Can the Secretary of State (Agriculture) tell us for the hundredth time that our Conservative government is standing up for supply management at the WTO?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, are we fighting tooth and nail for supply management at the WTO? The answer is yes. Where is the Bloc? Not there.

Did we invoke GATT article XXVIII in defence of supply management?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis: Where was the Bloc?

Some hon. members: Not there.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Did we implement compositional standards for cheese?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Where was the Bloc?

Some hon. members: Not there.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Did we implement special safeguard measures to protect supply management?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Where was the Bloc?

Some hon. members: Not there.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Will we, the Conservatives, do everything in our power to protect supply management?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Where will the Bloc be?

Some hon. members: Not there.

Hon. Christian Paradis: The Bloc will not be there for Quebec.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is sounding the alarm in *Le Devoir* today. She said that signing and ratifying an international agreement means we have to live up to it or pay the penalty. Sheila Fraser said that the price of failing to meet Kyoto should be included in the Conservative federal budget, but it is not.

Will the finance minister heed the warning of Canada's Auditor General, or does he plan to stick future generations with a bill for his government's failure on climate change?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will do two things. We will immediately continue to move forward on our plans to reduce greenhouse gases and help fight global warming.

Let me assure the member from the NDP, if any bills come in to Canada from the dark 10 years of the previous government, we will be sending them to the leader of the Liberal Party to go with his \$800,000 campaign debt.

[Translation]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if a person rents a car and does not make the payments, the car will be repossessed. If a person does not pay their mortgage, the house will be repossessed. If a person does not pay their credit card bill, they will be cut off and action will be taken against them. Why? Because there is a contract. The agreement was broken and there are consequences.

Why does the government refuse to follow Sheila Fraser's advice? Why is it ignoring the penalty it must pay for Kyoto?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we knew very well that something needed to be done, and that is why we took action. We created real regulations for absolute reductions for Canada's major polluters, something that never happened with the previous government.

We must work with the other countries to obtain real results. We are taking action, we are getting real results for Canada.

* * *

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are hiding the truth from Canadians. They filed a bogus civil suit against Elections Canada. They know very well that the RCMP never executes search warrants in civil cases. This morning, the RCMP executed a warrant in a quasi-criminal case.

How is it that the government does not know the difference?

● (1500)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, RCMP officials have said publicly that it is not an RCMP investigation. They have referred all calls to Elections Canada. They have indicated they were asked to assist by Elections Canada in executing an Elections Canada mandate.

We understand it is in relation to the issue of the campaign financing questions and our approach on spending, which is the subject of a lawsuit we have initiated with Elections Canada.

We are quite confident of our case. We are quite confident of our practices. We continue to stand by that and will in the future.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the party—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to be able to hear the question. The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville has the floor. We will have some order, please.

Perhaps the hon. member for Bourassa and the hon. member for Fredericton could have a Valium. We have to be able to hear the question of the hon. member.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Winnipeg the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice unveiled more measures the government is taking to protect Canadians from crime, tough new provisions to combat auto theft. Yet, some were critical of the new measures, saying they do not go far enough to address petty auto theft and dangerous joyriding.

What can the Minister of Justice tell us about the history of the bill and other efforts of the government to deal with auto theft?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are simple. Every three minutes a car is stolen in this country and it costs Canadians over \$1.2 billion. That is why the government is taking real action to protect Canadians against this very serious crime.

This is in contrast to the Liberals and their soft on crime approach. They recently gutted the private member's bill on auto theft by getting rid of the mandatory jail terms. That is their approach. Our message to car thieves is clear: The free ride is over.

The Speaker: That will bring to a conclusion the question period for today.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to table the audit performed by the University of Calgary audit services, which I referred to in my question during question period today, and which clearly demonstrates the kind of fraud that was ongoing in the last election campaign.

I seek unanimous consent so Canadians can know the truth.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Ottawa South have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I now recognize the hon. member for Joliette, who rises on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION—BILL C-490

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in reply to the claims the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform made in his point of order of April 8, 2008, I would like to review the arguments he cited to argue against the need for a royal recommendation to allow for a vote on Bill C-490 at third reading.

With regard to royal recommendation, s. 54 of the Constitution Act, 1867 states the following:

It shall not be lawful for the House of Commons to adopt or pass any Vote, Resolution, Address, or Bill for the Appropriation of any Part of the Public Revenue, or of any Tax or Impost, to any Purpose that has not been first recommended to that House by Message of the Governor General in the Session in which such Vote, Resolution, Address, or Bill is proposed.

Clearly any bill that would establish a new program requiring monies from the public treasury requires a royal recommendation. We all agree on that. It is based on the principle of responsible government.

As for the matter of procedural principle, the Chair must examine the notion of appropriation that is referred to in section 54 and that has always been debated in this House. The *Robert* dictionary defines appropriation as "taking possession of, ownership of". Yet the aim of this bill is quite the opposite of a measure requiring a royal recommendation. Instead of assuming ownership of money

from the public purse, the bill states that this money belongs to seniors and not to the government.

The spirit of the Constitution Act, 1867 must be understood in such a way that a distinction is made between the creation of a program that requires new public funds and a bill that forces the government to pay money back to people who never consented to giving it to them in the first place. That is precisely the case in the guaranteed income supplement file and Bill C-490.

Let us be clear. The people affected by this bill should have received the amounts requested. If they had applied for them the first year they were entitled to them, that money would in fact have been paid. The government deliberately kept seniors in the dark, hoping that most of them would not assert their rights and counting on the fact that this misappropriation of funds would not be reimbursed retroactively.

It is ridiculous that the government can put money owing into the public treasury but cannot take money out for spending that should have taken place, but did not.

In closing, it is appalling to watch the Conservatives play politics by raising this point of order. When the Conservatives were on the opposition side they joined with the Bloc Québécois in calling for full retroactivity of the money owed to seniors under the guaranteed income supplement program. This was even part of their election platform.

Since they have been in power, they have changed their tune when they had the chance to take action. Seniors in Quebec will remember the Conservatives' broken promises, as will all Quebecers.

I am convinced that the argument that has just been made will ensure that Bill C-490 will not require a royal recommendation. We could then proceed to a vote on this bill at third reading stage, for the good of our seniors and social justice.

●(1505)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Joliette for his remarks.

I will now turn the floor over to the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, who would also like to rise on a point of order.

[*English*]

COMMENTS DURING ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During the response to a question from the member for Ottawa South, the environment minister suggested that the member for Ottawa Centre was not aware of what was going on because perhaps he was wearing his tinfoil hat a little too tight.

I just want the Minister of the Environment to clarify which member he was referring to and to assure him that the only hats I have in my cupboard are ones for the Ottawa Senators.

Government Orders

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have great esteem for the member for Ottawa Centre and while I would accuse him of many things, I have no evidence of him ever wearing a tinfoil hat. If in any way, shape or form I misspoke, I say to the great member for Ottawa Centre that I apologize.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before the break for oral questions, I was discussing the whole matter of balance and how we have to address these issues. As I was saying, this is a deep concern for all Canadians. There is an ongoing dialogue among Canadians about what a balanced approach is and how we get there.

As I mentioned, the Conservative members have a strong slogan. They are involved in a war on crime, a war on drugs, and their fearmongering is reminiscent of the Republicans.

In response to the Conservatives' announcement to battle auto theft, Dan Lett, a reporter with the *Winnipeg Free Press*, said in an article:

[The Prime Minister's] pledge Monday was to introduce tougher laws to crack down on the trafficking of stolen vehicles and parts.

The problem is that the changes he outlined will do precious little to help the situation here, where auto theft is less about organized syndicates and more about a bunch of teenagers out for a dangerous joyride...

He continued:

This approach to fighting crime is probably the best example of not actually doing anything while creating the impression something is being done.

The so-called "war" on crime is often about being seen to be addressing the problem, while ignoring the root causes that lurk below the public's radar, and seemingly outside of the grasp of politicians.

He continued:

Longer sentences mean more people in remand, on trial and in jail, which means significant increases in the costs of administering the courts and of incarceration. That leaves less money for social programs that divert potential auto thieves to more wholesome activities.

As more young people experience prison—we already incarcerate youth at 10 times the rate of European countries—society can boast more graduates of what is essentially a post-secondary education in crime.

That was Dan Lett from the *Winnipeg Free Press* in response to the most recent announcement that the Conservatives made on their war on crime.

Those are important points to consider. They are certainly points that have been raised in the House in this debate on Bill C-26. In fact, Bill C-26 is part of a larger effort by the Conservative government in its war on crime. What is important in terms of how we move forward is that we need to look at how we address issues.

We also saw in the *Winnipeg Free Press* yesterday an article about a recent gang related shooting. It is a serious issue.

As I said earlier, this affects people from coast to coast to coast. We have an issue in this country that is related to drugs and gangs. We need to have a debate on finding an approach that will make a difference and make communities safer.

I would like to focus on a number of pieces that are directly related to my riding. The issues of drugs and crimes are very closely related. We look at the drug policy budget and the amount of money that is being spent on enforcement. In my riding there are dozens of first nations. They have separate jurisdiction which comes under federal jurisdiction. Their funding for their band constable program is an intrinsic part of dealing with this issue as it relates to policing.

• (1510)

There are four communities that are very closely situated. About a month ago, children and youth from the Island Lake communities, which include Wasagamack, Garden Hill, St. Theresa Point and Red Sucker Lake, decided to walk from the Island Lake area to Winnipeg. They were protesting the lack of attention by the government to the serious health and social issues, including drug issues and gang related issues.

In the fiscal year 2006-07 when the Conservative government took power, it cut all of those communities' band constable funding. Those four communities had band constable programs, which all first nations expect and require, as all Canadians do, to participate in policing efforts. That band constable funding went from an average of \$70,000, which each of those communities was receiving, to zero in 2006-07. Those funds were reinstated in the last fiscal budget.

There is an impact when the government cuts literacy and housing programs. The member for Trinity—Spadina talked about the relation between housing and gangs and drugs. It is a critical issue. As Dan Lett so aptly said, it is the root cause and we cannot ignore the root cause in this dialogue.

When we talk specifically about drug policy, we are talking about issues related to prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement but we are also talking about the other issues. The government, which claims to be tough on crime, has not made any effort to ensure that as a society we address all the issues in order to ensure safer communities. We cannot address this issue piecemeal.

Building more jails in order to be tough on crime is part of a Republican strategy that creates more criminals. In fact, many of the amendments that we are talking about are going to have an impact not on the big drug suppliers or the people who are involved in organized crime but the people at the lower end of the chain. Research has found that mandatory minimum sentences are blunt instruments that fail to distinguish between hard core and transient drug users.

Government Orders

We want to participate in an effort to build safer societies and communities. That is the approach that the Liberals are condoning. That is the approach we have to move forward on. Without a doubt, the relationship between drugs and gangs is something that does not escape anybody.

In fact, one of the primary pieces of work with respect to the Mental Health Commission has been around the issue of addiction. The Mental Health Commission has seen that as a priority. It is moving forward to create pilot projects. I am sad to say that this is another piece in which northern Canada has not been identified as a part of the country that will be participating in this pilot project. I have a very large riding. It encompasses about two-thirds of the province of Manitoba. There are dozens and dozens of communities and they require these services as well.

• (1515)

Where we have all these group causes and support systems within communities and within a society that are intrinsic in building a healthy community, we have seen the government make very little effort. In fact, it eliminated the national child care strategies, which affected not only all of the provinces, but also first nations. Through the Assembly of First Nations, first nations signed the national child care strategy with the government.

We also have the issue of housing. The government often says that it has identified more money than any government for first nations housing, but not one penny of that money was identified for on reserve housing. A primary concern the youth who participated in a walk from the Island Lake Tribal Council area is around social issues, overcrowded housing which would be completely unacceptable in any other part of our country, being one of the issues.

As I said, we could not find a group of youth who are more committed to trying to raise the issue of the crisis in which they live. There is the issue of health services. The government talks about its commitment to human rights, yet it brought forward a bill on human rights, which sought to repeal section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act for first nations, exempting the Indian Act. The aboriginal affairs committee worked very hard and long on this issue. Approximately 95% of the witnesses who presented at committee made recommendations to ensure the collective rights of indigenous peoples to participate in Canadian society and human rights for first nations.

I raise this matter again because it is dumbfounding to me that children residing on reserve do not get health services for complex medical needs. Health care should be a universal right in Canada. The youth from the Island Lake Tribal Council walked because they were concerned about drugs and gangs in their own communities. They are seeking assurance from the government that they can move forward.

We on this side of the House are recommending a holistic way of moving forward, addressing these issues, their root causes and identifying how we can hear from Canadians and amend the bill so it ensures we are moving toward a safe society.

• (1520)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her insights on this matter,

particularly with respect to the announcement yesterday, a typical Conservative announcement which appears to do something about something when in fact it does nothing about what the subject matter might be.

First, does the member have in her possession or is she knowledgeable about any study anywhere, any place, any time that shows imposing harsher sentences on people who steal cars and things of that nature have any impact whatsoever on the actual incidents of auto theft? It would seem to me that if we are to start a Criminal Code initiative, we should at least start with some basic fundamental evidence on that point.

My second question is with respect to the misallocation of funding. I agree with the member entirely. When we do this kind of funding, essentially we are putting more people in jail, or hope to anyway. In this case funds are taken out of the community and put into jails. Under our previous government, my community had initiatives, particularly in Scarborough Village area, where it put money into the community and crime rates went down.

Could the member comment upon this misallocation of funding? What we put into the penalty system is effectively taken out of the community. Is this consistent with her own experience?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an excellent point. There is no evidence that demonstrates longer incarceration sentences would have a positive impact on an individual. In fact, it has been proven in many studies that a multi-pronged approach needs to be in place and that rehabilitation is an intrinsic part of dealing with offenders.

I will also add that the bill, as it stands, would take away a judge's discretionary powers with respect to the offenders, the offences and mitigating circumstances. The member raises a very important point and I thank him for that.

I also thank him for raising the issue on investment in crime prevention. It was a very serious part of how the Liberals would approach the issues of crime. Under the current government, crime prevention dollars have been rolled back in my communities. In fact, the Island Lake Tribal Council, which I talked about, is an area which did receive crime prevention dollars and it had a very positive impact. For people who do not know, those first nations do not receive funding for recreational services.

Again, first nations do not receive infrastructure funding through the dollars transferred to the provinces. They do not receive funding for recreational facilities or programs, like other Canadians. They are lacking not only that funding source, but now they have lost their crime prevention dollars. As I said, the testament of youth walking 800 kilometres in the cold spring weather through winter roads is an absolute shame. Here is a community in which young people are saying to the government that they need all of these pieces to move forward.

Government Orders

We on this side of the House are not saying that we should not be looking at this. We need to look at it. We do have serious gang and drug related activities in our country. It is causing serious pain and damage to many communities. This is not only happening in the urban centres, it is happening in rural Canada, including towns and first nations. I believe Canadians want to participate in this dialogue, and it is really important that we send it to committee.

• (1525)

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, listening to the debate, I cannot fail to mention the fact that so many of our aboriginal people are in penitentiaries across our country, in numbers that are greater than they should be as far as percentages when we look at the small population of the aboriginal community in Canada.

At the aboriginal affairs committee, which I have been on since I became a member, one of the witnesses who came before us was an ombudsman for people who were in prison. He presented numbers that showed a very alarming rate of offenders in the prison system came from aboriginal communities. Not only that, many times they do not qualify for rehabilitative programs because of the way they are labelled in the prison system.

With the bills that are being introduced by the Conservative government, will we be seeing more of our people in the system instead of them getting out of the system and becoming contributors to society?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nunavut's question is about a critical issue. I represent a riding that has 36 first nations and numerous Métis people as well. This pattern runs across all aboriginal peoples in Canada. We do have a disproportionate number of aboriginal people within the prison system.

Whenever issues around this type of legislation come up, it becomes a primary concern within our communities. The whole effort must be on crime prevention and supporting people. It needs to be about addressing root causes. I am not saying that criminals should not be incarcerated, that people should escape incarceration for certain crimes. However, there needs to be a balanced approach. We need to address and be very clear and honest about the fact that there are disproportionate rates of aboriginal people in prison. We need to support communities and not pull their crime prevention or band constable funding.

We should invest in addressing the root causes. The cost, as Mr. Lett said in his article, of a post-secondary education in crime is far more expensive than a post-secondary education that would benefit to the country. It is about investing in the country. I do not understand this sort of fearmongering, the mentality of war on crime, pulling funding that addresses root causes. It has never been proven by data or research to have any benefit and it is an enormous cost to the country. Those are the pieces we need to look at as we move forward on the bill.

• (1530)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not usually quote from newspaper editorials but at the end of last year I came across an editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen*, which accurately reflects, although it was the best editorial, the number of editorials on this issue in major newspapers across the country. The

heading reads, "Drug-induced stupidity", and it is in reference to Bill C-26. The editorial states:

More than half the people incarcerated in American federal prisons are there on drug charges, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, and about one-fifth of those in state prisons. This doesn't count people whose crimes were indirectly related to drugs, but it includes people jailed for life for possessing one marijuana joint. Nevertheless, the war on drugs rages on.

Canada's Conservative government is choosing to copy this strategy, which has been failing non-stop since Prohibition. The reason Canada has drug addicts on its streets is supposedly that dealers aren't going to prison for long enough, so Tory Justice Minister...has a bill to make the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act harsher. Judges have had the discretion to sentence drug criminals according to the evidence presented in their cases, but now [the Justice Minister] wants to change that by imposing mandatory minimum sentences.

For instance, anyone dealing in marijuana would go to jail for at least a year if he or she did so in support of "organized crime" (that is, in a moneymaking enterprise involving three or more people). That covers just about all marijuana dealers, who are by definition organized if they have one supplier and one customer. Most of the changes are like this.

Some drug users might be exempted from the minimums if they're diverted into special drug courts that focus on treating addicts. But an addict who deals to support his habit, who can't break the addiction despite treatment? Why, what he needs is more prison time, right?

Actually, wrong. This is bad law in pursuit of bad politics based on non-existent science. Parliament shouldn't go along.

We in the NDP will not go along with this. We made that quite clear, as opposed to the other opposition parties that have stood in the House and made speeches opposing mandatory minimums in this area but then will vote in principle in support of sending the bill to committee. That is, in particular, the Liberal Party and its eternal shame.

This bill would do absolutely nothing to reduce drug consumption in our society. All we need to do is look to our neighbours to the south, or to the north if one is from Windsor, and their experience of the last 35 years. It is uninterrupted. Over that period of time, the United States has actively engaged in its so-called war on drugs but what do we have today? The production of drugs in the United States and around the globe is up. The consumption of illegal drugs in the United States is up. Prison populations have more than doubled and, in some cases, tripled, in terms of the number of people incarcerated on drug charges. The cost of that war on drugs is up in the range of 10 to 20 times higher depending on the state in the United States.

In the last few years, the United States has finally recognized that its war on drugs was not working. Last year, in Detroit, Michigan, the neighbouring state across the river to my riding in Ontario, the state legislature, which controls the criminal law in the area of illegal drugs, began reducing the charges where if people are convicted on drug charges they would have a mandatory minimum.

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● (1535)

The state legislature did it for two reasons. I could be somewhat cynical and say that it was only because of how much it was costing and the rate of incarceration that was occurring in that state, but it also did it because it finally recognized that it was not working. We can go through at least half a dozen to a dozen states just in the last few years that have begun to drop mandatory minimums with regard to drug offences.

In spite of those experiences in the United States and in spite of the Conservative government knowing about those experiences, it intends to copy that failed experiment.

Since the Conservative government has been in power, both of the justice ministers and the public safety ministers have appeared before the justice committee and the public safety committee. I and other members of the committees have repeatedly asked them about the basis on which they were making these decisions. Their answers have always been ideological. I want to say, and maybe its to their credit, that I have no hesitation in saying that they believe in that ideology. They believe that by mimicking the U.S. experience in fighting drug crime that they will change society and that it will work.

Unfortunately, when we hear them say those things, their tendency is to pursue it. However, there is absolutely no scientific basis or any study they can point to showing that mandatory minimums in the drug area work in reducing the consumption of drugs or reducing crime as a result of that consumption.

I and my party do not for a minute downplay the consequences of the crime rates that are going on around drug consumption. We know the level of crime rate in those specific areas and the consequential crimes that are committed in our society as a result of people breaking and entering, doing armed robberies or doing other violent acts because they no longer are in control or because they need financial resources to buy drugs.

We are very conscious in our communities. I live next door to the city of Detroit, a city that has one of the highest crime rates in a country that has one of the highest crime rates in the world. We hear on a daily basis about the crime that goes on there. My community is somewhat lucky that more of it has not spilled over but it does spill over to some degree.

Victims live in my community. It is to the eternal shame of the Conservative Party that it continues to mislead the Canadian public by saying that introducing these kind of amendments to the Criminal Code and to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act will somehow reduce the level of victimization in this country. It will not happen. The government cannot point to one jurisdiction in the world where this has worked.

When the Conservatives stand in the House and repeatedly mislead Canadians, which I am not suggesting they do intentionally, they really believe this will work. When they refuse to face the facts, to look at the reports and to look at all of the research that has been done in this area, they are misleading the Canadian public because it will not work.

When my colleague from B.C. gave a speech a while ago, he gave the classic definition of insanity as being someone who repeats over and over again the same course of conduct and expects a different result. The United States has followed that policy with regard to its approach on its war on drugs and now the Conservative government is attempting to do the same thing. It will repeat the same errors over and over again and it will not get any different results. The consumption rate of drugs and the production of drugs will continue to climb and we will continue to be a market for them.

● (1540)

Every study that we have done shows that we need to get at the whole issue of treatment and getting people off drugs. Putting them into prisons is not the solution. It just simply does not work.

I want to spend a few more minutes on what always bothers me about the government when it passes these kinds of laws.

An analysis was done on the impact this bill would have on the incarceration rate. It would have the effect of increasing the population in our provincial jails, for which the government pays nothing, by significant percentages. We know that at least 700 to 900 additional people will go into our jails, which, quite frankly, is optimistic to think it will be that low, if this bill goes through as it is presently written.

I will put that into context. At the present time, roughly 10,000 to 11,000 people are incarcerated in our federal prisons. Depending on the level of security in which they are held, to the tune of about \$110,000 at the top end to roughly \$90,000 at the minimum security level, that number in federal prisons will probably increase by 1,000 in the first couple of years if this bill passes.

If this bill passes, we will have at least as many more at the provincial level because, in spite of the rhetoric that we hear from the justice minister, the bill will not go after organized crime. It will be used to go after the small pushers and the sentences as a result will be in the six month to two year range. At least half of the people incarcerated, if the bill goes through, will be incarcerated at the provincial level.

The average cost of incarceration across the country, which does vary fairly significantly from province to province, runs at about \$75,000 to \$78,000 a year, money that the provincial governments need to find. We know that especially the smaller provinces will not have the ability to cover those costs unless they take it from other parts of their budgets, which means that other programs will suffer and, in particular, some of the programs in the corrections area that are more effective at reducing illegal drug consumption.

We have heard nothing from the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Public Safety or the Minister of Finance to indicate that there will be additional funding for the correctional services at the provincial level to cover these costs, which will not be inconsequential. We are talking in the range of \$75 million to \$100 million-plus that will need to be found to cover these costs if the incarceration rate is as high as we expect it to be. The federal government has given no indication that it will help in that regard. It will simply dump that cost onto the provinces.

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We can go on with the other costs that will be related to that increased incarceration. The length of trials will go up, as has been indicated by judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers. If one is faced with a mandatory minimum sentence, chances are there will be no plea bargain but there will be a longer trial, which is the usual consequence. We only need to go across the border to the United States to see repeatedly where the length and number of trials and the reduced number of guilty pleas for these charges were altered because of the mandatory minimums.

• (1545)

That puts an additional financial burden on the court system. It means that our police are spending more time testifying in trials. It means that our prosecutors are spending time in court on these charges for longer periods of time because the trials go on longer. It is the same for our judiciary.

As for all of these costs, the vast majority of these cases, I should point out, are not tried by our federal judges. They are tried by our provincial judges. All of these costs are being serviced and dumped, literally, on the provincial governments, with no indication of any compensation from the federal government to assist them with this. I have seen no assessment of how much it is going to be, but again, it is going to be at least in the tens of millions of additional dollars in those areas.

We will see provincial governments having to draw from other programs in any number of areas in order to cover these costs. They do not have a choice. That is one of the interesting things. They have no voice in this. Police officers have to lay those charges. Crown attorneys have to ask for mandatory minimums because they are mandatory. Judges have to send people to jail for those mandatory minimums because they are mandatory. There is no discretion at all in the system. Those costs just go on.

Let me move for a minute from the effect of this to alternatives. There are in fact alternatives. We see the government actively engaged currently in trying to shut down the safe needle program in the city of Vancouver downtown in spite of a report that came out as recently as yesterday. One has to appreciate that this report came from a body that was appointed by the current government. It did a complete analysis of the 24 reports that have been done on that centre. It concluded, as every single one of those reports did, that the site should remain open, that it should receive federal funding on an ongoing basis, and that the site reduces crime rates and literally saves the lives of drug users.

We can go through all the other positives of this program. Obviously it keeps drug users out of the court system to a much greater degree, allowing the police to do other work. In spite of this, I am sure that we are going to continue to hear the government attack that centre and look for some other way to pull the plug on it. It almost did so last September, but as a result of a huge outcry from the community it backed off and extended the funding until this June.

The fear in the community in Vancouver is very palpable that the government is going to figure out some way politically to justify doing this. Again, it will not be based on any facts, any science or any of the studies that have been done. That attitude, that ideological passion, and some may say fanaticism, that we get from the

government in this area is reflected in this bill. There are no facts on which to base it. In fact, there were studies from the justice department in 2003-04 on the use of mandatory minimums specifically in the drug area.

Maybe I should diverge for a second here. My party in fact has supported the use of mandatory minimums in Parliament in areas where we think they can work. I do not know how many times I have given this speech in the House. It is a limited area. It has to be focused. We in the NDP have done so quite extensively where firearms are involved. We believe that can be justified by studies and scientific fact, but there is not one study that does not say that the use of mandatory minimums with regard to drugs is useless. There is not one.

In fact, a major study was done, I believe in 2003, by the Department of Justice. It canvassed all of the studies and prior reports that had been done and it showed this. We have to appreciate that most small drug pushers are users as well. That is who this bill is really going to end up targeting. The government says that is not the case, and that is not who it means, but that will be the result.

• (1550)

My time is up, but I would plead with the government and with the opposition party. This is the time, at second reading, to vote the bill down. In principle, the opposition party should not be supporting it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member, who I know is well versed in these areas, so they will be in-depth questions.

First, the hon. member made the obvious point that some of these measures are the same ones that the United States followed and there was no appreciable reduction in drug use. Pretty well everyone involved in the justice system knows that. Therefore, my question is this: where was the breakdown in communication? Obviously the Department of Justice researches these items and would have had this information to give to the government to show that this is not what works.

Everyone wants to reduce drug use. Does the member believe that the Department of Justice would have informed the minister of this and that the government could have come up with a more effective strategy? Where does he think the breakdown was there? That is the first question.

Second, as for the philosophy of this, if a person was in the jail system long enough to get appropriate treatment to deal with the root causes of the problem, the person would not just be kept there, have the sentence extended and come back exactly the same. We would assume that by staying in jail longer a person would get more treatment and that there would be effective and sufficient treatment in the criminal justice system.

The member probably knows better than I: does he feel that the treatments available while a person is incarcerated in today's federal justice system are sufficient?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the questions of my colleague from Yukon.

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I did find that in my notes. I found the study. Maybe somehow the government missed it. It is called “Mandatory Minimum Penalties: Their Effects on Crime, Sentencing Disparities, and Justice System Expenditures”. It was done in 2002 by the justice department. It said, “MMS”, mandatory minimum sentences, “do not appear to influence drug consumption or drug-related crime in any measurable way”. That was the basic conclusion the study reached.

To answer the question more specifically about the miscommunication, I do not think there was any miscommunication. I know a number of people in the justice department. I am sure they showed this to the justice ministers. However, again, there are blinkers being worn by the government. The Conservatives are so driven by their ideology on this issue. They sincerely believe that if we punish people more, and more severely, we can change their habits.

They are absolutely refusing—I was going to say “reluctant” but that is too soft—to open their eyes to look at anything else. If the justice officials said to them that they had done all this research, here is the result, it shows no measurable difference, and there is no use at all in us doing this, they would just ignore that. I am quite sure that this is what happened.

With regard to the other issue about the availability of treatment when a person is incarcerated, if a person is incarcerated at the provincial level, there is hardly any available treatment. What is available is so backlogged that the vast majority of people who serve two years less a day will never get through the backlog. Those people will be out of custody before treatment is available.

The situation at the federal level is not much different. The vast majority of treatment programs, especially around drugs, are fairly scarce at the federal level. They are severely backlogged in terms of availability. Again, in the vast majority of cases, people may access those treatment programs, but if they actually serve four years, they may get into it by their third year, and then they are there for such a short period of time that it really does not work.

• (1555)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent speech by my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh. I want to ask him a question pertaining to a situation in my constituency of Winnipeg North, in particular the neighbourhood of Point Douglas, which is one of the hardest hit neighbourhoods in Canada in economic and social terms.

In response to the police and in response to our mayor who, like the Conservatives, quickly jumped to get tough solutions, which we do not dismiss but want to see applied judiciously, Sel and Christine Burrows said the following:

You want to get tough with these kids... Well, I hate to tell you, but the majority of these kids have seen a bloody sight more tough than you or most of your kids will ever see. Many of our Lost Boys were unwanted boys... they were delivered into a life of misery and poverty... mental illness and addiction issues, learning disabilities, hyperactivity, racism, FASD. These are all parts of growing up a Lost Boy.

Sel and Christine Burrows suggest that putting these kids in jail is not going to be any kind of solution. They are just going to be repeating a life of crime and drug abuse. They ask us to “think outside the box” and that means thinking outside the jail cell. I am wondering if my colleague could give us some comments on this issue.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, we need to put this in the context of what has happened. I heard one of the Conservatives talking. It was like was one of those speeches that we heard being given in our legislatures, and in the United States in particular, in the run-up to prohibition. The words being used were exactly the same: prohibit the use of alcohol and all of society's evils will be cured. There is the same attitude with regard to drugs.

As for incarcerating our youth, we are seeing in the Conservatives' attempt in the youth justice bill, which is waiting before the justice committee right now to be reviewed, this attitude that more penalties and harsher penalties will cure all of society's evils, contrary to all the evidence.

We know with regard to drug consumption in particular that the vast majority of users of illicit drugs have other emotional, psychiatric and psychological problems. We can look to all sorts of experiences in Europe, where the treatment model is to get the youth at an earlier stage, and which in fact does work to a significant degree.

I am not going to suggest for a second that it is perfect. It is not. We are human beings and the people who provide that treatment are human beings and it does not work in every case, but it is clear especially for youth that if a treatment modality is used, versus an incarceration modality, the treatment modality has a success rate that is four and five times that of the incarceration modality rate.

We have the knowledge. We have the ability, from a social science standpoint, to treat. We just do not have the resources. We are much more prepared to spend millions of dollars on the war on drugs, tens of millions and hundreds of millions, as opposed to spending similar or perhaps greater amounts on a meaningful modality that would work.

• (1600)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the member's handle on some of these justice issues. With respect, I tend to disagree that we cannot do something because the member thinks it does not work and therefore we should not really do anything.

The fact is that this government has put forward millions of dollars to attempt to find the indicators of crime early on in the schools and so on to try to assist in the prevention of crime. However, people repetitively choose to make the same mistakes.

I am holding statistics from my area of the country, where violent crime is up by 28%, with defensive weapons up by 20%. The list goes on, with a 100% increase in some of the drug crimes. If the crimes are added up, including all the different traffic violations, the crime rate is actually down by 3%, but the fact is that on some of these violent crimes with respect to drugs and weapons, the crime rate in my area has gone through the roof.

I think we need to get tough on these criminals once and for all, not the ones who need help, and I understand that, but there are a lot of folks out there who are making a lifestyle choice.

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Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the member gets his figures from. I am glad he raised it because I heard other members make the point.

There is only one figure that we really look at to be absolutely certain of what is happening with the violent crime rate in the country and that is the murder rate. For the last 20 years the murder rate in this country has gone down.

These are the figures of how we spend money on drug policy: 73% on enforcement, 14% on treatment, 7% on research, 2.6% on prevention, and 2.6% on harm reduction.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with the member for Surrey North.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill. The increase in drug use and drug trafficking has become a very worrisome problem in many of our communities.

We have seen the increase in petty crime. We have seen the ravages among many young people created by the use of drugs. It concerns members of all parties. Where we may disagree is on the best approach in responding to that very real problem.

There is a confusion, it seems to me, between the notion of mandatory minimum sentences, and some people have equated it to minimum effectiveness. If someone is against mandatory minimum sentences, the Conservatives say the person is being soft on crime.

I would like to talk about mandatory minimum and quote some of the experts who believe that it is the least effective tool that we could use to deal with this particular problem. Not only experts believe it is the wrong way to go, but most Canadians also believe that drug addiction is an illness and it should be treated in that way.

In the time that I have, I would also like to speak to the kind of response the Conservative government is giving to the harm reduction approach.

The mandatory minimum is a bad idea in principle. In 2001 a justice department report concluded that mandatory minimum sentences are least effective in relation to drug offences. It said:

MMS [mandatory minimum sentences] do not appear to influence drug consumption or drug-related crime in any measurable way. A variety of research methods concludes that treatment-based approaches are more cost effective than lengthy prison terms. MMS [mandatory minimum sentences] are blunt instruments that fail to distinguish between low and high level as well as hardcore versus transient drug dealers.

That was a report by the justice department, not by the New Democratic Party.

These would be some of the consequences of adopting this kind of ill thought out, ideologically driven policy.

The Prime Minister would like us to believe that this approach is just being tough on organized crime and big time traffickers. The reality is that it will not deter organized crime. In fact, we presently have legislation with respect to organized crime with mandatory minimum sentences. We can see the great effect that has had in reducing the number of Hells Angels for example.

Frank Addario, president of the Criminal Lawyers Association of Ontario, noted that justice department research shows that mandatory

minimum sentences do not deter offenders more than tailored proportionate sentences, and often result in lower conviction rates because judges are reluctant to convict someone for a minor transgression if they know the penalty is harsh.

Politicians have no business making preordained decisions on the future of people being brought before the courts. This belongs to the judges. A judge who has heard the case from start to finish should be the only person to decide what penalties are appropriate.

● (1605)

This reminds me somewhat of the Conservatives' attempts to meddle in nuclear safety. I do not know how much safer Canadians feel today after the Conservative government meddled with our nuclear energy regulator in Canada but I certainly do not feel safer. The issue of drug crimes should be in the purview of judges in Canada.

It is just too draconian to pass a law that ignores mitigating circumstances. For example, someone dealing in marijuana would go to jail for at least a year if he or she did so in support of organized crime. Organized crime, I am told, is defined as a money-making enterprise involving three or more people. That covers almost all marijuana dealers who are by definition organized if they have one supplier and one customer. Most of the changes in this law are like that.

We would all be concerned as parents to see children taking serious drugs, whether it be cocaine or crystal meth. My colleagues and I feel that the government's resources should go toward prevention. Rather than going toward making these kinds of draconian laws, the resources should go toward supporting the harm reduction approach, the four pillar approach that involves real enforcement. That is certainly needed. At the moment, without the other pieces of the four pillar approach, prevention, treatment, and housing, and I will come to that, the enforcement becomes a revolving door. The police are telling us that they are attempting to respond to a social problem.

I have some statistics on the amount of money that the government is spending on its drug policy. Of its drug policy, 73% is spent on enforcement, 14% on treatment. In Victoria, people who are trying to help drug addicts who want treatment just cannot provide it. It is just not available. There is no money for treatment. There are no treatment beds. There are no detox beds. This appears in report after report on the issue in Victoria. Across Canada 14% of the money goes toward treatment and 2.6% toward prevention. That is simply inadequate to address the very serious issues on our streets. While the federal government attempts to bring in these ideologically driven solutions, cities and municipalities are left to pick up the pieces and to deal with the lack of leadership by senior levels of government.

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We see the ravages on our streets. We see the impacts among our young people. We very strongly need enforcement. More than anything I see all the social providers in my city scrambling for funding, whether it be to set up programs around mentorship to help young people avoid crime, or programs to support those people who want to find a way out, or to provide detox or treatment services. The money is not there to provide those services.

• (1610)

That is where the negligence is by senior levels of government.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a clarification for the House and the member. I do not want to imply that the member was not here during the debate on the Chalk River nuclear problem, but all members in this House who participated in that debate came to the conclusion and voted unanimously on the actions the government had to take in that regard. I do not think it is fair that the member stands up in public and makes assertions that are contrary to that truth.

I want the member to know that we certainly do look at statistics even if they do not say what we want them to say. I am looking specifically at murder rates, which the NDP is inclined to do because, of course, they tell the story that the NDP members want to hear.

The fact is that drug crime in my riding in some cases, heroin, for example, is up over 100%. The folks in the downtown Galt area of Cambridge have called me into their homes to talk about the number of crack addicts that are roaming the street. It is absolutely epidemic.

I have former patients who are police officers who tell me they spend most of their nights dealing with drug issues, and the next night they are dealing with the same ones because it is a revolving door in the justice system which was so carefully built and supported by the previous Liberal government.

I would like to ask the member what she expects us to do with the current rate of drug related crimes that impact insurance costs, as some of these folks break into local businesses to finance, in some cases, their chosen lifestyle. I understand there certainly are folks that by no choice of their own have this problem, but I am not talking about those people. I am talking about the folks who make a choice, break into a business, and the business insurance rates go up, or worse, as is the case in my riding, some businesses cannot even get insurance. The downtown cores of these communities start to rot as buildings become empty.

I do not believe for one second the NDP has even a semblance of a grasp on this problem. I suppose that is okay because I do not think they will ever come to power and that in itself is a good thing.

Perhaps the member wants to comment on that reality.

• (1615)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I think it was the Prime Minister who assured all Canadians that there would not be a nuclear problem because there could not be an earthquake. I do not think members of other parties have a crystal ball to make those kinds of comments.

On the question that he asked, I understand very clearly the frustration in seeing the drug use in many cities across Canada. I also

think that kind of frustration should not drive us to poorly thought out policies that by all reports, and not just ours, but even reports from the justice department, are shown to be ineffective.

Instead of a knee-jerk reaction of wanting to incarcerate more people, which incidentally, brings about its own costs that are quite incredible, one of the answers may be to reconsider some of the policies that are at the source of these problems of the kind of hopelessness that we see and the increasing poverty that is prevalent in our communities. In my riding 25% of the population is living at or below the poverty line. These are the kinds of issues we might consider in terms of good social policy that might help.

Again, I want to stress that enforcement has to be a part of the solution to address those hardcore cases that the member just referred to, but to go beyond that and talk about using mandatory minimum sentences for the kind of situation that he has raised of robbery is just plain—

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

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to share some comments about the bill before us today. It seems this is yet another example of what I consider to be a lack of balance in the actions of the Conservative government.

I come from the city of Surrey, which has some significant drug problems. Every day we see individual drug use and drugs trafficked by very sophisticated organized crime. Just a few months ago we had a tragic incident when two innocent bystanders were killed as a result of simply being in the vicinity of an apartment building where a gang was producing crystal meth. I do not think we would find anybody in any part of the city in which I live who would oppose actions that would impose very significant penalties on those who would produce, traffic drugs and lure children into the drug trade. Nobody would suggest that the penalty should not reflect the crime. It should, but it often it does not, and I do not believe anybody would oppose that.

The city of Surrey has been able to create some successes around grow ops. Some grow ops are quite small, although they would probably still fit the three or more definition. Some are much larger because they are part of chains. Surrey has won an award for the way in which we have taken down grow ops. We have worked not only with the RCMP, but with the fire department and the hydro company. We have made significant inroads into the numbers of grow ops that are shut down. Should those people who run a series of grow ops be in jail for what are very deterrent and I would hope long periods of time? Of course they should be.

We always have to ask the questions: What does this bill say it is? What is it? Who does it help? Who does it hurt?

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The bill says that it is about minimum mandatory sentences, which it is. As one of my colleagues said earlier, we have supported minimum mandatory sentences in the House before, under different circumstances, so we are not opposed to a minimum mandatory sentence. However, I do not think it is true to suggest that the bill will make some huge difference in major drug activities, drive-by shootings and crystal meth labs. The bill would make a difference for individual, small time, non-violent offenders who may traffic on their own, not that this makes it okay.

● (1620)

When I look at the recommended sentences, I see one to two year mandatory prison sentences, prison sentences of perhaps a minimum of six months, one to three years, et cetera. These people are not creating the roots of drug crime in our communities. These people are not killing other people. Drugs are killing people and destroying lives. People are being shot as a result of drugs.

Who will this benefit? Neil Boyd from Simon Fraser University said that the people who would benefit from this would be the drug traffickers. The cost of drugs will go up and they will make a bigger profit. That is not the intention of the bill. However, I think it will hurt people who could benefit from a different kind of help, and I will speak in a moment about what we might be able to do about that.

I am worried quite a bit about drug courts, which are a fine thing. A lot of research has shown that as an intellectual concept they work in certain places. However, drug courts only work if people really want help and are able to access treatment after they have gone through the drug court. This is where the entire system fails.

We do not have enough treatment programs for people who are referred by drug courts. Perhaps it is only in British Columbia, which would seem unusual, but we are very short of drug facilities for youth, for adults who have been duly diagnosed, for single women or for women with children who want to take their children with them or want to know they are in a safe place while they receive treatment. The drug court concept is fine, but there are not nearly enough treatment facilities so the system will eventually block up as soon as there is no place to refer people.

These drug courts are going to be funded by provincial governments. The people going to prison, as a result of the sentences I read to the House a moment ago, are going to be sent to provincial facilities using provincial dollars. These dollars could go toward treatment.

We will be in significant difficulty until we find a way to provide resources to the provinces and not simply download on them. Bill C-26 will not make that any better. In point of fact, the bill would probably make it worse.

Others have said that we need a balance, that we need a multifaceted approach to this issue. This is about appropriate sentencing, but it is also about coordinated, well researched, well documented, well shared information about early intervention.

● (1625)

One member said earlier that all kinds of money had already gone into drug prevention programs and so on. However, the evaluation

has been poor. We do not know what has worked. We have not evaluated them properly at all. The money is put into programs that may be good or may not be good. However, there is no way of gathering that information, which I think is a critical federal role. It is one of the most important roles the federal government can play, which is to gather information from across the country, to ensure information is both qualitative and quantitative and then ensure the money put into drug prevention is done in a way that will be effective and efficacious, whether it is for 4 year olds, 14 year olds, 40 year olds or 80 year olds.

I will make a couple of closing comments. We talk about being able to help with organized drug gangs in the community. We cannot even prevent organized drug gangs in prison. There was a riot in Mountain Prison in British Columbia in which two people were killed. We are talking about putting more people in prison when we have a growing drug gang problem there. I am not quite sure how—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will have to stop the hon. member there.

Before I go to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, First Nations Technical Institute.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cambridge.

● (1630)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want comment on the member's speech, which I appreciate very much. The member has somewhat more of a balanced approach to this idea.

I want to suggest to the member that no one in Canada denies that drinking and driving has gone down considerably. The R.I.D.E. program goes up one year and then down a bit. No one would deny education has helped to educate folks that drinking and driving is a bad thing. However, I do not think anyone can deny either that tougher penalties have caused a great reduction in the episodes of people killed by drunk drivers. It is sort of a retrospective study that we do what makes sense, knowing full well it will happen, and the proof is there. That takes courage and leadership, which this government is showing.

The member mentioned some of the causes of crime and no one would disagree that poverty is one of the big ones. The government put forward a drop in the GST by 2%, which helps, not help completely, but it helps. The child care benefit helps, not completely, but it helps. There was a decrease in income tax to the tune in some cases of \$600 to thousands of dollars a year.

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There is help in the budget for the disabled and seniors. Seniors can now make a lot more money if they choose to work. If they do not, they have greater benefits. We have paid down the debt to help poverty in the future. As the member mentioned, this is the multifaceted approach of the government for which the member is looking.

Why did the member vote against that?

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, that would be a longer answer than you would allow me.

We all look at our balanced approach and the kinds of programs that are offered in a very different way. I see the ones in the budget, particularly around \$100 a month for families to “provide child care”, as being not very effective.

I want to go back to a comment the member made earlier. I live in Whalley, which was probably once known as the worst part of my riding. All of us are very proud of living in Whalley, our city centre, but many businesses are in the position that the member described earlier, and I am glad he raised it.

Some businesses are having trouble staying viable and some may be shutting down. People go to their businesses in the morning and find people sleeping on their doorsteps. They have to step over them to get into their premises. There is garbage, sleeping bags and body waste, et cetera. This bill will not affect those people. That was my point earlier. Who does it hurt and who does it help?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, excuse me, but I simply wish to inform you that there is currently no French interpretation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there a problem with the interpretation in general or only with the headset at your seat? We will look into it.

It is now working. The hon. member for Windsor West.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for solving that problem so ably and so quickly.

What I would like to ask my hon. colleague about is prevention. One of the issues that we have seen is a lack of attention to prevention from those individuals who have been brought into the drug culture or have been introduced to it, and then have been used by other people as well to promote other people's needs.

I used to work on behalf of Youth at Risk, and we found intervention programs to support youth to either get them back to school or help them find employment. There were many success stories where we actually got people untangled from those environments.

What we found most often was the fact that individuals were looking for hope and opportunity, and what they were not seeing was that developing in their lives because either they had not reached the goals that were necessary or they made bad decisions that needed to be fixed. Hence, bringing in programs that assisted in the facilitation of changing that direction really worked. We had individuals who clearly were able to repatriate their lives in ways that were much more progressive and law abiding, and contributing to society.

The hon. member did mention prevention, but I would like her to highlight a little more in that regard because it is an important issue that has not been discussed enough.

• (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are only about 30 seconds left for the hon. member for Surrey North.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Prevention in 30 seconds. Okay, Mr. Speaker.

We can identify, during pregnancy and early infancy, those families or infants that may be at risk of running into difficulty later. If we ask kindergarten teachers, they can identify children who are going to need some extra support.

As the member said, when youth move into that 10 to 15 year old range, which perhaps he was talking about, if we hold out a hand and get them hopefully before their first contact with drugs or with the law, but immediately after, we know that there is a very high incidence of being able to prevent that second contact with the law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today at second reading stage of Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

This bill seeks “to provide for minimum penalties for serious drug offences” and “to increase the maximum penalty for marijuana production”.

Even though the purpose of Bill C-26 seems clear, we believe that its ultimate goal, to reduce consumption of illegal drugs, would be better achieved with more subtle measures that would produce truly positive results.

The consumption, production, sale and trafficking of drugs are, in my opinion, a scourge throughout the world. That is the case in Quebec, Canada and in all other countries. We are trying in every way possible to reduce drug use among youth and also to prevent adults belonging to organized crime from producing drugs, from growing the plants used to make the drugs, and from seeking out youth where they congregate to sell drugs to them. Young people are being targeted.

At first blush, this is the basis on which the Bloc Québécois intends to assess certain provisions of Bill C-26. We want to look at this bill. At first blush, we can see once again, of course, that the Conservative government is remaining true to its principles and its ideology and using minimum sentences to deal with crime. I believe that there should be harsh minimum sentences for organized crime, which, as I said previously, leads to drug use.

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Like many Conservative bills, this bill relies heavily on minimum sentences and on the supposed deterrent effect of harsher sentences. We believe that this is not the only solution. The Conservative ministers and members are forever telling us that minimum sentences are a more effective way to fight crime.

We have said and our justice critics have said repeatedly that this is not the only solution. The United States imposes harsher sentences, for example. Our neighbours to the south send more people to prison, but the American homicide rate is three times ours.

Nonetheless, the Bloc Québécois is a responsible party and, as such, intends to study this bill in depth, because we are concerned about drug use among youth. I say youth because young people aged 16 to 24 are the main users of these mind-altering substances. Although it is true that drug offences are up slightly, we want to make sure the legislation we adopt meets the ultimate goal of reducing drug use. There is no point in getting tough by introducing bills if those bills do not really have any positive impact on the use, production, sale and trafficking of drugs.

In my opinion, we must listen to the various stakeholders, health agencies and detox facilities across Canada and Quebec, but also to the testimony heard by the various committees to see whether we can improve the situation even more and reduce this problem in our society. That is why we are prepared to study this bill in committee.

We believe that prevention and rehabilitation remain effective ways to meet this goal without undermining the war on drugs. When it comes to justice, we firmly believe that prevention is and will always be the most effective approach.

• (1640)

We must attack the causes of crime, poverty and social exclusion, addiction, suicide and violence. All of these things are often linked to addiction, and we need to be aware of that. Attacking the causes of delinquency and violence, rather than trying to repair the damage once it is done is the most appropriate and, above all, most profitable approach from both a social and financial point of view. We cannot ignore that.

We will not improve the drug situation by cutting prevention and health promotion programs, as the Conservative Party seems to have been inclined to do since it came to power. We have to study new measures and propose alternatives to drug use. That is what many stakeholders are often doing throughout Quebec and Canada.

I worked for a number of years as a social worker, mostly with youth. On many occasions I saw how beneficial the prevention and awareness programs about the negative effects of drugs could be in fighting the problems of addiction.

I am convinced that an approach that takes into consideration individual, family and social realities is much more effective, even though that is not the only solution.

We have to realize that drug-related sentences affect young people. According to Statistics Canada, roughly 2.5% of young people between 15 and 24 have become addicted to drugs, compared to 0.5% of those 35 and over. The drug phenomenon greatly affects young people.

It is important to have addiction programs, prevention programs and awareness programs in schools, in addition to various projects run by community organizations in youth centres and alternative programs. Detox centres and addiction centres, as well as street work, are other forms of intervention currently available in our communities. These agencies need support. These are forms of intervention and we have to encourage young people to turn to these alternative measures and resources.

Young people do not wake up one day and decide to use drugs for the sheer delight of it. Of course, some adults encourage young people to use drugs, but young people who use drugs often are going through some sort of pain and suffering. We have to address that aspect as well.

We are fully aware that drug trafficking offences must be severely punished. The government has a duty to intervene and use the tools at its disposal to allow Quebeckers and Canadians to live in safety.

We are also aware that drug use in young people is on the rise and that sentences related to drugs primarily affect young people. This is a tragedy, an alarming situation that we must tackle with the right tools.

I fear that Bill C-26 will only penalize a greater number of young people. We have to be careful: it is the criminals we should be going after. As legislators, we must ensure that our young people can benefit from measures that will facilitate rehabilitation.

With Bill C-26, we risk sending more young people to prison. It is a risk because prison is and will always be a crime school. Let us not forget that. It is a place where young people can become resentful toward society.

That is why we have to study this bill and the new measures it contains carefully, in order to ensure that the principle of rehabilitating young people remains, but that we also wage an effective war against drugs.

• (1645)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member talked about rehabilitation. Could he elaborate on that in some more detail by referencing some success stories, especially in his riding?

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of success stories, throughout Quebec and in many regions of Canada as well. The drug phenomenon is nothing new, and there are many people who specialize in this area. There are social workers, psychologists and criminologists who have studied this phenomenon. They have developed approaches and have intervened to try to help young people struggling with this problem. We are talking about young people but also adults.

There is an interesting provision in the bill. It states that a person struggling with a drug problem could be sentenced to participate in a drug treatment program. If a person is caught selling drugs because they have a drug problem, that person is sent to prison or to a detention centre. But that will not always solve the problems, as our NDP colleague mentioned. People take drugs in prisons.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the statistics I have read and the information that I have at hand, I know that harsher penalties and putting people in jail longer actually increase recidivism, repeat offenders.

By putting money and resources into treatment and prevention, the chance for success is much enhanced. What we find in Canada today is that we are spending 73% of our drug policy budget on enforcement but only 2.6% on prevention, 14% on treatment and 2.6% on harm reduction.

Looking at those statistics and that information, how could we actually be entertaining a bill such as the one that is before us here today?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with our NDP colleague that of course we must develop and invest more in prevention. My speech touched on that.

As for the bill before us, we know there has been an increase in the number of offences related to cocaine trafficking in our society, for example. Is this bill the solution?

We are saying that perhaps this is a document that can be studied in committee, for we cannot ignore the issue. We must look at ways to improve the situation, as well as to get tough on crime in certain cases. Indeed, we talk about prevention for our youth, but as I said in my speech, it is often adults involved in organized crime who produce and traffic in these drugs.

As I indicated earlier in my speech, the Bloc Québécois wants to examine this bill in a responsible manner in committee and make any changes that could improve it. If these suggestions and amendments improve the bill and serve to improve the situation for young people in Quebec and Canada, then we will move forward. If, however, this bill does not meet our expectations and contribute to the development of better methods to effectively address the use, sale and trafficking of drugs, we will not support it.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are several reasons I would like to get this bill to committee. I will talk

about some of the positive items first because that will be a very short part of my speech, but I am pleased with the objectives of the bill to further inhibit organized crime, to prevent harm to youth, to increase security and to enhance health and safety.

I am also in favour of moving GHB and flunitrazepan from schedule III to schedule I so there can be more serious penalties for those date rape drugs. However, I have a lot of problems with this bill and I will go through a number of them now.

One of the reasons I would like to get the bill to committee is because the government does not seem to listen to the facts presented by the various opposition parties. At committee, it can once again hear evidence from the experts, as witness after witness comes forward with what are becoming pretty commonly known facts, and maybe get the government to change its direction so that its crime package will not be such a disaster and fall apart the way it has. Members will notice that it has fallen right off the radar screen because it has really been much of a disaster in a lot of ways, based on what these experts in the field have come forward with.

One of the reasons the government has had this great problem with its crime agenda is the process. Normally in the bureaucracy, in bringing forward government bills, the process is that experts, in whatever federal department, in this case the Department of Justice, who have had a lifetime of expertise to study what happens in other countries and to do studies on the effects, propose to the government effective potential changes.

When the justice committee was in Toronto, I asked one of the witnesses why we were getting so many bad bills that did not make any sense. He said that the process, from the bottom up, was not the process that was being followed by the government. It was not the normal legislative development. Of course, that would obviously lead to a number of problems that even would be beyond the control of the Conservative backbenchers, so I cannot blame them.

It is kind of ironic that the Conservatives called this justice week and an hour and a half ago, for the fourth time, their chair of the justice committee walked out again, halting all progress on justice bills like this and a whole line-up that we have at the justice committee, and actually not following the standing rules of order in doing that. It is ironic that it is justice week when no progress is being made in a number of committees that are looking at other types of justice issues.

In the United States, it has tried the mandatory minimums. I think a number of members have pointed that out. I will not get personal, as some have, but I will say that the results of sweeping mandatory minimums in the 1980s in the U.S.A. have been overcrowded prisons with no appreciable reduction in drug crime.

That is our closest example of something that does not work. Why, in heaven's name, would we in Canada want to implement something that has proven to be an abject failure? The problem is that not only would it be a failure for the objective that every member of Parliament here wants, which is to reduce drug crime, and I honestly believe everyone here wants that, but we would actually be moving backward.

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What happens when we increase the numbers in prisons that are already overcrowded? We do not have enough treatment facilities. We do not have the capacity to deal with existing prisoners so they are corrected and healed and do not get out and hurt us or revictimize the victims who we are trying to protect. The whole problem is exacerbating and we are taking a step backward.

● (1655)

If we do not want to take the evidence from the United States, there are all sorts of studies showing that mandatory minimums, to a large degree, do not work except in some very select cases. However, in the area where it works the least is where the bill is focusing, and that is drug crimes. If members do not want to believe all the expert studies by professors from other places, experts who any normal academic or rational person would believe, they can go to the study done by the Department of Justice in 2002 which stated that mandatory minimums do not influence drug crime in any way.

Therefore, mandatory minimums in many ways are not helping the situation. As was mentioned on Monday, it is one of the negative aspects of the massive attack on judicial discretion that we have had under the government. Obviously, the more choices and options a judge has the more likely the judge will make the right decision on the alternative treatments and sentences that would help a person stop from reoffending and, once again, save victims and make society safer. Any time we put caps on that, we are reducing the potential to have a better outcome and a safer Canada.

An item in the bill suggests that the Conservatives may be understanding that a bit and going in the right direction. They have actually increased one of the maximum penalties from 7 to 14 years. Unlike most of their previous bills, which limited judicial discretion, a total mistake, as the academics have said, in this case they are expanding judicial discretion. They are actually making a maximum penalty longer, which may or may not be warranted but in some cases it would, and the judge would have that option to make Canada safer in that way.

A member of the government made an interesting comment when he commented on a statement made by a member of one of the opposition parties. He said that just because it does not work does not mean we should not do it. Of course it does not mean we should not do it. If we have a fire, everyone wants the fire out but throwing gasoline on it will not help. We do not do something that makes the matter worse. We look for another solution. A number of people have spoken about those options and I will speak to them later today.

The member for Cambridge talked about the crime rate in his riding expanding dramatically. Considering that crime in Canada has reduced over the years in general, that definitely is a big problem in his riding. If I were that member I would be looking at all the various solutions, such as more police officers, which the Conservatives had promised in their first term and which I think they are acting on now. It was a problem for the north. I am glad to see my colleague from Western Arctic here because the distribution of those police are on a per capita basis, which means that he and I get approximately one police person and assorted support to cover an area larger than any country in Europe. That will not make a lot of difference.

The member for Cambridge also mentioned that one of the biggest problems the police have night after night is dealing with drug

problems because, once again, the prisons are not working and that system is not working. As we know, virtually everyone gets out of prison so obviously it is not working. The member should be looking at other solutions so that the police in his riding do not need to deal with a problem that has not been fixed. We have just delayed it for a few days or a few years, to whatever time offenders will get out.

When a member suggested a drop in the GST would solve the problem, one member went laughing from the House. Most of the people who are in such desperate straits do not have a huge amount of disposable income that would give them a substantial savings on the GST to head in the right way of life. Had the income tax rate not been increased by .25% in the Conservatives' first budget and another .25% in the following year, they at least would have had that off their basic income if they had any income at all.

● (1700)

The murder rate across Canada has gone down in the last 20 years. That point was made earlier.

There is an item I am pleased with in the bill. It would allow the drug treatment court to impose a penalty other than a mandatory sentence when an offender who has a previous conviction for a serious drug offence where the offence involves no aggravating factors and the offender successfully completes the DTC treatment program.

I commend the government for this move. This is a recognition that we have to deal with the problem, not just put it on hold for a year or two, so when the person is released it continues to be a problem. We can actually take a serious look at the problem. In fact, the government is making provision for the drug courts, which have proven to be successful in a number of cases, to seriously consider the problem. I commend that particular part of the bill.

I also commend the attack on organized crime. I support any items that would reduce organized crime, but once again, most of the speakers today have suggested that the bill would not have that effect. I want to read a quote from a criminal lawyer who teaches drug policy. He is one of the most experienced experts in Canada. He said:

Organized crime doesn't care about the law. With these changes, the government is doing a service for organized crime.

That was from Eugene Oscapeella, a criminal lawyer who teaches drug policy at the University of Ottawa and once advised the Law Reform Commission of Canada.

The Law Reform Commission and the court challenges program, which the Conservative government unfortunately ditched, can no longer help improve lives. They probably could have given very wise advice in this particular area.

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I am not saying it is my opinion because I do not know, but it has been suggested by others that this particular bill would scare off the lower criminals, the mom and pop operations, so that there would be even more of a market for organized crime. However, I am certainly in favour of anything that the government can prove to me would reduce organized crime.

Everyone in the House wants to reduce drug crimes. We should be looking for solutions that actually work rather than solutions that research has shown do not work, and which every single MP through speeches in the House and expert witnesses at committee have shown do not work very effectively. What would work in a lot of cases to reduce this problem?

As I have said before in the House, to a large degree we have had a criminal justice system, a penal system that for 1,000 years has not really worked. People who have been to jail reoffend when they are released. Extending their sentence another day or another year will not make any difference. They will still reoffend when they are released. That is a total failure and it happens far too often. What can we do to stop that?

There were some good examples from experts in the city of Ottawa at restorative justice week a few months ago. Hundreds of enthusiastic people in the city of Ottawa have worked on some of these new restorative justice programs, such as, alternative sentencing, diversion, treatment, group conferencing, family group conferencing, which has been very successful in my riding, and family circles. There are all sorts of different ways when simple incarceration will not work.

The Ottawa police chief is very enthusiastic about finally having an alternative that has a greater degree of success. He suggested at the conference that even these methods I have spoken about fail 30% or 40% of the time. That means 30% or 40% of the time the youth that often go through alternative sentencing, restorative justice, still reoffend. However, had they gone through the regular justice system, had they been incarcerated or their incarceration has been increased, as this bill suggests, they would have reoffended 70% of the time. It is an amazing success story.

● (1705)

What have the Conservatives done with this amazing success story, what was their strategy? In Bill C-23 they tried to reduce the increase in crime. The use of this in a large number of cases would have been an absolute disaster for the country and particularly in my riding. More victims we are trying to protect would have been victimized. When we finally came upon a solution that in a number of cases worked, it was not allowed to continue.

I mentioned earlier today another program in my riding, a positive preventive measure, which is a carving course for aboriginal and other youth. These are very artistic people who either were having trouble getting employment or have substance abuse problems. They have produced some incredible work, some beautiful art.

At one time the operators of the program needed more funding. I hope the government has continued the funding because it has been a success so far. If the government has funded them to continue the program, I give it credit for that. It is the Sundog Carving Centre, a wonderful model that we could try in other places.

Another example I cannot imagine people would not be very supportive of is improving the treatment of prisoners. As I said, what good does it do to put people in jail when they come out and reoffend? Most people who have visited prisons would suggest that there be a wiser investment of money in prisons and in after care for such things as drug treatment, literacy, anger management. The programs are too minimal and are not nearly enough. More could be done to solve the problem than simply building more jails.

I also decry the lack in all the justice strategies of any significant mention of assistance to aboriginal people. There is a much higher rate of incarceration. The aboriginal justice strategy was a success story, way higher than the traditional system of putting people in jail when they just get out and reoffend. The aboriginal justice strategy was having a great success. I have to commend the minister that at the last minute he extended that program. He is a fan of it, so I commend the minister for that but I want him to make that strategy permanent and to do it soon because it is such a successful program.

I have two other items. One is related to harm reduction. I know the government is opposed to this in spite of the evidence of its positive effects. One of the corollary benefits to people coming in and keeping them alive and not passing their disease on to other people, which would add huge costs to the health care system, is they also get directed in the process to other resources that can help them with therapy, direct them to treatment centres when they have decided themselves that they want this help. Those corollary effects show that those are also good investments in the system.

In my last minute I would like to mention the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce which in the last month unveiled a strategy in conjunction with the crime prevention office. It is looking at some innovative ideas to reduce crime in the small business sector. It is looking at education, prevention and other items so that crime does not happen in the first place. Maybe the causes of the crime can be dealt with so that we do not have the unfortunate situation of a person going to jail, not getting any help, maybe learning lessons from other prisoners that should not be learned, and coming out not rehabilitated, not able to face society any better than when the person first went in.

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• (1710)

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Yukon if he feels that the way the Conservative government is dealing with criminals can be tracked in dollars, that this is the amount of money and this is what we are doing to prevent crime in our country, instead of investing in the programs that were mentioned, crime prevention and other initiatives that prevent crime before it ever happens. When someone is a good contributor to society I do not think we can put a dollar figure to that. I do not think we can say that for a good healthy person we spent so much money and this is the person's output for the country.

I honestly say the more we invest in the good health of people, the better the outcome for the country. However, because we cannot put a dollar figure to that, I keep thinking that the government is trying to go for initiatives where it can actually apply dollar figures to what it is doing on preventing crime.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nunavut is always very thoughtful. She has a special constituency.

First, whether the Conservatives could put a dollar figure to what they are doing, I think she is actually giving them too much credit in that respect. Although we disagree with their philosophy, if they were going to be efficient in implementing their philosophy, they would have done an actual dollar analysis. One of the major problems is that with respect to their program to increase incarceration, we asked officials at various committee meetings what analysis had been done on the results of this, and there was not sufficient analysis done. There was not a careful extrapolation of the expenses for the prisons, for therapists, for treatment, for longer aftercare. There was no money set aside for those types of things. They are not even putting in the dollars needed for their own solution, which of course we proved is wrong.

The member also made a very good point that with Canada being the best country in the world in which to live, we do not see the results because the crime does not occur. The facts are that everyone in this country, low income earners, seniors, and other people, has access to food. We have training for people with disabilities. We have pensions for seniors. We have retraining and literacy programs. It is very hard to reflect the effect of all these types of things because in many cases crimes are not occurring. It has been proven that poverty and a lack of literacy increase the crime rate. That much has been proven.

Finally, in relation to the member's riding, the problems that I mentioned with this particular philosophy of the Conservative government have hurt her constituents more than any others in the country. They are so far removed from penal institutions. If we move a person from such a unique culture and take the person away from his or her family, culture, supports, and the person has a problem to start with, how is the person ever going to heal and reintegrate into that society?

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's comments and I agree with him for the most part regarding the significant investment to be made in prevention and health promotion as well as the various programs to

be established to provide greater support for young people dealing with addiction.

I would like my colleague to speak about current sentences and the treatment of criminals, namely those who really target youth, those who produce and import drugs and who have very organized networks for feeding the drug habits of youth. Sometimes, these vulnerable young people are even forced into prostitution to obtain drugs.

Does my colleague believe that the measures and legislation put in place by the government provide an opportunity for restorative justice?

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member's question relating to sentencing and in particular to youth is a thoughtful one.

With regard to the philosophy of the Conservative government, the problems I suggested are even exacerbated for youth. What happens when young offenders are put in prison for the first time? It is called the university of prison. What access are they going to have to all sorts of other criminal activities and ways of doing things so they can be learn to be more successful criminals from the people they meet in prison? What types of role models are they going to have? What type of acceptable behaviour in society are they going to learn if their role models are other prisoners and hardened criminals?

That is why I believe that restorative justice, alternative justice and family group conferencing have had twice the success rate, statistically, of the prison system. In our aboriginal justice strategy, it was remarkable. From what I remember, in a lot of cases there was no recidivism at all. It had a remarkable success rate in dealing with youth.

Some people think that family group conferencing is an easy way out, that people just sit down and chew the fat and do not have to do hard time in prison. Let me tell members that they can talk to anyone who has been through this, the victims who went through it, and they will hear that those people would much rather have gone to prison. It was a lot harder to face up to their peers and families, to make the apologies, to make retribution and pay back—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today it is my turn to speak on Bill C-26, a bill introduced quite a while ago by the Conservative Party that has now come forward for more debate.

If we look at the history of the concern over the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in this country, we will see that the pattern has been in a fashion that is different from what we are dealing with here today. Many people of my generation and the generation that grew up in the 1960s looked to the leadership of the government. In the early 1970s, the government came out with the Le Dain commission report, which made certain recommendations about the use of controlled substances at that time.

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It went on from there. In the late 1970s in Parliament, many of the politicians of the day were more open-minded about questions of drug use in Canada, especially those who dealt with what was probably the largest single illegal drug used in Canada, cannabis. At that time, they were moving toward a different point of view on that particular controlled substance.

Then, of course, we had the introduction of the Reagan era in the 1980s. Through many of the international law enforcement agencies, the United Nations and many of the protocols at that time, we saw much hardening of attitudes toward the illegal use of drugs from the United States, which filtered through to the rest of the world. In this Parliament, that led, I am sure, to in some ways kowtowing to the United States and to going away from any semblance that we would go in the direction of the probably 20% to 25% of Canadians who use certain drugs at certain times. We made that conscious decision.

Once again, in the intervening years, the war on drugs went on and on. We saw the results in many third world countries. We saw the results in the United States.

Certainly we do not want Canada to follow the U.S. on its drug policy. Many people in the U.S. do not want us to follow them on the path the U.S. took through the 1980s and 1990s with highly restrictive legislation that led to incredible hardship and incredible increases in incarceration in the United States. The situation grew to where the United States as a population ranks first in the world in per capita incarceration, with roughly 5% of the earth's population but 25% of the total incarcerated population in the world.

Of the 2.2 million people in the United States behind bars today, roughly half a million are locked up for drug law violations and hundreds of thousands more for related drug offences. The war on drugs in the United States costs the U.S. government \$40 billion a year in direct costs and tens of billions of dollars more in indirect costs. That is useful information for all Canadians to think about when we approach the question of controlled substances.

We have a bill here that we in the NDP are opposed to and I am glad we are, because it is a hodgepodge of various types of efforts to bring to Canada what is in many respects a very harsh regime in regard to many of the controlled substances that are present in our society. They are used by people in our society and are there as a result of that use. When we speak in the direction that we should take on drugs now, in 2008, we find this bill to be absolutely the wrong direction.

• (1720)

As well, it flies in the face of previous Parliaments in the new millennium, where we had much more direction, such that we actually would move in some ways to lessen the sentences for possession of drugs. We had a greater understanding of the need for harm reduction in dealing with many of the other drugs.

We can see that today with some of the facilities across Canada that deal with drugs such as heroin, such as Insite, the injection site in Vancouver. I went to a presentation the other morning that was given by a woman who had worked at Insite for many years, including getting it established and working through the politics involved for many years. I wish every member of Parliament could have heard her heartfelt talk.

I wish they could have heard about the good that has come out of that kind of work in turning to harm reduction in a sensible and practical fashion for the many people in our society who, for one reason or another, do not make it. They fall off the path of righteousness and good grace and end up living on the streets.

These people are chronic drug users. They are the most victimized people in our society. This safe injection site in Vancouver has saved many lives, each one of them important. The life of every single Canadian should be important to us, should be meaningful to us and should get our attention.

I felt so strongly about it when I heard that speech. I would recommend that all members consider the good that comes from having tolerance and from understanding other people's situations and making our way toward that.

Instead, we are dealing with a bill today that is going the other way. Recent statistics have pointed out that over 24% of Canadians have used cannabis in the last year. Some 1% or 2% have used cocaine. Another 1% or 2% have used other substances. The crime industry in this country makes about \$10 billion a year from illegal drugs, of which the vast majority is cannabis.

We have a situation in Canada in which we have a lot of users. A lot of people do this and we are not going to change that with Bill C-26. However, what we will do with this bill is create a situation whereby more and more people will be targeted by this legislation for what they are doing. They will be directly targeted for any infractions of the Criminal Code, any of the things that go on in their daily lives.

That is what this bill does, and this bill is not what Canadians want. The majority of Canadians favour decriminalizing cannabis. They favour the medical use of cannabis. Our society is tolerant. We are not like this bill. This bill is different from what the vast majority of Canadians want.

The Conservative government has lumped many things into this legislation. It has included some things that it thinks might be attractive to its political base. The Conservatives have taken a stand that should guarantee the support of many of the people who support them already.

However, Bill C-26 is draconian in its approach to the problem. It is approaching the problem in a way that is the exact opposite of what we were doing a few years ago in this very House. That really is unfortunate. It is unfortunate that we have moved in this direction. It is unfortunate that the minority Conservative government feels it has the right and direction to do the things it is doing with respect to this legislation.

• (1725)

I am glad our party is standing up against it. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to it.

Private Members' Business

When we talk about mandatory minimum sentences and increased minimums for drug related crimes, this is a particularly flawed piece of legislation. In all cases, these types of crimes need the discretion of the judge. They need the judge, in these particular types of crimes, to have the ability to say whether granny with her pot plant in the corner is going to be put in jail for six months because it is the mandatory minimum that the bill proposes. The judge should really have a say and should have a way to deal with this in a correct fashion.

I know this is only the bottom of the heap in terms of where we are going with the bill. As it moves through other phases, we are seeing even greater sentences that would be given to people who—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but he will have nine minutes left in his speech.

It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC) moved that Bill C-520, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Home Buyers' Plan), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-520 will increase from \$20,000 to \$25,000 the amount of money first time homebuyers can borrow from the savings they have accumulated in their RRSPs. This will be the first adjustment in the borrowing limit since the home buyers' plan was created in 1992.

This increase in the \$20,000 loan limit to \$25,000 will help first time buyers in every region of the country and will allow couples to withdraw up to \$50,000. This increase will allow new homebuyers to maximize their down payment.

The home buyers' plan was proposed by finance minister Don Mazankowski to allow homebuyers to have access to their own retirement savings. Mazankowski viewed it as a win-win. In the 1992 budget he said, "The Plan will stimulate the housing market without reducing tax revenues or risking retirement savings". It was a win-win in 1992 and it is a win-win in 2008.

Canadian homebuyers like the plan. According to the Department of Finance, Canadian homebuyers have used the plan more than 1.6 million times since 1992. They have borrowed more than \$16 billion from their own savings.

Clearly, homebuyers prefer to borrow from their own savings rather than borrow from the banks and pay interest. As popular as the home buyers' plan is with homebuyers, its value has been eroded since 1992 by the dramatic increase in the cost of housing in many parts of Canada.

Home prices have climbed 152% in metro Vancouver since 1992, severely eroding the value of the original home buyers' plan put in

place by Don Mazankowski. If the home buyers' plan were to keep pace with the rise of home prices in metro Vancouver, the plan's borrowing limit might have increased to well over \$50,000.

The increase proposed in Bill C-520 is a very modest proposal that builds upon recent tax measures, such as the reduction in the GST from 7% to 5% and the creation of the new tax-free savings account, all which give Canadians an increased opportunity to buy their first home. This is the least we can do for aspiring homeowners in British Columbia and, indeed, throughout Canada.

The British Columbia Real Estate Association told the finance committee earlier this year that the borrowing limit should be increased to \$25,000. It was a laudable recommendation, worthy of our support today.

The finance committee agreed. In its February report on the budget it recommended that the Minister of Finance:

—increase the amount that can be withdrawn from a registered retirement savings plan to purchase or build a qualifying home for the holder of the plan or for a related person with a disability.

Bill C-520 will enact the increase recommended by the B.C. Real Estate Association and supported by the Canadian Real Estate Association. While a recommendation to increase the borrowing limit to \$25,000 may have come from British Columbia, it also has widespread support throughout the country.

The actions that will flow from this private member's bill will address one of the most fundamental desires shared by most Canadians: to own a home. A home is more than just a roof over one's head or a place to hang one's hat. It is a symbol of permanence, an investment in something bigger than one's own property. It is a connection with the community.

The privately owned home is perhaps the strongest keystone in the building blocks of a community and the strongly shared values that flow from being part of a community. We are often buoyed when we hear that the housing market is booming because we know that housing construction is a huge economic driver. In some parts of the country, it is the only economic driver.

We have also welcomed news in the last decade that has pointed to the growing rate of home ownership. In fact, some would argue that the home buyers' plan introduced in 1992 helped to drive the expansion of home ownership with a rate of home ownership increasing from 62.3% in 1992 to 66.1% in 2001.

However, we must dig deeper into the statistics to see an alarming trend that runs contrary to the positive results I have just quoted. Statistics show that young people are struggling to meet the promise of home ownership. Home ownership rates in the first time homebuyer age groups are well below the level of two decades ago.

• (1735)

According to research by the Vanier Institute of the Family in a 2004 report entitled "The Current State of Canadian Family Finances", the home ownership rates for those households aged 34 and under fell from 44% in 1981 to 41% in 2001.

Private Members' Business

Among households aged 35 to 44, home ownership rates plummeted from 72% in 1981 to 67% in 2001. The report reveals that both of these groups had flat earnings for almost two decades.

The lower home ownership rates are confirmed by a Statistics Canada analysis which indicates that there was a slight increase in the proportion of young adults living with their parents and 41% of Canadians aged 20 to 29 were living with their parents in 2001 compared to 33% in 1991 and 28% in 1981.

The decline in home ownership among the young is due to factors which are not measured in traditional analysis of affordability. The latter generally concentrate on mortgage payments on a typical dwelling versus average incomes. Such analyses tend to exaggerate the effects of lower interest rates and do not take into account other important factors which together determine whether someone is able to afford to purchase a home. For many young Canadians, purchasing their first home is extremely difficult, particularly accumulating a down payment.

The challenges faced by first time homebuyers are not clearly understood by many housing analysts and policy makers. It is important to note that the decline in home ownership rates among the young is not a reflection of diminished desire to own a home. Research shows that this desire is as strong as ever. While most people wish to own a home, home ownership has become less viable for a large proportion of Canadians.

This bill takes direct aim at that decline. It helps young Canadians meet the challenge of coming up with a down payment. The home buyers' plan is unique in that it both encourages savings and it maximizes down payments available to homebuyers.

It addresses directly two important Canadian desires that strengthen the economic health of our nation by strengthening the economic health of individual Canadians: buying a home and putting away savings. These are worthy financial goals for ordinary Canadians and worthy goals for a nation that believes in home ownership and believes people are most able to care for themselves when they have cared for their long term financial success.

The program is only of value if it reflects the realities of the marketplace. Bill C-520 does just that. It raises the borrowing limit for registered retirement savings plan holders to a level that is close to its real value when it was introduced in 1992, when we compare it to the rate of inflation identified by the CPI. It recognizes that the average price of a home has risen more than three times as fast as the rate of inflation since the program was introduced.

By encouraging home buying activity we would be driving an important economic engine that produces many economic spin-offs. These spin-offs include increased tax revenues that will flow to government. I have not done the economic modelling necessary to verify any figures but my belief is that this measure in terms of its tax deferral implications should be revenue positive.

It is worthwhile to take a brief look at the history of the home buyers' plan. The home buyers' plan exists today because of the determination of two finance ministers, one Conservative and one Liberal, Don Mazankowski and the member for LaSalle—Émard, to let homebuyers have access to their own retirement savings when borrowing for their home.

Then finance minister Don Mazankowski, in his February 1992 speech, announced a plan to allow homeowners to use their retirement savings for down payments for first home purchases. Mr. Mazankowski told Parliament that the plan would stimulate the housing market without reducing tax revenues or risk retirement savings.

The Mazankowski plan was introduced as a temporary measure. As one of my first statements in the House, I rose on January 31, 1994, to ask the new government to extend the home buyers' plan. While I do not claim any credit for the extension of the plan, the new Liberal government made the plan permanent in the 1994 budget a short time later.

• (1740)

The finance minister of the day, the member for LaSalle—Émard, indicated that he made the program permanent so as to continue supporting the housing market and further encourage home ownership. In his 1998 budget, the former finance minister amended the home buyers' plan to enable persons with disabilities to have greater access to the plan by allowing existing homeowners to use the home buyers' plan to purchase a more accessible home or a home for a disabled, dependant relative.

It is worth noting that the regulatory impact statement printed in the *Canada Gazette* on January 6, 1999, when these changes were made, did not identify any cost to the federal treasury in extending the plan to persons with disabilities. I take this as another indication that Finance Minister Mazankowski was correct in 1992 when he said in the House that the home buyers' plan did not create any revenue loss for the federal treasury.

The House of Commons finance committee in February recommended to the Minister of Finance that the 2008 budget:

—increase the amount that can be withdrawn from a registered retirement savings plan to purchase or build a qualifying home for the holder of the plan or for a related person with a disability.

This recommendation had all party support.

The Bloc Québécois, in its own chapter in the finance committee's report, specifically supported an increase in the amount that a home buyer could borrow from a retirement savings account:

To make home ownership more accessible, the Bloc Québécois supports the recommendation to increase the amounts available under the Home Buyers' Plan (HBP).

I would now like to address a number of questions that arise when we talk about increasing the borrowing limit from an individuals' earnings to \$25,000, or \$50,000 if both spouses have an RRSP.

Private Members' Business

First, has the home buyers' plan been successful? Over the last five years, almost 600,000 Canadians have made withdrawals from their RRSPs under the home buyers' plan, totalling over \$16 billion. Since the introduction of the home buyers' plan in 1992, about 1.6 million Canadians have borrowed from their savings accounts for their first-time home purchases. On the average, first-time home buyers borrow \$10,000 from their retirement savings accounts, for a total of \$16 billion. That is \$16 billion borrowed without any cost to the government and without any cost to home buyers, because home buyers borrow from their own savings. It is a program that first-time home buyers absolutely support. Clearly Canadians prefer to borrow from themselves rather than borrow from the banks and pay interest to the bankers.

Second, is there a negative impact on the government's tax revenues? There is no impact. The former minister of finance, Don Mazankowski, who introduced the home buyers' plan, advised Parliament in February 1992 that the \$20,000 would have no impact on government's tax revenues:

The Plan will stimulate the housing market without reducing tax revenues or risking retirement savings.

If the \$20,000 limit had no impact on government tax revenues in 1992, then \$25,000 would have even less impact on government tax revenues in 2008.

Third, does the home buyers' plan assist retirement security for Canadians? Yes. Before the home buyers' plan, Canadians had to make a choice, either save for retirement or save for a house. The home buyers' plan allows Canadians to do both. The home buyers' plan is a means to strengthen home ownership at no cost to the Canadian taxpayer. Borrowed savings are invested in a principal residence, which is a pillar of security for retirement.

Since the home buyers' plan was introduced in 1992, the rate of home ownership has increased from 62.3% in 1991 to 66.1% in 2001. The home buyers' plan is unique among support programs for home ownership in that it encourages savings and maximizes down payments. By emphasizing the down payment, the home buyers' plan helps the home buyer to minimize the level of indebtedness over time.

Fourth, what has happened to home prices since 1992? Residential home prices rose 85% nationally between 1992 and 2006. Since 1992, home prices in metro Vancouver have increased 152%. The 152% increase in home prices in metro Vancouver has eroded the value of the home buyers' plan. Nowhere in the country is the need for an increase in the borrowing limit in the home buyers' plan to \$25,000 greater than in metro Vancouver.

• (1745)

In closing, let me reiterate that there are no negative consequences to increasing the amount that first-time homebuyers can borrow from the savings they have accumulated in their RRSPs from \$20,000 to \$25,000. Rather, this increase would result in a greater number of young Canadians being able to participate in the dream every young person has, to own their own home, which would be very positive both for young people and for Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, the Bloc

Québécois will support this bill because, in the report of the Standing Committee on Finance, we stated that we wanted to make some changes in this respect. I thank him for mentioning this in his speech.

Since the ceiling has not been raised since 1994, it is important that we make it easier for young couples to purchase property more quickly.

Would my colleague be open to amending the bill to allow for the indexing of the amount, so that we will not have to come back year after year to increase the maximum? This would avoid another situation like this one, where we want to increase the current amount, which was set 14 years ago in 1994.

Would my colleague be open to such an amendment if the Bloc Québécois or the committee decided to put it forward? I will repeat that we support this bill. We think it is a good idea, and the sooner it can take effect, the better.

[English]

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, we did contemplate putting the indexing factor into the bill. The reason we left it out was simple. It simplified the matter. We felt it was an issue that could be dealt with in this Parliament, for this Parliament and by this Parliament, so we left it at that one figure. However, philosophically, I have no difficulty whatsoever with agreeing to that sort of amendment.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I support the bill. I think it is a very well-intended and needed bill to help young couples buy their first home. However, I have a question that I hope the hon. member can answer.

By increasing this limit, it might reduce tax revenue for the government. With the RESP bill, we heard the Minister of Finance say that it would have put us into deficit. Have any calculations been done? Will this bill put us into deficit or not?

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, my friend raises an interesting point, and it is one which we addressed. We think the bill is revenue neutral. People contribute money to their RRSPs. It is an ongoing program. The government has every indication just how much money on average Canadians will put into the RRSPs and gain a tax benefit from it in any one particular year, and the bill would not alter that. All the bill would do is allow people to take that money out of their RRSPs and use that money to purchase a home.

The former prime minister, when he was finance minister, and Mr. Mazankowski, agreed that this would not be a net cost to the government. I see a former finance minister across the way who may concur with that notion, that the bill would not be a cost to the government. Therefore, I do not see how it could impact on the budget.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his hard work on this file and, particularly, for bringing this legislation into the House.

Could he share with us some of the stories he has heard with regard to the rising costs of housing in certain parts of the country, perhaps specifically in his region, the Lower Mainland of B.C.?

Private Members' Business

Finally, would my colleague comment on how certain measures that our government has brought forward help Canadians lower the cost of home ownership? I am thinking specifically of our cut to the GST.

● (1750)

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, both the cuts to the GST and the savings account, introduced by the finance minister in the last budget, will help young people to acquire the down payment for a home. That is the bottom line on this bill.

In my area of the country, acquiring a down payment for a house is a very difficult for young people. I am sure it is a major challenge for young Canadians across the country. The bill would allow Canadians to do just that, to utilize the RRSP—

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I have interrupt the hon. member at that point.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of the bill. It is an excellent idea. It barely keeps up with inflation since the idea was first introduced. It is good to take this action. I agree with the hon. member that there will be little, if any, implications for government revenue. It is the kind of action that is very helpful for first-time home buyers, particularly where the member comes from in Vancouver with the huge housing inflation. Indeed, across Canada house inflation has been much greater than the amount of the increase since 1992. It is a good bill and I am very happy to support it.

As well, if we look at housing more generally, I am concerned about other Canadians in the housing market. I am particularly concerned about lower income Canadians. Three programs were introduced by the previous Liberal government for which I gather the funding comes to an end on March 31 of next year.

Those programs include the rehabilitation housing funding program, which involves a subsidy paid by the federal government to lower income individuals occupying co-ops. It happens that the co-op people came to see me this morning. They expressed great concern that the funding for these lower income Canadians might come to an end on March 31 of next year.

Second, is the whole homelessness file. I understand that funding may come to an end as well on March 31 of next year. There is great concern on the part of those who are homeless, or who advocate for the homeless, or who care about the homeless that this funding might also end.

Finally, in budget 2005, funding was provided to provinces to help in the provision of affordable housing. I understand that too comes to an end March 31, 2009.

Under the former Liberal government, Claudette Bradshaw, in particular, took a passionate lead in favour of homelessness programs, in favour of support for social housing. She and all of us on the Liberal side would also be very disappointed and critical of the government should these three important programs, addressing lower income Canadians in need of housing plus the homeless, come to an end.

We should be under no illusions. I refer members back to the “Advantage Canada” booklet, which came out with one of the government's previous budgets. It talked about federal-provincial jurisdictions. The government has a very narrow definition of federal and provincial jurisdictions. There were two examples given in the booklet of areas which were entirely provincial, according to the government. Perhaps not coincidentally the two areas mentioned were precisely housing and homelessness. According to the government's budget documents, these were considered provincial areas, not federal areas. The implication being that it would be just fine if the federal government washed its hands of any kind of support for social housing, or homeless, or low income Canadians in co-ops. I would not be terribly hopeful as to continuation of support for these programs on March 31, 2009.

On the Liberal side, we believe in these programs. We were the ones who initiated them. This is not to say that the federal government should necessarily be involved in the construction of new houses, but we think the federal government should be there to support cross-Canada initiatives, possibly led by the provinces, to deal with issues of homelessness, social housing and housing accommodation for lower income Canadians.

While I support the bill and I congratulate the member on bringing this forward, and it is very appropriate, as worthy as the bill is, there are far more pressing needs in our country by lower income Canadians, by desperate people who are homeless and by those agencies which have come to expect some funding from the federal government to support housing initiatives for low income Canadians.

● (1755)

Given the government's very narrow interpretation of the Constitution and its disdain or disregard for homeless or lower income Canadians, whom it does not see as its voting core, I think all of us in the House, at least on the opposition side, should be very concerned that these funds for these three important programs may be allowed to lapse on March 31 of next year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague from Delta—Richmond East for introducing this bill, which will increase the amount of money people can borrow from their RRSPs to buy a house from \$20,000 to \$25,000. For a young couple, that means the limit will increase from \$40,000 to \$50,000.

I think there was a need to fix the existing situation. This is a good program, and this measure helps give people access to property. In my riding in particular, many young couples will have a greater incentive to become homeowners thanks to this measure. They will vacate housing that can be occupied by other people, because in some of the municipalities in my riding, there is a real housing shortage. This change will have a positive ripple effect.

Private Members' Business

I would also like to thank my colleague for the fact that the Standing Committee on Finance's prebudget consultation report recommended doing something like this. The Minister of Finance did not follow that recommendation this year. However, let us hope that the situation will be improved by the progress of this bill, its adoption, or some other measure.

In its supplementary opinion, the Bloc Québécois explained why it supported this measure and why the party thought it was important to make the proposed improvements to the program.

It is clear that this whole issue is also about encouraging people to save money. I think that adopting this bill will solve the non-indexation problem that has been around since 1994 and will also create a ripple effect to improve access to housing. I think we will all benefit by making this happen.

Following my colleague's speech a few minutes ago, I also got the impression that he would likely be open to the possibility of an amendment so that in the future, that amount can be either fully or partially indexed so that in five or ten years, the amount will still be realistic with respect to housing prices.

These types of actions, which have already been around for a number of years, as well as the other conditions under which homes are being built, have certainly helped Quebec and Canada avoid experiencing all of the difficulties being faced in the United States, where interest costs are fully deductible. I think that the actions that were taken in Canada were the right ones, and this bill only improves the situation. That is why the Bloc Québécois will certainly support this bill.

As I was saying earlier, the maximum amount for the home buyers' plan has not been increased since 1994, and is set at \$20,000 per individual and \$40,000 per household. Bill C-520 would increase that to \$25,000 per year, to a maximum of \$50,000 per household. Thus, individuals who have contributed to their RRSPs will have be able to have a larger down payment and therefore a smaller mortgage payment. This is a real and direct incentive for home buyers.

We know that couples often put a large part of their expenditures towards rent. With this measure, couples will have financial security while they are getting older and establishing a family. There is definitely a positive incentive in the existing program and even more so in the improvement provided by the bill.

This increase is justified by the spectacular rise in the cost of homes over the past years. Paradoxically, the cost of homes is not rising only in large cities. In my riding, along the shores of the St. Lawrence, the baby boomers are arriving, wanting to retire in the country with nice surroundings. And this has increased the costs of homes all along the St. Lawrence. This often means that young couples who have just moved to the area do not have access to these properties. However, in a number of towns not on the river, houses are becoming available. Often, as is the case with young couples, while two people work in a factory or in their first job, they have student debt to pay back.

● (1800)

They need more time to save the money they need to purchase a home. This program makes it easier for them to become homeowners.

In a way, the program aids regional economic development. In many communities where the population is aging, more homes are coming on the market as seniors leave their homes to live in residences or, sadly, die. The program encourages young people to settle in these towns and villages. Ultimately, families with children will justify keeping schools open. Obviously, this is not the only factor to consider, but it is one of the reasons we support this bill.

The assistant chief economist at RBC said:

Nationwide housing affordability deteriorated in every quarter throughout 2007 to end up at the worst level since...1990. Back then, soaring interest rates and a recession sparked much of the trouble. Today, however, a long upward trend in house prices, driven by sounder macroeconomic fundamentals such as job growth, is primarily responsible.

Passing this bill will send a clear message that legislators have the will to tackle the negative effects and move forward with a positive measure. Many people have asked why this situation has not already been indexed. If it had been, we would not have had to take this step now. The hon. member must be congratulated for taking the initiative to move forward to correct it.

Nonetheless, as I was saying, the Bloc Québécois would like the indexing to be incorporated into the bill during review in committee. Depending on the testimony we hear, we could study the possibility of doing so. Ultimately, we should have seen this type of measure in the last budget, but that was not the case. The hon. member's initiative can help correct the situation. Let us hope this bill is passed quickly.

During this economic downturn we are currently experiencing, this is a small tool that could be used to help maintain growth through domestic consumer spending, which we are in great need of to respond to the decline in consumer spending in the United States and the huge number of homes available in that country. We are all aware of the ripple effect, the domino effect this situation has on the economy and the entire forestry industry.

Since this bill introduces such a tool to correct the situation, at least partially, the Bloc Québécois will support it in good faith. In the presence of positive and constructive measures, we are indeed capable of working together with the government or with other hon. members of this House to pass such bills that will improve the situation, especially for our young families.

● (1805)

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate tonight in the debate on Bill C-520, an Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Home Buyers' Plan), a private member's bill from the member for Delta—Richmond East.

Private Members' Business

As we have heard a number of times tonight, this private member's bill seeks to increase the eligible amount for the home buyers' plan from \$20,000 to \$25,000. That is the amount one would be able to take out of RSP savings to put toward a first home purchase. For couples who both have RSPs, that would mean from \$40,000 to \$50,000 to put toward their first home.

The money borrowed from the RSP has to be repaid over 15 years. If the yearly minimum is not paid, that balance has to be added to one's taxable income in that time. Also, if one defaults on the yearly repayment, that money cannot later be repaid into the RSP. It is lost to the RSP if there is default on the repayment plan.

The current limit was established when the program was created in 1992 and has not been adjusted for inflation since then. The \$25,000 proposal is almost the adjustment for inflation. It would have been slightly higher than \$25,000, but that is the overall intention of this legislation.

I have to say that it seems to be a reasonable proposal from the member and it is supportable. Over its existence, this has been an important program for millions of Canadians. It has helped many people enter the housing market for the first time. In fact, the Canadian Real Estate Association has reported that 1.8 million Canadians have used this plan since it was first created. That has resulted in over 900,000 home purchases.

One of the concerns that has been raised, and the member from Delta—Richmond East raised it as well, is that upon analysis of the home ownership rate, one can see that it increased between 1991 and 2001, the year statistics are most readily available, from 62.3% to 66.1%. However, when one looks more closely at the statistics, one sees that it is older folks who benefited most in terms of moving into home ownership. People aged 55 and older benefited most from being able to move into home ownership in that period.

Therefore, it is hard to say that a program like this actually increased the ability of younger folks to purchase a first home, since the rate of first home ownership in all the other age groups actually went down, most significantly in the lower age group. It is of concern that this may not have addressed one of the intended purposes, which was to ensure that younger Canadians were able to enter the housing market for the first time.

There were concerns raised about this program when it was first implemented. A number of analysts saw it as a regressive program and said that it was in fact more helpful to wealthy Canadians, to people who are most likely to be able to set aside money for their retirement in an RSP, than it was for other Canadians of more modest incomes or low incomes. A lot of those folks are not able to put money aside in an RSP. A lot of those folks do not qualify for mortgages as easily as wealthier Canadians and therefore would not have the ability to access this program.

In a sense, then, as an affordability measure of increasing the availability of Canadians to participate in the housing market, it is not well targeted. It does not target the folks who are most in need in terms of ensuring they have a home and a roof over their heads. Other programs, such as tax credits or homeowner grants, would work much better in terms of targeting people and ensuring an affordable housing approach to this kind of program.

●(1810)

We also need to point out that younger Canadians, the original target group for this program, face significant student loan issues because student loans have risen dramatically in recent years. I think the average debt of most students after they graduate from university is \$24,000, which increases their difficulty to take advantage of an RRSP.

Similarly, child care expenses for young families are rising. Many young families need to put significant resources into child care, which limits their ability to put money into an RRSP.

We also need to look at how people's ability to make repayments affects their retirement savings. Some of the information that I saw, albeit early on in the program, showed that almost one-third of the participants in the program failed to make their yearly required repayments and, by defaulting on the amount, the amount went into their taxable income. I think one-fifth of the total amount due was defaulted on back in 1995.

When people default on their repayments, that money in their retirement savings is lost and it cannot be backfilled. People cannot go back years later and put that money back into their retirement savings. Their ability to contribute is lost for the year they defaulted on the repayment. That is something else we should look at. We should get more up to date information on the failure to make repayments and find out how that affects people's retirement income generally as a result of their participation in the homebuyer's plan.

Housing prices have skyrocketed, particularly in some urban centres. We have already heard that there is relatively more help for people who live in an area where the real estate market is not as hot as it is in a place like Burnaby. There is significantly more assistance to people in a real estate market that is a little calmer than the one in metro Vancouver for instance. This might be another issue for us to take a look at when we are examining this program and how it has worked.

The homebuyer's program has been important for millions of Canadians. Many people have been able to buy their first home partly because of the assistance they received through the homebuyer's plan and the fact that they were able to use some of their RRSP savings to purchase their first home.

This is only a piece of the puzzle when we are looking at the housing crisis in Canada. There is a significant problem with finding affordable housing. Far too many Canadian families are spending too much of their income on housing. Thousands of Canadians are homeless and many more are in danger of becoming homeless.

A measure like this, while it is important, does not address those needs in particular and certainly does not replace the need for a national housing program that would actually build affordable housing for people already spending too much of their income and who are at risk of becoming homeless. Nothing can replace that kind of participation by the federal government.

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I was disappointed to see in the most recent budget that the federal government made no new commitment to a national housing program. The only measure in the budget is a very limited pilot project.

I am also very concerned that the government has made no commitment to extend the residential rehabilitation assistance program beyond next year, a program that helps people upgrade their homes and ensure they are still liveable.

As these programs are significant to Canadians, we need a commitment from the government that these programs will be in place in the coming year.

Nothing can replace those commitments: the commitment to build homes for the homeless and the commitment to programs that help Canadians stay in their homes now. We need to ensure those commitments are not forgotten as we address this specific measure that, undoubtedly, has been of assistance to many Canadians as they enter the housing market for the first time. This program is an important piece of the puzzle around housing in Canada but it is a small piece. We also need to ensure that other important and critical issues are addressed when we look at housing policy in Canada.

• (1815)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-520, introduced by my Conservative colleague, the member for Delta—Richmond East.

Before I continue, the member has long been recognized as a strong advocate on behalf of his constituents, effectively bringing their concerns to Ottawa since his initial election back in 1993, a stellar record. We applaud the member for Delta—Richmond East for his longevity and his ongoing contributions to Parliament.

We now turn to his latest initiative, a private member's bill that proposes an expansion of the home buyers' plan through amendments to the Income Tax Act.

For those unfamiliar with the home buyers' plan, this program allows a first-time home buyer to withdraw up to \$20,000 from an RRSP tax-free to purchase or build a home, as long as the amount is repaid within a specified timeframe of the plan in equal amounts over 15 years. No tax is paid on the amount withdrawn.

The plan's intended objective has been to make home ownership easier for the first-time buyers, while still encouraging long term retirement savings. Since its introduction in 1992, it has helped approximately 1.6 million Canadians to purchase their first homes.

Bill C-520 would modify the plan by increasing the maximum amount a first-time home buyer would be permitted to withdraw from an RRSP tax-free to \$25,000 per individual.

We all recognize that the Canadian housing market is extremely robust, especially in British Columbia and the rest of western Canada. Indeed, the number of new homes started in Canada was at the second highest level in nearly two decades in 2007. That trend is expected to continue into 2008. More relevant to the discussion on Bill C-520 is that since 2002, the average selling price of an existing home has risen by almost 10% annually.

I believe all parliamentarians would agree that encouraging a robust, free market economy, including the acquisition of private property, is a basic tenet for a healthy democracy. As the revered economist, F.A. Hayek, asserted "private property is the most important guaranty of freedom".

The most important piece of private property for the most number of Canadians is a home. Additionally, for most, buying a home will be the single largest investment Canadians will make throughout their lives. For these and other reasons, encouraging widespread private ownership is a goal that we should all share. Make no mistake, the Conservative government has introduced noteworthy measures to ensure home ownership is more affordable for more and more Canadian families.

First and foremost, we did something the previous Liberal government refused to do. We cut the GST, reducing it down to 5%. This one measure alone is having a major positive impact for those who have purchased or will purchase newly built homes. The Canadian Home Builders' Association heralded the GST cut as "great news for both home buyers and owners". The Canadian Real Estate Association cheered the lowering of GST as "savings to new home buyers", adding it would also "help Canadians pay for their home renovations".

Indeed, our GST cut will translate into more than \$1 billion in annual savings for the housing sector, returning money back where it belongs into the pockets of Canadians. For instance, an individual or family looking to buying a new \$250,000 home will now save \$3,200 because of our GST cut.

A lot of Canadians, especially new home owners, are very happy with the GST reduction because it is making a big, positive difference in their lives, people like the newlywed couple building a house in the riding of Fredericton, or that young professional woman who just bought a condominium in the riding of North Vancouver, or that family of new Canadians purchasing their first home in the riding of Oakville.

• (1820)

Unfortunately, each and every one of those individuals and families is currently represented by a Liberal MP in the House, an MP who is not really happy that those people are happy as the Liberals are strongly opposed to our GST cut. What is worse, all of the Liberal MPs support a Liberal leader who keeps saying he might raise the GST.

In effect, Liberal MPs want to go to those new homeowners, that newlywed couple, that single professional woman, that family of new Canadians, and reach right back into their pockets, grab the money that they saved through our GST cut and funnel their money back to Ottawa to pay for the boondoggles and scandals that would inevitably result from another Liberal government.

To those Liberals who say to Canadians that the Liberals would never raise the GST, I ask them to explain the words of their own leader who, when asked if he would raise personal taxes like the GST, said, “We will consider that”. I would ask them to explain why the Liberal finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, when asked specifically if the Liberals would raise the GST, revealed, “It’s an option. All I can say is that it is consistent with”—the Liberal—“approach”.

What has Canadians nervous, especially present and future new homebuyers, is the current Liberal leader and Liberal Party who subscribe to a tax and spend philosophy, including advocating for a huge hike in the GST. Even some—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. This is private members' business, which is about this particular private member's bill. I would just caution the parliamentary secretary to try to stay relevant and not bring too much government versus opposition stuff into private members' business, as this is not what it is for, or we will be moving on soon.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, some of the suggestions that I was referring to were simply reiterating what has been said. I would like to continue, if I can, and I will try to bring more relevance to it. There are other Liberals I would like to quote, Mr. Speaker, but having been chastised by you, perhaps I will leave some of those quotes to another day. I am sure they will be raised as reminders.

I am proud to belong to a Conservative government that does not support the pro GST stance of raising the GST. We also do not care for the tax and spend philosophy. Indeed, that is why our Conservative government has slashed the tax bill for Canadian families and businesses by nearly \$200 billion since forming government just two short years ago.

In budget 2008, moreover, we introduced the new landmark tax-free savings account, TFSA. This has a lot of Canadians very excited, regardless of political affiliation. Indeed, even the well-respected and non-partisan C.D. Howe Institute has called it:

—the most significant advance in Canada's tax treatment of personal savings since the registered retirement savings plan.... TFSAs will become a mainstay on the Canadian financial landscape, providing new savings options and flexibility for people of all ages and incomes.

Indeed, the TFSA will be a new tax efficient savings vehicle that provides an additional way to meet the challenges of home ownership, allowing Canadians to put more money aside, an additional \$5,000 every year, and watch their investments grow tax free to use for whatever purpose they wish, including the purchase of a new home.

While TFSA contributions will not be deductible, there will be no tax on investment income earned in the plan or on withdrawals. These new savings accounts will give Canadians full flexibility in terms of how they use their savings and how quickly they replenish them.

Take, for example, a young woman who begins to save \$100 a month in her TFSA as she starts working.

Mr. John Maloney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, you admonished my hon. friend about the partisan nature of his speech, which has little relevance to his colleague's bill, which many of us

Private Members' Business

think is a very good idea. I wonder if it might be time to move on, like you said you would do.

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: It seemed to me the parliamentary secretary was trying for a while after the admonition, but he has only a few seconds left, in any event.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I would like to sum up by once again recognizing the hon. member for his private member's bill. We are looking forward to getting this bill to committee. We will be able to study it, understand its real financial ramifications, and we look forward to that.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in favour of Bill C-520, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Home Buyers' Plan).

Prior to my election to the House of Commons in 1993, I worked for many years as a real estate agent in the greater Toronto area. During that time I remember the introduction of the home buyers' plan in 1992.

My work in real estate helped give me insight into the importance of home ownership in Canadians' lives. That is why I spoke in favour of extending the plan in one of my first speeches in the House of Commons on February 1, 1994.

The Liberal government made the home buyers' plan permanent in its budget three weeks later. Since then the program has helped hundreds of thousands of Canadians purchase their first home. It has assisted thousands of Canadians with disabilities in finding a home more suited to their needs.

The home buyers' plan seemed like a good idea when it was first introduced and over the years has proven to be a great success.

The program has minimal cost to the government and because participants must quickly repay the money they take out from their RRSP, in most cases it has no negative long term effect on retirement savings. In fact, due to the importance of home ownership in the retirement plans of many Canadians, it could be argued that the plan adds to participants' financial security after they leave the workforce.

Thus, it seems that the only major problem with the home buyers' plan is that the \$20,000 allowable amount is set in the Income Tax Act and therefore has not increased since it was first created.

Bill C-520 aims to fix that problem, at least for the time being. It raises the allowable amount to \$25,000, a more appropriate amount given today's financial realities.

The need for this increase is great. In the past 16 years real estate prices in Canada have risen at historic rates making the home buyers' plan an even more important incentive, especially for urban Canadians.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation reported in February 2005:

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It is interesting to note that the proportion of participants in the HBP in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, Gatineau, and Quebec, was higher than the proportion of these cities' population in the Canadian population. In other words, the Home Buyers' Plan take up is more heavily concentrated in Canadian urban centres.

It is not hard to see why that might be the case. Since I was first elected to the House of Commons in 1993 the average multiple listing service sale price of a home in Toronto has risen from \$196,000 to an incredible \$352,000 in 2006.

Prices in some other cities have grown at even faster rates. According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, the average sale price of a home in Calgary was \$415,000 in February of this year—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. member at this time. He will have five minutes and fifty seconds remaining when this bill comes up again.

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.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1830)

[English]

FIRST NATIONS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to address an issue that I brought forward to the minister on February 7 about the First Nations Technical Institute. I welcome the opportunity to expand on the question that I had for the minister at that time.

One of the things that I want to raise is that the First Nations Technical Institute is an important avenue for providing first nations appropriate control over education.

"No higher priority" is a report that was presented by the aboriginal affairs committee. It identified the importance of appropriate funding for indigenous controlled educational institutions.

As well, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in article 14 talks about the fact that indigenous people have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, and providing education in their own languages in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning, and it goes on.

The fact that the federal government has reneged, essentially, on its responsibility in terms of funding indigenous post-secondary institutions is a very good question for the House to consider.

There are some words that are far more powerful than my own that talk about the importance of the situation. In a letter to the *Belleville Intelligencer* the writer, Dave Wilson, says:

FNTI was founded in 1985 with the active support and encouragement of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)...They recognized the need in the Ontario

Region for innovative, culturally relevant post-secondary training for First Nations students.

He goes on in his letter to say:

Over the past 20 years, FNTI has demonstrated how to provide culturally relevant and academically sound programs in an efficient manner.

He said that the federal government needs to be a partner with FNTI, not an impediment, and he goes on to talk about the fact that on one hand the federal government talks about how it has invested, but he actually puts some numbers to this.

He refers to a member of this House when he says that by his reckoning, cutting the federal funding to First Nations Technical Institute by \$2 million and then offering \$500,000 to help it shut down is a reprieve to FNTI. It boggles the imagination that cutting funding by \$500,000 is actually a reprieve to any institution.

This institution was literally lurching from week to week, wondering if it should lay-off staff and give notice to students that their programs would be finished.

In a second letter from Richard Johnston, he says:

I was absolutely blown away by [the] assertion that the federal government had helped save the First Nations Technical Institute. It is the best case of double speak I have heard recently. Reality is just the opposite; it was the lack of vision and commitment by the federal government that has systematically withdrawn funding from FNTI and placed it in danger of closing... For years governments have hidden behind the skirts of jurisdictional responsibility—

He goes on to talk about a few more things. Then he says:

—realizing that a successful aboriginal post-secondary model like FNTI is a rare treasure that needs to be fostered, not killed by continual bureaucratic cuts.

What we have is a case where the federal government acknowledges that education is important, but fails to fund it. I wonder if it is not time that there be a recognition that leadership should be demonstrated by the federal government and that it actually invests in aboriginal controlled post-secondary education institutions.

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. Speaker, I appreciate the questions that have been raised by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Our government truly appreciates and recognizes the fine work done by post-secondary aboriginal educational institutions. There is no debating the value that they provide to aboriginal learners throughout our country.

Though the provinces have primary responsibility for post-secondary education, including for aboriginal students and for post-secondary institutions, whether they are located on or off reserve, the Government of Canada plays a supporting role.

Through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Indian studies support program, we provide funding support to institutions for post-secondary curriculum design, development and delivery of aboriginal-specific programs.

Under the ISSP, the First Nations Technical Institute, or FNTI, is eligible for approximately \$530,000 in 2008-09. Further, FNTI remains eligible to submit proposals under the same program through which it received additional funding in past years.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada must, and has treated FNTI as it does other aboriginal post-secondary institutes, by providing proposal-based funding.

Let me reiterate that we remain committed to working with FNTI and the province of Ontario to help the institute evolve into a fully self-sufficient, sustainable educational institution.

To this end we have offered to fund a strategic business consultant to work with FNTI to assist in developing a sustainable business plan. FNTI has accepted this offer and INAC officials are working closely with FNTI to get this in place.

• (1835)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention, but the reality is that the aboriginal affairs committee did an extensive study on post-secondary education and one of the factors for success was a core-funded, aboriginal-controlled, post-secondary education institution.

We know there are other institutions in Canada that the government does contribute to, so this is my question. Given that FNTI has a long track record of successfully graduating students, and we know that first nations will be critical to help address the serious labour shortages in Canada over the next couple of decades, why will the federal government not take some responsibility, demonstrate some leadership, abandon the jurisdictional disputes,

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and come to the table and truly provide some core funding so that these educational institutes can operate with some level of certainty over a number of years?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, having been a member of the aboriginal affairs committee, I did take part in that education study at the post-secondary level. A number of important issues were raised during that study and, thankfully, our government has received that study from the committee.

I would like to reiterate some of my points. Under the Indian studies support program, FNTI is eligible for over \$500,000 in 2008 and 2009.

With respect to post-secondary education, more generally, our focus has always been on transferring tuition dollars to individual post-secondary students. In 2007-08, this student support amounted to \$73 million in Ontario alone. In 2008-09, this amount is set to rise to \$75 million for these same Ontario students.

This funding will allow them to attend the Ontario post-secondary institutes, colleges and universities of their choice. This support increases the employability of these students and, in turn, contributes to the Canadian economy—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:38 p.m.)

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