



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, May 6, 2010**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 6, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

### PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ACT

**Hon. Jay Hill (for the Minister of Justice)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation in the conference of presidents of the Americas section of the APF, held in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, Louisiana, on March 11 and 12, 2010.

In addition, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation in the meeting of the political committee of the APF held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on April 7 and 8, 2010.

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[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second and third reports of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills

and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-395, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (labour dispute) and Bill C-308, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system).

The committee has studied both bills and has decided to report Bill C-395 back to the House with an amendment, and Bill C-308 without amendment.

I wish to thank all the committee members for their hard work and collaboration in getting these bills through.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to competitiveness of Canadian agriculture.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to the Day of the Honey Bee.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in relation to the study on its implementation of the economic action plan.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

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### PETITIONS

CAFFEINATED BEVERAGES

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present this morning.

*Points of Order*

The first petition is signed by dozens of people calling on the government to rescind Health Canada's authorization for the provision of caffeine in all soft drinks. Health Canada announced on March 19 this year that beverage companies will now be allowed to add up to 75% of the caffeine allowed in the most highly caffeinated colas to all soft drinks.

Soft drinks have been designed and marketed toward children for generations. Canadians already have concerns over children drinking coffee and colas, and they acknowledge caffeine is an addictive stimulant. It is difficult enough for parents to control the amount of sugar, artificial sweeteners, and other additives that children consume, including caffeine from colas.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to reverse Health Canada's new rule allowing caffeine in all soft drinks, and not follow the deregulation policies of the United States and other countries at the sacrifice of the health of Canadian children and pregnant women.

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is also signed by dozens of Canadians, calling on the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens for the victims of the earthquake in Chile.

The big earthquake occurred on February 27, 8.8 in magnitude in southern Chile, and the Chilean community has been actively fundraising. The petitioners want to know when the Prime Minister will give the same treatment to the earthquake victims in Chile as he did for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti, and match the funds personally donated by Canadians to help the victims of the earthquake in Chile.

POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from a number of people, largely in the Montreal area, who are concerned about the very quick and abrupt decision in the budget that the government made to no longer allow for the exemption for post-doctoral fellowships.

Their point is that this decision was made without any consideration with the community. They are calling on the government to engage with the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars, the research councils, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and other stakeholders.

This is signed by a number of post-doctoral fellows as well as professors, Canada research chairs and others. They are simply calling for some consideration and dialogue before this decision goes into effect. That is what this petition is about.

\* \* \*

**QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 95 and 157 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 95—**Hon. Shawn Murphy:**

With regard to the \$2.1 billion earmarked in the Budget Plan 2007 for the new Gateways and Border Crossings Fund: (a) what is the detailed breakdown explaining how much of the \$2.1 billion allotment has been spent; and (b) for each individual project, (i) what is its description, (ii) where is it located, (iii) what is its projected cost, (iv) how much of the money has been spent?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 157—**Mr. Yvon Lévesque:**

With respect to the Food Mail Program: (a) how many hearings on this program did the government hold; and (b) for each hearing, what was (i) the exact location where it was held, (ii) the date on which it was held, (iii) the number of participants, (iv) the identity of the participants?

(Return tabled)

• (1010)

[English]

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

**POINTS OF ORDER**

ADMISSIBILITY OF AMENDMENTS TO BILL C-3

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to respond to the point of order raised on Thursday, April 29, 2010 by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons concerning two amendments to Bill C-3 adopted by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

The parliamentary secretary shared in his opinion that these two amendments should be ruled out of order because he felt they went beyond the scope of the bill.

Given the significance and profound issues; that is, sex discrimination and gender equality, that have prompted the introduction of Bill C-3, I feel it is vitally important to present counter arguments before you give your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

First, I would like to quote from the sixth edition of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules & Forms*. At page 205 it states in subarticle 689(2):

The committee may so change the provisions of the bill that when it is reported to the House it is in substance a bill other than that which was referred. A committee may negative every clause and substitute new clauses, if relevant to the bill as read a second time.

Article 694 on page 206 states:

*Points of Order*

Amendments may be made in every part of a bill, whether in the title, preamble, clauses or schedules; clauses may be omitted; new clauses and schedules may be added.

Beauchesne's sixth edition also states on page 205 in subarticle 689(3):

The objects (also referred to as the principle or scope) of a bill are stated in its long title, which should cover everything contained in the bill as it was introduced.

The long title of Bill C-3 as listed on the bill's cover page under the number assigned to the bill is "An Act to promote gender equity in Indian registration by responding to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia decision in *McIvor v. Canada* (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs). Therefore, the principle and/or scope defined in this title is to respond to the decision of the B.C. Court of Appeal. To understand what "to respond" means in the context of this legislation, it is necessary to return to the decision of the B.C. Court of Appeal that is referenced in this legislation.

The court ruled that two 1985 amendments to the Indian Act failed to eliminate gender discrimination in the second and subsequent generations. Paragraph 161 of the ruling states:

Sections 6(1)(a) and 6(1)(c) of the Indian Act violate the Charter to the extent that they grant individuals to whom the Double Mother Rule applied greater rights than they would have had under s. 12(1)(a)(iv) of the former legislation. Accordingly, I would declare ss. 6(1)(a) and 6(1)(c) to be of no force and effect, pursuant to s. 52 of the Constitution Act, 1982. I would suspend the declaration for a period of 1 year, to allow Parliament time to amend the legislation to make it constitutional.

Nowhere in its ruling did the court prescribe a remedy to the Government of Canada. In fact, in paragraph 160 it states:

In the end, the decision as to how the inequality should be remedied is one for Parliament.

Although the court arrived at a narrow constitutional finding based on the specific facts of the *McIvor* case, it accepted the broad harms suffered by aboriginal women and their descendants because of non-entitlement to Indian status. In fact, the Court of Appeal left open the possibility of future equality challenges to the status provisions.

More important, previous precedent exists to support the notion that the court's ruling in *McIvor v. Canada* does not create a rigid constitutional template. The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed the role of Parliament to build on a court's ruling, particularly where the judicial scheme can be improved by the legislature.

In its decision in *R. v. O'Connor* in 1995, the Supreme Court of Canada laid down a procedure for the disclosure of confidential records of sexual assault complainants which purported to balance the equality rights of complainants and the rights of accused to full answer and defence.

In 1997 Parliament enacted amendments to the Criminal Code which differed from the procedure delineated by the court and which ostensibly went further to protect women's equality rights and protect their confidential records from disclosure to those accused of sexually assaulting them.

In upholding the new legislation in *R. v. Mills* in 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada emphasized the importance of Parliament building on the court's earlier decision in *O'Connor*. In this case the government chose a more expansive legislative remedy than that

suggested in the *O'Connor* ruling after hearing from women's organizations and others.

• (1015)

Another example is the case of *M. v. H.* in 1999, which involved a section 15 charter challenge to the definition of spouse under the Ontario Family Law Act. The remedy ordered by the Supreme Court impacted only the definition of spouse in the Ontario Family Law Act, but the government of Ontario introduced omnibus legislation to change the definition of spouse in all provincial statutes. Further, the federal government, which was not even a party in *M. v. H.*, brought in the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act in 2000 to respond to the court's ruling.

There are other examples. These precedents confirm that the governmental response to a court ruling can clearly include the implications of the decision but is not restricted by it. Therefore, we argue that the amendments to Bill C-3 are admissible.

I would like to reiterate that the B.C. Court of Appeal did not order a specific remedy in its ruling, and instead ordered a declaration of invalidity. The purpose of a declaration of invalidity is to give the legislature the scope and flexibility to respond to a declaration of constitutional invalidity in the most appropriate way, after the democratic process of hearing the submissions of those most impacted.

Constitutional scholar Peter Hogg explains in chapter 36 of his text, *Constitutional Law of Canada*, that in many cases where the court has found a law to be unconstitutional, the court would prefer the legislature to design the appropriate remedy.

This is exactly what has happened in *McIvor v. Canada*. The B.C. Court of Appeal left it to Parliament to determine an appropriate remedy. The government introduced Bill C-3. The committee then heard unanimous testimony that residual gender discrimination would remain under the status provisions of the Indian Act if Bill C-3 were not amended. All witnesses encouraged the committee to amend the bill in order to eliminate all residual discrimination.

The amendment I introduced in committee to clause 2, which was fully supported by all opposition parties, is a response to this testimony. It will once and for all eliminate this residual discrimination and ensure that the Government of Canada lives up to its responsibilities concerning gender equality.

Based on this precedent and the broad implications of the B.C. Court of Appeal ruling in *McIvor v. Canada*, which is referenced in the long title of Bill C-3, I would argue that the amendment I introduced to clause 2 should be considered one of many possible responses to the court's ruling, and as such should be considered admissible. If this amendment is admissible, the parliamentary secretary's challenge to the admissibility of the amendment to the title should also be dismissed.

*Government Orders*

In Bill C-3, the Conservative government has introduced a piece of legislation that purposefully leaves gender discrimination in the Indian Act's provisions on status entitlement. If we know, which we do, that gender inequality or sex discrimination exists, as parliamentarians we have an obligation to remedy it. Common sense as well as unanimous testimony of witnesses at committee dictate that this is wholly unacceptable. My amendment responds to this fact and, as I have argued, is fully within the scope of Bill C-3.

I respectfully ask, given that generation after generation has fought for this equality, these arguments be given great consideration, as I am confident they will. Let us once and for all end sex discrimination that exists under the Indian Act.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. If possible, I would like to add to what my colleague just said.

The member from Labrador presented this very important amendment. We are asking the Chair to accept this amendment, which is very important to the development and the future of aboriginal communities.

If I may, I would like to talk about something important. Two days ago, a group of about 100 aboriginal women left Wendake, a Huron community near Quebec City, headed for Parliament. They will stop in Trois-Rivières, Montreal and Gatineau, before arriving here on June 1. They are marching to speak out against Bill C-3. Why? Because this bill does not do enough—that is what they told us in committee—and because Bill C-3 will continue to allow the systematic discrimination that aboriginal women have been subjected to since 1876.

When I spoke in this House after Bill C-3 was introduced, I told the government that it could expect amendments to this bill, because it was very important to listen to what the aboriginal peoples had to tell us. We did our job.

There are things in life that I do not understand, and this is one of them. We, the politicians, are criticized for not doing our job. But when we do our job, we are told that we did it too well. Something is wrong here. It is true that Bill C-3 is a response to the McIvor decision of the British Columbia Court of Appeal, but it is important to read this decision in its entirety, which the legislator, the Conservative Party, does not seem to have done.

I wonder why the Conservative Party did not read the full decision. Because if it had, it would have realized that the judges of the British Columbia Court of Appeal say that this is the issue before them and that they are going to rule on it. They rule that Ms. McIvor has been the victim of discrimination under section 15 of the charter since 1985. Therefore, the problem has to be addressed. The judges add, however, that the discrimination against aboriginal communities and specifically against aboriginal women under sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the act will continue unless the government puts an end to this discrimination. I am not the one who said this; it was the judges of the British Columbia Court of Appeal. That is what we did, and my colleague from Labrador proposed amendment No. 1, which is extremely important and would put an end to this discrimination.

I believe that you have the power to accept this amendment. I will not repeat my colleague's arguments, which are very solid and which I agree with completely. As my anglophone colleagues would say, I concur with my colleague. I concur with his legal arguments. It seems clear to me as well that you can go as far as we were asked to go thanks to amendment No. 1.

But it gets worse, Mr. Speaker. If you rejected this amendment, what would happen? Women would no longer have any recourse and would have to keep on going to court. But the Conservative Party, in its wisdom, closed the door to potential court action by cutting funding for the court challenges program, which Ms. McIvor had used to stand up for her rights.

● (1020)

So what will happen? If this amendment is not accepted, not only will aboriginal women continue to be discriminated against, but the government will be taken to court again, and it will be another 20 years before we end this debate.

● (1025)

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** I want to remind hon. members that this is a procedural discussion. It is not the merits of the amendment; it is whether it is procedurally acceptable. That is the argument we are dealing with here.

[*Translation*]

I hope that if the hon. member for Yukon has something to say about this, it will be regarding procedure.

[*English*]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, very briefly, a former prime minister was elected on the grounds that we should have a just society in Canada. I do not think anyone disagrees with that.

We have a bill whose objective is to remove gender discrimination and whose title indicates that. With one amendment the bill could do that. An amendment should fall within that scope of the bill. It does that. I think it is incumbent on all of us in the House, including you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we have a just society. That could be provided by allowing this amendment.

**The Speaker:** I will be back to the House in due course on the matter that has been raised in the point of order, as I indicated when it was first raised. We will hear more, if necessary.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-16. A number of members spoke eloquently to the bill yesterday and we want to proceed further and hear more debate on this issue before it goes to committee for whatever amendments are deemed necessary.

This bill is another Conservative crime bill that has been recycled several times. It is basically a blinding array of paper that we see in front of us year after year. The bill started as Bill C-41, Bill C-42, then Bill C-9 and now it is Bill C-16. The reason it has had such a torturous journey is because of the government.

The government mandates fixed elections and then does not follow its own laws. It called an election a year ahead of time and killed all of its bills. Then, within a month, it prorogued the House and killed them all again. A year later, it prorogued again and kills them another time.

It is little wonder that the public is having second thoughts about the government's commitment to this so-called tough on crime policy which is not being tough on crime. As a matter of fact, any government should have a smart on crime policy, but that certainly does not describe the government's actions on this file so far.

Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, ending conditional sentences for property and other serious crimes, would amend section 742.1 of the Criminal Code which deals with conditional sentencing to eliminate the reference to serious personal injury offences. It would also restrict the ability of conditional sentences for all offences for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 14 years or life and for specified offences prosecuted by way of indictment for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 10 years.

The first bill of this type was introduced back in September 1996. We now have a 13 year history of dealing with this type of legislation. In fact, it has worked fairly well over the years. It allows for sentences of imprisonment to be served in the community rather than a correctional facility, which some people have called a school for crime. It is a midway point between incarceration and sanctions such as probation or fines.

The conditional sentence was not introduced in isolation but is part of a renewal of the sentencing provisions in the Criminal Code. These provisions include the fundamental purpose and principles of sentencing. The fundamental principle of sentencing is that a sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender.

The renewed sentencing provisions set out further sentencing principles, including a list of aggravating and mitigating circumstances that should guide sentences imposed. The primary goal of conditional sentencing is to reduce the reliance upon incarceration.

We dealt at length with the costs associated with keeping an inmate in prison in Canada. In the provincial system it is \$52,000 a year and in the federal system it is \$90,000 a year. Yesterday a Bloc member pointed out that it would be anticipated that we would be looking at an extra 13,000 to 15,000 people in the system because of this and the projected cost would be somewhere around \$780 million. That is just a guess because no one knows exactly what the figure would be. I would have to think that the government would

know, having come up with this initiative. It also is not the one that would fulfill the cost. The cost would be borne by the provinces. We are talking about conditional sentences of less than two years and those people will be sitting in provincial jails, some of which have to be built.

• (1030)

In Manitoba's case, it is running at capacity at the moment. Therefore, if this legislation were to pass, provinces such as Manitoba could not actually fulfill the laws. They would have to embark upon a prison expansion program funded by the Province of Manitoba or any other province. It would take a number of years to build a new facility at a cost of many millions of dollars. When we say that the cost is around \$700 hundred million for this initiative right now, that is not taking into account the cost of building new jails, which, in some cases, could take many years.

The public is being misled because the Conservatives go for these one-off thirty second advertising clips saying that they will get tough on crime, but they do not give any explanation of what the final result will be. They do not explain to people that it will cost billions more. For example, last week, on the two-for-one credits sentencing, the Conservatives went so far as to indicate that it would cost about \$90 million. Within days, however, they were contradicted by more reliable sources and had to admit that it would be \$2 billion. If we multiply these sort of figures among the 13 or 16, or whatever number of crime bills their crime bill factory keeps producing in this House, we are talking about huge costs. That is fine, but what is the benefit?

Let us look at best practices. Since governments talk about best practices when it comes to IT issues, computer issues and all sorts of other issues in society, why not apply the same best practices approach to the judicial system? We can make changes and improvements to bills but we should not be embarking on programs that have been totally discredited elsewhere. The United States is a very poor example but that is the type of example the Conservatives tend to want to follow.

The primary goal of conditional sentencing is to reduce reliance on incarceration by providing the courts with an alternative sentencing mechanism. In addition, the conditional sentence provides an opportunity to further incorporate restorative justice concepts into the sentencing process by encouraging those who have caused harm to acknowledge the fact and to make reparations. At the time of their introduction, the conditional sentences were generally seen as an appropriate mechanism to divert minor offences and offenders away from the prison system.

As I have indicated, there are two major benefits for doing that. One is to keep first-time offenders away from hardened criminals, the criminal university that these prisons are, and to also look at the cost of \$52,000 a year to keep them in these prisons. The overuse of incarceration was recognized by many as being problematic, while restorative justice concepts were seen as beneficial. In practice, however, a conditional sentence was sometimes viewed in a negative light in some cases. That, of course, gave the government the opening it needed to bring in some new rules.

*Government Orders*

Concern has been expressed that some offenders are receiving conditional sentences that are not appropriate. When the bill gets to committee, which it will at some point, maybe some changes will need to be made, but there are probably some parts of the bill that we will find acceptable. It may be beneficial to allow persons, who have not committed a serious or violent crime and are not dangerous, and who otherwise would be incarcerated, to serve their sentence in the community. Certain commentators have argued that sometimes the very nature of the offence, however, requires incarceration of the offender.

●(1035)

Yesterday, the member for Burnaby—Douglas mentioned that he was not aware of any example. We have asked members to show examples where conditional sentences have not worked out. Where is the big problem? The government is supposed to be here to solve problems, but if it cannot identify what the problem is in the first place, then why is it doing this, other than maybe for publicity purposes.

The provisions that govern the conditional sentences are set out in sections 742 to 742(7) of the Criminal Code. Several criteria must be met before the sentencing judge may impose a conditional sentence. The offence, as I had indicated before, cannot be a serious personal injury offence, which is an indictable offence. Indictable offences include high treason, treason, first degree murder or second degree murder involving the use or attempted use of violence against another person, or conduct endangering or likely to endanger the life or safety of another person or inflicting or likely to inflict severe psychological damage upon another person, for which the offender may be sentenced to imprisonment for 10 years or more. Also, an offence or an attempt to commit an offence of sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon, threats to a third party causing bodily harm, or aggravated sexual assault.

The offence for which the person has been convicted must not be terrorism, so terrorism is excluded, prosecuted by way of indictment for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 10 years or more.

The offence for which the person has been convicted must not be a criminal organization offence prosecuted by way of indictment for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 10 years or more.

There is a picture emerging. We are talking about very limited numbers of cases here, and certainly not the super serious ones that I have just indicated on the list.

Another issue, of course, is the whole area of judicial independence. If we follow the Conservatives' reasoning on these types of bills, we really do not need a judge. We can simply have a law clerk mete out the sentences. The whole area of judicial independence is there because judges are trained and have many years of experience, and in law they are always given latitude to deal with cases on an individual by individual basis.

What the government is trying to do with these types of bills is to take away the judicial independence of the judge. It wants to sideline the trained individual and simply mandate what the sentence will be. There is no need for a judge to do that.

The sentencing judge must be satisfied that serving the sentence in the community would not endanger the safety of the community.

That is another issue that the government likes to talk about. However, one of the criteria is that the sentencing judge must be satisfied that there would not be an endangerment to the community.

Insofar as the other criteria are concerned, the objectives of sentencing are the denunciation of unlawful conduct, the deterrence of the offender and others from committing offences, the separation of the offender from the community when necessary, the rehabilitation of the offender, the provision of reparation to victims and the community and a promotion of the sense of responsibility of the offender.

We have a situation with the government appointing Mr. Sullivan as an Ombudsman for Victims of Crime for a three year contract. After the three year period, he does not have a lot of good things to say about the government. He indicates that it is shortchanging victims of crime.

The government has wrapped itself around the flag and, for several years, has claimed that it is looking out for victims and acting in the interest of victims of crime. However, the very first Ombudsman for Victims of Crime that it appoints, after only his first, and last as he is not being reappointed, three year term, reports that the government is not that helpful to the victims of crime and that it is more concerned about punishment than it is with the victims of crime.

●(1040)

It has also been proven that victims of crime tend to like the whole idea of conditional sentences, because they are interested in results. They are interested in the rehabilitation of offenders. How is society better off if people keep reoffending? That is not what we are trying to do here. It is not a positive for the victims of crime to have people reoffend. Let us do things that are going to stop them from reoffending. If conditional sentences help people not reoffend, we should do that.

Speaking of victims of crime, there cannot be any bigger victims of crime than the taxpayers of this country if they have to put out another \$700 million to fund more prison construction to house people who are going to be, at the end of the day, statistically bigger reoffenders because they are in the prisons as opposed to communities.

Another really good example I would like to mention now is this whole idea of closing down the six prison farms. We have petitions coming to our office on this issue. This is an issue that will rock the Conservative base because people shake their heads when they realize that the government would close down six prison farms that have been operating for years and produce terrific results. Almost everybody I talk to asks why the prison farms are being closed down and says the number of them should be increased.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** That's right, people have been telling me, too.

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** The member is not sympathetic to that, but I would ask him to take a petition around and talk to people.



*Government Orders*

The NDP critic was in Athens, Ontario, the other day. The member may have never been to Athens, Ontario, but I have been there many times and it is not really a hotbed of NDP votes. I can assure everyone of that. That whole area has had a strong Conservative base for many years. As a matter of fact, voting Liberal in that area is really stepping out. The people there are not happy about the situation with the prison farms. It runs contrary to common sense.

The issue is that the Conservatives have obviously been in government a little too long, because they are starting to lose their grip on common sense. That is fine. If they want to ignore the prison farm issue and continue to close them down, then they do that at their peril because that issue is going to be around for some time to come.

Another principle underlying sentencing is proportionality. The sentence imposed by the court must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. Another sentencing principle is that aggravating and mitigating factors have to be taken into account because there must be similar sentences for similar offences.

One of the reasons conditional sentences came about in the first place 13 years ago is that there was not a consistency across the country in terms of sentencing. For the same offence, a person would get a certain sentence in one province and someone in a neighbouring province would get a different one.

This certainly is a time to take another look at the Criminal Code. As a matter of fact, the NDP critic from Windsor—Tecumseh has talked about that repeatedly, that as a Parliament we should sit down and do a rewrite of the entire Criminal Code. That is fundamentally what should be going on in this case rather than just making piecemeal reforms.

I have many more points to make, but perhaps I can make them in the following debate throughout the day.

•(1045)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member might want to get his pen out because I have three questions.

First, he and a number of us have mentioned in the last couple of days the costs for the provinces. I wonder if he has any input from attorneys general of the provinces on that.

Second, he mentioned that the government cannot really be serious about its crime bills because it keeps proroguing Parliament or having elections, both of which put off its own crime bills. However, he did not talk about the seriousness related to this bill and the fact that the government has only had three speakers. There have been all sorts of objections that have come out and people have found technical problems, yet no one in the government has spoken to defend them. The justice minister and the parliamentary secretary have not even spoken.

However, my main question is on proportionality, as he has mentioned. When a judge whose job is to invoke justice has had the tool removed that would naturally work for justice in a given situation, he has to look for another option. That might have the unintended consequence of his choosing a suspended sentence, for

instance, with probation. That could actually be more dangerous because the person would then not necessarily go back to jail and certainly would not get the rehabilitation that would make it safer for victims and other Canadians.

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend actually asked four questions, not three.

I have listened to him make presentations on this and other bills in the House and I certainly agree with him. He has an excellent analysis of the problems.

I did bring up the issue of the government speaking, last week too, when the minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism actually showed up in the House for his bill. He listened to each and every one of the speakers and actually participated in the debate by answering the first question and asking questions in each of the questions and comments periods. Then he was quickly followed by the minister for democratic reform who was here for all the speeches on his bill to limit Senate terms. I think we in this House, speaker after speaker, recognized that. Certainly in the Manitoba House, for a large number of years, that was just common practice.

So, where is the government? It has gone AWOL again. It seemed to change its pattern for a few days, but now it seems to have gone back to its old way of ignoring the problem and hoping it will go away.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona for his excellent summary of the current situation and the conditions under which a judge can impose a conditional sentence.

I will only mention three of the conditions: the person who has been convicted of an offence cannot be subject to a minimum sentence; the judge must find that the offence merits a jail term of less than two years; and the judge must be convinced that serving the sentence in the community would not pose a threat to public safety. The member presented these facts, and I would like to thank him for that because it gives us a clear idea of the current situation.

I would like to ask him the following question. How transparent does he think the government really is when it calls the bill the Ending House Arrest for Property and Other Serious Crimes by Serious and Violent Offenders Act? That is the alternative title the government has given this bill. What does the member think about a government that misleads people in this way?

*Government Orders*

●(1050)

[English]

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Mr. Speaker, that is certainly consistent with the current government's advertising program. It is as if the Conservative Party advertising firm has simply tied its way into the bills in the House of Commons. Over and over again, the Conservatives feel they have to add a sexy title to the bill that sort of fits in with the press release that is already written. I say they do not have to do that. The press releases are ready. I have a bunch of their clippings here that I could show to anybody who wishes to see them. That is what they do. I think they write the press releases first and then they write the bills based on the press releases. All their crime efforts are really based more on trying to gain votes, and it is just not working. Their numbers are going down because the public, I think, is seeing through what they are up to here. The fact of the matter is that their crime agenda is just not getting the traction they hoped it would get at the initial stages.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I noted that my colleague spoke of the American experience in his speech. The U.S. went down this road of being tough on crime, throwing people in jail and being heavy on punishment, to find it really was not working.

I remember hearing a speech in Sault Ste. Marie from a Jesuit who works with gangs in San Francisco. He very clearly made the case that simply throwing people in jail and getting tougher in terms of punishment was not working for the people he was in contact with every day in the organization where he was executive director. He said to me that Canada should learn from the U.S. experience, that we should not go down that road and that we do not need to spend that kind of money or create that kind of pain and hardship for everybody concerned.

I would like the member to expand a little on his knowledge, understanding and experience of the American experiment that did not work.

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Mr. Speaker, it is an issue of déjà vu. The reality is that Europe has lower crime rates, Canada has mid-range crime rates and the United States has the highest crime rates. Let us assume, for want of a better argument, that they are 25 years ahead of us. If we are looking at what they did 25 years ago, we would see that they have a system that does not work.

They expanded private prisons in the United States in an explosive manner to house criminals under the "three strikes and you are out" program and the mandatory minimum programs of Ronald Reagan back in the 1980s. At the end of the day, what have they got? They have a system that is bankrupting their state and the highest crime rate around.

How could that possibly be seen as following best practices? What is it going to take for the government to wake up and realize that, on this and other issues, it should be looking at best practices? It could look and see what works in Sweden or what works and does not work in other countries. Why be wedded to an American system that has been proven not to work? Not only does it not work, but it costs a fortune.

●(1055)

**The Deputy Speaker:** There is enough time for a very brief question, perhaps 30 seconds for the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, just following up on the thoughts of my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, it seems to me that the United States should be the safest country in the world, given that it has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Can he elaborate on this seeming contradiction? If tougher sentences make safer streets, why is it that the United States has the toughest sentences in the world and the highest rate of crime? Can he expand on that?

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Mr. Speaker, I think it just shows that prisons are really crime schools. Prisoners are put in with other prisoners and learn the trade. At the end of the day, they come out with their degree. They are just better at crime when they come out of prison than when they went in.

How is that a positive for society if prisoners keep reoffending? We are trying to stop that system, and having conditional sentences seems to be working. It is also cheaper.

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

**Some hon. members:** Question.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

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#### FAIRNESS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES (EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE) ACT

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC)** moved that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the minister have unanimous consent to share her time?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to express my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Petty Officer Second Class Craig Blake, who made the ultimate sacrifice on Monday while serving Canadians proudly in Afghanistan. I was deeply saddened to have learned of his loss. He was a dedicated father of two sons who was a native of Simcoe, Ontario, in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk. Our whole community has been shaken by this loss.

Petty Officer Blake is a local hero and a brave Canadian. Let us never forget Petty Officer Blake and all of the other brave men and women who have died while protecting the freedoms of Canadians and of those around the world.

In memory of Petty Officer Blake, I am humbled and privileged to rise today to speak about one of our government's newest bills, Bill C-13, the fairness for military families bill. This bill proposes to improve access to employment insurance parental benefits for members of the Canadian Forces.

Canadian Forces members are in a unique situation. Every single day soldiers are putting their lives on the line for the rights and freedoms of Canadians and of people all around the globe. They have such conviction in what they are doing and they desire to serve their country so much that they do something that not many of us are prepared to do: They spend large amounts of time away from their families.

Frankly, I cannot imagine what it must feel like for our soldiers to be halfway around the world in life-threatening circumstances knowing that they will not get to kiss their spouse, that they will not get to hold their new baby, or they will not get to hug their mom for months, but that is what our soldiers are willing to give up in order to serve our country. There are no words to properly express our gratitude to the members of our armed forces.

It is not just the soldiers who make the sacrifices; their families do as well. They spend endless sleepless nights worrying about the safety of their loved ones and spend months without the help and support of their spouse, their parent or their child. We also owe these people thanks for all of their hard work and their sacrifice.

In Canada, unfortunately, we sometimes forget about how lucky we have things. Where else in the world can we stand on a street corner and see a mosque, a synagogue and a Christian church, and not have the fear to practise the religion of choice? We must never forget this freedom and we must never forget that it did not come without a price. It is as a result of the sacrifices that our brave soldiers have made that we are able to enjoy the freedoms that we have right here in Canada.

The work of our soldiers is obviously not limited to the protection of our Canadian freedoms. In the battlefields of Vimy Ridge to Normandy and now in Afghanistan, Canadian soldiers have been on the front lines fighting for what is right in the face of tyranny.

Most recently, through the courage of our soldiers in Afghanistan, young women can now attend school and there are now democratic elections. In fact, simple freedoms that we take for granted in Canada, such as listening to music or watching a film, are now for the first time in decades available in Afghanistan as a result of the work of our Canadian soldiers.

No government has shown such unwavering support of our Canadian troops as our Conservative government. We recognize the important contributions of our soldiers and we are committed to ensuring that our brave men and women have access to the programs and services that they need and deserve.

Just a few short months ago, the member for Nepean—Carleton approached me with an issue. He had met a soldier from his riding

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who was unable to access EI parental benefits and enjoy time with his new baby when he returned from his deployment in Afghanistan. That is because under the current Employment Insurance Act, eligible Canadians must access their maternity and parental benefits within 52 weeks of the birth or the adoption.

• (1100)

This means that Canadian Forces members, including reservists, who are ordered to return to duty while on parental leave, or whose parental leave is deferred as a result of an imperative military requirement, may not be able to use the weeks with their family to which they are entitled. I had the same reaction that my colleague did when I heard this news. It is not right and it must be fixed.

This has been a problem for several years now. Unfortunately, the previous Liberal government completely ignored the issue, but our Conservative government is taking action. Bill C-13 fixes this unjust problem. I want to thank the member for Nepean—Carleton for bringing this issue to my attention and for his hard work in making sure that it was resolved.

The fairness for military families bill extends the window to access parental benefits to a maximum of 104 weeks instead of the previous 52 if a Canadian Forces member's parental leave is deferred, or if the member is recalled to duty from leave in the first year that a child is born or adopted. Even though soldiers may miss their baby's first steps, they will not miss the baby's first words. Military families can have a bit more piece of mind knowing that being deployed to serve our country will no longer prevent soldiers from having the opportunity to bond with their new child when they return.

[*Translation*]

We all agree that maternity and parental employment insurance benefits are good for families. These benefits help parents bond with their new child. In 2007-08 alone, over 186,000 Canadians took advantage of these benefits. Clearly, this has helped many families. We hope that this change to the employment insurance system will give Canadian Forces members more opportunities to bond with their children.

• (1105)

[*English*]

This bill reflects our Conservative government's clear commitment to families and our unwavering support for our Canadian Forces. We believe that families are the foundation of this great country. We also believe that parents should have the option to raise their kids as they see fit. That is why we introduced important new measures, such as the universal child care benefit, which provides \$100 a month for every child under the age of six, and we are putting more money in the pockets of parents to spend on what matters most to them: their families.

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[Translation]

The government also believes that Canadians, including Canadian Forces members, should not be forced to choose between work and family responsibilities. That is why we recently made special employment insurance benefits, including parental benefits, available to 2.6 million self-employed workers on a voluntary basis for the first time in Canada's history.

This bill is another example of that commitment. We want to make sure that when Canadians decide to join the Canadian Forces, to put on a uniform and serve our country, they can still bond with their new children when they come back. This bill shows that we understand the sacrifices that soldiers and their families make. As it stands, the Employment Insurance Act does not account for situations specific to soldiers and their families. It is time for the Act to recognize the important contribution that Canadian Forces members make.

[English]

We also announced in budget 2010 that we were taking steps to make it easier to access EI sickness benefits for immediate families of military personnel who have unfortunately died as a result of a service related injury. This change would provide recognition of the impact on family members of losing a loved one in the service.

[Translation]

This is another way for the government to express its gratitude to Canadian Forces members for their sacrifices.

[English]

There are no words to express how grateful we are to our armed forces. Bills like this one will bring us a step closer to ensuring that our soldiers have access to the programs to which they are entitled, soldiers, like our late Petty Officer Blake. The least we can do in return is give them some time with their families.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have had a chance to chat with the parliamentary secretary and others on that side about the bill. It certainly looks like something that would get all-party support, but I obviously do not speak for the other parties.

Does the minister know how many people would likely be affected by the bill? What would be the annual cost of the bill?

Would the minister be prepared to look at some amendments at committee? If it turns out that there are some people who may not have been covered who could have been covered by this bill, would the government be prepared to entertain amendments at the committee stage?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's support of this important bill.

It is only an estimate, but we estimate that some 60 soldiers' families would benefit from this each year. The estimates at this point in time are that it would cost approximately \$600,000 per year, which I believe is a very small price to pay.

We want this bill to go forward. We want it to help as many Canadian Forces families as possible. If the hon. member has reasonable amendments that would help us put this through to

benefit as many people as possible, we would certainly be willing to entertain them.

• (1110)

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-13. The only thing I did find a little curious was that the minister is using the same arguments in favour of Bill C-13 that she rejected regarding the bill to eliminate the employment insurance waiting period. I find that rather strange.

I would like to know if the minister's bill will include retroactivity. In other words, will this apply only to Canadian Forces members who need it once the bill comes into force, or will there be any retroactivity for members who have already returned but also need it?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, once again, I very much appreciate the Bloc's support. Our objective is to help the families of Canadian Forces members who cannot be with their new baby for the first year. That is what we want to do.

Under existing legislation, there is a two-week waiting period before benefits can be paid. That waiting period will be maintained, because it applies to everyone who receives benefits. However, we are trying to include all military personnel who should be able to access those benefits.

If the hon. member would like to propose a reasonable amendment to include people who are already receiving these benefits, I would welcome such an amendment and take it into consideration.

[English]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important bill that will support Canadian military families. By improving the access of Canadian Forces members to employment insurance parental benefits, we are recognizing their profound and dedicated contribution of service to our country and to all Canadians.

The men and women who serve in the Canadian Forces play an enormous role representing Canada abroad and serving our interests at home and around the world. Our contribution to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan is only the latest of many overseas missions past and present, which have called our service men and women away from their families on behalf of service for us all.

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When we recognize their service, we must also recognize their sacrifices. We recognize those who make the ultimate sacrifice. We should remember them always and every day as we go about our lives in peace, security and prosperity in a country ruled by laws and blessed by freedom. We remember them solemnly every November 11 and we commemorate them on April 9. We did that less than a month ago in a moving ceremony not far from this place.

By the same token, we must recognize the tremendous hardship that arises when a Canadian Forces member has to leave his or her family because of an imperative military requirement, and it is an imperative requirement for the members to do so. Our Canadian Forces members spend many months on end away from their families, often more than eight or nine months at a time. This is very hard on a family and even harder on a family with or expecting children.

Our service men and women in these situations deserve our support. We need to help them preserve and strengthen the ties of family. The bill would help them do just that. The current Employment Insurance Act does not recognize the unique circumstances that our soldiers and their families face. It is time the act recognized the important and imperative contributions made by our Canadian Forces and the members of the forces.

We also announced in budget 2010 that we would take steps to make it easier to access EI sickness benefits for immediate family of military personnel who unfortunately died as a result of a service-related injury. This change will provide recognition of the impact on family members of losing a loved one in service, the shock and the sadness that no family should have to endure, but many do endure because they have to.

All Canadians are deeply and profoundly touched by the sacrifices made by our soldiers on behalf of us and on behalf of others. That is why Canadians, by the thousands, line up each unfortunate time to observe the memorial motorcades on the Highway of Heroes. That is why on Fridays Canadians wear red.

I cannot adequately express the thanks we give to our service men and women. Through initiatives like this bill, we can get a step closer to ensuring our soldiers have access to the programs and services to which they are entitled. As our minister has stated, the bill is the right and fair thing to do.

Canadian soldiers are willing to give their lives for our country. They are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, often make many other painful sacrifices for all of us. The least we can do in return is to give them some time with their families.

Technically, what the bill would do is extend the eligibility window for EI parental benefits by the number of weeks that a Canadian Forces regular and reserve members' parental leave is deferred or interrupted because of an imperative military requirement during the eligibility window. The window would be extended by up to a maximum of 52 weeks for a possible total of 104 weeks to allow these individuals to access part or all of the 35 weeks of EI parental benefits available to them. This would allow Canadian Forces parents time to share in those important milestones that form an integral part of every family's story. That is why we are doing this.

As I have said, we must recognize the service and sacrifice of these brave men and women. They face circumstances other Canadian workers do not. Most Canadians do not face imperative military requirements as a normal part of their daily life. Canadian Forces members put their lives on the line for our country and our government is proud to stand behind them and support them in whatever ways we can.

● (1115)

Under the legislation, we propose to address the specific challenges faced by Canadian Forces members, including reservists, who have their parental leave deferred or are ordered to return to duty while on leave due to imperative military requirements. The measure we have proposed is similar to what is offered to parents on EI parental leave who have a child in the hospital. The period in which parents can claim benefits is extended one week for every week the child is hospitalized, up to a maximum of 104 weeks.

EI parental benefits play an important role for many new parents by providing income replacement. Use of EI special benefits, including maternity and parental benefits, is high. The 2008 monitoring and assessment report found that more than 186,000 Canadians accessed parental benefits in 2007-08. The number of parents sharing parental benefits continues to rise. Parents use almost 95% of the time available to them under the benefit. It is well used and well received. Everybody recognizes the importance of the early years and the intellectual and emotional and social development of children.

Canadians recognize that service in the Canadian Forces is honourable, but comes at great personal risk. That is why our government values the extension of parental benefits as a meaningful gesture to the men and women serving in the Canadian Forces. It shows that we value their sacrifice and we value strong families.

Military families also deserve our support in another way.

As it currently stands, eligible individuals who are unable to work due to illness, including the stress caused by the injury or death of a loved one, can qualify for up to 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits.

Budget 2010 proposes to facilitate access to EI sickness for immediate family members of military personnel who died from a service-related injury. This recognizes the impact on family members of losing a loved one in service to their country. It reflects our country's deep appreciation for the new generation of men and women in uniform who stand up for the values and principles that Canadians hold dear.

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We owe so much to the Canadian Forces members who have served and continue to serve with great distinction. I encourage my fellow members of Parliament to show their support to military families by facilitating access to EI and by passing this bill. I would ask that this bill be passed quickly and unanimously by the House.

• (1120)

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my parliamentary colleague, who is on the human resources committee, a similar question to the one I asked the minister.

I think all parties in the House are generally supportive of the bill, but there are certain military members who still do not qualify for family maternal benefits for certain reasons specific to the bill.

Would the parliamentary secretary, whose judgment I have come to respect, give us his word that we would consider those if this comes up in the course of our study in the House of Commons? I do not anticipate that would be a long study. This is a fairly limited bill, small in nature. However, if we find some way to improve the bill, would he be amenable to that?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, my minister indicated that she would consider all reasonable amendments. I would do the reasonable thing and go along with all reasonable amendments.

It is fair to say, generally speaking, that this is a very specific amendment that we all support. We want to ensure that no one is left behind. When the bill is enacted, personally I would like to see that anyone who has been in service, or is in service, and is not able to qualify for all of the 35 weeks of parental benefits is given the opportunity to do that and is not prejudiced by the fact that those weeks have been interrupted because he or she was deployed to service.

We certainly will work with the opposition to ensure that comes to pass.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I believe the secretary's answer is along the same lines as my question. However, I wonder he could elaborate on something. It would be possible for a reservist to have been absent for 35 weeks. Could this apply to a reservist who was there 10 or 15 weeks, which is quite plausible for a reservist with the Canadian Forces?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, we will have to look at the specifics of what the hon. member has proposed. We will certainly undertake to consider it.

My personal view is we need to ensure that any benefits that are interrupted and not available should be corrected by this bill. We will do everything possible to ensure that happens and take whatever constructive suggestions the members opposite may have to ensure that is achieved when the bill is passed.

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a previous question that was asked about the costs and number of soldiers involved. I believe the minister said that we were looking at 60 soldiers, at a cost of about \$600,000 per year.

Is it contemplated that we would be looking at 60 new cases per year? If that is the case, would the government be willing to look at maybe expanding the bill in other areas in case more people would benefit from this?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, the numbers provided by the minister have obviously been looked at. As I mentioned before, the desire is to cover all those who would be affected and that no one would be left behind. We will certainly be prepared to do whatever it takes to accomplish that.

The dollars are an estimate year to year. The numbers affected are not substantial. If we were to ensure that no one would be missed, the costs would not go up significantly. We will again have a look at that when we discuss the matter in committee.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have an opportunity to speak to this bill, which was introduced a couple of weeks ago and has come up today.

I want to divide my comments into a few areas. I am going to talk about the bill itself, what it actually means and what it actually does. I want to chat a little bit about the challenge for military families, coming from a military area. That is the second thing. The third thing I want to do is talk a little bit about EI itself and how this fits into the whole context of what could have been done for EI. That is what I am going to talk about, so members who are here and were planning to doze off can adjust their schedules accordingly.

First, this is a bill that is designed to assist members who are serving in the Canadian Forces. Although it is very specific in nature, does not capture many Canadians, and does not make a huge impact on the national level, it certainly could be argued it would make an impact for certain military families.

It addresses the special situation in which CF members can be placed when they are called to return to duty while they are on parental leave. In some cases such a call could translate into a loss of parental benefits, since parents have a limited period of 52 weeks after the child is born to claim those benefits.

When a child is born, a claim for employment insurance must be made within 52 weeks. This bill would address this by extending the period during which CF members can claim their parental benefits if they are called for duty during their parental leave, extending the benefit from 52 weeks to 104 weeks.

It does not mean that Canadian Forces members would have more than 35 weeks of parental benefits. It is the same as everybody else has, it is just that it recognizes that Canadian Forces members are sometimes not actually here in Canada to start that benefit. According to HRSDC officials this will only affect approximately 60 people a year, and it is somewhere in the range of \$500,000 to \$600,000 a year.

It is the position of the official opposition that it makes sense to support the bill. In fact, I think we should support it as quickly as we can, get it into committee, and have a look at it. Also, as I indicated a few minutes ago, I do not think it needs a whole lot of study. There are many things in our committee, including a report on poverty that we are hoping to finish that has to be done. However, as soon as this gets to committee, it will get the attention that it requires.

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I do want to commend the member for Nepean—Carleton, who is one of the members of this House, like myself, who has constituents who might be affected by this. I am quoting from the Nepean-Barrhaven newspaper from April of this year, referencing the family the member for Nepean—Carleton came across, the Duquette family. The article states:

Four days following the birth of their first son, Jacob, in July 2004, Major Jim Duquette had to leave for duty in the Golan Heights in the Middle East. He returned to Canada in August 2005 and attempted to apply for a deferred parental leave, only to find that the benefits had expired in his time away from home.

"That was really difficult", said Anne Duquette, his wife. "Part of what got us through in that first year of parenting was the thought that we could have that extra time together".

During the 52 weeks following a birth or adoption, 35 weeks of parental benefits may be paid.

That is a specific case that was brought forward by the member for Nepean—Carleton. I wish he had mentioned this last summer when I had the occasion to spend many hours in small rooms with the member and the Minister of HRSDC. We might have been able to deal with this last year. Nonetheless, it has now been brought forward.

I come from a strong military area. I come from a part of Canada where we have the east coast navy, 12-Wing Shearwater, Windsor Park, Stadacona, and a very long and distinguished military history in Dartmouth and the greater Halifax area.

One of the great pleasures and one of my great prides is the opportunity to be a member of Parliament for an area that is rich in veterans and also rich in serving members of the Canadian Forces. I was reminded of this the other day when I went to the launch of Senator Bill Rompkey's book about St. John's, Newfoundland and the Battle of the Atlantic. It is a fabulous book. I commend it to all members. If members move quickly, they could get an autographed copy from the senator.

It talks about St. John's, and keep in mind that Newfoundland and Labrador were not part of Canada during World War II, they joined us in 1949. They played an integral role, particularly in keeping the channels open between North America and Europe.

•(1125)

I know, coming from Halifax where a number of the great corvettes sailed from, how important that was. Where I come from, HMCS *Sackville* is called Canada's naval memorial. It is the last of the corvettes, the last of those great sturdy, rugged, small vessels that kept those shipping lanes open in the cold north Atlantic.

I am a proud trustee of HMCS *Sackville*. I was a trustee before I was a member of Parliament and I suspect I will be a trustee when I am finished in this place.

When one lives in Halifax-Dartmouth, when one meets people like Allan Moore, Doug Shanks, Hank Einerson, Charlie Carroll and people like this, that I have the opportunity to rub shoulders with on a regular basis, one gets a sense of the great heroism. However, the heroism does not come from what they say because they will not talk about. The heroism comes from being in their presence, knowing what they went through and getting little pieces of information from them about their experience in World War II or talking to Tom Estabrooks about what he went through in the Korean War and

talking to our many peacekeeping veterans who have served this country so well.

I think it is incumbent upon us as a country to ensure that all of our social infrastructure, including employment insurance, is designed in such a way that the great veterans of this country, including the very recent ones and the serving members of the Canadian Forces, have full access to those benefits.

I think, living in an area as I do, that we have an even greater respect and a greater understanding of our military. Everyone knows people who have served in Afghanistan. I know many people who have been in Afghanistan. I know people who are in Afghanistan today. I think of a family in my community whose father right now is serving in Afghanistan whose son is on my son's soccer team. Although they keep it inside and they deal with their responsibilities in a very personal, respectful manner, I know how difficult it is when families are called upon to serve their country. All members of the House would share the respect that we have for them.

I have seen how families adjust. I have seen how families make sacrifices. I have seen how families have had to adjust everything from their finances, to the school year, to vacations, in order to have one member serve. We should do whatever we can to make it as easy as possible on those families.

Of course, not everyone who serves comes back the way that we would like them to come back. One of the darkest days that I have had as a member of Parliament was the day in 2006 when we flew back from Ottawa. There were a number of parliamentarians on the plane. As we touched down we all turned on our Blackberrys to the news that Corporal Paul Davis had died. He was one of the first casualties in Afghanistan. His father Jim and wife Sharon are very good friends of mine and I know other members of the House. We would all hope that when people who serve their country and choose to do something to make the world a better place, as Paul Davis did, that they come back obviously in different circumstances. Not everyone does.

I have had the opportunity to meet people in my constituency who suffer with PTSD. I recall sitting on a deck with a constituent. This was a person who we could just tell was a very vibrant individual who joined the Armed Forces as a robust, energetic person who wanted to serve the world. Now in many ways he is a broken person and he needs help. He needs more help than he is getting.

I meet with veterans who do not qualify for the VIP who are having trouble keeping up with their daily chores and obligations.

However, many people do come back and we need to ensure that whatever we do, we know and respect the challenges that they face when they come back.

I get to meet with a number of constituents in that circumstance with my assistant, Percy Fleet, who is a former member of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. He understands the situation very well. One of the great pleasures of being a member of Parliament is to help veterans to advance their cause and to pay them back in some small tangible way for the service that they have given this country.

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We should do more. Though this is a small step, it is a significant step. It will have my support. I want to look at the bill in committee to see who is covered and see whether there are other people who might be covered considering the small cost of the bill.

It seems to me that there may be opportunities. I certainly will not hold the bill up, but we might want to look at some of those considerations.

● (1130)

Over the past year or so, employment insurance has been a hot topic. It has been a hot topic because this country has gone through a difficult time. I want to quote from a report that came out this week from the Citizens for Public Justice, which was developed with funding support from World Vision Canada's programs. CPJ is a faith-based organization. It looks at issues of poverty and it is a great advocate for Canada doing more to assist those most in need.

It produced a report that puts some numbers and figures behind what Canada has been going through in this recession. We all have a sense that things have been difficult, but it has been hard to quantify exactly how difficult it has been, particularly for Canadians most in need. This report, released on Tuesday, said:

The recession also demonstrated the inadequacies of EI. While the rate of EI coverage increased, just over half of unemployed Canadians qualified for EI benefits. Over 770,000 unemployed Canadians did not qualify for EI. Benefits for those who qualified for EI were low, with the average weekly benefit representing a poverty income for households without any other source of income. As many as 500,000 Canadians may have exhausted their benefits in the past few months, as the average length of unemployment increased during the recession. Workers who exhaust their benefits or who do not qualify for benefits at all either need to turn to social assistance or live off of savings or credit. Social assistance caseloads increased across the country, as social assistance had to fill in the gap created by EI.

Employment insurance has been a hot topic and the response of the government has been inadequate. While the numbers have changed month to month, I recall that last year less than half of 1.6 million unemployed Canadians qualified for EI.

There was a call across the country that we should have a national standard, at least during this period of recession, for employment insurance. It was called for by the Leader of the Opposition and all opposition parties. It was called for by labour unions and public policy think tanks. It was called for by the wife of the federal Minister of Finance. It was called for by all the western premiers and just about everybody else.

If we are going to look at employment insurance as a fundamental piece of the social infrastructure of this country, let us do something significant. Let us have a national standard. The government decided that it would not do that and I think that was a mistake.

We have had private members' bills in the House. The member for Brome—Missisquoi, the member for Chambly—Borduas, the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, and the member for Sydney—Victoria have all brought forward bills in the House that could have improved employment insurance for those who need help and need help immediately.

There is no shortage of people who have been shortchanged by the employment insurance system. We could get into all kinds of reasons for that. I know that people like to blame different people for what happened on employment insurance. The fact is that at some point in

time we have to move from history to current events. We have to look at the recession that came upon this country. It was not as if people were not saying that we should do more. It was not as if the case was not being made by a wide range of people from all political parties and from all across society who said that this is when EI should be invested in, this is why we have an employment insurance system.

This bill brings to mind another case from a year or so ago and that is the case of Trooper Kyle Ricketts. This was brought to national attention by the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte. In this case, I am going to quote from the *Ottawa Citizen*. It said:

Trooper Ricketts was severely injured by an IED on March 8 while in Afghanistan. He was enduring a dozen or more reconstructive operations and his parents wanted to be by his bedside when that was happening. As the CBC originally reported the military flew Sadie and Maurice Ricketts, who live in Pollard's Point in Newfoundland's White Bay, to Ottawa to help care for their son. The couple, however, was told they will lose the employment insurance benefits they were collecting since they were laid off if they stayed away from their home for more than a week. Officials told the couple that only one of them is entitled to "compassion leave", meaning that the other would lose EI benefits unless they returned to Newfoundland within a week. The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development said the case will be revisited.

In the end, I think Trooper Ricketts got taken care of through the heroes fund. It was only due to the intervention of the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

● (1135)

I use that case to illustrate how many potential ways we could use the employment insurance system, even specifically for the people who choose to serve in this country's military.

We come to this bill now. As the critic for the Liberal Party, I expect all members of the Liberal Party will support this bill. To that extent, we think the government has done a sensible and a wise thing. The problem is it leaves so many holes unfilled as we continue to go through a difficult time.

A report came out this week from the Citizens for Public Justice indicating the statistics it has put together in terms of caseloads for social assistance in Canada. Alberta is a prime example. It went up by 43% during the recession. Ontario and B.C. both went up by 20% or more. They may still be going up.

It is not good enough to suggest that we are at the end of a difficult time. We do not know when the end of a difficult time will be. It may be that for people who do well enough the recession may be over. Now we are looking to see what happens in Greece and Spain and other economies. For many people who were poor going into the recession, it certainly is not over. For those who were driven into poverty during the recession, it certainly is not over.



*Government Orders*

We have to look at this bill in the context of the overall situation that affects Canadians. We are helping 60 families. It may be that in committee we can look at how we can help others. There are millions of Canadians who go to bed hungry. There are millions of children who wake up hungry, who go to school on an empty stomach, who do not have the social infrastructure that a country as wealthy as Canada could afford. I hope that is something that will be addressed by the government.

On Bill C-13 I offer my support. I hope that at committee we can deal with it reasonably quickly. If we can find a way to strengthen the bill, we should do that. I am pleased that the minister and the parliamentary secretary have indicated that they are open to those kinds of considerations.

The people who choose to serve in our military, the people who choose to go to foreign lands on behalf of Canada in the sincere and honest belief that they are making the world a better place, deserve to be well treated.

The other day I supported Bill C-201 from the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I wish that had been a bill the government could have supported.

We need to have fair standards for all Canadians, but I also believe it is reasonable and fair and aligned with most Canadians that those who serve in our military, those who take on dangerous tasks without complaint, deserve the very best that we can offer them.

This bill goes partway toward that goal, and for that reason, I would be pleased to support it.

● (1140)

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member in his comments is always on point and makes sense in terms of his critique of the minister and the government where it hands out small crumbs to people in our country who are in need of support from the government. I agree with him that today we have a bill that we can all get behind and support.

Certainly these days it is easy to be cynical of a government, sometimes for very political reasons. In this instance, though, we can agree on the right thing to do which is to extend a benefit for a group of people when they come back from Afghanistan. We must consider the government's vote on a bill that went through this place yesterday regarding the pensions of veterans. There was a lack of interest and support from the government to reform that whole system, but this bill is something the government is doing that is right.

The member and I and the member for Chambly—Borduas have seen in committee other pieces of legislation that present a flashing bright light on the political horizon for the government, but at the end of the day, when it actually rolls out and we look at the finer details on how many people it actually helps and what it is doing for a group that we want to give assistance to, it really is not what it was cracked up to be.

I wonder if this bill is a Trojan horse. I wonder if the member has discovered anything in the nature of this bill which in a week or two down the road as we begin to look at it may show it to be less than it is presenting to be today.

● (1145)

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, certainly we have to look at those things and see if there is something that can be made better.

I was surprised when I went to the departmental briefing to find out that this is about 50 to 60 people a year and half a million dollars in cost. It is not a big bill. I am not an expert on parliamentary procedure, but I have to wonder whether it is something that could have been done some other way. I do not think anybody is going to oppose that.

I do want to say that we have tried to work with the government on things that we agree on. It brought forward a bill for the self-employed before Christmas. I always indicated that I had no problem with EI for the self-employed. I have advocated for that, but there were some issues with the bill itself. What is the rate in Quebec versus the rest of Canada? Where is the money going to come from? Is the EI fund going to have to backstop it?

At the end of the day, we were all asked to support the bill in order to get it through before Christmas so it could take effect. I did that. I worked with the parliamentary secretary. He knows that, but there were questions about it. This House passed a motion from the Bloc the very last night that we sat before Christmas so that we could monitor that, because there are always things that come up that maybe the government does not think are a problem, but we get into committee and we find out that they are.

I do not know exactly what might come up on this bill, but I hope the government is open to it. If we are going to go through this whole process for a bill that is only going to cost the treasury something in the range of \$600,000, perhaps there is a way that it could assist more Canadians who need that help as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his speech on this bill and for his fine work in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, as well as for the role he plays as a parliamentarian.

In many ways we are very similar in our desire to improve the employment insurance system.

My question is twofold. First, does the hon. member agree with me that this government has been negligent in terms of its support for our soldiers upon their return from a mission when they are often physically exhausted from their injuries and emotionally exhausted by the strain of reintegrating into their families and into society?

Second, does the hon. member agree that it is high time to protect the employment insurance fund in order to make the improvements he himself has suggested to help families when a family member has the misfortune of losing their employment?

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, I will be as specific as I can. My colleague does great work, along with my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie, on the committee and helps to make it a productive committee.

I do think there is some negligence in terms of support that is provided to soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen who come back.

Quite often we as MPs meet people in our ridings who are going through difficult times. The people I and all MPs deal with at Veterans Affairs Canada are fabulous people. They just have certain constraints. We need to do more to assist people.

I referenced the person I met on a deck in Cole Harbour and the problems he is going through. One cannot help but be affected by that. When I sit with someone who has served our country and he tells me he is not the same as he was, as a member of Parliament, I cannot help but think that is not right and we have to do more.

There is more we should do. We need to protect our EI system. We need to protect the EI fund. We need to make sure that in terms of what employers and employees have to pay in payroll taxes is not overdone, but we need to make sure that the EI fund is run effectively and well for the benefit of those who need it.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his work on EI in general and all the areas in which he has a critic role.

I would like to ask him and everyone in the House who will be supporting this minor amendment which is very positive, how they can have trust in the minister on the EI file, when we had the horrendous experience we had last summer. The government had asked for one last chance and Canadians gave it that chance on the grounds that the minister would make some important changes.

Could he talk about the horrendous experience that arose from that?

• (1150)

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, it was a difficult time; I understand that. I have talked about it in the House before. I am not one to allow the past to destroy any hope of future co-operation. I hope that we can work together as government and opposition parties.

Last summer was a difficult time because the government clearly had no interest in doing what it said it wanted to do, which was to make EI a more fair, reasonable, regionally fair system. The Conservatives did not share ideas with us. One of the members was the member for Nepean—Carleton. He could have brought forward the idea that he had, which came to him in 2008. We met in 2009 and now it is legislation in 2010.

I am not going to relive the horrors of the past. Let us co-operate when we can. On this bill, let us do what we can to make sure that Canadian military families and military personnel have access to the very best, which is exactly what they deserve.

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague opposite for his comments on this bill in particular, but his more broad and inclusive comments about the importance of support for the Canadian Forces

and military families during what is a very high tempo period of time within the Canadian Forces. Much of the stress and strain that is placed upon the families at times like this in our country's history is worthy of acknowledgement and worthy of tangible support, which in fact is what this legislation is designed to do.

This is more of a comment than a question, but it clearly defines this place in a much more positive light when we see the tenor and the tone of the debate that we have seen today. Members are coming together around a very worthy piece of legislation, a very worthy initiative, in a spirit of solidarity in support of the Canadian Forces and their families. This truly will make a difference for them. It truly is reflective of a higher calling, a higher spirit in this place and within the Canadian Forces themselves that we are able to put partisanship aside and support this type of legislation. It is something that Canadians can be very proud of and something that really is a reminder of the greater good when we are coming together in a spirit like this.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his comments. Coming from the same province as I do, he knows the military history. He knows that when we have to make decisions in the House when it comes to the military, it is a little different for us. Whether it is an extension of a mission or whether it is a piece of legislation like this bill, I always go with the philosophy that we default on the side of the men and women who serve this country, and I think so far it has served us well.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill. Whenever we have a bill or a measure before us that helps people and is constructive, we are all for it. We are in favour of Bill C-13 because it corrects a flaw, an injustice actually, towards Canadian Forces members who take parental leave.

As we know, when Canadian Forces members return from a mission and go on parental leave, they are sometimes forced to leave home again because of an operational imperative to return to duty. These people are being treated badly. They should be compensated for this time and allowed to take the full period of parental leave.

First off, I would say there is a flaw in this bill that needs to be fixed in committee. I believe that my colleagues from the three other parties will agree on this since we spoke about it briefly. We must make this bill retroactive. I hope we can correct this flaw during the debate or in committee.

We would like the bill to be retroactive, not indefinitely of course, but at least by 52 weeks, to the previous year. This would cover military staff who were on parental leave during that period and who could have been penalized if they had to return to military duty abroad because they were not covered by this bill. They should be allowed to use the rest of their parental leave upon their return.

The Bloc Québécois will support this bill because we must recognize that members of the military participate in dangerous and exceptional missions that can also lead, at the same time, to injustice with respect to their rights under the employment insurance system. One of those rights is the ability to use all the parental leave to which they are entitled.

*Government Orders*

This bill is necessary. The Minister of National Defence, who just spoke, will agree that the Conservatives' measures are not always exactly right because they are one-time measures. They are piecemeal attempts to respond to a specific need, in this case, that of the military.

The same thing happens with all workers subject to employment insurance. It is a poor practice because when you implement a measure to correct an injustice for one segment of society, in this case the military, you neglect to implement similar measures for other segments of society, who are also penalized by the application of the Employment Insurance Act, in particular. I will come back to the overhaul of employment insurance, which was raised earlier by my colleague for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

We do not give enough recognition to the contribution of the Canadian Forces to Canada and to each part of our country, in our case, Quebec. Many Quebecers are currently serving in the armed forces.

• (1155)

These soldiers come home in fragile condition as a result of the missions they were sent on. They are physically fragile because of injuries, but they are also psychologically fragile. They do not receive any assistance, or very little, to reintegrate into society. The family unit is the basic building block of society. They often come back overwhelmed and severely affected by their mission. When they return to their families, they are in shock, because what they have just seen and experienced has changed them.

Bill C-13 provides an opportunity to recognize that the assistance we must give our soldiers should not be limited to a single measure, such as parental leave, which is not nothing. It is an important measure, and that is why we will vote in favour of Bill C-13.

This debate must serve as a reminder that there are other dimensions to the distress and injustices the soldiers are exposed to. There is a lack of psychological and financial support. In our role as parliamentarians in our respective ridings, we meet people from nearly all walks of life, including veterans and soldiers who were sent on missions and who, even if they were not fighting on the front line, witnessed situations that were traumatizing. Upon their return, it is clear that they have changed. Even those who did not know them well before their departure say that they are not the same. The majority of these soldiers are men, and their behaviour is often inconsistent. They are having difficulties and there are few or no resources to help them.

In many cases, they are abandoned by the armed forces. That needs to be said here, in the House. We must implement measures to supplement the lack of resources available to them when they return from their missions.

Earlier, I talked about the financial aspect. In 2005, the government of the day proposed and the House passed a measure to give returning veterans a lump sum to replace the monthly payments they had been receiving. The idea was that returning veterans would be better off getting a lump sum to help them rebuild their working lives quickly by starting a business or retraining, for example.

Experience taught us that this measure was not the wisest approach under the circumstances, mainly because of the situation I described earlier, the shock soldiers experience when transitioning from a mission or a combat zone back into society. Some people remain traumatized or shattered, while some recover and adapt. Many go on living with their problems and do not talk about them.

• (1200)

However, the government realized that many individuals spent their lump sum payments on things that may not have been good for their families or for themselves. In most cases, people squandered their lump sum payments. The measure we took was not appropriate under the circumstances and did not help soldiers or their families. On the contrary, it hurt families.

That has to change. What we are proposing is reinstating monthly payments. Of course, there will have to be a certain amount paid up front to help people reintegrate, but we need to bring back monthly payments so that people can reintegrate gradually and, most importantly, be guaranteed an income in the medium and long terms. We think that this would be a wiser approach, and that is what we have to work toward now.

As such, the Standing Committee on National Defence supported 34 recommendations that raise the issue I just mentioned, among other things. We circulated a petition to ensure a lifelong monthly pension for soldiers. As I said earlier, most soldiers are pretty messed up when they come back home.

I would like to come back to the instrument that we want to use to assure our military personnel that Bill C-13 will give them all of the parental leave provided for in the employment insurance system. Over the years, the employment insurance fund has been used for other things. In order to be able to use it for other things, the two successive governments ensured that as many people as possible would not be eligible to receive employment insurance benefits. More than 50%, 54% to be exact, are ineligible. How did they do it? The government put all sorts of stringent measures in place in order to accumulate the biggest surplus it could. We are talking about \$57 billion. Of course, the government and the two parties that formed the successive governments want us to stop talking about it. It is disturbing that the government pillaged \$57 billion from the employment insurance fund. And it did it on the backs of those who lost their jobs.

What happened? Access to employment insurance was restricted to the max. One thing is for sure, we need to keep working to overhaul the employment insurance system. That is what the Bloc Québécois is doing. We have introduced various bills in order to amend the number of hours needed to qualify. During the election campaign, virtually everyone said that 360 would be an appropriate number of hours. However, once they were elected, we saw what happened. Félix Leclerc, a Quebec poet and songwriter, had a song about this. The day before the election, they called you their best buddy and the next morning, they could not remember your name. It is the same for this commitment, this promise. All of the parties agreed on 360 hours, but now, we are about the only ones, along with the New Democrats, that are sticking with that number and continuing the fight.

*Government Orders*

• (1205)

Employment insurance coverage should also be increased permanently from 55% to 60% of income.

The law must be amended so that individuals the government deems uninsurable can be insured. There is a principle of culpability whereby individuals who apply for EI are assumed to be malicious and ineligible. People have to prove that they are entitled to EI even though they have paid their premiums and they have the required number of weeks. The time has come to do away with the principle that an individual is guilty even before he or she has received any EI benefits. It is true that some people are not entitled to EI because they do not qualify, and this is to be expected, but these people are a small minority. There must be very clear rules to determine who does and does not qualify.

The famous two-week waiting period must also be eliminated. During the election campaign, there was a general consensus that the waiting period should be eliminated, but the government announced that it would not grant the royal recommendation for this measure. It has not kept its promise. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they made a recommendation with us that the waiting period be eliminated.

Independent workers must have access to EI on a voluntary basis. What this government has done for independent workers amounts to half measures. It has made them eligible for a portion of EI benefits. Workers in Quebec are eligible only for leave for serious illness and compassionate care leave, which is not very much.

What independent workers have to pay for their employment insurance benefits is three times what they actually cost Quebec. This is not true elsewhere. Quebec has its own system of parental leave. The other provinces of Canada can have access to parental leave, and more power to them. That is fine with us. They pay the appropriate premium, but workers in Quebec have to pay three times the cost. I hope the government will tell independent workers that they are paying too much, because it has not told them so far. Yet the House unanimously adopted a Bloc motion on this. The party in power agreed that the government should redo the math and make premiums proportional to benefits.

In conclusion, we agree with this bill, because it corrects the injustice Canadian Forces members face. At the same time, the bill should remind us that there is a lot of work to do to overhaul the employment insurance system. We need to tackle this as parliamentarians, or else the government will keep on doing a piecemeal job.

• (1210)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his speech on this bill for Canadian Forces members.

Someone mentioned the \$57 billion surplus in employment insurance. Now it is closer to \$60 billion. Can the member tell us if there are other measures that could help military personnel and their families in that situation? This could affect not only those who are outside of Canada. Could employment insurance be flexible in other ways, and even if the CF members are not working abroad?

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Speaker, the question posed by my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst is extremely pertinent. I would also like to congratulate him on his perseverance in leading the fight to overhaul the employment insurance program.

His question is especially pertinent because CF members pay into the EI system. Considering the flaws that now exist in the system because it was ravaged, we see that they too are penalized and are disqualified. For instance, they are entitled to benefits equal to only 55% of their income, which is very little, because military personnel do not make a lot of money. The number of weeks has also been reduced over the years. Today that number is 50 weeks, but again, it is only a temporary measure.

What is more important, however, is access to benefits and eligibility. This is where I come back to the 360 hours. Consider, for example, a CF member who does not have enough hours because of the way things played out in his military service and who therefore does not qualify. We need to consider these things from now on, as we try to overhaul the employment insurance program.

I know that my hon. colleague is just as shocked as we are by the misappropriation of nearly \$60 billion from the employment insurance system, yet the government is about to help itself to another \$19 billion between 2012 and 2015. This is a serious economic crime against the people who cannot access employment insurance even though the money is there and it is their money. It is the same kind of misappropriation of funds committed by people like Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix. Of course the government did not do so for personal use or for any particular individuals; it did so for the general public. But that does not make it any less devastating for the people who cannot receive EI benefits. That is what makes it a serious economic crime: these people have been deprived of something they are entitled to and this, in many cases, leaves them destitute.

• (1215)

[*English*]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I missed a bit of the member's speech. Did he propose any amendments to the bill that could make it even better? I know we are all supportive of the bill.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Speaker, I announced one of the amendments we will be proposing, to provide, among other things, for it to be retroactive for 52 weeks. We will have to think about two other amendments, but that one would mean not leaving out in the cold the troops who were already on the scene of military activities after having their parental leave deferred, and who were directed to return to their missions. So it would make the bill retroactive for 52 weeks. So far, I have spoken with members from the other three parties and they were in relative agreement on that.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased today to speak to Bill C-13, which recommends changes to employment insurance. The summary of the bill says: "This enactment amends the Employment Insurance Act to extend the benefit period and the period during which parental benefits may be paid for Canadian Forces members whose period of parental leave is deferred or who are directed to return to duty from parental leave."

*Government Orders*

To begin, I want to say that my party and I are certainly going to support this bill. We have to recognize that our troops, who are defending our country or democracy everywhere in the world on a Canadian mission, deserve to be given consideration in this regard so they are not penalized. Because if they had not gone overseas, they would have been able to take parental leave, for example, to be with their newborn child. That is so important.

Most of the people in this House are parents. I can tell you that in our day, we did not have parental leave. I have three daughters and two of them have had children. Parental leave was something wonderful for them as parents, but it was also wonderful for their children. We are living today in a world where both spouses work and the first thing the newborn experiences is its parents not being there. The child is sent to a daycare centre because the parents have to work. A bill like this one is appropriate. It gives parents the chance to experience the birth of their child and to live with the child for the first year of its life. That is wonderful.

Our soldiers, our troops, do us honour everywhere they go. The Bloc member also clearly stated other benefits we might give our troops. This is one benefit we can support. The member who introduced the bill said he knocked on a door and a soldier answered, and he was the one who made him aware of this issue.

With respect to employment insurance, I can say we have knocked on a lot of doors. The people have made us aware of the problems they have with the employment insurance scheme and the problems that causes in society. The government has a surplus of \$57 to \$60 billion dollars in the employment insurance fund. This is a program paid for entirely by workers. Many people are not entitled to employment insurance, given the eligibility criteria—a minimum of 420 hours or 840 hours worked, in the case of a first claim. A lot of people are excluded from the employment insurance system.

For women, the same is true. There are a lot of women who work part-time and cannot accumulate the number of hours required. These people are not eligible for employment insurance. That is why there are over 800,000 people in Canada who pay into the employment insurance scheme and are not eligible because of the restrictions the government has imposed.

The government is making piecemeal changes. That is what it is doing. At the same time, as I said, there are many other changes it could make. I know this is a bill for our troops and I am going to come back to it quickly. But we have to look at the human element, really, and the changes being asked for.

•(1220)

There is the case of Ms. Marie-Hélène Dubé, who lives in Montreal North. She circulated a petition that was presented here by a member of the Bloc Québécois. Signed by 62,766 people, it asks that sick leave be extended to 52 weeks. We have to see the human side of this. People work their entire lives and then have the misfortune of falling ill. These people are not fortunate to fall ill. They are very unlucky and very unhappy about it. A person gets sick and then finds she has cancer. Before remission occurs, this person has to take care of herself and take the treatments prescribed by specialists for a year. But after 15 weeks, she no longer qualifies for employment insurance. Unless she works for a company that provides insurance, she has no income and is thrown onto welfare. It

is totally unacceptable for us to have a program belonging to the employers and employees who have worked for it but for which people do not qualify.

I want to return to what happens on both sides, the military side and the civilian side, beginning with the military. The government says we should support our troops. There is nothing wrong with that. We should support our troops and we do, even though the Conservatives try to imply that the opposition does not support the troops because we disagree with them about some of the missions the government sends them on. There is a difference between a mission and supporting the troops. We support our troops, but sometimes there are missions with which we disagree. We live in a democracy and have the right to express our views in the House of Commons. That is what we were elected to do: to express our views on things like this.

They ask us to support our troops, our veterans, our soldiers and our military personnel. Early this week, I got a phone call from one of our soldiers. He said he had been in the army for 20 years and had a disability that was officially acknowledged by the army. As a result, he was put in the reserve army—I am not sure about the exact military term—and could stay there for three years with pay but without serving in the regular forces. The government knew he was going to retire. It knew he would be finished with the forces at the end of May and would receive an official pension from the federal government. The army told him, though, that he will start getting his pension 8 to 12 weeks from now.

The Conservatives say we should support our troops and our veterans, but here I am, forced to get involved. I have to ask National Defence why it needs 12 weeks to cut a cheque for a soldier when it has known for three years that he was going to retire. The cheque will not be ready at the end of May when he retires, and he will have to wait 12 weeks without any income. Is that how they support our troops?

•(1225)

[English]

A man called me this week and told me that he has been in the Canadian forces for 20 years and that he would be retiring in three years. He told me that because of a medical problem, which the forces has recognized, he was put into another category and is no longer in the regular forces. He said that the military has known for three years that he will be taking his pension this month but he was told that he would not be able to get his pension for at least 8 to 12 weeks from now. He wants to know who will feed his family.

Is that how we support our troops? Our troops go to war, they defend our country and they defend democracy around the world, and when they come back they need our support. I support Bill C-13 because it would give our soldiers, when they come back from a mission, a break of 52 weeks to spend with their families. They would receive parental leave like any other Canadian.

*Government Orders*

I would like the government to think about going further than that. I may put an amendment forward at committee, but if I do, I know the government will get around it by saying that it requires a royal recommendation because it requires spending money.

I hope the government will be nice and fix the problem that it has created for our troops.

[*Translation*]

A press release issued April 19, reads:

The newly established Rotation Bar was presented today, recognizing Canadians who have served more than once in Afghanistan. Recipients included more than 30 Canadian Forces (CF) personnel, four members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), two police officers of the Ottawa Police Service and three civilian employees of the Non-public Fund of the CF.

I suggest to the government that clause 3 of Bill C-13 be amended by adding after line 5, page 2 the following: adding after line 5 on page 2 the following:

(3.02) For the purposes of subsection (3.01), a member of a police force who is a Canadian citizen in the employ of Her Majesty in right of Canada or a Canadian citizen under contract with the Government of Canada, and who has been deployed as part of a mission outside Canada is considered to be a claimant.

I believe this is reasonable because we are not talking about millions of people. We have police officers who are deployed in various countries to conduct missions and help in reconstruction efforts. We have other members of police forces who go to those countries.

I know of a specific case. RCMP Sergeant Gallagher lost his life after landing in Haiti the day of the earthquake. He went to that country to help the Haitian community build up its police forces. We have other citizens in similar situations.

That is why I take Bill C-13 seriously. It is a good bill, but we have to consider who we are talking about.

We cannot say the situation is resolved because a Conservative MP knocked on a door and met a soldier. It is reasonable for the House to study this bill and refer it to committee where we can share our points of view and get the government's reaction.

If our government calls on our police forces, whether the RCMP or city or municipal police, to help other countries within the framework of a Canadian mission, I think that is the same as sending a soldier. We ask our police to take part in such missions, which are quite dangerous.

If we ask our police officers to go to Afghanistan to help that country's police force, it is dangerous for them as well. They go abroad to do a job on behalf of our country, just as the military does. For that reason, they should be included in this group.

Military and police veterans must benefit from the same programs upon their return from a mission. That is why there is a flaw in Bill C-13. All those who are sent on a mission by our country should be treated in the same way.

● (1230)

[*English*]

Clause 3 of Bill C-13 should be amended by adding after line 5 on page 2 the following: "(3.02) For the purposes of subsection (3.01), a

member of a police force who is a Canadian citizen in the employ of Her Majesty in right of Canada or a Canadian citizen under contract with the Government of Canada and who has been deployed as part of a mission outside Canada is considered to be a claimant".

That is just reasonable. We are not talking about thousands of people. We are talking about a minimum number of people who are sent there by our government. The jobs they do are very dangerous too. They are sent on missions, for example, to help the Afghan police reconstruct their force. They are in dangerous areas.

If they are not sent, they are not going to be claiming that 52 extra weeks. However, if the government calls upon them to be outside the country to help our soldiers around the world, they should be in that same category.

The reason I am reluctant to make the change is that I think it is really important that we treat everyone the same. We believe this would be going in the right direction.

At the same time, we have problems across the country with people losing their jobs. The EI program belongs to the workers. All across the country there are workers who lose their jobs. We are in an economic crisis and the government should be able to make other changes, not piecemeal like the way it is being done.

We sat at one time together, all parties, and made a report in the human resources committee with 28 recommendations. Those recommendations should come forward. The government should look at the big picture of what the problems are with employment insurance and why people are not qualifying.

It should be 360 hours. Why do people who are sick have to have 600 hours to qualify for employment insurance? It is nonsense. No one chooses to be sick. Employment insurance should be there to help the workers. It is insurance to help the workers. It is not a tax to bring in funds for the government to pay down the deficit and bring it to zero by using the employment insurance premiums. That money should go back to the workers. We should work toward that and have the government do the right thing.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Our debate on this bill in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities will be truly important. I hope that the Minister of National Defence heard what I said. I hope that the government heard. I know it heard. The Prime Minister's Office listens to all debates and I am certain that it knows what is going on and that it is concerned about our police force. It would be unfortunate for our police forces and other citizens who are sent on missions commanded by the government if they were not protected by Bill C-13 and if they did not have these 52 additional weeks of entitlement to parental leave. It is important to a family that parents be with their children. The Conservative government says it is pro-family. I say prove it.

[*English*]

The Conservative government says it is pro-family. If it is pro-family, then it should prove it by accepting my proposed amendment.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, certainly when it comes to issues of EI, and I think also issues of the men and women who serve our country, the member speaks from a strong background.

Like myself, I suspect, he meets a lot of returning veterans who need more support than they get, whether it is people who have recently come back with PTSD from serving in the gulf or Afghanistan, or perhaps it is veterans who are trying to qualify for the veterans independence program. As MPs, we can sometimes assist people like that, but it just shows that occasionally the system is not working as well as it should, in spite of the great people at Veterans Affairs.

I want to ask him this. On this specific case of employment insurance, there are other ways the government could act as well. I refer to the case of Trooper Kyle Ricketts from Newfoundland and Labrador. The member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte brought it up in the House a couple of years ago. He needed treatment and a number of surgeries in Ottawa. His family, who were laid off in Newfoundland and Labrador, were on EI and were told they could not get EI if they travelled to Ottawa to take care of this particular Canadian hero. This was brought up in the House. I think in the end he got some compensation from the hero's fund. However, could EI not be a little more flexible in dealing with people in the unique circumstance of somebody being injured and needing family support, but those family members happen to be unemployed and risk losing their benefits to travel to take care of, in this case, Kyle Ricketts?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, let us put it this way. I agree with the member, but I hate to play the military against civilians, because my opinion is that it should cover everybody.

I think it is a shame when people are sick today and a member of their family cannot go to see them in the hospital because they do not have that type of hospital where they live. The individuals don't choose that there is no hospital in northern New Brunswick that is able to treat all kinds of sickness. They do not choose that there is no hospital in Hearst, Ontario, that is able to treat all kinds of sickness,

I believe, with the communication we have today, that if family members have been on employment insurance and their partner or spouse is in hospital someplace else and they want to be with the person who is sick, they could go to assist that person, military or not, because with a cellular phone, they could get the information and go home very quickly to get their job back.

Today it is unacceptable that we do not have that flexibility, because we do not choose to be sick and we do not wish it on our worst enemy. We do not choose that, so employment insurance should be more flexible.

At the same time if we have people who are not in a union, do not have a contract and do not have leave of absence with pay, employment insurance could help. In the workforce, whether we are employers or employees, we should be a big family, and if somebody is sick, members of their family should be able to take a leave of absence with pay from employment insurance to help the family, because the worst thing is for the person to be alone when they need help and when they are sick.

If the health care system takes the trouble to move people from Newfoundland to Ottawa, that means they do not just have a cold; they have a sickness that is pretty serious and they need all the help they can get, and one kind is the moral help of having their family beside them. I do agree with the hon. member's statement.

● (1240)

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to first of all commend my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst for his eloquent remarks here this morning where this very important piece of public business is concerned.

There is no one in the House who should question his experience, knowledge and understanding of this issue. As a matter of fact, he came to this place riding on an issue that was very current and immediate in his own riding back in 1997. Then shortly after getting here, he crossed the country, meeting with people to talk about the impact of the changes the government of the day had imposed on EI and the impact that would have on families and workers.

Here we are now, almost 15 years later, and we are still struggling with this issue of how we can get help to people who need it. How do we get a government that seems to have blinkers on to recognize that there are people out there who are desperately in need and hurting?

As the report that came out earlier this week from Citizens for Public Justice said, with the poor who have lost their jobs, some qualified for EI and have now run out of their EI, and the many who did not qualify, around 50%, are out there now. The recession for them is still on. It is still raging. The recovery is not happening for them as the treasurer suggests in this House, and they are looking for some help.

Here we have a small opening today to provide some assistance to a group of people who, when they come back from giving their all for their country in Afghanistan and their family has had a child, need some time to make sure that little person gets a good start in life with his or her parents present and available. We should do that.

I agree with the member that we need to expand this. There are others who are going over to Afghanistan as well in the same circumstances and who need to be recognized. So I am wondering what recommendation he would have for me, as a member on the committee, to push the government to actually include the change he has suggested here this morning.

We do not want to turn this into a long-drawn-out debate. It does not need to be, but the government could, in all good will and if it wanted to, recognize that this needs to be expanded to include a few more people. We are not talking big dollars here. We need to include a few more people who actually would benefit big time from the change he suggests.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, we are not talking about a large number of people. The minister who just came back from Afghanistan recognized 30 members of the Canadian Forces, 4 members of the RCMP and 2 members from the Ottawa Police Force. We are not talking about a large number of people. At the same time, that does not mean that their wives had a child while they were there. Then we really would be talking about a small number, but we have to treat everybody the same.

*Government Orders*

I honestly hope that the government forgot or never thought about them, that it made a mistake and that it will correct that mistake. The member for Sault Ste. Marie asked how we could fast-track correcting that mistake. It is very easy. If the government agrees, I am sure I have support for my proposal from all parties and that could be done within one minute. No, one minute is too long. We could do it in one second. The words are, “Yes, we are doing it. We accept the document”. That is very easy.

If it is not done, it is because the government has refused to accept putting that in its bill. This is the way to get a royal recommendation. That would mean that the government refused.

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

The government would be making a mistake if it did not support our police forces and our citizens who are sent to other countries on a mission. Sometimes decisions are made and those excluded are hurt. We want to give the government the opportunity to address this while Bill C-13 is under study.

As my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie was saying, we can do a number of other things. We should not wait until veterans are 80 years old to give them their veteran's allowance. We should not let them suffer all those years. It is as if the government were waiting for them to be on their deathbeds before giving them their pensions and then congratulating itself for correcting the situation. The same thing applies to military spouses. We must acknowledge these families and give them what they are owed. They fought for our country and they must be recognized for it. They should not be recognized just before death, but right from the start. We have to support our troops from the moment they return to Canada.

Earlier on, another colleague spoke of illnesses contracted by soldiers during the war. A young man, just 33, came into my riding office not with a bottle of pills, but with a whole bag of pills. The government has difficulty acknowledging that this man's problems started while he was on a mission for the government.

[*English*]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak to Bill C-13, which is a very important for our military. I am excited to support the bill and help our military.

I want to congratulate our critic, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, for his analysis and support of this and many other bills in his area and our critic, the member for Don Valley West, for the tremendous work he does to move forward the situation of veterans. A number of speakers today have mentioned the problems in which veterans find themselves. I also congratulate all other members of the House who have spoken to the bill and the people who brought it forward. I think everyone is very supportive of it. I know everyone is very supportive of our military. That is why I am so excited about this. These troops often go overseas and into horrendous situations. They get paid about the same as everyone else, yet they put their lives at risk to protect our freedoms and the freedoms of those people around the world who cannot protect themselves.

This is a great role for Canadians. However, our soldiers bear the brunt of that role. They do a great service for all Canadians, and we

certainly appreciate that. I think that is why everyone is so enthusiastic about the bill.

I remember the tremendous work Bill Graham did, as minister of defence, supporting the troops and moving ahead on their living conditions. However, much more can be done, and I compliment the House for moving forward in this area.

I have always been a great supporter of the military. I have tried, in the decade I have been in Parliament, to get more of these tremendous troops in the north and have been somewhat successful. One regiment moved to our riding, the cadet management, and the number of troops has dramatically increased by over 100%, which is very exciting. That is why I enjoy the times I have been on defence committee, trying to once again support the military.

I am also a very active member of our local legion. I compliment the Legionnaires for the tremendous work they do to honour our troops, to ensure that no one ever forgets what they have done for our country. They have organized many celebrations and have raised funds through the poppy campaign to help those who are still in need.

I know it is easy to talk about this from the comfort of the House of Commons, but it is really brought home when we go into the area where the troops are serving. I remember my trip to Kabul, which is one of the safest parts of Afghanistan. Even then I saw the jeopardy in which our troops were. It was very tricky simply landing at the airport and getting away from it safely. The lives of our troops are in jeopardy just to get there. In fact, as we arrived at the base, they had just discovered rockets at the old palace, which were aimed at the base. We were in jeopardy and were shut down for several hours. As we know, the troops sleep in tents, and that is not much protection from nearby rocket attacks. We know from the news reports about the other deadly attacks they face when they leave the base.

For all these reasons, I know all members of Parliament and all Canadians are very appreciative and supportive of our troops. If there is a minor adjustment to an act that could help them out, we are definitely in favour of that.

Of course there is much more to be done. As we speak, veterans are going to food banks. We certainly need to address situations like that and move forward on the provisions so this never happens to the men and women who have so nobly served our country.

I know how difficult it is to be away from our families. As people know, my riding is the farthest from Ottawa. It is located in the farthest northwestern corner of the country. I get home from work on Saturdays. It is a pretty hard to be away six days every week from my wife and our 18-month old baby.

● (1250)

People have said to me that it must be terribly hard and painful to be away, but I tell them it could be a lot worse. I could be in the military and I would be unable to get home every weekend. I would be unable to see my baby and my wife. That must be excruciatingly painful for family life. The last thing we want to do is make it difficult by an aberration in the law that is not flexible enough to accommodate the families of military people.



*Government Orders*

Another thing that is very important is the formative years of a child. Professors and experts in child development say that probably the most important part of a child's life, or the formative years, which will determine what type of citizen, what type of benefits he or she will bring to society, or the cost to society if it does not work out, are the very first few years of life. It is totally unnecessary for parents, be it the mother or father, to be deprived of being with their children during those early years. A minor amendment to the act, like we are doing on Bill C-13, would be of great benefit for children, for family cohesiveness and ultimately for society.

There are a couple of ideas that hopefully the committee will discuss. Speakers before me have mentioned some good ideas to be discussed as possible amendments. The member for Acadie—Bathurst mentioned looking at other people who may be in the same situation. That is discussing in the committee discussion and listening to witnesses. He suggested, for instance, police officers. Canada often sends police officers to help other countries in dire situations. It is not only the military that needs training to be democratic and professional, but often the police forces, RCMP or other police are sent to help people in need overseas and they may be in the same situation as the military.

Perhaps even in certain cases, maybe not often, aid and emergency workers. Today being the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is a perfect time to mention this. In emergencies those individuals get extracted from their families. Usually it is not for that long, but it is something to look into when the committee discusses this.

Remember we are talking about roughly 60 people a year who this would affect. The bill would take effect the first Sunday after it receives royal assent. To remind people what the bill would do, if people have parental leave for a baby, they normally get 35 weeks. Military members also get 35 weeks of benefits and can be at home with their baby. That 35 weeks have to be used any time within the first 52 weeks.

The bill would extend that another year, depending how long people are called away for military duties. If they are called away in the middle of this leave or before it is about to start, like the example we heard when the baby was four days old, they would not lose their benefits because they are away for a year. They can claim those benefits in the following year. This would allow parents to spend the time with each other and with the baby, which is tremendously important for people when they do not even know whether their wife or husband will come back from military duties. They would be under tremendous stress. Anyone who has had children knows how much stress it is to raise a child, let alone raise a child when the other parent is overseas.

The point I was getting to is the fact that the bill comes into effect on the first Sunday after it receives royal assent.

• (1255)

We are in a minority Parliament. There have been a lot of disruptions. Bills that seem to make common sense get delayed, the House prorogues or we have elections. We are only talking about 60 people. Instead of waiting until the bill gets royal assent, why not make it retroactive for people right now who are away, are having babies, and could lose those benefits? It would only add a few more people to the bill.

The member for Chambly—Borduas suggested it before I did. I did not realize he was thinking about it. It looks like there could be consensus with others who agree with this idea. It certainly should be looked into, especially at this time when our biggest mission in Afghanistan is on the verge of ending. There would be even less need than perhaps 60 people a year, for a while at least. Why not try to help a few other people in this unfortunate situation by making the bill retroactive for them?

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour also made a good point in which I am also interested. We are talking about such a minor modification, less than \$1 million for 60 people. Why does it have to go through the legislative process? It is unfortunate that this item is not in the regulations so smaller amendments like this could be implemented, which would prevent us from having to go through this type of process.

I want to use this point to pay tribute to a constituent of mine named Tony Fekete. Unfortunately he passed away last week. His memorial is this Friday at three o'clock in the Catholic Church in Whitehorse. He was a great person and common man who was very interested in politics. He was always bringing up his ideas. He came from Europe.

I want to commend him for his effort to improve Parliament. He suggested that we did too much in Canada by regulation, that cabinet made decisions and ran the country without any democratic input from the people because it could change things by regulation. He was a champion of democracy and put forward his strong ideas. I pass on my sorrow and condolences to his family.

It seems to me this case is an example of the purpose of regulations so things that require minor changes do not have to go through the lengthy process, including three readings in each House, committee debate and witnesses, et cetera in each House. If some things can be done by regulation, it can give us more time to focus on larger issues, which are very important. The obvious things could be done very quickly. I will mention some of the other types of things we could.

In summary, we certainly have unqualified support. I imagine this bill to improve the lives of military families will pass unanimously in Parliament. We are all very excited about that. I am sure young military families that are planning to have children and that will benefit from the improvements will be very excited to hear it as will other military families. It means 60 people in need every year will have a wonderful benefit.

However, this is a country of 33 million people and millions of them have other needs. As parliamentarians, we need to deal with those. As well, Parliament needs to deal with many other gaps. I look forward to the government moving forward in the same spirit it has with this bill to quickly deal some of the many other needs in our country.

Thousands of children are living in poverty at the moment. Thousands of people attend food banks. In the time we have taken to discuss this bill to help 60 families, thousands of people have gone to food banks so they can survive.

*Government Orders*

•(1300)

There are thousands of people in pain on waiting lists for operations. There are high levels of youth suicide, especially in the Arctic areas. There are many people incarcerated in this country for reasons of addiction and mental health who deserve more appropriate treatment by their government. There are many women being abused in this country and many aboriginal women are disappearing.

Thousands have lost their jobs and cannot support their families, which must be the most horrific feeling for anyone. There are seniors who must choose between food and heat. I hope the government moves forward quickly in the same spirit it has on this bill to help deal with all those Canadians who we in Parliament should be doing our best to help.

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre informed me that this particular piece of legislation could have been affected by an order in council regulation. I know the member was asking that question.

I would also like to ask him if he is aware of the member for Acadie—Bathurst's amendment to include members of a police force who were deployed on any part of a mission outside Canada. They too would be considered as claimants under this bill. We are talking about very few people.

I wonder whether the member for Yukon would indicate his support for that amendment from the member for Acadie—Bathurst and whether he has any other comments about the idea that somehow this did not have to be a bill but could have been done through order in council.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Madam Speaker, I am aware of the technical procedures that this bill could have gone through. The point I was making was that I would hope that things like this could be done through order in council, through regulations or some other amendments, and we would not have to go through this process. That would have been fine with me, had it gone through such a process.

I mentioned in my speech that I supported the member for Acadie—Bathurst's idea for the committee to look at other groups that this type of change in the provisions of EI for maternal and paternal benefits could cover, such as police officers. I also mentioned looking at aid workers. There may be some other groups that the committee will suggest.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona makes many good points. As he said, it would affect very few people. We have police officers in Afghanistan and Haiti. We often send RCMP officers to missions along with our peacekeepers. They have a very important role. They could be similar difficult situations and there may be others. I certainly hope that the committee will explore those situations in depth.

•(1305)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today, somewhat unexpectedly, I might add, to speak to Bill C-13.

This is an important piece of legislation. Although we have discussed the matter of this particular legislation that actually could

have been done through an order in council process in this Parliament, the government has chosen to turn it into a bill.

Having said that, all the parties seem to be agreeable to the bill. I would think that it will probably make its way, very quickly, to the committee stage. At that point, we will be looking at different amendments.

It seems that no matter how much care is taken in presenting legislation, whether it is government legislation or opposition legislation, and no matter how much consulting we do, we always manage to leave something or somebody out of the process. That is why it is very important that we look to the committee process and look at amendments.

Our member for Acadie—Bathurst has come up with such an amendment, which I would hope will receive favour by the members of the committee. His amendment was very simple. It was to add members of police forces. Members of police forces are being deployed. They are part of missions outside Canada.

The member for Yukon spoke previously and indicated that police officers are part of the missions in Afghanistan and Haiti. They, too, should be included in this bill. The member for Acadie—Bathurst is very committed to that idea and will present an amendment at committee.

We hope the government, in an open fashion, will look kindly on that and will support that amendment so we can better flesh out this bill. In terms of the initial costing of the bill, the government indicates that it is looking at perhaps 60 soldiers per year at a cost of \$600,000.

It is rather interesting that the government does not seem to be able to provide costing figures for other bills. We just completed a multi-day series of speeches on the bill dealing with conditional sentencing. The government is not able to provide a projection of what that bill will cost.

Last week on the two for one credit issue crime bill, the government was suggesting that the cost was going to be a matter of several million dollars. The next day it was contradicted by a better, I would think, authority who said it was going to be \$2 billion.

We can see that this costing issue is something that has to be projected, but the government is in a better position to do the job. It has the facilities and the ability to assess the number of people who will be affected and the cost of each program.

I think it is incumbent upon the government to be proactive in providing this costing analysis in the beginning and to not simply hit the road with a press release for the early hits and then come to Parliament to have us try to pull these figures out. In most cases, we are unable to get the figures.

In this case, I give the government credit. The minister was asked this morning, how many people would be involved in this bill, what was the scope of the exposure, and what costs would be associated with the bill? She was able to say 60 people a year at a cost of \$600,000.

*Government Orders*

●(1310)

We appreciate the government doing that. I maintain that this is something that we should be able to have on a consistent and ongoing basis with all government bills that come before the House.

As the government has pointed out, this is not a huge or controversial bill. The government proposes to improve access to employment insurance parental benefits for military families. The new measure would extend the EI parental benefit window for Canadian Forces members who are ordered to return to duty while on parental leave, or whose parental leave is deferred as a result of a military requirement. The measure would extend the period for which they are eligible by another 52 weeks. This is something that our party would certainly support.

As the member for Yukon pointed out, a large number of people have been affected over the years in the military.

Members of the military have a difficult job at the best of times. Imagine, as a child, being uprooted every three years and moving to another area of the country. That was the old practice. Military members can recount growing up, as children, and their family being stationed for three years in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, as an example. After those three years, the family would be sent to Germany and somewhere else after that. Whole families were uprooted. Children had to form new friendships. As someone who never went through something like that, I would think it would be very unsettling for children.

Then we hear stories about soldiers being mistreated after serving in the military. A report came out just two or three weeks ago about the Prime Minister being at a food bank for veterans in Calgary.

There are many examples of mistreatment not only in the Canadian and American military but in all militaries in general. People are wanted while they are healthy and eager, and willing to work, but as soon as they come back with post-traumatic stress disorders or another disability as a result of their time in service, they are basically ignored and thrown on the scrap heap.

We need to ensure that we provide first-class treatment to our veterans in this country and to our existing military forces. We cannot leave them in a second-class position.

I listened to the member for Yukon talk about the dangers of military service. He was on a trip to Afghanistan and he said it was a dangerous experience just getting from the airport. I have never been to Afghanistan. Since the current plan indicates that our forces will be leaving there next year, I do not plan to be over there. The member indicated that our soldiers have to sleep in tents over there because they are always subject to rocket attacks, not to mention the explosive devices on the roadside that have killed so many of them. I have to wonder why anybody would want to take up a duty such as this and put their lives in danger.

In most cases, our soldiers leave young spouses and children at home. They go on six month rotations and do not see their children during that time.

●(1315)

The member for Yukon summed it up very well when he said, "I have a tough job here. I only get home for one or two days a week. I have to fly all the way to Yukon and that is a long trip". He himself said that was nothing compared to the sacrifice that our soldiers face when they go into a danger zone. For six months they are away from their children and their spouses.

I do not think it should be a surprise to anyone that social problems develop out of a situation like that. I do not know for sure but I assume that the divorce rate would have to be fairly high in situations like that. It makes civilian life seem a much easier life when one only has to show up for work at 9 a.m., work all day and work a 40-hour week and then have a weekend off. It seems like a big difference.

One would wonder why people would want to do that. We do not have conscription in this country. It is a volunteer force. People obviously do it because they believe in the greater good and the cause of peace in the world. That is why we are there. We are there to make a better life for the Afghan people and improve the lot of women in Afghanistan. There is a great deal of evidence that some of efforts are in vain because the lot of women does not appear to be improving substantially in Afghanistan when we see that the government there has a very shaky commitment to that cause.

This is a mission that I believe we have spent perhaps \$13 billion on so far. I am trying to do this from memory right now because I do not have notes on the subject in front of me.

I have been getting petitions from people demanding that we end the mission now. They do not want to wait even until the middle of 2011 to get out of the Afghanistan situation. The biggest argument they have is that their philosophy is that the military should be taking a peacekeeping role.

Lester B. Pearson, who was a Nobel Peace Prize winner, actually shaped Canada's foreign policy in those days and, for a great period thereafter, was Canada's peacekeeper. I can recall years ago, when Canada was involved in Cyprus where the Greek and Turkish Cypriots were in conflict with one another, Canada's role was to keep the peace. There was a peace to be kept and our Canadian soldiers did an admirable job in those circumstances.

That was the mindset of the Canadian people. They were quite willing to support their military to fulfill that role. Outside of the two wars, World War I and World War II, where there was overwhelming support for Canada's efforts, when it came to the issue of peacekeeping, that was a new role for the military. Everything proceeded along those same lines for all those years until this current situation involving the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

Even though our forces had been in Afghanistan for a period of time, some of my constituents thought they were there on a peacekeeping basis. They, in their own minds, were not conceiving of us being involved in taking an active and fighting role in the conflict.

*Government Orders*

● (1320)

It has only been over time and with the 150 young soldiers who have been killed over there that they have gradually begun to realize, and some of them accept, that we are actively engaged, that this is a very dangerous mission and that we will be looking at more deaths. As a result, people are starting to change their minds.

Polling done last year indicated that well over 50% of the Canadian population were opposed to our mission in Afghanistan. Many people believe we are there under false pretense. They thought our forces were involved in a peacekeeping mission but, of course, there is no peace over there to keep.

Afghanistan, as we know, has a long history of foreign countries involving themselves in its affairs. Everyone remembers the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in March or April of 1979. Once again people thought it would be a clean-cut affair and that the mission would be over in short order. Were they ever wrong. The Russians got stuck in Afghanistan for years. It cost them tremendous amounts of money. As a matter of fact, it could be argued that it was perhaps one of the contributing factors that actually dragged down and led to the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the day in 1989.

We found ourselves essentially being dragged into a situation that was basically very similar to where the Russians left off, and we were involved in assuming that role.

The next issue is how we get out of there. We need to remember that it was the Liberal Party that got us in there in the first place. It was given two choices: go along with the Americans in Iraq or take Afghanistan. At the time, I guess the prime minister thought that Afghanistan was the lesser of two evils in terms of choices, and I think most people in the country would have agreed with him at that time, so he opted for the Afghanistan decision.

However, it is clear that the Canadian people want to see us revisit that. They do not want to see a commitment.

If the Conservative government had formed a majority government at any time in 2006 or 2008, I believe that commitment to Afghanistan would have been signed, sealed and delivered for an almost unlimited amount of time. The fact that the Conservatives have been stuck with a minority government has caused them to come to their senses and be more sensitive to the public, and that is one of the things I like about minority governments. A minority government is more sensitive to the public and recognizes that while there is a large group of people out there within its support base who are eager for longer term commitments in this mission and others perhaps, it has to recognize that well over 50% of the people out there are not in favour of extending the mission. In fact, people signing petitions and sending them to me, not only do not want it to go beyond 2011, they do not even want it to go to 2011.

I realize that the second last rotation has now left for Afghanistan and there is a final rotation coming up in October. Assuming that we do not have an election and the Conservative win a majority and they sign for an even greater extension of the Afghanistan mission, which is possible, let us assume for a moment that we withdraw from Afghanistan as planned. Let us hope that we as a Parliament have the good sense to keep our troops out of further missions for at least a year or two and give it a bit of a break.

● (1325)

We are already hearing discussions about the Congo. We have not even solved the first problem. We have not even extracted ourselves from the first mission that has cost us \$13 billion and lasted for years and years. We are already planning to look at the Congo. Who knows how many years that will involve and how much that will cost?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague just how good Bill C-13 is, which amends the employment insurance program to provide parental benefits to military personnel. If the Conservatives had a longer view of things, could they not introduce bills allowing other people as well to receive various kinds of benefits?

[English]

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Madam Speaker, I think the government is doing the right thing here. I would say that it is doing the right thing because it is a minority government and it is not exactly peaking in the polls at the moment. If it had a majority government, I would not expect any great ideas coming from it. I would expect the basic right-wing programs that we see right-wing governments following around the world. I think that would be its approach to things and we would not be seeing legislation like this.

To the government's credit, this is a good bill and I believe we are all supporting it going to committee. If I had not stood up it would have been in committee already.

In answer to the member's question, we are looking at the cost of this bill to be in the neighbourhood of \$600,000 a year. It would affect about 60 people per year, give or take, if we were to add the amendment by the member for Acadie—Bathurst to include police members. The government has said that it is willing to look at other amendments, too. Perhaps we will be looking at a bigger number, but it is not a huge number overall.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, Bill C-13 before us today proposes a necessary change to the employment insurance system, and for that reason, we will support it.

It fixes one of the countless injustices in the employment insurance system, which stopped long ago providing real insurance in case of job loss. With this bill, military personnel will be able to get the parental leave to which they would otherwise have been entitled if they had not been summoned to leave on a mission.

The work our military personnel do takes great bravery and they should be congratulated on their spirit of sacrifice, their courage and all that they accomplish for their fellow citizens.

*Government Orders*

Their work requires them to constantly put their lives on the line. For this, they deserve our respect of course, but most of all, they deserve to be treated fairly and equitably. Justice cannot be blind. Different or exceptional cases cannot be treated in the same way as all the rest. Canadian Forces members inevitably find themselves in an exceptional situation when asked to leave on a mission.

The current Employment Insurance Act provides for a 52-week benefit period, that is, the time that someone who is entitled to benefits has to claim them. There are some exceptions to this rule, for example when a child is hospitalized or in the case of extended benefits for long-tenured workers. However, Canadian Forces members were not included.

We have excellent news for them, therefore, because once the bill passes, they will know that serving in the Canadian Forces will not, paradoxically, cause them undue harm and they will get the benefits to which they are entitled and for which they pay employment insurance premiums, like virtually all workers. They deserve these benefits.

In regard to all the various bills proposing improvements to employment insurance, we basically feel that we say the same thing over and over. We repeat the same old refrain because we are always confronted with the same old problem: the inability to access benefits.

The same problem is tackled, for example, in Bill C-395, introduced by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, which proposes that the qualifying period, that is the period taken into account to determine the number of insurable hours, is considered to be the 52 weeks preceding the outbreak of a labour dispute. In other words, the period during which a labour dispute is underway and the workers are therefore not accumulating very many insurable hours would not be included. This means that if they lose their jobs at the end of the dispute—something that is not very frequent but does happen sometimes—they are not left without any resources.

The same logic prevails here as in the government bill. Benefits would be provided to workers who, through no individual fault of their own, find themselves cut off from employment insurance. There are always two parties to a labour dispute, the employers and the employees. Employees do not just decide to have a labour dispute. There is usually a period of negotiations during which they hope to arrive at a settlement and the dialogue with their employer is maintained. Most of all, though, they hope that the 25 years they spent working for the company and contributing to the employment insurance system will count for something and they will receive benefits, if and when needed.

In this case, if the business shuts down just before the labour dispute, the workers would be entitled to benefits. We want the weeks preceding a labour dispute to be taken into account. But according to the Employment Insurance Act, if a business shuts down after a labour dispute that lasts more than one year, these workers are left with nothing. They are financially destitute because they would have had to make do on meagre strike pay, which usually covers the bare minimum needed to survive.

That is another example of the injustices currently found within the system, and it is very similar to the cases of soldiers who did not have access to the parental benefits they should have been entitled to.

• (1330)

In both cases, the legislative solution is quite simple, and does not involve massive amounts of money from EI. On the contrary, the amounts required are quite insignificant. Of course, they are not insignificant to the claimants involved, for whom this represents a lot of money. For some, it means the difference between bankruptcy and financial survival, between the anxiety of losing everything and the hope of having a chance to start over.

That is why there has been so much criticism of the employment insurance system for several years now: this system no longer does what it was designed to do.

I would like to quote Michel Ducharme, the president of the Montreal branch of the FTQ, who recently testified before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities regarding Bill C-395.

We are all paying into that system, both workers and employers, and these contributions are intended to protect us in cases of plant or company closures. That is part of what makes them legitimate. When a labour dispute arises when a collective agreement is to be renewed, the idea is to save jobs. Some unions provide strike pay, but the whole idea is not to be off the job, but rather to save that job, preserve working conditions and reach an agreement. If that turns out not to work, that is something the worker has no control over [which is what I was saying earlier]. The workers pay into the system for 25 or 30 years, and are working for a company that has always operated and has never had layoffs. Then, from one day to the next, the company shuts down. It is illogical for people not to be eligible for employment insurance benefits in those cases. That is precisely the whole purpose of these benefits.

Like the employment insurance system, the veterans charter seems to have also lost its original function, and today, it is also the subject of fierce criticism, notably from the veterans ombudsman. Passing the New Veterans Charter means that, from now on, veterans with psychological problems or physical disabilities resulting from their service in the armed forces will no longer receive an annuity, which guaranteed them some financial security. Instead, they will receive a single lump sum payment.

It was soon noticed that this amount was clearly inadequate and that, in the end, it was much less than the sum they would have received if the compensation had been paid out monthly. That is one more example of the Conservative government's lack of compassion for people in need and who, on the contrary, can use the help.

The numbers speak for themselves. Upon their return from Kandahar, 4% of soldiers have suicidal thoughts, 4.6% of them have symptoms of major depression and 15% suffer from mental health issues. Those numbers are huge.

That is why it does not make sense to give a single large sum of money to people who are, by definition, unstable and likely to squander the money in no time. Veterans with PTSD often have alcohol or drug problems.

*Government Orders*

I want to point out that the member for Québec very recently presented a petition urging the government to end this practice, which can cause major problems for some injured soldiers. All we can do now is hope that the government will heed the soldiers' call for more humane treatment. This government seems to have a tendency to take a clear-cut business approach to all services provided to the people.

For example, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development recently compared the employment insurance waiting period to the deductible associated with, say, car or home insurance. That kind of cynicism conflicts with the role of the state.

When the Veterans Ombudsman, Colonel Patrick Stogran, appeared before the Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs on April 22, he had this to say about the administrative culture that prevails in the Department of Veterans Affairs: "It's very much an insurance company approach to doing business."

• (1335)

He went on to say that:

I feel very strongly that the culture has to change. I feel very strongly that to do that it has to go towards a needs-based approach. I also feel very strongly that in order to satisfy that needs-based approach, case managers on the front lines have to be empowered to offer veterans what they really need. I think that's the principle upon which this program is based.

He could have said the same thing about the employment insurance system as it is currently managed. His comments would have been just as relevant. In both cases, a major overhaul is critical to restoring and respecting the intent behind the creation of both programs: meeting people's needs so that they can maintain a sense of dignity in hard times. Right now, they are forced to fight to get anything over and above the often ridiculously low lump sum the army gives them.

In the January 9 edition of *Le Soleil*, Francine Matteau, the Québec woman who started the petition presented by the member for Québec, said this about the compensation her son received, and I quote:

"The first offer the army made him was ridiculous, so he appealed and they offered him just over \$100,000. He has to appeal again now, because that is not enough," she complained, pointing out that her son, who has learned to walk again but struggles to get around, no longer meets the army's standards and cannot easily hold another job. "Medals and commendations are great, but they don't pay the mortgage or buy groceries!"...

The article goes on:

Mrs. Matteau says that the UK is much more generous to veterans and in December 2008 increased the maximum benefit for British soldiers wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan from \$470,000 to \$940,000.

"In addition to this benefit, wounded British soldiers receive a monthly pension that can increase the total lifetime benefits to more than \$1.5 million," states Mrs. Matteau, who now hopes to make the public aware of the fate of Canadian soldiers wounded in action.

Knowing that the maximum benefit in Canada is \$276,000, we have a better understanding of why our soldiers are frustrated. To continue the comparison with employment insurance, the government runs these two programs with the same twisted logic, forcing potential benefit recipients to fight the government machine for their rights.

Is this how the Conservative government thinks we should thank workers and members of the military, who work extremely hard for their families, their fellow citizens and their society?

In another article that appeared in *La Presse*, the veterans ombudsman did not mince words:

"Soldiers should not have to worry about their standard of living. They should be confident that, regardless of their injuries, they will be able to support their families and themselves...They should not have to worry about the rest of their lives when they are trying to recover from physical and psychological injuries."

I do not want to downplay the importance of the legislative amendment the Conservative government is proposing with Bill C-13, but I believe that we can safely say that there may be more important issues to deal with when it comes to the treatment of Canadian soldiers.

• (1340)

Reforming the Veterans Charter is something the government could do that would really prove that it supports our troops—as it claims to do. It is not enough to say it in the House. Once again, they need to follow through on their fine words and listen to the veterans who are speaking out by the thousands against a program that treats them like beggars, when on the contrary, that program should evince some sign of the gratitude we owe them for the sacrifices they have made.

As legislators, we cannot be insensitive to the difficulties facing our veterans, who are often affected by their war injuries, whether physical or psychological, for the rest of their lives. These are people who face difficulties right away, from the very fact of joining the armed forces, because they are separated from their families and loved ones. Injured or not, they deserve recognition for the extraordinary work that they do.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the Bloc's support for the bill currently before the House, that is, Bill C-13. As I was saying, it will redress the injustices committed against CF members, and we should feel good about that. However, in that context, I cannot help but see and draw some parallels between the situation facing other workers who are also being deprived of the EI benefits they are entitled to, and the situation facing our wounded veterans.

Since justice requires that everyone get what they deserve, we cannot remain silent when the issue is before us. We must speak out against all injustices.

• (1345)

[English]

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the member's speech was very thoughtful and well presented. She covered a lot of ground, particularly where the shortcomings of the employment insurance system are concerned. She indicated her support for this small initiative, for which we thank the government, but obviously, all of us think we should be doing more.

My concern is that we are not getting the time necessary to really dig into this bill and give it its due process. Does the member have any thoughts around how the government might find a way, as it has in so many other instances, to claw this back from these people?

*Government Orders*

She was on the committee when we introduced the employment insurance benefits for the self-employed. In talking to some of the self-employed in my area, I am finding that if the self-employed own their own business, if they pay into and collect from the fund and their business continues to make some profit while they are off on benefit, at the end of the year they could lose that money. It could be clawed back.

The government has a way of doing that. It is like a Trojan horse. It does this with many of our military who go off to foreign countries to defend freedom and democracy. They come back to find, in big part, that the pension they have paid into and thought they would get when they turn 65 is clawed back well.

The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore who champions the causes of veterans over and over again, has indicated very clearly how that happens. In fact, he has brought bills to the House and they have been opposed by the government. Even if a bill passes, the government will not enact it to protect soldiers. Soldiers come to the time in their lives when they expect to get their pension only to find that a big chunk of it is clawed back.

Are there any guarantees the member knows of that this piece of public business will not end up in the same pile as the others, where folks thinking that when they come home they will get this benefit only to have it clawed back?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. I hope I understood it properly because it was about self-employment. The bill essentially proposes—because soldiers are considered workers who pay employment insurance premiums and who therefore are entitled to parental benefits when they have a child—that all these soldiers have access to their 35 weeks of parental insurance, and I do hope they will have access to those benefits.

I also want us to be able to discuss the bill in more detail in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I am also aware that when it comes to soldiers, the Conservative government is supposed to be doing a complete overhaul of the new Veterans Charter to ensure that these soldiers have access to all their rights and all their benefits.

• (1350)

[*English*]

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today and talk about a bill that is very important to our military families.

I am proud to be part of a government that continues to stand up for our military men and women. We have looked after our veterans as well with the expansion of the VIP program and the implementation of the new veterans charter. Indeed, as my hon. colleague mentioned, the committee is undergoing a study of the veterans charter to ensure that this is a living document and that we continue to improve it. We are looking at several recommendations that have come forward from witnesses in their testimony.

I do have to take one second, though, to say that I hope the Bloc and the NDP are sincere on this. It is very troubling, as a member

who comes from a military community and a military riding, to have them day after day call into question our men and women in the Canadian Forces, and the intentions of our men and women in the Canadian Forces, and then stand here pretending they are championing their causes afterwards.

My question for the member is in regard to the operational imperative of Canadian Forces members who have to deploy. They have no choice. There has been talk by both the NDP and the Bloc about trying to move an amendment to this bill in regard to the RCMP who are also deployed. There is a difference when it comes to the deployment options of the RCMP. Members of the RCMP are not forced to deploy for six months at a time, whereas it is imperative for our men and women in the military.

Does the member recognize this difference? How would that be addressed in the amendment?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned an amendment.

For now, I do not believe the Bloc is proposing an amendment. If we have the opportunity to discuss this bill in committee, we could look at all the options that this bill could include. However, what concerns me the most is that the bill is called the Fairness for Military Families Act. I look at the word “fairness” and I hope the Conservative government will say that fairness applies to all workers and soldiers alike. This could apply to all the other bills on employment insurance and then we could talk about fairness and equality for all workers.

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Lambert for putting this bill into such clear perspective.

We support this bill in principle, but it is important to realize that it is not much of anything. If we really want to use a law to help our veterans, we will obviously have to do a great deal more than that. But, it is at least a small step.

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development used the same logic and the same arguments that were used for a bill that the Conservatives opposed.

Does my colleague believe that this bill could be detrimental to reservists, who are often sent on short missions. They may not necessarily have the required 35 weeks. It might be a good idea to protect them as well by automatically deeming them to have the required number of weeks when they participate in a mission.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this proposal.

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Madam Speaker, yes, this bill could be detrimental to reservists. That is why I want to be able to discuss this bill in committee. There, we could look at all the possibilities and consider all the soldiers who would be entitled to parental benefits through employment insurance.

*Statements by Members*

We must also take into account the reservists who are entitled to these benefits. I would like to talk about this in committee, because we have not had the chance to do so yet. I hope we will be able to examine the bill more closely and ensure that all workers will have access to parental benefits.

• (1355)

[English]

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her passionate defence of what we need to do for veterans. If we had had a comprehensive review of the entire employment insurance system instead of this ad hoc, piecemeal, fix this little piece or that little piece, could we not have had a comprehensive system that would have taken care of this need a long time ago?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I think he is correct. This is another example of the Conservative government's short-sightedness. It is true that, from time to time, it would be good to have a long-term vision and to do a comprehensive review of the programs that affect everyone.

[English]

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today not only to address the fairness for military families act, but also to speak a little about its origins in which I am honoured to have had a small part.

Some time ago I was knocking on doors in the southwest Ottawa village of Osgoode. On a doorstep there, I met a soldier, Major Duquette. He told me his personal story, having served Canada in the Middle East, in the Golan Heights. He left five days after the birth of his son, Jacob. His story illustrates the immense sacrifice and courage that families in the military make all the time. His wife later said that one of the things that got them through that year while he was serving Canada abroad was the fact that he would take parental leave under employment insurance when he returned to make up some of the lost time with the newborn he was missing out on as a result of his service to Canada overseas.

When he returned after serving nobly in theatre, he applied for his employment insurance. He would have been surprised not to receive it because after all, like all members of the armed forces, he paid premiums into the employment insurance system, just like everyone else. He was shocked to learn, however, that his time for receiving those benefits had expired during the period he was serving all of us overseas. He looked in the law and found that there was no exemption to capture the fact that soldiers may be away during the time that follows the birth of their children. There was an exception, as he learned, for criminals to put off their benefits until their prison sentences are complete, an irony that I felt was untenable. I committed to him that day that I would bring this problem to the Prime Minister and that we together would get it solved.

That is why I was very proud that our Minister of Human Resources tabled in the House of Commons a government bill designed to fix that inequity. I would like to congratulate all members in the House of Commons who have committed to support that very important remedy. This is a non-partisan issue. It is about

our families. It is about our soldiers. It is about giving them back the benefits for which they have paid, which I think all members in the House would agree is the very least that we can do.

Madam Speaker, I know that you share the same passion for our soldiers and I hope that all members of all parties will share it as well and we can unify in this place and show Canadians that we really can work together in the best interests of this country in order to bring fairness to our employment insurance system. Fairness is what this bill is all about; in fact, fairness is in its name.

To conclude the first part of my speech today, I will thank Major Duquette for having brought this issue to the attention of Canada's Parliament so that we could act on behalf of all soldiers who find themselves in similar circumstances.

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member will continue his comments later.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### SNOWMOBILING

**Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Annapolis Valley Lake and Ridge Runners for receiving Canada's Snowmobile Club of the Year award.

This is a very exciting time for the Runners, as they were chosen as the winners of this prestigious award out of 743 snowmobile clubs across the country.

These organizations not only strive to promote and foster safe snowmobiling as a family winter recreation, but also aim to boost the local economy by growing their sport at home and encouraging snowmobilers from other areas to visit.

We were all very pleased when the Prime Minister came down to the valley last year to announce a \$25 million investment in Canada's trail network as part of the economic action plan. As the Prime Minister stated, "These trail projects open up new opportunities for the tourism industry in Nova Scotia and Canada-wide".

I once again would like to congratulate the Annapolis Valley Lake and Ridge Runners and wish them all the best in the future.

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### CANADIAN RED CROSS

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day and Canadians like Al Alcock.



*Statements by Members*

Al started his career in the field of logistics and administrative management with the Canadian Armed Forces at the age of 16. He served 16 years in Europe and locations in northern Canada and the Arctic. For the next 21 years, Al was a director of administration and purchasing with the Yukon government. He recently retired as the fire chief for his community volunteer fire department.

After hurricane Katrina, Al was the shelter coordinator for the Canadian Red Cross in Hammond, Louisiana, running three shelters and a staff of 69 Red Cross volunteers. Soon he will be off to Haiti to help those who have lost so much in order that they may regain their lives, their dignity and rebuild their communities.

The Canadian Red Cross responds to thousands of disasters every year in Canada and beyond. It trains millions of people per year in first aid and water safety, provides community health programs and education on issues ranging from humanitarian values and prevention of bullying, and other forms of abuse.

Today we all pay tribute to the 36,000 volunteers and 6,000 employees of the Canadian Red Cross.

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[Translation]

**ROBERT DE COURCEL**

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Madam Speaker, the Eastern Townships are in mourning. Robert De Courcel, one of the leading figures in the townships' media and cultural scene, passed away on April 21 at the age of 70, succumbing to lung cancer.

An interviewer, columnist and journalist, Mr. De Courcel became known to young people of the 1960s through the show *Le Cirque à Tonton*, on which he played Tonton Bonbon. He was also the director of programming at the CHLT and CJRS radio stations, after which he returned to television and writing for print media. Robert "Ti-Bob" De Courcel was also known for his involvement in the Fondation du Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to his family. And, Mr. De Courcel, one last time, we thank him for all the good memories.

\* \* \*

[English]

**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Multiple Sclerosis Society and those suffering from MS are calling for greater government support for research, including the CIHR, on the cause and cure for this debilitating disease, and help for those with MS.

Why is this relevant to me as a member of Parliament for Edmonton—Strathcona? Alberta is the MS capital of the world at two to three times the national rate.

My sister died of MS. My cousin and many family friends bravely live with the disease.

I testified, along with a family doctor, before the Alberta Energy Board on the high rates at Lake Wabamun, home to the largest and growing density of coal fired power plants in the country.

Although the cause is unknown, only a small portion of funds for health research and living support are dedicated to MS. The society seeks federal support to establish a coordinated study of potentially related neurological diseases and \$10 million for clinical research. It seeks adjusted employment and disability tax benefits to better reflect the character of this disease.

I implore the government to give these requests the support they deserve.

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**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge May as being MS Awareness Month in Canada. The MS Society has worked tirelessly in the past fifty years to raise awareness about the devastating effects that MS has on its victims.

The MS Society has established itself as a leader in this cause with tens of thousands of volunteers dedicating their lives to not only helping with service programs, fundraising events and advocacy, but also to finding a cure for this disease, raising \$10 million annually.

One local volunteer in my riding who has championed the cause of MS incredibly is Jeanette Elliott, who needs to be particularly commended. She has done everything from leading fundraising efforts to advancing policy change. She has also led the charge for income security and supportive housing for people affected by MS.

I would also like to pay tribute to renowned vascular surgeon, Dr. Sandy Macdonald, a Barrie resident who has invested his own time and funds toward new and emerging treatments of MS.

The dedication of the MS Society and its local chapter is an example of Canadian generosity, and I want to pay tribute to my constituents.

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● (1405)

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, why is the member for Ottawa West—Nepean ignoring our police officers? They support the life-saving gun registry, a vital tool to keep our families and our communities safe. So do the police chiefs, police boards, and the survivors of the École Polytechnique massacre.

Why is the member for Ottawa West—Nepean not listening? The registry is used more than 11,000 times every day and it costs less than the Conservatives' wasteful government advertising. It is strange to see the member for Ottawa West—Nepean being muzzled, but his constituents deserve better.

*Statements by Members*

He should speak up for them and work with us to make the life-saving gun registry work for all Canadians. Vote for gun control, vote for community safety, and vote no on Bill C-391.

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**CANADIAN RED CROSS**

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day to pay tribute to Red Cross staff and volunteers across the country like Douglas Mole from Fonthill, Ontario in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook.

After serving for 28 years in the Canadian military, Mr. Mole joined the Red Cross movement in 2001 when he responded to the tragedy of September 11 in New York. Since then, he has used his skills as a logistics delegate to help people around the world, whether it be in conflict zones, responding to natural disasters, or distributing bed nets to fight malaria.

When he is home in Canada, Mr. Mole serves as a Red Cross emergency response volunteer in the Niagara region. His partner, Christiane Muir, is also a fellow Red Cross delegate.

The Red Cross responds to thousands of disasters every year, ranging from single house fires, to floods that disrupt entire regions of this country, to large-scale natural disasters like the earthquake in Haiti.

It is Canadians like Douglas Mole who make up the heart of this leading global humanitarian organization and today we salute them.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, is there any hope that the Conservatives will vote to maintain a life-saving tool if they do not even understand why people wanted it and how it came to be in the first place?

The member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup believes that there is no connection between the creation of the gun registry and the École Polytechnique tragedy that happened on December 6, 1989. He does not believe that the survivors had anything to do with the creation of the registry.

Either the Conservatives are oblivious or they are simply ignorant.

It is a fact that the bill to create the registry was passed at the urging of the Coalition for Gun Control, which came into being following the Polytechnique tragedy. Denying that direct link is just bad faith.

I hope that the survivors of the massacre who are here on the Hill today will be able to refresh the Conservative members' memory and that of the eight Liberals and 12 New Democrats who voted to get rid of the registry.

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**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I really have to wonder what the Bloc Québécois has done for Quebec

in the party's 20 years here in the House of Commons, apart from sitting back when it is time to act, and constantly criticizing with nothing to show for it.

With the Conservative government in power, we recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada. We have concluded an important Canada-Quebec cultural agreement concerning UNESCO and we have made huge investments in Quebec infrastructures. But the Bloc Québécois voted against that. We are also providing farmers with support for supply management, and the list goes on.

On many occasions, Bloc members stay seated when our government proposes important initiatives for workers and families in Quebec.

From the Bloc leader on down through the ranks, the Bloc Québécois is no longer achieving anything for Quebec in Ottawa. It is the Conservatives who are working for Quebeckers.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a spectacular democratic rally is taking place today on the Hill. Members of associations of police officers, chiefs of police and police boards; female students and graduates of the École Polytechnique; and representatives of shelters for women who are victims of spousal violence are rallying on the Hill to call on members to save the gun registry.

Quebec, its families and its police officers want to save the registry, but the Conservatives from Quebec want to scrap it, against the will of their constituents. This is no doubt because they do not know what they are talking about, just like the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who said yesterday that the gun registry and gun control had nothing to do with the killings at the École Polytechnique. The hon. member should take another look at the history of Quebec, and the NDP members should as well.

How can they stand the fact that their party is responsible for scrapping the registry? I urge all members to vote for gun control and safety in our communities.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last November 12 NDP members of Parliament stood in the House, did the right thing, and voted to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry at second reading. However, they have another important decision to make.

Bill C-391 is now in front of the public safety committee. I am sure the constituents of those 12 New Democrat MPs would be interested to know that their leader and the NDP justice critic joined the Liberals and the Bloc in trying to force the committee to accept the witness list that was 85% in favour of keeping the registry. Thank goodness they did not get away with it.

We have a message for the NDP: no shifting or sliding when it comes to the committee, no shifting or sliding on scrapping the long gun registry.

The constituents of those 12 New Democrats know that they either vote to keep the long gun registry or vote to scrap it. It is just that simple.

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#### CANADIAN RED CROSS

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day to pay tribute to Canadian Red Cross volunteers and delegates, delegates like Danielle Levesque, a pediatric nurse originally from the small community of Saint-Joseph-de-Kent in New Brunswick.

She spent many weeks in Port-au-Prince helping the injured or, in many cases, children of injured or deceased parents with her skills in psychological support. When the emergency health needs were met, Danielle took part in a massive vaccination program to stave off disease in many of the tent camps that had formed around Port-au-Prince.

Soon after she returned to Canada from Haiti, another earthquake devastated large parts of Chile. Once again, Danielle packed her bags and headed south to help those in need.

We must support the work of skilled emergency response delegates from across the country like Danielle Levesque. They represent Canada's goodwill and humanity to the world in times of devastating loss by providing relief, dignity and hope for recovery.

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#### ETHICS

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this morning the Liberal chair of the ethics committee showed yet again the ethical bankruptcy of the Liberal Party, when it was revealed that he had a private conversation with the interim Information Commissioner about an ongoing investigation.

Is this how the Liberal Party respects the independent officers of Parliament? All members of the House should believe in respecting due process, all members should believe in respecting the independence of officers of Parliament.

No member of the House should be engaged in a private conversation with a legal authority about an ongoing investigation in the middle of that investigation.

Yet, the member for Mississauga South threw due process and respect for the independent authority of that officer completely out the window by attempting to influence, interfere or direct that independent officer of Parliament.

This is highly inappropriate, grossly unethical, and shows yet again why the Liberal Party cannot be trusted.

#### Statements by Members

[Translation]

#### RED CROSS

**Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today we are acknowledging World Red Cross Red Crescent Day, which will be celebrated on May 8.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of some 100,000 volunteers in Quebec's chapter of the Red Cross who, every day, carry out the organization's mission to help people cope with situations that are threatening their survival and safety, their well being and their human dignity.

The Quebec chapter works together with other members of the movement in order to provide assistance during international disasters such as the recent earthquake in Haiti, where the people affected received help and emergency care. A fundraising campaign was organized in the wake of this terrible earthquake. Like the International Red Cross, the Quebec chapter espouses international humanitarian law and values in everything that it does.

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois join me in commending these people who devote themselves day after day to providing comfort, help and care to people in need here and elsewhere.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

#### VE DAY

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate the 65th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. This Saturday, we will pay tribute to the 46,000 Canadians who lost their lives liberating the people of Europe.

We will never forget the joy of this day of liberation.

[English]

On VE Day we all think with pride and respect of today's Canadian Forces who represent the best of us.

As Churchill said on May 8, 1945, "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing but let us not forget...the toils and efforts that lie ahead".

What lay ahead was the rebuilding of a whole continent. Sixty-five years on, Europe is united and at peace, and Canadians can be proud of the part that we played in that achievement.

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#### LOBBYING

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Liberal leader told reporters that his calendar was open to the public, but his office refused to provide it when asked.

Because of this lack of transparency, Canadians do not know which secret meetings the Liberal lobbyists the OLO is trying to protect. They do not know whose agenda the OLO is pushing. Most important, Canadians do not even know who is really making decisions in the Liberal Party.

*Oral Questions*

The Conservative government brought Canadians the Federal Accountability Act to fix the lax lobbying laws the Liberals relied on to do business with their friends. We want to extend those rules to make all parliamentarians accountable for who they choose to meet with.

Canadians deserve to know that their MPs are representing their interests, not special interests or hidden Liberal agendas.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, survivors of the École Polytechnique tragedy are here today.

Canadian police, police chief and police commission associations are also on the Hill to support the firearms registry. They are all saying that this registry is vital to public safety.

Why are the Conservatives ignoring the victims and police?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians were tremendously moved by what happened many years ago in Montreal. We are all deeply committed to ensuring that the country is safer for Canadian women and, in fact, for all Canadians.

Where there is a reasonable difference of opinion is that we believe the billions of dollars spent on the long gun registry have been a waste and that we can make better criminal justice reform, such as has been implemented by the Minister of Justice in this Parliament, that this House can be proud of.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, just as a point of fact about one of the top 10 myths of the Canadian firearms program. It actually costs \$4.1 million a year to operate. It is good value and it keeps Canadians safe.

We stand with the survivors of the École Polytechnique massacre. We stand with the chiefs of police. We stand with the officers. We stand with legitimate gun owners who stand behind the gun registry in order to keep our communities safe.

Why is the government ignoring all of these voices of reason?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will take the word of the Auditor General who certainly did not call it value for money when more than \$1 billion were wasted on the creation of the long gun registry.

We stand with victims and with Canadians. We stand with all of those who want to make our communities safer, which is why we are pursuing an aggressive regime through amendments to the Criminal Code, reforms brought in by the present Minister of Justice.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to support victims, he should get behind our crime agenda.

● (1420)

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the government wants to stand behind victims, it will stand with the victims of École Polytechnique and it will stand for a gun registry.

Why will the government not do the right thing and stand with chiefs of police, with legitimate gun owners who believe that the gun registry is an essential measure of public safety and stand with police officers who know they need a gun registry in order to keep officers safe? Why will the government not listen to these voices of reason?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government supports reasonable gun control. This government supports reasonable efforts to keep our communities safe.

What we do not support is the billions of dollars that have been wasted on an ineffective gun registry that gave Canadians a false sense of hope that the previous Liberal government was doing something to tackle violent crime. That long gun registry has wasted in excess of \$1 billion. We are committed to ending it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Polytechnique students are in town today. I am sure that the member for Outremont would like to introduce them to his leader, given that the NDP is still waffling on keeping the registry. Will he do it?

However, my question is for the Conservatives' Quebec lieutenant. He knows that the consensus in Quebec is that the registry should be kept. The Liberal Party agrees with that consensus.

Why is he voting against the will of his constituents?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while we support the licensing of people and the registration of prohibited and restricted weapons, we do not support the wasteful long gun registry. It is time to end the criminalization of our hunters and our outdoor enthusiasts.

What we have seen is the Liberals playing games at committee with witnesses and others. We hope that all Liberal and NDP MPs will put the call of their constituents above the order from the Liberal leader and vote to finally end the wasteful long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the Quebec Conservatives follow their leader like sheep. As for the leader, he follows the pro-gun lobbyists.

What other explanation is there for the comments by the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup to the effect that the firearms registry has nothing to do with the Polytechnique tragedy?

*Oral Questions*

What do the Conservatives have to say to the Polytechnique graduates who have come to Ottawa today? What do they have to say to police, other than accusing them of belonging to a cult?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will always remember the Polytechnique tragedy. However, I would like to correct my colleague's comments about a Quebec consensus. I travel to all regions where there are forests, and where there are forests there are hunters. All of Quebec's hunting associations have asked us to abolish this registry, which is too cumbersome for them. We are fighting criminals, not hunters.

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**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is just one surprise after another with the Conservative government. Yesterday we learned that it slashed funding for at least a dozen women's groups whose opinions on abortion differ from those of the Conservative Party. Today we learned that the government decided to fund religious groups that believe in the imminent return of the Messiah and translate the Bible into African and Asian dialects.

Will the government admit that the decision to finance religious groups or sects is an ideological decision along the same line as the decision to cut funding for pro-choice women's groups?

• (1425)

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government wants to ensure that when we help women in Canada and women abroad, we will do it responsibly and we will make a difference in their lives. This is why we have taken on responsibility for hard-earned taxpayer dollars to help women, and we will do this so they can see that they can have a better life wherever they may live.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it will really help women to send preachers such as themselves to Africa or to have the Bible translated. What a huge help and so essential. Meanwhile, the government has justified cuts to the Department of Status of Women—it irritates them, does it not?—by saying that it was a financial decision.

How can the government explain that it is spending up to \$800,000 on religious groups or sects—because that is what they are—while cutting funding for organizations that are helping women battle poverty on the ground?

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is completely incorrect. This government has increased funding for women's groups across Canada to record levels. We are very proud of that. In fact, we are supporting projects in every province and territory in Canada now.

These programs are working so well that we are oversubscribed. In fact, we have more women's groups applying than ever before. All of these groups have merit and are doing great work across the

country but we cannot fund everyone. However, I am very proud that 42% of our funding this year will go to groups that are working to end violence against women.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, according to the director of MATCH International, bureaucrats were telling women's groups right up until the last minute that they would get their funding. Now the government claims that the funding was cut because of administrative deficiencies. In fact, this decision, which was made by the minister's office, smacks of ideological revenge, given that the bureaucrats were satisfied with the work of the organizations.

Is the government's decision not more readily explained by its desire to advance its religious and ideological agenda at the expense of women?

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will put the facts on the record. It was CIDA officials, based on an independent evaluation, that deemed the project ineligible due to poor accountability.

This is not about ideology or entitlement. This is about how we best use taxpayer dollars so that we can make a difference in developing countries. We are helping women in developing countries so they can better feed their children, keep them healthy and ensure they have a safe and productive life.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this terrible decision to cut funding for women's groups was made arbitrarily and based on ideology. The government is pursuing its path and cutting funding for anyone who does not think like it does.

Will the government admit that the lack of warning from bureaucrats to justify these cuts demonstrates that the party's religious base, and that alone, is what has guided its decisions?

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as we have said, this is not about ideology. This is not about entitlement. This is about getting the best value out of taxpayer dollars. This means that for every one of our international dollars we provide, we want to get more health, more education, more economy and more people out of poverty. That is how this government will use our international assistance dollars.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. There are some very serious allegations from a very credible third party, and we have to believe the Bank of Montreal is a more credible third party than a private investigator, suggesting that the Conservative member of Parliament from Calgary Northeast is linked to what is believed to be, at \$100 million, the largest bank fraud in Canadian history.

What is the difference between him and member for Simcoe—Grey? Why did the government not call in the RCMP? Why is the member still sitting in the Conservative caucus?

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite the hon. member's penchant for always believing the banks about everything, clearly this is a personal, civil matter concerning the member for Calgary Northeast. It has absolutely nothing to do with the business of the Government of Canada.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is clearly a double standard.

Speaking of double standards, the government needs to explain its approach to funding for women's groups.

Why the cuts to the Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail after 25 years of good work? What is wrong with the Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec? What did the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine do wrong?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. This government is giving a record amount of funding to women's groups in every region of the country. We want to ensure that we get value for money.

We should also be very clear that funding is not automatic and it is not forever. We want to ensure that women's groups from all over Canada, from time to time, can get support. That is exactly what the government has done.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep pretending they are giving more money than ever, but we know what is really going on. They are systematically denying the funding to groups of women that are advocating for the rights of women in our country. That is what is going on.

Why are the Conservatives so keen on meeting with an unregistered lobbyist like Rahim Jaffer when they will not even meet with the groups of women whose funding they are cancelling and whose good works they are putting the brakes on? They will not even take the time to discuss it with them.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me tell the leader of the NDP what the government is doing.

In New Brunswick we have assisted entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and develop leadership skills that will help them become future business leaders.

In Manitoba we funded a program to increase the awareness and prevention on the important issue of human trafficking and the exploitation of women.

We have also funded a national women's shelter program to improve the access to quality services for women who are in abusive situations, with a focus on aboriginal, immigrant and rural women.

Our Minister for Status of Women is doing great work, and the House should be proud of it.

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government maintains it has turned over all documents concerning privileged access granted Rahim Jaffer and Patrick Glémaud.

However, a Liberal access to information request has fleshed out unreleased documents at the Department of Natural Resources. The request asked for any records relating to Glémaud going back to November 2008, the same month he founded Green Power Generation.

The government first denied and now it is withholding information it promised to make public. Yesterday the Minister of Natural Resources and his predecessor dodged the committee. What are they hiding?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Public servants at the Department of Natural Resources have revealed that the documents in question pertain to Mr. Glémaud's role as a public servant and have nothing to do with either Mr. Jaffer or with Green Power Generation.

I trust the public servants at Natural Resources Canada when they say that.

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the request was pretty clear. It had to do with GPG and Patrick Glémaud and Rahim Jaffer.

The government operations committee specifically asked the Department of Natural Resources for records related to Jaffer, Glémaud and GPG. The department has confirmed these records exist. However, in a letter to the committee, the former minister says that there are no records, while the current minister says that records have already been turned over. We know that nothing produced so far has come from the Department of Natural Resources.

Why the continued stonewalling? Why the denying? What is the government afraid of?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we had an effort in Parliament yesterday to expend the Lobbying Act. We were only too happy to support it and said "let's go even farther. Let's include all members of Parliament in that effort". One Liberal member of Parliament is quoted in the paper as saying, "I have to provide some confidentiality".

For our friend, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, I was reading the World Wide Web today and, lo and behold, the Liberal MP for Scarborough—Rouge River is advertising himself as a lobbyist.

● (1435)

[Translation]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has said several times in the House that all the documents related to Rahim Jaffer, Patrick Glémaud and Green Power Generation have been made public.

Last Friday, he said that his government had released all the documents in question.

The minister is in trouble now that we know he is sitting on a pile of documents from Human Resources Canada.

Will he admit he was trying to mislead this House?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the World Wide Web, the Liberal member of Parliament is advertising himself as lobbyist. What does he do for his clients?

He reviews policies and the conduct of the Canadian Security Intelligence Services. He assists foreign and offshore organizations in obtaining operating licences. He advises government bodies on international issues, regarding cross-border tax collection. The Liberal Party member of Parliament is advertising that he can “lobbying government on policy issues as well as facilitating inter-governmental relationships”.

What exactly does the Liberal Party have to—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is hiding thousands and thousands of pages of documents on the detainee torture scandal and on the green power energy fund.

Last Thursday, that minister said that the government released all documents. On Monday, he said that the government made all the documents public. We know that is not the case.

First it was one Conservative minister, then two, then seven and now it is eight. When will the current government stop stonewalling and denying and release all the information?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to release a copy of the Sun & Partners website, where the Liberal member for Scarborough—Rouge River advertises himself as a lobbyist. This raises a number of questions about the Liberal Party.

Who is the Liberal Party's member of Parliament lobbying for? When he says that he secures regulatory government approvals for mergers and acquisitions, who is he talking about? When he advises government bodies on cross-border tax collection, when he lobbies government on policy issues, when he calls a minister's office, who

### Oral Questions

is he fighting for? Is he fighting for his constituents or some foreign well-paid interest?

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, for the first time, three police associations, including the Canadian Police Association, which represents 41,000 officers, are banding together to call on the government to maintain the firearms registry. These three police associations are clear: the registry saves lives.

Instead of turning it into an ideological debate, why does the government not listen to those who are on the front lines and who are calling for the firearms registry to remain unchanged?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to report that just a little while ago, someone said that the problem was that we are using the registry too often, because there have been other mass killings since École Polytechnique, and the registry cannot stop someone with a mental illness from deciding to get a gun and killing someone.

That was said by Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, the former speaker of the Quebec National Assembly and a former minister in the head office of the party opposite.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, he also said that we should maintain the registry.

The Conservatives are taking an ideological stance and are ignoring the truth. This was clear in the comments made by the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who denies that the École Polytechnique tragedy played a role in the creation of the registry. Not only is that untrue and unacceptable, but it also negates all the work done by the Coalition for Gun Control.

Why refuse to listen to the École Polytechnique survivors, who are also calling for the firearms registry to be maintained?

● (1440)

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the tragedy at École Polytechnique will be forever etched in the memories of all Canadians. The Bloc is once again using this tragedy as a political ploy to put pressure on the government. Our government supports the abolition of the firearms registry because it does not think that being tough on crime means being tough on farmers and hunters. Everyone knows that criminals do not register their firearms.

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### FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

**Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the President of the European Union, José Manuel Barroso, demolished the Prime Minister's arguments about a bank tax. He pointed out that all countries are feeling the impacts of the financial crisis.

The American Treasury Secretary, Timothy Geithner, said that it is possible to implement this type of tax while limiting the negative effects on consumers.

*Oral Questions*

Why is the Conservative government going it alone and refusing to help out with efforts to stabilize the financial markets?

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is our financial system in Canada is a model for the world and our regulation system is a model for the world. No Canadian taxpayer monies went into Canadian banks. Would that it were so for the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries in western Europe. Those countries had to put taxpayer money into their banks. Now they are going back to the banks and taxing them, or proposing to, to get their money back for their taxpayers. That is not the Canadian situation. We have one of the best banking systems in the world.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, instead of rolling up the rim and spending time at Tim Horton's, he should be spending time with Tim Geithner.

From 2007 to 2009, chartered banks made \$46 billion net, post-tax. They saved \$6 billion in tax havens. That is \$52 billion, which is equivalent to the Conservative deficit.

Why does the Minister of Finance keep giving his banking friends preferential treatment at the expense of Canadian consumers?

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite wants to follow the American lead. I know his leader wants to invest continually in the oil sands. However, I did not know he had anything against Tim Hortons. This is a great Canadian exporting business. Our banks and our insurance companies were well regulated by the Government of Canada, and the agencies of Canada have shown themselves to be a model for the world. He should be proud of our Canadian financial systems, including the National Bank in Montreal.

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### ETHICS

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are having trouble figuring out where Conservatives draw the ethical lines. Apparently, if someone leaves behind security documents at a girlfriend's place, he stays in caucus. However, if a shady gumshoe makes second-hand allegations, which we still do not know, about a minister of the Crown, she gets kicked out of cabinet, kicked out of the party and the Mounties are called in.

How are Canadians supposed to understand where ethics end and political expediency begins?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if people believe what they read on the Sun law firm website, I can tell them there is no line in the Liberal Party. It is just one common room where one can act as a member of Parliament and a lobbyist at the same time.

I want to know from the Liberal Party which foreign and offshore organizations are being helped to obtain operating licences. How is the Liberal member securing regulatory government approval for mergers and acquisitions? Which clients is the Liberal member asking to review the policies of CSIS? Is the Liberal MP for

Scarborough—Rouge River providing foreign and offshore organizations with information about CSIS?

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us get some facts. The government will use anything to cover up its actions by attacking opposition members. A Conservative member is being accused by one of the largest financial companies in Canada of participating in a multi-million-dollar fraud. There is not a word from the Prime Minister, not a word, yet on secret allegations from an amateur investigator, she is finished, out of cabinet and out of caucus.

Where is the line? In one case, the Prime Minister ignores guidelines. In a second, he kicks her out. Why does the Prime Minister put political expediency first?

• (1445)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we in the House are debating important issues like lobbying reform this week. We want to raise the bar on the registration of lobbyists and increase lobby registration, but the Liberal Party is fighting us. It does not want us to include MPs in that lobbying reform.

We all wonder what the Liberals have to hide. Now, we learn that the Liberal leader is condoning his own Liberal members of Parliament acting as paid lobbyists for foreign organizations. The leader of the Liberal Party should ensure that all Liberal MPs who are acting as paid lobbyists for special interests put their information on the table. Be honest with Canadians.

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### POVERTY

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this recession has hurt Canadians. Now we know how bad it is, thanks to a report released by the Citizens for Public Justice and its partners, including World Vision. It is deeply troubling. The national poverty rate has increased from 9.2% to 11.7%. Child poverty has increased from 9.5% to 12%. That is an increase of 160,000 children in poverty.

One in four Canadian workers earning less than \$10 an hour have lost their jobs. Almost half of those unemployed still do not get any benefits. As many as half a million have exhausted their benefits and it has not hit rock bottom yet. What does the minister say to Canadians still reeling from the recession?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of things to help those who are unemployed and those who need more income. We have introduced the working income tax benefit to make work pay and to help low-income Canadians over the welfare wall.

Here is what the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour had to say:



I support very much the direction on the WITB. I think improving the working income tax benefit is a very positive thing.

We put about \$3,000 in the hands of every average Canadian by our tax reductions. It is something this member should support.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is either ignorant or ignoring those who are hurting. There has been an increase in welfare caseloads in every province. They are up 20% in B.C., 23% in Ontario and 43% in Alberta.

The cost of living is outstripping inflation. Food costs are up. Debt load is up. Bankruptcies are up. Food bank usage increased 18% last year. Millions of Canadians have received no help from the government but may be expected to bear the brunt of the government's ballooning deficit.

How can the government pat itself on the back when more and more Canadians are living in substandard housing and lining up with their children at food banks?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have invested billions of dollars in housing for seniors and housing for those with a disability. We have helped those who are homeless. We have added \$1.9 billion over five years for them. We have enhanced the national child tax benefit, the child tax benefit itself.

Here is what Deb Matthews, then the Ontario minister of children and youth services, had to say:

...I was happy to see...initiatives that will directly improve the quality of life and the standard of living for kids living in poverty. The increase to the WITB will directly help low-income families. Thank you for that... The increase in the CCTB is also appreciated.

A number of initiatives to help those—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

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### LOBBYING

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board told Canadians that our Conservative government will require lobbyists to tell Canadians about their meetings with parliamentarians. However, Liberals quickly backed away from this proposal, leaving Canadians wondering what the Liberals have to hide.

Our government created tough lobbying rules through the Federal Accountability Act, but the Liberals fought those changes at every step. Can the President of the Treasury Board please tell the House why the Liberal Party is once again opposing greater transparency for Canadians?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a known fact that former Liberal ministers would meet regularly with secret Liberal lobbyists. Now that the Liberals are no longer in government, those secret meetings with lobbyists still continue. Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, they continue behind those curtains just beyond your thoughtful, watchful eyes. They continue in the office of the Leader of the Opposition.

### Oral Questions

The Liberals think Canadians do not have a right to know. We think Canadians have a right to know. We would like to know what is going on behind those curtains, what is going on behind the doors of the opposition leader's office that they do not want Canadians to know about.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

[Translation]

### HEALTH

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of prescription drugs has had adverse effects on the health of Canadians. We have been waiting for a pharmacare program for 50 years. The provinces and territories want to see such a program implemented. This represents not only excellent social policy, but also excellent fiscal policy. We will actually save money.

When will the government listen to Canadians and groups that work in health care, and introduce a pharmacare program?

[English]

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should know, our partners in the provinces and the territories are responsible for deciding which drugs are publicly reimbursed. That is why we have increased the federal transfers to the provinces and territories each year by 6%.

Our leadership and commitment to working with the provinces and territories continue to better our health care system and to make it more efficient.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, more stone-walling from the government, but the fact of the matter is that a national pharmacare program would save the government money.

This party claims to be the party of fiscal responsibility and it claims to be a party that cares about the interests of Canadians. It refuses to show federal leadership for a pharmacare program that would save the government money and help Canadians. Why?

When will the government put the interests of Canadians ahead of those of pharmaceutical companies and its own ideologies?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member should know that the provinces and territories deliver health care, which is why our government has increased transfers to the provinces and territories each and every year by 6%, so that they decide which products will be publicly covered through their health care systems.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT**

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said that she was ready to "support efforts to realize the goal of a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East". Her statement applies to both Iran and Israel.

Does the Conservative government agree that an international conference to create a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East should be held as soon as possible?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, Canada is indeed a champion of non-proliferation, but unilateral declarations are quite unworkable.

I think as we proceed with the discussions at the United Nations over the coming weeks, this may be a topic of discussion.

[Translation]

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, at the G8 conference of senior officials on security, the Minister of Foreign Affairs specifically targeted Iran and called for stronger nuclear non-proliferation provisions. That is fine, but my question is not just about Iran.

Does the government intend to support Hillary Clinton's ambitious objective to create a nuclear-weapons-free zone across the Middle East?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada works with the Americans and with all nations that support the concept of non-proliferation. We are committed to promoting international peace and security by preventing the spread of nuclear weapons in any part of the world.

\* \* \*

**OMAR KHADR**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Justice.

The minister will know that the United States government has responded to his request after the Supreme Court ruling with respect to making sure evidence received as a result of the CSIS investigation and interrogation of Mr. Khadr was not used at the trial. The Americans have refused it.

I would like to ask the Minister of Justice, specifically the minister, and the minister needs to respond to this. It is a basic matter of justice. It affects the rights of a Canadian citizen.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the member's question, but the fact of the matter remains that Canada's position regarding Mr. Khadr has not changed. Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges, including murder. The Obama administration has opted to send Omar Khadr to a military commission, and we are letting that process proceed and unfold.

● (1455)

[Translation]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we want a clear answer from the minister responsible for justice in Canada, not the parliamentary secretary's robotic responses.

How is justice being served for this Canadian citizen? Why is the Minister of Justice refusing to answer questions about the rights of a Canadian citizen? What is he doing over there?

[English]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps he should ask his question of someone else as he does not like to hear my answer.

The fact of the matter is that the government's position has not changed. Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges, and we will await what is happening at Guantanamo Bay before we make any kind of decision.

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**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Afghanistan committee was told by CSIS that it was in partnership with the notorious NDS in Afghanistan and that it had received information from the NDS it could not use because of the methods by which it was obtained. It knows what we all know but what the government refuses to admit, that the NDS tortures people in its custody.

When will the government stop the cover-up, live up to our obligations of international law and stop transferring detainees to the NDS?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, CSIS agents are bound by the same human rights standards as all Canadian personnel in Afghanistan, and this government has been clear that we do not condone the use of torture for any purpose.

However, what does concern me today is the revelation of the Liberal member's lobbying on behalf of foreign organizations for information related to CSIS. I think that member should stand and explain exactly what information that individual is sharing with foreign organizations.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we also heard from the respected international organization Human Rights Watch, whose senior legal counsel said Canada's practice of obtaining diplomatic assurances from the Afghan government, even with monitoring of transferred detainees, was not enough to comply with our international human rights obligations. She also said, "NDS torture and ill-treatment of detainees in its custody has been well known for years" and that it most often occurs within the first 72 hours of custody.

When is the government going to call an independent judicial inquiry to get at the truth and satisfy Canadians that we can do the right thing in the future?

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what we heard yesterday was a strongly held legal opinion that was based on never having visited Sarposa, never having visited the NDS facility in Kandahar, never having visited the Canadian facility at Kandahar airfield, never having visited Kandahar airfield, never having talked to the Government of Canada since the fall of 2006 and never having talked to anybody on the ground who had anything to do with the mission. That is what we heard yesterday.

What we heard from Gavin Buchan was that none of these contacts, and he had many contacts, produced information to the effect that Canadian-transferred detainees were being abused or that our detainee arrangement was not being respected by Afghan authorities.

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#### POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week we learned that the federal Liberal Party is sending letters encouraging its supporters to donate hundreds of dollars to its party anonymously. Canadians know that, unlike the Liberals, our Conservative government believes in transparency in political financing.

Can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform please clarify for the House the rules on political donations?

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to clarify the rules for the Liberal Party. Anonymous campaign donations over \$20 are illegal. Unlike the Liberals, our government believes in transparent political financing.

We have already made changes to the election financing rules, and just last week I introduced the political loans accountability act to reduce the influence of big money in politics. I call on the Liberals to support our legislation instead of promoting secret political donations.

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#### HEALTH

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, desperate multiple sclerosis patients protested across this country. They want diagnostic imaging and treatment for possible blocked veins, as recommended by the International Union of Phlebology.

Will the Minister of Health tell the House today that she will listen to the MS Society and immediately provide \$10 million of new money to CIHR, and will Canada respect the international guidelines?

• (1500)

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government understands how debilitating and devastating neurological disease can be for those affected and that is why our government has invested \$15 million to work with stakeholders in an effort to find better treatment and services.

#### Oral Questions

As well, last year, CIHR invested \$5.3 million for specifically for MS. CIHR also invested over \$120 million in a larger area of neuroscience for improved treatment for people living with this disease.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### OMAR KHADR

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict points out that international protocols provide special protection to children in armed conflicts. Accordingly, she is calling on Canada and the United States to treat Omar Khadr as a child soldier.

Will Canada finally recognize Omar Khadr as a child soldier and demand his repatriation?

[English]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, Canada's position regarding Mr. Omar Khadr has not changed. Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges, including murder.

The Obama administration has opted to send Omar Khadr to a military commission and we are letting that process unfold.

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#### FISHING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in a report released today, Dr. Andrew Wright states that land-based, closed containment salmon farming is economically and technically feasible and is less environmentally damaging than current open-net farming.

We know the government wants to expand west coast aquaculture. We also know that sea lice from fish farms are having a negative impact on wild salmon.

Will the government protect our wild salmon and require salmon farmers to transition to a greener way of doing business by moving to closed containment?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government supports both a wild salmon fishery and a sustainable aquaculture industry and that is why our Prime Minister established the Cohen Commission to investigate the decline of the Fraser River sockeye salmon.

I would encourage the member opposite to listen to the steelworkers who last week criticized his bias against aquaculture. They said, "Justice Cohen has been appointed to conduct an inquiry into this matter, and for an elected official to assume that the cause is due to fish farms is irresponsible".

*Points of Order***JUSTICE**

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, child pornography is a very serious form of sexual exploitation. Our government remains committed to protecting Canadians, especially our children, from crimes being committed in today's technological environment.

Would the Minister of Justice please update the House on the legislation that was tabled earlier today that would address this important issue?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his question and once again on his very important motion that was passed by the House in the last session aimed at protecting vulnerable Canadians.

Our legislation makes it mandatory for providers of Internet services to the public to report any tips they receive regarding websites where child pornography may be available to the public, as well as safeguard evidence if they believe that a child pornography offence has been committed using a service that they provide.

Again, with the help of the member for Kitchener—Conestoga and my colleagues on this side of the House, we are getting the job done in protecting Canadian children.

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government would unveil its agenda for the balance of this week and next week, including the designation of any opposition days that may fall into that period of time.

I know the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has been giving this matter some thought and I wonder if he is yet in a position to be specific about the occasion upon which we can have a take-note debate with respect to the east coast shellfish industry.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to respond to the Thursday question from the hon. House leader of the official opposition.

We will continue with the debate today and tomorrow on Bill C-13, fairness for military families, followed by Bill C-10, Senate term limits.

Next week we will continue with Bill C-13, if we do not complete it this week, followed by Bill C-14, fairness at the pumps act; Bill C-15, nuclear liability; and Bill S-3, tax conventions.

I will give consideration to any bills also, as usual, that are reported back from committee to the House.

My hon. colleague asked about allotted days. Next Tuesday, May 11, shall be the next allotted day.

I am pleased to report that following extensive consultations between all parties, pursuant to Standing Order 53(1) I choose to designate Wednesday, May 12 for a take note debate on the importance of the Atlantic shellfish industry.

In conclusion, there have been additional consultations between all parties and I believe Mr. Speaker, you would find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the hours of sitting and the order of business of the House on Thursday, May 27, 2010, shall be that of a Wednesday; that the address of the President of Mexico, to be delivered in the chamber of the House of Commons at 10 a.m. on Thursday, May 27, 2010, before members of the Senate and the House of Commons, together with all introductory and related remarks, be printed as an appendix to the House of Commons *Debates* for that day and form part of the records of this House; and that the media recording and transmission of such address, introductory and related remarks be authorized pursuant to established guidelines for such occasions.

• (1505)

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, just as a point of clarification because I think this is a change from what we might earlier have heard. Is it correct that following Bill C-13 the next order of business is Bill C-10?

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. It is my intention to call Bill C-10, the Senate term limits, after Bill C-13.

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**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising from events in question period.

During question period, the Minister of Transport claimed that he had a document that was available on the worldwide web that details the lobbying qualifications, if we want to call it that, of the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

That document talks about the member's position as a former parliamentary secretary and his position as a current chairman of a committee of the House of Commons, and how one might be able to access the excellent connections that he has to further one's business interests, whether it is a domestic or foreign business.

I wonder if we could get unanimous consent for the Minister of Transport to table that document so we could all have a look at it.

**The Speaker:** I do not understand the question from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Is he asking for unanimous consent for the minister to table the document? Ministers do not need unanimous consent to table documents. Ministers can rise and table documents to their heart's content and there is nothing that the chair can do about it or any other hon. member.

*Points of Order*

I would suggest that perhaps the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development take the Minister of Transport for lunch, butter him up and perhaps he will table the documents tomorrow or later.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the years that I have been here representing my constituency, this is the first time I have raised a point of order on an inappropriate comment that I think I heard. Over the years, I have seen inappropriate gestures and have heard inappropriate comments and have not risen to this point, but this is so serious that I must.

When a question was raised by the member for Toronto Centre and the member for Calgary East stood to answer, I listened to what he was saying and I think I heard him say, "Sit down. Sit down. You don't know what you're saying. Sit down. Go back on a plane".

If indeed he said that, it would be a very inappropriate racist comment and I would ask him to clarify whether he said that and, if he did, he needs to apologize to this House.

• (1510)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I sit right beside the member for Toronto Centre and I certainly heard no such remark. I heard a number of other remarks vigorously expressed because of the lack of quality in the answer, but I certainly heard nothing of the nature that the hon. gentleman has just alleged.

I will most definitely bring this to the attention of the member for Toronto Centre and I am sure he will be in a position to respond for himself. However, I want to make it clear that I sat within one foot of the gentleman and I did not hear any such remark.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this seems to be a lively day in the House.

I have been in this House for over 16 years and my point of order relates to something that was said by the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. I gave the hon. member notice that I intended to raise this.

I recognize that in this House, members have a very broad and strongly protected right to the freedom to enter into debate and to speak their minds, and I respect that and am glad of that, but what I heard today from the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the leader of the Bloc, was what I consider to be an intolerant attack on Canadians who hold beliefs that are contrary to his own. In my view, the remarks that he made were bigoted and divisive. This kind of rhetoric, in my view, is completely unacceptable in our pluralistic society.

I would point out that our country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms proudly proclaims that certain human rights are guaranteed in this country. I will read section 2 of the charter where it states:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression...

I find it deeply disturbing that the Charter of Rights and the rights that are guaranteed to Canadians would come under attack in this very House through the very intolerant and specifically targeted words of the leader of the Bloc in question period.

Therefore, I would respectfully ask the Bloc leader to reconsider his language in attacking in this House the charter rights of other Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the leader of the Bloc Québécois has ever attacked democratic values in the House.

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** They are religious biases.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Could the minister be quiet so that we can respond? We listened to what the member for Calgary—Nose Hill had to say.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois has never questioned the rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter has never been called into question. I respectfully submit that the point raised by my colleague is a point of debate. She will have an opportunity to reread the question the leader of the Bloc Québécois asked and the supplementary question about cuts the Conservative government made to the budgets of 12 allegedly pro-choice groups.

However, the government is giving \$800,000 in additional funding to religious groups and sects that preach a specific ideology and values. The leader of the Bloc Québécois has never challenged freedom of religion, freedom of thought or freedom of speech.

My colleague used very strong language to describe what was said, which was debate. To my way of thinking, there is no point of order.

• (1515)

**The Speaker:** I should start by saying that it is not the Speaker's role to enforce the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms here in the House.

[*English*]

Much as it might be tempting to become a law enforcement official, that is not the role of the Speaker.

[*Translation*]

I am here to determine whether the language used in the House is parliamentary or not, no more, no less. Controlling the debate by invoking other laws of Canada in the House is more than I can do.

[*English*]

I am here, really, to ensure that the language used in the House, as members enjoy freedom of speech in this place, is parliamentary. I did not hear the minister of state suggest that the leader of the Bloc Québécois had said something unparliamentary. She suggested it was contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[*Translation*]

This is something that can be debated, but not something on which the Speaker can rule at this time. I hope that all hon. members will accept my decision on this.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***FAIRNESS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES (EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE) ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** When the matter was under discussion before oral questions, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister had the floor. There are six minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks. I therefore call upon the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, earlier today I was talking about the fairness for military families act, or Bill C-13 as it is also called. I am going to refresh the House's memory on the background that I shared with it earlier today.

Just over a year ago, I was knocking on doors in the southwest Ottawa community of Osgoode, a village about 40 minutes from where I stand today. I ended up on the doorstep of a soldier. He related to me his story of service in the Golan Heights. He was called to go on a mission four or five days after the birth of his son, Jacob. He stayed on duty in that mission for an entire year, meaning that he missed basically the first year of his child's life while he was sacrificing for all of us. His wife would later say that one of the things that got them through that long period of separation was that he would be able to return and collect his employment insurance parental leave and use that leave as an opportunity to make up for lost time with his family, and in particular, with his small child. And why would he not apply for that parental leave; after all, Major Duquette pays employment insurance premiums, as do all soldiers. As such, they should expect to receive employment insurance benefits.

In this case, the time period during which those benefits were available to him had expired while he was serving all of us overseas. When he returned and applied, he was saddened to learn that he would not have the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits for which he had been paying as a Canadian who pays employment insurance premiums. He felt that this was an injustice. What bothered him additionally and what exacerbated the situation was when he opened the statutes he learned that there is an exemption in place for criminals to defer their benefits until after they complete their prison terms. The system provides a special advantage for criminals, but not for the law-abiding, patriotic, sacrificing Canadian soldiers who do such important work on our behalf and at such great emotional and personal cost to their families.

We have in the House a number of veterans who have served in the armed forces for whom this issue is especially important as well. One of them is my seatmate, the member for Edmonton Centre. The member for Edmonton Centre is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with him. As a former air force pilot, I know that he will have a very special perspective to share with us. I think we should take a moment to recognize him.

When I was standing on Major Duquette's doorstep, I said to him that I would bring his concern to the Prime Minister and that after we were able to study the matter, we would act quickly to fix this injustice with the introduction in the House of Commons of the fairness for military families act. That is precisely what we have done. I congratulate the Minister of Human Resources for drafting this legislation.

This legislation allows soldiers to defer their benefits until after their mission is complete so that soldiers who find themselves in a similar situation to that which befell our friend, Major Duquette, will be able to have their benefits waiting for them when they get back from duty abroad. That means that children will get extra time with their mother or father who is a member of the forces. I want members to consider the human benefit that should be associated with this legislation.

● (1520)

When people make the sacrifice to be away from their families and away from their children in that crucial first year, they make a big sacrifice and so do the families. When they return, should we not allow them to have access to the benefits that they pay for? Should they not have the chance to rekindle that bond, to solidify that relationship and to become more acquainted with the newborn or child from whom they have been separated during their service to our country?

I ask that question to all members of this chamber. I think members of all parties would agree that mothers and fathers, like Major Duquette, who perform this valuable service for our country often at great risk to themselves should be able to have the opportunity to spend subsequent time with their children, especially considering that they paid for that benefit. Let this be one of those occasions when members of all parties come together in support of families, of our troops and of fairness.

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member may or may not know that the member for Acadie—Bathurst will be proposing an amendment to the bill at committee which we hope members opposite will support. It is to include members of the police forces who are under contract with the government and are being deployed on these missions with the soldiers, for example in Afghanistan or Haiti.

We would like to know whether he and his party will be supporting this amendment to add them. I do not think there is a great number of people involved. The entire bill evidently only deals with 60 people a year and costs about \$600,000. I do not anticipate that the number of police would increase the numbers a lot. Would the member entertain this motion in a favourable way?

● (1525)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from the NDP makes a very good and thoughtful point. I know that the member for Acadie—Bathurst, who is on the committee that will be studying this bill, is very passionate about it as well. I look forward to working with members of the New Democratic Party to ensure that this bill, after it goes through all the stages in the House and the Senate, is the best possible bill to ensure fairness for Canadians.

I hope that we can work together to ensure not only that this bill comes out in its best form, but that it also passes as quickly as possible so that armed forces personnel who are currently serving Canada abroad will have access to these benefits as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today we have an important opportunity in this Parliament to discuss a bill that seeks to provide benefits to those who make great sacrifices for our country.

As my colleague stated, we are proud of the amendment proposed by our NDP colleague to include members of the RCMP.

How quickly will the government lend its support to this bill and what priority will it assign to it?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Manitoba for her question. I believe she is raising an important point.

Unfortunately, I have not had the opportunity to read the amendment proposed by the hon. NDP member, but we would be open to supporting amendments that would improve the bill. At the same time, we must adopt this bill as quickly as possible to provide these benefits to soldiers as quickly as possible. We realize that the Afghanistan mission is drawing to a close and we do not want soldiers to miss this chance for justice in the system.

In conclusion, I would like to work with the member to advance the bill so that it is the best bill possible.

[*English*]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak in the House today on such an important matter as support to our men and women in uniform. The topic, which was reiterated in last month's throne speech, is a priority for this government. The legislation before us will ensure that Canadian Forces personnel and their families continue to receive the benefits and support they need and deserve.

[*Translation*]

I know that all members of this House want what is best for Canadian Forces members because our troops are an exceptional group of men and women. They are among the best this country has to offer, and I can tell you that they are dedicated and courageous, and they work tirelessly to defend Canada and Canadians. They risk their lives every day, whether winching down from a Cormorant rescue helicopter into the stormy Atlantic or assisting with counter-narcotics operations in the Caribbean Sea or protecting the residents of Kandahar City. They are respected around the world and here at home they are admired as heroes.

[*English*]

Their job can be very dangerous and stressful. They face many challenges related to deployments, not the least of which is time spent away from their loved ones.

I have had the honour to join the Minister of National Defence in welcoming our troops home from Afghanistan. Standing at the airport, we cannot help but get a lump in our throats, watching husbands and wives with tears in their eyes, children clutching hand-

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made welcome home signs, and babies meeting their fathers for the first time.

The personal sacrifices our troops and their families endure are tremendous. The least this country can do in return is to ensure that Canadian Forces personnel and their families have the best possible support.

That is the intent of this legislation. Canadians want to support our military personnel. Canadians believe that hard work and sacrifice should be recognized. They are proud of the forces and they show that pride by wearing red on Fridays and at red rallies, participating in fundraising events for Boomers Legacy, sticking a "support our troops" magnet on their cars, or standing for hours in all kinds of weather on an overpass above the Highway of Heroes to welcome home our fallen.

Pretty much as we speak, that is taking place again today as we welcome home Petty Officer Craig Blake. Our condolences go out to his family and comrades, and our sincere gratitude on behalf of the country.

This government is also proud to stand behind our brave men and women. We are doing what we can to ensure they have the tools and resources they need and deserve. Our government has stood behind our pledge to rebuild the Canadian Forces and stand up for what they need, the people who defend our country day in and day out. We take this responsibility very seriously.

Two years ago, we introduced the Canada first defence strategy. We announced our intention to invest in personnel, equipment, readiness, and infrastructure to produce a first-class, modern military. We have already made good progress.

Investing in people is an important pillar of that strategy. Just over 50% of National Defence's budget is spent on people. That is, again, our most important resource.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

We do our utmost to care for that resource, especially our forces members and their families. It is an area where we are constantly working to improve.

Over the past year we have been pleased to support the successful creation of the joint personnel support unit. This unit coordinates personal and administrative support for all injured and ill Canadian Forces members and former members, their families and the families of the deceased. This is a collaborative venture with Veterans Affairs Canada, and encompasses a network of 19 integrated personnel support centres across this country. It helps our ill and injured recover and offers the support they need to heal, to adjust, and to prepare for the next phase of their lives.

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[English]

We are always trying to find ways to do more for those who sacrifice so much. This legislation represents another step forward in this regard. It takes care of our brave men and women in uniform. It introduces measures to improve the quality of life enjoyed by our troops, quality of life that rests largely on the health of families.

Force members and reservists face unique challenges. They can be asked to deploy immediately cutting short their time with new children.

The proposed legislation will improve access to employment insurance parental benefits by extending the period in which they can take leave to up to 104 weeks. That means that our troops do not have to choose between families and work. It will provide more opportunity for parent-child bonding in those critical early stages of life. These relationships are so important and already so fragile for our troops to maintain when deployments can take them away for months at a time.

I am sure that many of my fellow members of the House can relate to the importance of families spending time together especially in those fleeting early months.

This legislation demonstrates this government's resolve to take care of our troops and to stand up for their families. It shows respect for our serving members and it will allow the Canadian Forces to continue to attract the very best young individuals to the service.

This government has done a lot for members of the Canadian Forces and 2010 will be another good year for the forces.

Bill C-13 is just one part of this government's continuing commitment to care for those who wear the maple leaf for us at home and abroad.

I would have loved to have had this benefit during my air force career. I know many of my friends would have benefited from this greatly.

Taking care of the needs of military families, all of their needs, is a priority for this government. I am extremely proud of our government's record. Those who wear the uniform consistently put country before self.

In return, we must do everything to support their well-being and I am very grateful for the opportunity to add my voice to this important debate.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-  
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his speech, delivered with a great deal of passion, given the fact that he has had such an illustrious career with the Canadian Forces. I see what he means when he said that many of his colleagues may have taken advantage of this program who did not before.

I have a couple of quick questions though, just for clarification. Number one, a lot of the talk is, and I am assuming that it was spurred by the inspiration on the doorstep by the hon. member, referencing the Afghanistan situation. So we are not talking about sites specific as to what it could be. He may have answered my question at the beginning when he spoke about the Cormorants.

The second part of my question is this. Would the government be willing to consider this for the diplomatic corps as well? In other words, would the government be open to providing the same benefits for members of our diplomatic corps?

• (1535)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, when the bill passes second reading in the House, which I believe it will, it will go to committee and anyone can then propose amendments to the bill. There were some suggestions from members of the NDP as well.

We want to ensure that first and foremost we take care of the men and women in uniform. The bill is initially for the Canadian Forces. There may be others but that can be sorted out at committee. We want to ensure that we take care of those who serve Canada under the most trying of circumstances and a large part of that is the danger that members of the Canadian Forces face when they deploy to Afghanistan or elsewhere.

At committee, everything can be considered. It is up to the members of that committee.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank both my colleague and the prior speaker in terms of their eloquence in stressing the importance of this legislation. What I think this speaks to is perhaps the power of one.

People might sometimes be disillusioned about politics and politicians, but here we are talking about one person, one story, and a politician taking that story and moving it into positive change.

I am just wondering perhaps if my colleague could speak to how we can influence and make positive changes, and get support in a non-partisan way.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, if one was watching an hour and a half or so ago, one might not have been so impressed with the collegiality and the sense of co-operation that can happen in the House, when we can get together and do the right thing for the right reasons.

It really speaks to the importance of the power of one constituent regardless of where he or she lives, being able to talk to the member of Parliament on the doorstep and actually having something positive come out of that not just for that individual but for everyone in Canada.

It really is an inspiration for Canadians. I knock on a lot of doors. I think we all knock on a lot of doors. We talk to a lot of people. Hopefully, it gives people some hope that when they talk to their member of Parliament, something good can come out of it.

I am really proud of Major Duquette for bringing a great suggestion forward to my colleague. I am really proud of my colleague, the government, and the opposition members who are going to support this worthwhile legislation.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the speech by my friend from Edmonton Centre on Bill C-13. He had, as we all know, a 30-year career in the Canadian Forces and speaks with obvious passion on the issue of our troops and soldiers who are doing their duty for Canada in Afghanistan and elsewhere.



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The NDP fully supports this bill. The fact that a bill can come to the House of Commons through the offices of an individual member of Parliament, whether someone on this side or that side of the House, and can be made into law is really what being parliamentarians is all about. Obviously, this is a government measure, but how does it get here? How does it become an issue for parliamentarians?

It happens because someone raises it and feels strongly about it. It is an idea whose time has come and needs to be recognized. We in the NDP fully support this piece of legislation. In fact, we have been critical of the government in other areas when it talks of supporting our soldiers and troops, particularly veterans, which I will get to a little later, but to focus on the particular issue of this bill is extremely important.

We have all seen and know from family, friends and constituents the hardships, worries and concern we have when soldiers have gone off for long rotations to Afghanistan in the past seven or eight years or elsewhere. They are going to be away from their families, children and spouses or, in the case of parental leave, which is what we are talking about now, fathers are not being present at the birth of a child and being away many months before seeing their newborn. It tugs on the heart strings of all of us to know that Canadians do that for their country because that is the job they have taken on, the commitment they have made, and the sacrifice they have undertaken on behalf of their fellow citizens.

We are all proud that we have young men and women who are prepared to do that. We owe them not only a debt of gratitude but full support for doing what Canada is asking of them. We also, of course, owe it to them to ensure that our own government's actions and activities are in keeping with the high standards that we have as Canadians.

It is a pleasure to support this piece of legislation. On a going-forward basis, it will give soldiers and young families some comfort to know that they will be guaranteed of having family time after a deployment when it is interrupted by service or when a birth takes place while a soldier is deployed.

My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst has spoken on this bill already. The NDP has some proposals that would expand this to include others who serve overseas on Canada's behalf, some of them in fact in Afghanistan. One of whom, as we know, in the diplomatic corps lost his life in the same theatre of war as soldiers are fighting now, Glyn Berry. He lost his life while serving in Afghanistan as part of the diplomatic corps.

We have other diplomats stationed abroad in such places like Afghanistan and elsewhere, who make the sacrifice of being away from their families for long periods of time. We believe this change in the EI Act should be expanded to include them as well. It should be noted also that not only in Afghanistan but elsewhere, places like Haiti and others, there are a considerable number of members of police forces, whether the Canadian Royal Mounted Police, provincial or municipal police forces, who volunteer and are part of military and international engagements that Canada has undertaken.

I know members of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in my province have served in Bosnia as part of a mission. They are serving in Haiti and elsewhere in training missions away from their families.

• (1540)

Similarly we have a large contingent of RCMP and others in Afghanistan, assisting and training the Afghan police force. We recognize this is directed at military personnel only, but the concept is a good one and in fairness should apply to others in the diplomatic corps and to police officers who serve abroad under the same kind of circumstances, away from their country.

I will not go into the details of the amendments. I know one of the previous speakers said that he had not had an opportunity to read them yet. As indicated, this will be a matter raised in the committee. This being second reading, we are talking about the principle of the bill. When it receives second reading, and I have every expectation that it will receive the support of all parties in the House, and goes to committee, there may be an opportunity for witnesses to be heard, to talk about the provisions and to talk about their experiences with EI.

I know other members in the military and some veterans have issues with EI. In many cases, they are unable to collect EI, although they pay into it for many years. We may hear some more information about problems with respect to the employment insurance system and military or other foreign service. There may be opportunities to improve the legislation, to make it more fair to other Canadians in similar circumstances.

I know the impetus came from, and we should focus on, the consequences to military families when members serve abroad and have an addition to their family, whether it be by birth or adoption. I am not sure, to be honest, that this covers the adoption situation, and I hope it does. If it does not, then we would be very careful in looking at the committee stage. Parental leave applies whether we are talking about a birth or an adoption.

To be fair to military families on that score, we want to ensure, and certainly the NDP wants to ensure, that the same provisions with respect to parental leave available to ordinary citizens are available in these circumstances to the military as well.

There is no reason why that form of parental leave ought to be cut short by military deployment or being called into service, or have to be deferred until after the deployment is over so they can actually spend that time bonding with the new addition to the family and providing the kind of support that is always needed when there is a new member to a family, particularly a newborn or in an adoption situation. There is a whole change in circumstances that have to be adjusted to. That is the whole purpose of parental leave in the first place.

We can fully support the legislation. I will not use this as an opportunity to talk for any great length about what our troops do in Afghanistan. We do know they are there for long periods of time, up to six months and for some it is more than one rotation. We have had evidence before the defence committee that some individuals have done as many as four rotations in Afghanistan over the very lengthy period of time we have been engaged in that combat.

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I do not think a lot of Canadians realize that the military engagement in Afghanistan has gone on longer than any other military engagement in which our country has ever, in its history, been involved. It has been longer than the second world war, which lasted from 1939-45. It is obviously longer than the Korean War or the first world war. It has been going on since 2002 until now, eight years, where Canadians have been engaged in combat in Afghanistan. Soldiers have been deploying there on an ongoing basis, as many as the 3,000 soldiers, diplomats and police officers are involved today. I suppose that long period of time has given rise to the kinds of issues that we see now, the ongoing needs of military families in these circumstances.

• (1545)

I know the military family support groups are very active across the country. I think all parliamentarians support those groups in their ridings and recognize the good work they do. One of the things they do is provide support for the families who are left behind.

In my province of Newfoundland and Labrador it is a little more difficult in some respects. Most of the people who are deployed overseas are from the reserve units and they are spread around. The support provided by the military family support organization has been extremely valuable where people do not live on base and where there is less of a connect between them. Their neighbours are not necessarily in the same boat and do not understand the same way other military families do, whether they be spouses, or parents, or siblings, that are concentrated in other places where there are have significant bases.

It is important on military bases as well. There are military bases where large numbers of military personnel are deployed and military family support groups are active. Even though there is a social network among military families, the kind of services and counselling that might be needed, in some cases specialized counselling, not only has to be supplied, but an attempt has to be made to understand the need for that. In many circumstances, where people are going through hardship, particularly psychological hardship, it often takes someone else to recognize they may need the kind of assistance and help that can be provided through counselling.

We support all those initiatives through the military family support groups. This is another piece that we, as parliamentarians, can do to mitigate, to some extent, the sacrifices of being away from their family.

I know that even as a parliamentarians, and we do not make the kind of sacrifices that soldiers do. Being away from our family for even four or five days at a time, sometimes a week or two at a time, our young children in particular are affected. We realize how that must affect, on a long-term basis, people who are away for a long time, particularly in the case of people deployed to Afghanistan. Imagine what is on the minds of family members throughout their deployment, how are their loved ones are faring, are they safe. They cannot wait to see them arrive at the airport. I have seen those reunions of families as well. I do not think anybody can be but moved to see a couple being rejoined after a long period of time, particularly where the dangers of war exist and the possibility for injury, or even worse, is present.

We all have to understand, appreciate and be proud that we have young men and young women who are prepared to make that kind of commitment on our behalf.

We would like to see that also extended to diplomats and police force members who also make the same kind of commitment for overseas deployment.

Also, at committee, we will be interested in hearing about other aspects of the employment insurance with respect to military personnel and veterans. I know there is a concern among many veterans and RCMP officers, in particular, about getting access to the EI benefits they may have paid for all of their career. Yet when they leave the forces, they have great difficulty getting access to the employment insurance to which they feel they are entitled and should be entitled. As members of the workforce, they have paid into the EI fund. We commonly hear them say that.

We do not know how many people are affected by this, but I understand we will be hearing from them at the committee phase of the hearings. Hopefully, if there is a need for other improvements to the EI system with respect to military personnel and veterans, then there will be opportunities to discuss those in committee and possibly make the kind of amendments that might be needed.

• (1550)

The bill is contained in only five sections of the act and will come into force very soon, on the first Sunday after the day it receives royal assent. I do not know how soon that would come. It has to go to committee, but I hope it comes back from committee before we rise this spring so it will be available to anyone who qualifies very shortly.

I note, unfortunately, it does not apply to anyone whose benefit period for parental leave began before the day in which the bill comes into force. I do not know why that is. If people are undertaking parental leave now and they get called up at some point during their parental leave, I do not know why the act would not apply to them. Maybe this question can be answered in committee.

The bill is very clear, however, that there will be an extension of the benefit period for someone who is in the Canadian Forces and is required either to defer parental leave because he or she is in service or is called away when this happens.

I commend the government. We do criticize the government for being vocal on supporting our troops in name. This is a case where it is actually doing something concrete, which will improve the lot of individual soldiers by changing legislation that applies to all, to ensure the special circumstances of people in uniform, particularly those serving overseas and making those kinds of sacrifices, are not left out of the benefits of paternal leave and parental leave because of their deployment.

It is a positive change in the law. Our party has been on record many times calling for improvements in general to the EI regime. My friend from Acadie—Bathurst participated in the committee that came up with 28 separate recommendations to make EI better in Canada. We want the government to listen to that as well.

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It is a bit ironic in a way. I do not know the record totally, but I know that parental leave has not been a part of the EI system for all that long. I am not sure if the Conservative Party supported it when it was brought in. However, I am glad, given the fact it is here and available to Canadians, we will make the special provision to ensure military personnel get access to it.

We support the bill, I support the bill, wholeheartedly.

• (1555)

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from St. John's East for both the tone and the content of his remarks on the EI program and Bill C-13 as it affects the parental leave for military personnel.

The EI program was a hot-button topic in 1997, the year I was elected. With the changes the Liberals made to the EI program, it pulled \$20 million per year out of my riding of Winnipeg Centre alone.

We went riding by riding, and I remember looking at the statistics. The changes the Liberals made to the EI program, which made it almost impossible for anybody to qualify any more, pulled \$50 million per year out of one riding in St. John's, and I will ask my colleague if that was his riding. The impact of that was so devastating. I remember we did some analysis and it was the same as pulling two factories out of my riding, with 1,000 employees each. That amount of payroll that used to come into my riding from the federal government was sucked out of it. The same was true in St. John's by a factor of two and a half times.

Other than asking if those members can confirm the veracity of those figures in that statement, why are we clogging up Parliament with such a minor adjustment to EI, which everybody seems to approve of and which is in the interests of basic fairness? Why does the government not just implement it by order-in-council and allow these returning military personnel to have access to parental leave?

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Speaker, I have to confess I do not recall exactly which riding he is talking about, but I do remember the figure of \$50 million. When the changes were made to the EI program in the 1990s by the Liberals, we went from a situation where more than 75%, I think it was 80 and some per cent, of people who were unemployed qualified and were able to collect EI benefits. It is now down to I think 53% of people who become unemployed in this country are eligible for EI benefits. That is down from 80 and some per cent, which is a shocking change. It has undercut the incomes of working people throughout Canada, but it has been particularly devastating in my riding and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this morning the member for Yukon explained how important it was in a child's early years to have the parents around and involved in the child's life. He described how difficult it is for him to get back to the Yukon every weekend to see his young child.

People in the military are away for six months at a time. It is a big deal to miss six months of a young child's life. This measure is long overdue. We recognize there is general agreement and that we will be looking at some amendments at committee.

With respect to one of the amendments that was suggested this morning, in addition to the one from the member for Acadie—Bathurst, a member of the Bloc asked about making the bill retroactive. I know that is something we do not like to do, but the member has alluded to this, and I know he is a lawyer, that there are some people who are going to be excluded if we do not make a change to allow for some retroactivity.

Would the member like to expand on that issue? Perhaps he would also like to make a comment about the very good idea of our member to extend this coverage to members of the police who are involved in these missions as well.

• (1600)

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Speaker, we should not only talk about people involved in military missions such as Afghanistan. There are sailors who are at sea for many months at a time on a regular ongoing basis. It is something that applies not just to people fighting in Afghanistan, although we obviously appreciate the commitment, sacrifice and courage of those people.

In terms of being good for the child, it is also good for the parent to have that early relationship with a child and the bonding with the family despite the fact that there are periods of absence and ensure that the father has that opportunity, and we are talking about parental leave and normally we are not going to have a serving member of the forces who will have maternity leave, regardless of whether there is a deployment or not. From a parental leave perspective, having the family together for a lengthy period of time in the early years of a child's life is a very important thing. Yes, we should have it and we should have it fast. We do not need to have a big rigmarole about this. It could be done other ways. We welcome other EI reforms to take place as well and put them in a big bill. We would certainly be happy to see this bill passed quickly.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I want to expand a bit on something my colleague was talking about, the ratio of eligibility. It seems to me that the Liberals used the EI fund as a cash cow. They created an environment where it was mandatory that everybody pay in, but virtually no one qualified for anything if people were unlucky enough to lose their jobs. The Liberals designed a program where they could actually milk this cash cow for, in the end, 52 billion dollars' worth of surplus, and it is no surprise why it was a surplus. People pay in and pay in with the good faith and optimism that if ever, God forbid, they should become unemployed, they would be eligible for income maintenance.

For the Liberals to use the surplus for anything other than income maintenance I believe was a deceit and a fraud because that money was not even their money. In the mid-1980s, the federal government stopped paying into the EI fund. That fund was strictly the contributions of employers and employees as insurance.

What does the member think of that as an insurance fund? If it were house insurance and people had to pay for it and there was a less than 40% chance of collecting if their house should happen to burn down, what kind of an insurance program would that be?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I am not sure what that had to do with Bill C-13, but the hon. member for St. John's East can answer it.

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**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Speaker, I think the question is directed at the employment insurance program itself and the fact that people could not qualify which resulted in a huge fund. I think it ended up that some \$57 million was taken from the workers' and employers' contributions. The government says that it is not going to retroactively put it back in, so we are back to square one with the workers' and employers' money being thrown into the government coffers for something else.

The real problem is that when the government gutted the fund, it also put in rules that treated people who collected employment insurance, particularly seasonal workers, as repeat offenders. If people came back a second year because they were in seasonal employment, they received less in EI benefits that year and the year after that they received less again. It was driving people out of the seasonal workforce, hurting our forestry industry, our fishing industry, our construction industry, and all sorts of other industries in the process.

● (1605)

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-13. It is hard to expand on the points that have been made here today by various members from all sides, so I will keep my comments rather short and speak to a few of the points in the bill.

It is really good when we can do something for military families. They give so much to our country and they sacrifice so much. If we have an opportunity to give back to them, we should look at doing it.

This bill identifies a unique issue with our EI legislation. When our soldiers are called back to active duty to serve our country, they lose their benefits.

This bill would be good for military families. Over 450 military personnel serving across Canada come from my riding. I try to communicate with them as best I can and as often as I can. I do hear back from them occasionally on different issues that have an impact on them. I will be consulting with them on this bill to get their opinions and to find out what else we could do to improve the EI system for them.

This bill would be good for younger families. In Newfoundland and Labrador I often meet with people. We used to see large families with 13 or 14 siblings but nowadays families are smaller. People are only having one or two children. It is very important that we give our military personnel every opportunity possible to spend time with their children in the early years. In most families, both parents work.

Quite often two members of the military will marry and raise a family in the military environment. It is important that these benefits be made available to them. There might be circumstances when both are in the military at the same time. They could benefit from this particular piece of legislation.

It is a pleasure to speak to this bill and support it. The only problem I see with this legislation is that it probably does not go as far as it should. Maybe we should be looking at making more EI changes to help military families.

HRSDC says that this bill would only apply to 60 Canadian Forces members at a cost of about \$600,000. It is very tiny. It would

not impact a lot but it would have an impact in the future as military personnel consider raising a family. This would play into their decision to raise a family.

We could be looking at some of the other issues with EI that may impact military families, and in fact, all residents, who at one point in their lives may have to avail themselves of the EI system.

I would be remiss if I did not talk about the two week waiting period for EI. Currently, there is a two week waiting period before anybody can receive EI benefits. People ask me time and time again why there is a two week waiting period and what it accomplishes. From my analysis of the situation it accomplishes absolutely nothing. It may give the bureaucrats some time to implement a claim, but we are not asking for two more weeks of benefits. We are just asking to start the benefits a little sooner. People still have to go on with their lives. They still have bills to pay. The two week waiting period does not extend EI benefits by two weeks. We are just asking for the period to go back two weeks. This would not add two weeks on to the end.

This is something that our party has been asking for. The New Democratic Party has been very outspoken on this issue as well. This is another way in which people could benefit from the EI system.

I have spoken to some military families. They want to benefit from the EI system when they leave the Canadian Forces. Some Canadian Forces members spend 25 years in the military. How can the EI system benefit them when they want to move on to another job?

This is another important issue that we should look at seriously. If people decide they want to move on to another job and decide to quit, well they are on their own and they are not eligible for any EI benefits. Being in the military is a different occupation altogether.

● (1610)

If people decide to move on to other occupations, we should look into the EI system's being able to assist them in that, for their betterment as individuals. That is another change to the EI system I would like us to look at.

Finally, on another point, diplomats who are serving overseas have asked the government that they too be included in this particular EI measure. It is definitely worth some consideration that we look at diplomats and other people who serve our country, be it in a military or a non-military role. If they are overseas and are called back, we should look at extending their benefits for parental leave as well.

It is a pleasure to speak in the House today. I do not want to repeat comments by any of the other members, but it is a good bill and it is good that we can have some good debate on it. I hope when it goes to committee we will have an opportunity to bring up some issues on how we could expand it and benefit more Canadian Forces members who serve us so well.

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**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out to the member that it has been suggested by the member for Winnipeg Centre that this initiative did not actually have to proceed by way of a government bill, even though it is a good idea and all parties are supporting the bill to get it to committee. This could have been done by order-in-council by changing regulations.

We are talking about benefits that will affect, perhaps, 50 or 60 people and will cost about \$600,000 a year, benefits that should have always been in place. It is actually a surprise to me that we are having to make this change in 2010. It should have been done years ago.

We have some amendments that have been suggested. The Bloc has suggested some retroactivity for people who would qualify right now but for whom it would not start until the bill comes into force. There should be a retroactivity clause put in so that anybody who would currently be affected would be covered.

The member for Acadie—Bathurst has suggested an amendment which would expand the scope of the bill to include members of police forces. As the member knows, members of the police forces are assigned to the missions in Afghanistan and Haiti, and we think they should be included as well, because these are people who are working together on the same projects. Why would we just expand it for people in the military and not people in the police forces? That would probably add two or three extra people to the numbers of 50 to 60 that we are talking about right now.

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Mr. Speaker first, as a new member I am astounded by the speed at which things happen in this place. It takes so long to accomplish something, and often a lot of us doing a lot of talking on an issue drags things on. Maybe the government could have gone that route, but it is good to have the debate, if we can focus it and make suggestions like the two that have been made.

Regarding the retroactivity, I am not quite sure we want to go down that road, because sometimes somebody gets left out. If it is retroactive for a certain period, then why was it not retroactive for a little longer? Maybe it is the best route, and when the bill receives royal assent, that point will be taken further. There always has to be a starting point, so maybe we should look to the future.

As for extending it to the police members, that is not a bad idea. I would like to see some of the numbers on that. It could be two, three or four more individuals who would benefit from that. It may be very worthwhile to discuss that at committee to see if there is anything else we could do to expand it to include them. We had better not just limit it to their service. We might have to look at some of the other facts around that. That would be a pleasure.

•(1615)

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the opportunity to comment briefly on Bill C-13, which I know all parties in the House are supporting. New Democrats are pleased to support it, partly because we have been saying all along that there are many changes that should be made to employment insurance, many ways that the benefits payable to Canadians should be improved, and partly because we recognize that it is Canadians who pay into the system to make those benefits possible.

Therefore we are glad the Conservatives have seen fit at least on this important but small initiative to move forward and make this proposal. However, there are many other places where EI could be expanded to benefit Canadians.

We know there was a huge surplus of premiums taken in, paid by employers and employees over the years, which was not spent on benefits and could be used to do that.

We also know the government is proposing in its current budget to increase the payments employers and employees are going to make into the EI fund again, without any proposals yet to be seen other than this small one in terms of expanding the benefits.

I am wondering if the member might comment briefly on what other possibilities are out there for improving the EI system, what we should be doing in terms of acknowledging this is a program paid for by Canadian workers and Canadian employers and how they might further benefit from changes to the program.

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we should have an in-depth look at how the EI system is funded and has been funded over the years, in particular at the amount of money that went into a surplus, which has been spent.

If we look at the Auditor General's reports, we see that at one time the EI fund was not sustainable. Now, as we move along, and we went through this recession period, the money needs to be there to make sure this fund is sustainable into the future.

That is definitely something we should look at, and any money that goes into the EI fund over the years should be kept there to make sure it is well funded.

Perhaps it is time for us to look at how EI is funded and make sure it is sustainable over the years.

I think that addresses a couple of the points of the member's question.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government has introduced a bill for military families. Does my colleague think the government is doing enough for soldiers and veterans?

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Mr. Speaker, there is always more we could be doing for our soldiers and veterans who are serving overseas.

I had the pleasure of serving on the veterans affairs committee. There are so many different aspects to it. I have only touched the surface of this particular file in the last year and a half. I have enjoyed my time on the veterans affairs committee. There are many more areas, and it is hard to pick just one specific area where we could do more for our veterans.

We need to look after them when they come home. The VIP is one program. However, we are finding that a lot of our new current-day veterans are not getting involved in veterans' activities. It seems that after they serve, they have done their piece and they move on.

*Government Orders*

We need to recognize them, we need to reach out to them and we need to encourage them to stay in touch with veterans affairs and be a part of it because of the tremendous service they have done for our country.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Avalon, next door to me, has done a great job and serves this country well and the opposition well in veterans affairs and all things related thereto.

I want to ask him a question about parental leave pertaining to a particular area around my riding, which is the home of 103 Search and Rescue Squadron. Parental leave is near and dear to my heart, and many times I feel we are not doing enough for people, not just in the military or any other function but for all parents in general.

I hope the bill covers the domestic operations as well. The debate centres on those deployed overseas. I am not taking away from that whatsoever, but there are so many domestic operations ongoing, such as search and rescue, which involve soldiers or airmen and airwomen who serve so bravely on the high seas just off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as the west coast.

I was wondering if the member could comment on that also.

• (1620)

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from my neighbouring riding for the question and for all the work he does for the Canadian Forces base in Gander and domestically.

There are a lot of Canadian Forces bases in the Atlantic region, such as CFB Goose Bay. Maybe another question we need to ask about the bill is that it not only apply to the Canadian Forces member but to spouses of members, who may not be Canadian Forces members. Sometimes time off is split between both spouses, and maybe that is something we should look at.

Parental leave is very important and we need to look at all aspects of this. I am looking forward to this going to committee and asking a few more questions.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to a bill about employment insurance benefits. Of course, I would have liked us to be focusing on a comprehensive reform of the Employment Insurance Act instead of piecemeal measures.

This enactment amends the Employment Insurance Act to extend the benefit period and the period during which parental benefits may be paid for Canadian Forces members whose period of parental leave is deferred or who are directed to return to duty from parental leave.

I know that the minister intends to correct an injustice that Canadian Forces members suffer, and I thank him for that. But choices like this one inevitably make other people feel as though they are being ignored again.

The government must be aware of the real needs of thousands of workers in Quebec and Canada. I would like to remind the members that there are other injustices, and the people suffering those injustices are still waiting.

For example, I would like to mention Marie-Hélène Dubé, a determined woman who to date has managed to rally more than 60,000 Quebecers to her cause, which is individuals with a serious illness who receive only 15 weeks of benefits. I want to thank the Canadian Cancer Society, which is calling on everyone to help Ms. Dubé in her quest to have people with a serious illness treated more equitably with regard to employment insurance.

When will EI be made more flexible for people with a serious illness?

What about the other measures the Bloc Québécois has proposed to make EI more flexible? I will come back to them later if I have time to talk about them all.

What I want to illustrate here is that we cannot wait indefinitely. There has to be a clear commitment by the government to reviewing the Employment Insurance Act. The flaws in that act are ruining lives, destroying families and hurting communities. No one should have to wait. The fact is that five years ago, in 2005, a consensus was achieved in the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. The Conservative government has the key points on which greater flexibility is expected and has been proposed in its hands. This is the list:

Introduce an eligibility threshold of 360 hours for all regions and all insured persons. This eligibility threshold would entitle claimants to a varying number of weeks of benefits, based on the unemployment rate in their region.

Permanently increase the benefit rate from 55% to 60%.

Amend the Employment Insurance Act so that employment of a related person is not deemed to be uninsurable.

Eliminate the two-week waiting period during which claimants have no income.

Increase the present \$2,000 income cut-off for entitlement to a refund of employment insurance premiums to \$3,000.

Make self-employed workers eligible for the scheme on a voluntary basis.

The Bloc Québécois has introduced several bills to improve the employment insurance scheme and expand access to it. Like my colleagues from Saint-Lambert and Chambly—Borduas, I stress that the other segments of the population are entitled to expect that the Minister will come back to us with concrete measures as soon as possible. It is high time.

Before continuing, I wanted to express the enormous indignation I felt when I learned of the number of veterans and former soldiers who are eating at community kitchens and food banks. It is surprising that this government, which boasts of how it listens to its troops, is abandoning those who have given loyal service so that we can enjoy some peace and quiet.

*Government Orders*

I will take this opportunity to urge the government to proceed with the same speed on issues affecting seniors, like the guaranteed income supplement, and to take its cue from the Bloc Québécois bill that will be debated shortly. I urge it to consider the good it could do for these old soldiers if it also made the benefits they are entitled to fully retroactive. It is inconceivable to see seniors living in poverty. It is unacceptable to see veterans lining up at food banks.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-13, to extend the benefit period and the period during which parental benefits may be paid for Canadian Forces members whose period of parental leave is deferred or who are directed to return to duty from parental leave, in principle. The Bloc Québécois has the greatest respect for the troops who perform extremely dangerous missions where they risk their lives.

• (1625)

It is precisely that great respect that means that because their lives are in danger, we have a responsibility not to expose them to more risks, to provide for the best possible accommodation between their career and their family life, and to make sure that their return to the country is facilitated by measures that help with their integration into civil society.

Bill C-13 allows members of the Canadian Forces to take parental leave they would have been unable to take because they were out of the country. Although this measure is necessary, the Conservatives are still continuing their bad habit of making piecemeal changes rather than undertaking genuine reform. First, there has to be social and psychological assistance for members of the military when they experience traumatic events or when they come home and have to deal with tough challenges. There are also challenges in dealing with the employment insurance scheme that make a thorough overhaul necessary.

The Conservative government is pursuing its short-term vision of sprinkling programs here and there for reasons of visibility rather than effectiveness. In so doing, it keeps its ideological blinkers firmly in place so it can avoid seeing the other aspects of employment insurance and assistance to members of the military that are in obvious need of improvement.

Bill C-13 includes a number of clauses that will provide better coverage under the Employment Insurance Act to a new segment of the population: soldiers. If passed, the government's bill will allow military personnel to defer and collect parental benefits if they are directed to return to duty from parental leave. We know that soldiers contribute to employment insurance just like other workers. Section 5(1)(c) clearly states that service in the Canadian Forces is insurable employment.

The department's press release says that "This new measure would extend the EI parental benefit window for Canadian Forces members who are ordered to return to duty while on parental leave or whose parental leave is deferred as a result of a military requirement. The measure would extend the period in which they are eligible by another 52 weeks".

Clauses in Bill C-13 allow military personnel to defer and benefit from parental leave.

I would like to take this opportunity to focus on certain elements of the bill.

Clause 2 stipulates that section 10 of the Employment Insurance Act will be amended by adding the following after subsection (12):

(12.1) If, during the period referred to in subsection 23(2), the start date of a claimant's period of parental leave is deferred or a claimant is directed to return to duty from parental leave, in accordance with regulations made under the National Defence Act, the benefit period is extended by the number of weeks during which the claimant's parental leave is deferred or the claimant is directed to return to duty, as the case may be.

Clause 3 deals with subsection 23(3.1) of the same Act, the Employment Insurance Act, which will be replaced by the following:

(3.01) If, during the period referred to in subsection (2), the start date of a claimant's period of parental leave is deferred or a claimant is directed to return to duty from parental leave, in accordance with regulations made under the National Defence Act, the period is extended by the number of weeks during which the claimant's parental leave is deferred or the claimant is directed to return to duty, as the case may be.

I would like to draw your attention to clause 4, which stipulates that:

Sections 2 and 3 do not apply to a claimant for a benefit period that began before the day on which this Act comes into force.

Clause 4 of the bill would not allow soldiers whose benefit period began before the day on which the act comes into force to benefit from this measure.

I have a question for the government. Would soldiers currently on parental leave, who are ordered to return to duty after implementation of this bill, be entitled to defer their leave considering that they had already started receiving benefits?

I am asking the government this question and I hope that we will not pass a law without providing for transitional measures for people in this situation. Retroactivity is important and military personnel should be included.

According to the government's backgrounder:

Parental benefits provide income replacement for up to 35 weeks to biological or adoptive parents while they are caring for a newborn or newly adopted child. Benefits may be taken by either parent or shared between them. If parents opt to share these benefits, only one two-week waiting period must be served.

We can see that, even with this bill, the government must make clarifications. I believe they should be addressed by the committee which, I am certain, will study this matter very carefully.

Because the bill deals with fair treatment for military families, I would like to share with members measures that could help our armed forces members.

The Bloc Québécois has the utmost respect for our troops, as I mentioned at the very beginning of my speech.

• (1630)

This deep respect goes hand in hand with the responsibility to not increase their risks and to help them when they return from theatres of operations.

The Conservative government, rather than giving priority to and protecting members of the military, is currently making ad hoc decisions without an in-depth analysis of the consequences.

*Government Orders*

In terms of the members' physical and psychological needs, the Conservative government makes much of the contribution of Canadian armed forces to various military interventions. But what about its responsibilities when some members return damaged by their experiences, suffering from physical injuries and trauma?

They are less prompt to talk about the increased suicide rate among armed forces members who return to civilian life and the incredible lack of the psychological and financial support they need.

The armed forces should provide adequate follow-up of its members who return from a mission such as that in Afghanistan, especially since we know that 4% of soldiers returning from Kandahar develop suicidal tendencies, 4.6% have symptoms of major depression, and more than 15% experience mental health problems. I have taken these statistics from an article published in *Le Devoir*.

In the course of its parliamentary work, the Bloc Québécois has always been concerned with support for veterans—all those who proudly donned the uniform.

For example, we have always insisted that the government should allocate all possible resources to help our armed forces members and veterans meet their health needs, especially those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the Standing Committee on National Defence, the Bloc Québécois supported most of the 34 recommendations in a report asking the government to provide more resources to military personnel to meet their health needs. This report was adopted on June 8, 2009, and tabled in the House on June 17 of that year.

In the Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Bloc Québécois also backed recommendations from a report asking for more support for the services provided to veterans. This report was adopted and tabled in the House on June 17, 2009.

We fought for the creation of a position of veterans ombudsman and it was established in April 2007.

I would also like to draw a parallel with another issue, the transfer of Ste. Anne's Hospital. The future of Ste. Anne's raises questions that make us wonder about the quality of the necessary services and the amount of assistance that our veterans need. In the course of the negotiations, we need to take into account the specific nature of the care that veterans require.

I hope the government will listen to the voice of the veterans who have been returning from various theatres of operations over the years and who want the government to focus on their real needs and provide them with the services they really require.

I hope the government will face the facts and focus as well on establishing a separate entity. The government should change the negotiator's mandate for the transfer to include specific provisions responding to the requests of the people involved. I am talking about the veterans themselves, the people who treat veterans, and the military personnel who return from various theatres to be treated for post-traumatic stress disorder.

I would also like to draw the attention of the House to a petition signed by thousands of Quebecers who want to change the

compensation system for wounded soldiers in the Canada's Veterans' Charter.

In 2005, the House of Commons passed a Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act, commonly called the Veterans' Charter, which took force on April 6, 2006.

Since then, National Defence no longer provides lifetime monthly pensions for its damaged soldiers. Instead, it introduced a lump sum payment in 2006. For every injury, there is a corresponding indemnity, up to a maximum of \$276,000 in the worst of cases. The amount is paid once, and the armed forces member is left to figure out on his own how to handle the money.

In January 2010, the veterans ombudsman was very critical of this new system for compensating armed forces personnel for the injuries they suffered. Since stopping lifetime annuities, the forces have been providing veterans with a lot less money and failing to meet their needs.

• (1635)

He said that he was not a proponent of the lump sum payment because someone with psychological issues could spend it unwisely, waste money and not have a single cent to put towards their financial security.

The ombudsman, a veteran of Bosnia and Afghanistan himself, added that

—veterans can quite easily become homeless. Many of them lose their way because of mental health problems. The only way to “force” them to maintain a residence would often be to send their compensation in monthly installments by mail, as used to be the case.

He also said that this issue is important and that he is very worried about the fact that veterans can become homeless and end up waiting in line at food banks.

According to some veterans, the compensation being offered is not the only flaw in the federal department. They say that the whole claim process is burdensome, complex and ill-suited and the burden of proof rests on the injured soldier, who has a hard time understanding the procedure.

We know that there is much to be done for military personnel who are coming back and their families. Expectations are high.

Thousand of people have signed a petition demanding changes to the Veterans Charter.

The Bloc Québécois member for Québec stated:

We cannot remain indifferent to the injustices that our injured veterans are facing. The people of the greater Quebec City area, the rest of Quebec and in fact all of Canada must rally behind this cause. Together we must make the federal government understand that the current situation is completely unacceptable and that corrective measures are needed immediately.

The Vaudreuil-Soulanges region is sensitive to this issue and is entirely supportive. The petition is currently circulating in my riding.

As for employment insurance, the Bloc Québécois has been relentless in its efforts to bring attention to the need to get the EI system working again for our workers.



*Government Orders*

The Bloc Québécois has introduced several bills aimed at improving the employment insurance system and access to it. It is very unfortunate that the Conservative government will not take any concrete action to help workers who lose their jobs and who cannot access EI. So many workers pay into the EI system, but only 40% of them have access to it.

The government's actions clearly show its complete indifference towards workers. The measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois have two objectives: to reassure workers who lose their jobs by providing them with a more accessible and generous employment insurance program, and to stimulate household spending by enabling workers who have lost their jobs to get the benefits they need to keep the economy going.

In that sense, the proposed EI changes are important. The Bloc Québécois has proposed a new approach that assumes claimants are acting in good faith, which will speed up delivery of the first cheque.

It is inconceivable that at this time, when claimants win their employment insurance appeal, they receive a letter 30 days later telling them that the government is appealing the appeal, and they have to continue fighting for as long as 90 days. And that is what happens when the ruling is in the worker's favour.

In addition to the initiatives I just mentioned, there is the assumption that claimants are acting in good faith, which the government could easily amend. There is also the expansion and adaptation of the work sharing program and the extension of a claimant's right to receive benefits while pursuing training.

•(1640)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before we move on to questions and comments, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Avalon, Veterans Affairs; the hon. member for Labrador, Aboriginal Healing Foundation; the hon. member for Welland, International Trade.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, Bill C-13 would apply to roughly 50 to 60 people and cost \$600,000 per year. However, this measure would enable Canadian Forces members, including reservists, who have had their parental leave deferred or were ordered to return to duty while on leave due to military requirements, to access EI parental benefits.

The measure would extend the period in which they are eligible by another 52 weeks. Parental benefits provide income replacement for up to 35 weeks to the biological or adoptive parents while they are caring for newborn children or newly adopted children. The benefits may be taken by either parent or shared between them and there is only a two-week waiting period to be served.

I listened to the member's speech with great interest. She has a very expansive view of this legislation. I really enjoyed her speech. She mentioned food banks. Two weeks ago the Prime Minister was attending a food bank for veterans in Calgary. I just wonder why things have become so bad that the Prime Minister would be attending a food bank for veterans. We should be taking better care of our veterans.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question, because anything that has to do with poverty among seniors is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that today, given the income levels of seniors, they are not able to index their guaranteed income supplement benefits, which would bring their income up to an acceptable level. Indexing the benefits and making the guaranteed income supplement retroactive could help them.

The member also spoke about the cost of such a measure. Although the measure is not very expensive, in examining this bill, we discovered that it would not be retroactive, and that some soldiers would be excluded. We would like soldiers to be included in this bill. We cannot put a price on soldiers.

**Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her speech. Our soldiers do extraordinary work, but let us not forget that they were sent to Afghanistan on a mission to rebuild that country, not on a mission of war. Today we find ourselves in a wartime situation, in which people are being blown up by landmines. These people were not prepared before they left for an unending war. Unfortunately, we do not know when it will end. When our soldiers return from war, they are entitled to receive some services.

I have a very important question for the hon. member. There are soldiers who return with significant post traumatic stress, as the following statistics attest to: 4% of soldiers who return from Kandahar develop suicidal tendencies—a number of them have already committed suicide; 4.6% of them have symptoms of severe depression; and more than 15%—that is a lot—have mental health problems.

I would like the hon. member's opinion on this. We absolutely must do something about this because other soldiers will be coming home and we will have even more problems.

•(1645)

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question. The mission in Afghanistan has changed and has become much more perilous for our soldiers. They are currently being exposed to great risk and great danger, not to mention the catastrophes in the theatres of operation. They are continually in danger. Red tape is the least of their concerns. If the bill eliminates problems with red tape for military families then that is commendable.

Furthermore, when soldiers return to society, life goes on for them. We owe them good services because of their sacrifices and hard work and because of their problems. The statistics are alarming as the ombudsmen has pointed out. Soldiers deserve our utmost respect and also deserve our attention to their true needs.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is a very important issue and it is kind of disturbing to see that there is a lack of quorum in the chamber today. I think there should be a quorum for this important debate.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I believe there are 20 members in the chamber.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Shefford.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is true that this is an important debate and that members in the House of Commons and the party in power should be concerned about this issue. As the hon. Liberal member said, it is important that we are able to continue the debate, especially since we are talking about the New Veterans Charter.

For example, under the New Veterans Charter, a person with certain level of disability receives a lump sum. This veteran does not receive the maximum lump sum of \$276,000. That is available to people who are completely incapacitated and whose mobility is 100% affected. However, the veteran receives 75% of gross pay.

After they have received all the care and once the rehabilitation period is over, they will have only 75% of the insurable amount from when they were hurt. And that amount is taxable. The veteran must pay tax on that amount.

Can my colleague tell me if it is reasonable that someone, who lost a limb in Afghanistan, comes home with an amputated arm and receives 75% of their salary when you think that, on top of that, that amount is taxable?

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the veterans ombudsman:

Military personnel should not have to worry about their living standards. They should know that, no matter what their injuries, they will be able to meet the needs of their families and themselves. They should not have to worry about the rest of their lives while they are trying to heal physical and psychological wounds.

That says it all and summarizes the importance of the situation of soldiers returning home. The families of military personnel are important and we need to look at all of the measures that should be implemented.

• (1650)

*[English]*

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise on behalf of the New Democratic Party to discuss Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act. I will read the recommendations out so that those who just tuned in or showed up will understand:

Her Excellency the Governor General recommends to the House of Commons the appropriation of public revenue under the circumstances, in the manner and for the purposes set out in a measure entitled "An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act".

It is actually a good initiative, because what happens sometimes when military personnel are on maternity or paternity leave, they can get called back in the middle of that leave in order to serve their country. What happens is they then lose out on their benefits, so when they come back from their tour or operation, or come back

from whatever they have been asked to do, they can then continue on to achieve and receive that parental leave. That is a good thing, but my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst has asked very clearly that it also include any police officers or other folks who have also been in that same situation.

I could not help but notice that this bill comes from the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. So, it is actually a government bill, not a backbench bill like the gun legislation.

So few people in the country would actually benefit from this bill. There are not thousands and thousands of people who would fall under this. This would assist very few people but it is a good thing that they will be helped.

However, I then ask myself that if the Minister of Human Resources goes to all this trouble to introduce legislation to help the military and military families, why did she not go all the way?

For example, in the last week from the media pages alone, British Columbia has a shelter for homeless military veterans. At the same time, on Easter Saturday our Prime Minister, the face of Canada, was at a Calgary food bank set up specifically for veterans. What kind of government actually takes a photo op at a Calgary food bank designed specifically for veterans? It is not just food they are receiving. They are also receiving medical and dental aid. When we speak to the directors of the Calgary Poppy Fund and Veteran's Food Bank, they say very quickly that these are veterans and their family members who have fallen through the cracks.

These are people who have served our country with dignity and honour and there should be no cracks for them to fall through. We know of 60 families in Calgary that go to the Calgary Veteran's Food Bank every month. What does our Prime Minister do? With the legislative powers at his hand and the millions of dollars at his disposal, he could correct this situation, but no, he gets a photo op. It is unbelievable.

I am not sure who is around saying that it would be a good idea to go out on Easter Saturday and take a picture at a food bank for veterans. That is a classic one. I do not think I have ever heard of that in my life, but that is just one thing.

Another thing the Prime Minister could have done, if he really wanted to help out veterans and their families, was to end the marriage-after-60 provision, that discriminatory practice in the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act. It talks about what would happen if the spouse of a retired 55-year-old military person dies and the person decides to remarry at 59 and lives for 20 years. His second spouse would be entitled to his pension. However, if he had the audacity to fall in love again and remarry at age 60 and then live for 20 years, his second spouse would get nothing.

Why did the government not introduce legislation to fix that problem? That would have been most helpful as well to make an omnibus bill for veterans and their families. That would have been a creative thing for the Government of Canada to do.

*Government Orders*

Another example is that when military or RCMP personnel die, they are allowed to only leave 50% of their pensions to their spouses. Why not two-thirds, as the Royal Canadian Legion indicated? In convention after convention, they have made this recommendation unanimously so that they can leave two-thirds of their pensions to their spouses. That would have assisted a tremendous number of people, mostly women, especially elderly women in this country, but, no, there was none of that.

• (1655)

I remember the letter of 2005 from the Prime Minister himself, when he was in opposition, to Joyce Carter of St. Peter's, Cape Breton, in which he said, "Mrs. Carter, we can assure you that if the Conservatives form government, we would extend, immediately—", and the word "immediately" was highlighted in the letter, "—to all widows and widowers of World War II and Korean Veterans, the VIP Program.

I would remind the House that he said "immediately" and "all".

The fact is in 2008, two years after the Conservatives took government, they had then initiated into the budget additional funding for VIP. However, not all of them got it. In fact, many of them still do not qualify because in order to get it they had to have had a disability tax credit or be of a certain income.

That is not what the letter from the Prime Minister said to Joyce Carter. He said that all widows and widowers would receive the VIP immediately upon forming government. There were no caveats to that letter, no attachments or amendments. The Prime Minister, when he was the leader of the opposition, said "immediate" and "all". It did not happen.

With respect to agent orange, I remember very well the former minister of veteran affairs saying in 2005 that if his party formed government it would have a public inquiry into agent orange and defoliant spraying at Gagetown. Did we get it? No. The Conservatives also said that every person between the ages 58 to 84 would be covered. What happened? I think less than 3,000 people actually got an ex gratia payment of \$20,000 or a bit more for that. At least the government did give some people a \$20,000 compensation.

However, the Conservatives promised so much more and delivered so much less. They had the chance when a minister of the Crown introduced legislation in order to assist that.

There is another thing they could have done if they wished. The Prime Minister said that when the majority of the House of Commons votes on a bill or a motion and it passes democratically, the government is duty bound to honour that bill or that motion.

On four separate occasions, November 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010, we in this House had the benefit deduction at age 65 for Canada pension disability for military and RCMP veterans. The majority of House voted in favour of those four different times and we did that because the current Prime Minister said that the government had to be duty bound to honour the majority of the House.

What happened? The Conservatives were consistent and said no. At least they were honest about that and said no every time. That is

another example where if a minister of the Crown really wanted to introduce legislation to help many more people, this was the opportunity to do that. However, again they did not.

There is another thing they could have done. We know very well that by the time some of us to go to bed tonight we could lose anywhere from 90 to 100 World War II or Korean veterans because of the aging process and these brave heroes will have crossed the bar. We know that hospitals like Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, the Perley, the Colonel Belcher and the Camp Hill in Halifax do a tremendous job in looking after those veterans who have the opportunity to get a hospital bed and be cared for in the later stages of their life.

However, what will happen when the last Korean War or World War II veteran passes away? Those beds will not be available. In fact, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Hospital right now is being looked at between the federal government and the provincial Government of Quebec to have it transferred over to the Province of Quebec.

• (1700)

We have thousands upon thousands of modern day veterans who are now in their seventies. They served during the Cuban missile crisis, in the cold war efforts, in the Suez, in Cyprus, in Bosnia and now in Afghanistan. They served in Haiti and East Timor. They have served around the world. Many of these individuals will soon require hospitalization because of the effects of what happened to them in their various conflicts. Even if they were not seriously injured or affected by their service, they served our country. We should be serving them all the way to and including their headstone, which means that there should be a hospital bed paid for by the federal government all the way until they pass away. The care of veterans and their families is a federal responsibility, not a provincial responsibility.

The other thing is that no veteran or his or her family should ever need to go to a food bank but we see that happening in Calgary. Those people at the Calgary food bank are decent, hard-working people and thank God there are people in Calgary willing to do that type of work. God love them for doing it.

What does it say when we tell veterans that they cannot have a hospital bed? What does it say when they cannot get their proper pension benefits and we will deduct it from here? What does it say to these people once they take that uniform off?

I could not help but notice that DVA is about to do a survey. It will be sending it out to about 1,200 of its clients. The front-line people at the Department of Veterans Affairs are some of the best public servants in the entire country. They do a fantastic job but time and time again we hear that their hands are tied by legislation and they tell us what the government and we in this House have to change in order to make their jobs even easier. This is not a criticism against them.

*Government Orders*

However, the department will be doing a survey of approximately 217,000 clients and 1,200 will be asked: "What do you think of the service of DVA?" If people are getting a pension benefit or a VIP benefit from DVA and being well looked after, the response will be very positive. However, what about the thousands upon thousands of veterans and RCMP officers who get turned down for a benefit, who do not get VIP, a pension benefit or anything of that nature? What will their reaction be to a survey by a government department asking their opinion on it?

If the government wants a true reflection on how the department is handling Veterans Affairs, it should expand the discussions to include all those people who are veterans but not necessarily clients of DVA. That would give a true reflection on the department. We know the department does great work with what it has and the resources it has, but we believe that it should be much more for many more people. The men and women who serve our country are our greatest Canadians and we should not be putting them through the cycle of appeal this and appeal that. It is quite mind-boggling the work they have to do to fight and argue for a pensionable benefit.

I will now get back to Bill C-13. We thank the minister for bringing this issue forward. We know it will help a few people but why would the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development not take the opportunity to do more, especially after the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the country that I was born in, the Netherlands, the 60th anniversary of the start-up of the Korean conflict and the 100th anniversary of the navy? It is continuous. We will be having commemorations throughout the country. We commemorated the passing of the last World War I veteran, Mr. John Babcock. The government did a very good job in honouring the unanimous motion in the House of having a significant day in the recognition of all those who served in World War I. I congratulate the government on that. On Vimy Ridge day there was a tremendous ceremony here in Ottawa and across the country. It was truly the right thing to do.

All of us are very good at expressing our views of how we love the veterans and how we can never do enough for them, et cetera, but when the rubber hits the road, in some cases we fall off the road and we end up in the ditch. The fact is that many veterans contact their MPs on a regular basis with their frustration of how they are being dealt with, not just by the department but by the military itself.

We know the military can be a tremendous career for young men and women, or for anyone for that matter, but the problem is that when they take that uniform off, what happens to them? All of a sudden they go through the bureaucratic cycle and it can be intimidating.

● (1705)

I know many World War II and Korean veterans who applied for a benefit at DVA were turned down and they gave up. They did not realize they could appeal or get all this other assistance. They are in their 80s. The government said no, that is it. It is from the old school. It sits there and says that it cannot do anything more, so we try to assist veterans in that regard.

Many people are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. They have been diagnosed from an incident that happened maybe 20 or 30 years ago. It is very difficult for them to go to DVA and

indicate that their current problems are related to their service some 30 years ago. If nothing is on their medical file, they have problems trying to prove it.

The government has a clause in the Veterans Charter called benefit of the doubt. I have worked on a lot of cases. I have 10 of them on my desk right now from people across the country. In all the cases I have seen, it is rare to see the benefit of the doubt clause applied. I have yet to see it on my own personal files. I am not saying that it has not happened, but it may have.

If the government truly wanted to help military families and the personnel of the RCMP as well, it would have had our support in an omnibus veterans bill to be more inclusive. If it had done that, it would have had the support and I would have praised the parliamentary secretary from West Nova from the top of Canning and the beautiful view of the Annapolis Valley. I would do that if he had a bill of that nature. He can read this in *Hansard*. If he ever did that, I would be at the top of Canning Look-off Mountain, praising his name right through the entire valley. Trust me, I have the lungs to do it.

We will support the legislation to the committee stage. At the committee stage, we hope to advance it, change it, move it around a bit and everything else, but it does leave one question. If military members go on maternity leave, they get so much EI payment and the military tops up the balance of it. Why are there two different forms of payment for maternity leave? There should only be one.

Members of Parliament do not pay into employment insurance because we do not get to collect it. However, if military members serve 20 or 25 years and retire, they do not get to collect EI. Once they receive their annuity, they do not have any access to collect it. We need to look at that.

However, I thank the government for this small initiative. We will support it to the committee stage and see where it goes from there.

If the Conservative Government of Canada really wanted to do something for military veterans and their families, all it needs to do is come over and talk to us or talk to veterans themselves and it will get all the ideas it needs.

We salute all the veterans and military personnel in our country.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member give what some might consider to be a stirring talk, but it is also most disturbing. I served in our military for 20 years. Finally, we have a government that is taking action that supports our military. Although this is a chamber of ideas, it is also a chamber of action.

*Government Orders*

Every time our government puts forward a solid initiative seeking the support of other members to support our military, the member votes against it. I talked about budget 2006. The member voted against it. He also voted against budgets in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Every time this government takes an initiative or tries to deliver money to the military to improve its equipment and support it in operation, the member votes against it. He has all sorts of flowery ideas, but when it comes time to stand in his place and vote, he either votes against or he skulks out the door so he does not have to vote.

I would like him to answer to Canadians. If Canadians want to check the record, they can go to [parl.gc.ca](http://parl.gc.ca) and check his voting record every time we act for the military. Why does he skulk out of this chamber or vote against the military when it is time to take action?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** In the game of baseball, Mr. Speaker, that one gets batted out of the park. What an amazing coincidence. If the hon. member wants to discuss *Hansard*, I remember a certain all party committee. When I was on the Standing Committee on Defence and Veterans Affairs, the 2003 report, we in the NDP went along with the other parties and recommended a \$4.5 billion increase to the military defence, and we supported it.

• (1710)

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** That was seven years ago. What have you done recently?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wishes to heckle, he can skulk if he likes or he can just be quiet, be a good boy and listen while I talk to him.

If that MP really wanted the bare facts, his government brought forward a minimal amount for VIP. The hon. member's government promised all of them. It let so many down.

What kind of MP could stand in his place and be proud of the fact that his government's budget has created a homeless shelter for veterans in B.C., a food bank for veterans in Calgary and the closure of hospital beds in London, Ontario and in Montreal? I would be ashamed to call myself a Conservative and stand in this House and try to defend the interest of veterans. If he really wants a lesson on veterans, he should come to my riding and I would guarantee we would have quite the discussion. We could have a game of golf and —

**An hon. member:** No more skulking. Stand in your place and vote for the military.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is the greatest show in town, there is no doubt about it. That was quite the blistering little argument back and forth. I hope they will continue that a little further.

First, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on Bill C-201. I also want to congratulate him for all the work he has done for veterans over the years. I agree with him. I do not think all the good work that has been done for troops, soldiers and veterans is exclusive to one party. Despite the fact that some parties do take credit for it, it is all parties in the House over time. We can prove that.

I want to ask him a question about this bill, and it is confined to a certain amount. One thing I would like him to discuss is ways of expanding it to include people who are in a situation similar to many troops, posted overseas or away on duty. Perhaps the diplomatic corps is one example. Perhaps other uses of this one and the spouses who are not soldiers, for example, is a good way of addressing that issue.

Again, I congratulate my colleague and I would like him to comment on that.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador represents a great base out of the Gander area, but he is absolutely right.

We appreciate the fact the government has moved ever so slightly on a very small aspect of that. This is why we will support getting it to the committee. It is at the committee where my hon. colleague, the other groups and individuals can be a part of this initiative. That is where we can include those changes. We cannot do it right now, but we support getting this to the committee. It is at the committee stage that I hope all his questions will be answered properly.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. A group of military personnel is currently excluded from this bill because it is not retroactive.

Does my colleague support this measure? Will he ask the committee to have a closer look at these measures and amend the bill?

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois is absolutely correct. If we look at particular legislation to assist certain people, we have to ensure that retroactivity takes place to be more inclusive and to ensure that nobody falls through the cracks. Far too many people fall through the cracks on this issue, and we simply do not need that to happen. We have an opportunity.

We thank the minister for bringing this issue forward. She knows she will get the support of the House. However, we need to make some corrections. That is why we have a standing committee. Hopefully the standing committee will have the opportunity to thoroughly go through the bill and make the required changes.

• (1715)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member. He certainly stirred up the government. He did that because he was able to explain and expose its position on veterans and why it had taken veterans for granted.

He talked about the veterans' beds that are being removed. He talked about the homeless shelter in B.C. He talked about the food bank in Calgary and the Prime Minister's photo op there just two weeks ago.

Could the member explain to us why the Conservatives continue to take our veterans for granted?

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they made grandiose promises. When it comes to the fiscal realization, they realize they cannot do it and they go back on their word.

The government could have taken some of the initiatives brought forward by all parties in the House. Even some backbench Conservatives indicated some major improvements were required for veterans and their care. We know that.

We are working right now in the veterans affairs committee on possible changes to the Veterans Charter. We hope the committee will be able to make unanimous all party recommendations that we can give to the government, similar to other advisory groups and the Royal Canadian Legion that have made similar recommendations, to upgrade the Veterans Charter to ensure no veterans or their families fall through the cracks.

I know the parliamentary secretary, the member for West Nova, is on that committee as well. I will give him credit. He is doing a very good job channelling the Conservative aspects on that. It is a non-partisan committee. We hope that many of the issues we have heard and addressed in the Veterans Charter will be done unanimously and eventually adopted by whatever government in order to improve the lives of all veterans and their families.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to have one thing explained to me. When a veteran has paid into employment insurance all the time he has been employed, and when retires and receives his pension, should he still get employment insurance?

For many years, I paid into employment insurance. I was very fortunate because I never had to collect it. However, when I went into small business, I did not receive anything.

Why should the military be any different?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Madam Speaker, there are two things. We are glad to see that business owners now can apply for EI and receive it, which is a new change.

With great respect to the hon. member, military men and women and RCMP men and women have the unlimited liability. They risk their lives so we can have a good night's sleep. We in turn have the ultimate responsibility to meet their needs all the way to and including the headstone.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act. I would like to take a moment to read the bill's summary, which states: "This enactment amends the Employment Insurance Act to extend the benefit period and the period during which parental benefits may be paid for Canadian Forces members whose period of parental leave is deferred or who are directed to return to duty from parental leave."

First of all, it is important that the Quebeckers and Canadians who are watching us right now understand that Canadian Forces members pay into employment insurance. They are entitled to parental leave. Inevitably, they are always in dangerous situations when taking part in overseas missions. Here is what this bill will do: when they were

on parental leave and they come back from a mission, they can continue their parental leave, or if they were entitled to parental leave and did not take it, they will be entitled to that leave when they return from their mission.

This is an important bill and the Bloc Québécois supports it in principle. My colleague from Vaudeuil-Soulanges mentioned this earlier. We want to ensure that no one is left out. This bill is not retroactive. There will be a debate in committee. The Bloc Québécois will most likely propose an amendment and we hope that the Conservatives, the Liberals and the New Democrats will agree to make the bill retroactive in order to cover the young fathers or mothers who were recently entitled, but were not covered because of the delays in passing this bill.

We can set policies, that is what we are here for. We can have discussions. We can talk about the missions. The Bloc Québécois was in favour of the military pulling out of Afghanistan in 2009. Other parties decided otherwise. We can discuss this, but the fact remains that soldiers are young men and young women. They are our sons and daughters, Quebeckers and Canadians.

I have personally gone through an experience that other colleagues may have had. I attended the funeral of a fallen soldier in my riding. I will not name the municipality or the soldier out of respect for the family. He had just started his tour. He had just completed his training for this mission. It was his choice. People lined the funeral route. I had to walk to the church and it struck me how young our troops are. They are young men, young women, young fathers and mothers, and they are the face of today's Canadian Forces. Our society is evolving. The military is having difficulty finding recruits. It is a matter of how we treat people and if we want our young men and our young women to offer their services, then we have to be able to offer them adequate conditions. Parental leave is one way to provide them with such conditions. We must never forget that they are human beings.

Gone are the days when people went into the army to defend the queen. Today, people who choose to go into the army need to feel that they are supported and that the work they do when they put their lives on the line to defend societal principles is valued. This bill is a prime example of something that happens too often. How long have we been in Afghanistan? Yet this bill is just being introduced now, in 2010, for all sorts of reasons.

The Conservative Party can make a big deal about this and say what it wants, but it should have introduced this bill a long time ago, when it came to power, even though it had a minority government. Once again, politically, the Conservatives are interested in missions, visibility, international relations. But too often they forget that the army is made up of young men and women who chose to work in the military and who have a taste for adventure. A military career is a choice, and that is how the Canadian Forces sell themselves, by targeting people with a taste for adventure. That is how they try to attract young Quebeckers and Canadians into the army.

• (1720)

To attract people and ensure that the army does not have any trouble recruiting, as it does currently, the government has to offer good working conditions. The bill that is before us is one way to do this. The Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle, because it has a great deal of respect for soldiers.

Soldiers deserve the right to parental leave, because they pay into employment insurance. If they lose that privilege because they are on mission—and risking their lives—they deserve to be compensated.

Young soldiers with families who are currently on mission deserve the right to parental leave, especially since they are getting younger and younger. Few of the soldiers I met that day were over 35. Most were between 20 and 30. Some were young fathers, and others were potential young fathers or mothers.

We must ensure that they have good working conditions. Being part of the Canadian Forces is a job. We must ensure that they have adequate working conditions, just like every other worker in our society. This way, individuals who were not able to take parental leave or whose parental leave was cut short would be able to take their parental leave once they return from their mission. It is only fair to them.

As the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges said, we must make parental leave retroactive for the young men who have recently been sent on missions, but who were not able to take their parental leave.

I will perhaps have the chance to explain to my colleagues everything the government should do to provide good working conditions for our armed forces.

Some members in this House spoke about the support we need to provide, which we forget all too often. The Conservatives see international relations as a way to show their power. They increase investments in equipment and armament. That is important, but we must also invest in our young men and women. They are the hard core. It is all well and good to have all the equipment we need, but if there is no one there to drive it or use it, it is useless.

We must focus on measures that make the job easier for our soldiers and that provide them with working conditions similar to those of other workers in society. This way, we might attract more of them and let them feel they are part of society. They are not just risking their lives in combat for a taste of adventure, but also because it is their job, for which they are paid and have access to the same benefits as other workers.

We must also look after all their physical and psychological needs. It is important to compare. The comparison shows that they should

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be entitled to parental leave. If they are on a mission, they are not entitled to it. This bill would restore that right. We agree with this provided that the measures are retroactive and cover those who were unable to benefit recently. They too are workers who can suffer physical and psychological wounds because of the nature of their work.

Every time there are concerns or problems in the construction industry, a series of safety measures is adopted.

• (1725)

We have legislation, workplace safety, laws and all those things.

However, when members of the military put their lives in danger to defend our society's principles and our values, and return home needing physical and psychological help, the government is not always around. The military does not have a health and safety board. It may be because there are not many employees in that sector. However, we have to start thinking of them as workers and give them what they deserve. The government should think about helping and supporting these workers who sometimes suffer from psychological or physical trauma because of their jobs. That is the direction we should be headed in.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** 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.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

### CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL BILL OF RIGHTS

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP)** moved that Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC)** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights, sponsored by the member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Without commenting on the merits of the bill, I submit that it would require new spending not authorized by Parliament. The second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states on page 834:

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—a royal recommendation is required not only in the case where money is being appropriated, but also in the case where the authorization to spend for a specific purpose is significantly altered. Without a royal recommendation, a bill that either increases the amount of an appropriation, or extends its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications is inadmissible on the grounds that it infringes on the Crown's financial initiative.

Bill C-469 would establish a Canadian environmental bill of rights. The bill raises problems with respect to new spending in two areas. First, part 2 would authorize environmental protection action against the government by enabling Canadians to seek recourse in the Federal Court to protect the environment in relation to any action or inaction by the government, which has resulted in significant environmental harm.

As a result, clause 19 in part 2 would create potential new legal liabilities for the government by adding the power to enable the Federal Court to order the government to pay for the restoration or rehabilitation of the part of the environment, and the power to order the government to pay for the enhancement or protection of the environment generally. Clause 19 would result in a potential increase in the government's legal liabilities since payments resulting from decisions of the Federal Court would be made from the consolidated revenue fund.

Procedural authorities and precedents indicate that such a measure would require a royal recommendation. The 21st edition of Erskine May states on page 714:

Any proposal whereby the Crown would incur a liability or a contingent liability payable out of money to be voted by Parliament [requires the Queen's recommendation].

On June 12, 1973 the Speaker of the House of Commons ruled that a royal recommendation was required for Bill S-5, an act to amend the Farm Improvement Loans Act. He stated:

It may be said that the proposal in Bill S-5 does not in itself propose a direct expenditure. It does, however, propose substantial additional liabilities on public moneys.

On May 25, 2009 the Speaker of the other place ruled that Bill S-219, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (student loans), required a royal recommendation because it would increase the Crown's liability under the Canada Student Loans Act. The Speaker stated:

Bill S-219 would expand the range of conditions under which the government would have to make good its guarantee of loans under the Canada Student Loans Act. This would change the existing scheme, since payments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund might increase due to the change in possible obligations. As such, the bill should have a Royal Recommendation—

While the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act establishes a general process for settling civil judgments, Bill C-469 would establish a new mechanism for creating civil liability judgments, thereby expanding the objects and purposes of the royal recommendation that accompanied the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act. The sixth edition of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules & Forms* states on page 183:

—an amendment infringes the financial initiative of the Crown not only if it increases the amount but also if it extends the objects and purposes...expressed in the communication by which the Crown has demanded or recommended a charge.

The second problematic area of Bill C-469 is part 4, which would add additional functions for the Auditor General not currently authorized in the statute, which would require new government spending. Part 4 would require the Auditor General to:

—examine every regulation transmitted to the Clerk of the Privy Council for registration pursuant to the Statutory Instruments Act and every Bill introduced in or presented to the House of Commons by a minister of the Crown, in order to ascertain whether any of the provisions thereof are inconsistent with the purposes and provisions of the Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights and the Auditor General shall report any such inconsistency to the House of Commons at the first convenient opportunity.

Section 5 of the Auditor General Act sets out the powers and duties of the Auditor General. It states:

The Auditor General is the auditor of the accounts of Canada...and as such shall make such examinations and inquiries as he considers necessary to enable him to report as required by this Act.

• (1735)

The act is clear that the Auditor General has discretion in the examinations and inquiries that she wishes to undertake. Bill C-469 would change that by requiring the Auditor General to examine all regulations and bills introduced in the House of Commons.

The role of the Auditor General is an audit function. This means that the Auditor General can examine and inquire into the performance of a program, money spent on a particular program, and examine financial statements. What is not provided for is a perspective analysis of the impact of proposals not yet implemented. Yet, this is exactly what Bill C-469 calls for, to study policy proposals before the House of Commons.

The Auditor General's website is clear on this point. On choosing topics for performance audits, it states:

The Auditor General does not audit topics that fall outside the Office's mandate. Examples are all policy decisions, which are the prerogative of Parliament and government—

Precedents indicate that substantive mandate changes require a royal recommendation. On February 11, 2008 the Speaker ruled on Bill C-474, National Sustainable Development Act, that:

However, clause 13 of Bill C-474 would modify the mandate of this new independent commissioner to require...the development of "a national sustainability monitoring system...The clause...would impose additional functions on the commissioner that are substantially different from those foreseen in the current mandate... clause 13 thus alters the conditions set out in the original bill to which a royal recommendation was attached.

In conclusion, Bill C-469 would increase spending through provisions to increase government liabilities and through provisions to expand the mandate of the Auditor General, and therefore would require a royal recommendation.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his arguments. The Speaker will certainly take these arguments into consideration.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I would like to reserve the opportunity to reply to the point of order at a later date.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Yes, absolutely. I would invite anyone with arguments to bring them forward as soon as possible.



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**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, almost three decades ago, I drafted an environmental bill of rights with the northern Alberta environmental law section of the Canadian Bar Association. Sadly, that bill was squashed by the southern Albert bar.

Since that date, however, more than 130 nations have enshrined the right to a clean and healthy environment in their constitutions. Others have enacted national laws. A number of provincial governments in Canada, to their credit, have enacted environmental rights. Some have enshrined these rights in a stand-alone law, such as the environmental bill of rights in Ontario. Other provincial governments have incorporated an array of rights and duties in their respective environmental laws.

Past federal governments have also incorporated some limited government duties and citizen rights to environmental protection in federal statutes, but no comprehensive law has been enacted at the federal level to accord the right to all Canadians, regardless of where they live in this vast nation, to a clean and healthy environment. Equally rare are any mandatory duties imposed upon federal ministers or officials to take action to protect the environment, or to take precautionary measures to prevent harm to health and the environment.

There have been many public calls for an environmental bill of rights to ensure that all Canadians will receive equal protection for their environment and health. I am appreciative of the many legal experts who helped me in the crafting of this bill. I am also encouraged by the letters of support I am receiving from communities across the country, from Newfoundland to Victoria, from New Brunswick to Saskatchewan, from Alberta to the Northwest Territories.

The key purposes of the bill are the following.

It imposes environmental duties on the Government of Canada and extends clear environmental rights to Canadians. It grants every resident of Canada the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. It imposes the obligation on the Government of Canada, within its jurisdiction, to protect those rights.

What new duties are imposed?

First, the bill imposes a legal duty on the federal government to protect the public trust, defined as the duty to preserve and protect the collective interests of the people of Canada in the quality of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Various federal ministers are currently obligated to take specified actions to protect the environment or to prevent health impacts. For example, under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the federal Minister of Health is obligated and mandated to take action when she receives information that toxins may harm human health. Additionally, the federal Minister of the Environment is obligated to take action within specified timelines to protect endangered species.

However, what is groundbreaking about this bill is that it extends the duty to all federal authorities, in all federal decisions impacting the environment, to assert its jurisdiction and powers to protect the environment on behalf of all Canadians.

Where the government knows or suspects that a substance may harm the environment or human health, it should be duty bound to act. Where a species is endangered and in fact listed under federal law, the government should have the duty to act.

Second, the bill compels the government to provide effective, timely and affordable access to environmental information. Clear evidence of the need to make mandatory this duty is found in the recent awarding by the Information Commissioner of an F grade to Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada.

Just this week, scientists testified before the parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, calling for greater transparency in decisions about recovery plans for threatened species, if only to ensure that scientific information provided is factored into decision-making.

Given timely access to information, potentially impacted communities will be better able to hold federal ministers and authorities accountable to act in their interests to prevent harm or to require action by polluters. Government officials will be obligated to reveal to Canadians the negotiation positions by the government on critical environmental treaties and bilateral agreements.

Associated with this duty is the extension of whistleblower protection for any federal employees who participate in decision-making, who apply for investigations, who provide information, who give evidence, or refuse to act in good faith.

Third, under this proposed law, the federal government must also ensure timely and effective public participation in decision-making on federal laws and policies related to the environment. This enshrines a commitment made by Canada in ratifying the Rio convention and as signatory to the North American agreement on environmental cooperation.

● (1740)

What new rights are accorded or embellished under Bill C-469? The bill enshrines a bundle of environmental rights. It accords the necessary rights and standing to Canadians to ensure access to environmental justice. This includes seeking court intervention where the government fails to comply with legal duties to protect the environment, or human health impacts, or to enforce federal environmental laws.

Any resident of Canada or entity such as an environmental non-government organization will have standing to bring a public trust action against the Government of Canada for failing to meet its duties as trustee of the environment. The courts are accorded broad and innovative powers in a successful action, including restoration, preventive measures, or order for production of a compliance plan, all sensible results. They may suspend or cancel permits or require posting of financial collateral.

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Standing is also accorded to bring civil actions against violators of federal environmental laws where the offence has resulted, or may result, in significant environmental harm. Obviously, it adheres to the precautionary principle. This extends the right of standing beyond a more narrow class of persons who may be deemed directly impacted. Any Canadian will have the right to seek the review or enactment of any federal environmental law or policy.

Any resident of Canada will be able to seek the investigation of an offence under any federal environmental law. While this right is provided under some federal environmental laws, such as the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, this would extend that opportunity for all laws, whether related to toxins, fisheries, wildlife, climate change, or environmental assessment.

Recently, the government tabled an omnibus bill to make more consistent enforcement provisions across the law. This would do a similar action in according equal rights and obligations across all environmental statutes. Canadians are also granted the right to seek an interim order to prevent significant environmental harm. Clear criteria are specified for the court to consider in granting such an order. This is consistent with the direction the government has taken in criminal law. Clearly the laws on the environment should also follow a consistent direction. The order may issue a cleanup order, a restoration order, or fines directed to environmental protection for monitoring.

In closing, I would like to share with the House a quote which regularly inspires me in taking action to protect the environment. I have spent more than 35 years in my career as an environmental lawyer representing the interests of the public of Canada and abroad to ensure that they have equal rights and that government is obligated to take action. This is a quote by George Cheever:

The man who can really, in living union of the mind and heart, converse with God through nature, finds in the material forms around him, a source of power and happiness inexhaustible, and like the life of angels.

• (1745)

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her more formal presentation on this important bill on the Canadian environmental bill of rights. I would like to ask her about elements of the bill that would engage the Canadian citizenry. I know, for example, that under the North American Free Trade Agreement Commission for Environmental Cooperation there is a role for citizens from the three countries that participate in NAFTA, just as there is a specific role for citizens under the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's mandate.

Could the member help us understand how the bill would get Canadian citizens more actively engaged in protecting our beautiful environment?

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, the member's question is an important one. Under previous Conservative governments and under a number of Liberal governments, Canada has had a propensity for stepping up to the plate and being one of the first to sign and ratify international conventions, but the way Canadian law works is that we actually have to enshrine in our domestic laws those obligations so that they can be binding on the country. We have also had a propensity for signing on to bilateral agreements where we commit

to do a variety of things, such as under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation.

This bill would put in law the binding duty to deliver those rights to access to information to participate in decision making across statutes, across obligations of the government dealing with protection of the environment and health.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the efforts of my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona.

Previously, the New Democratic Party brought forward Bill C-311, which was just going through the process here in the House. At committee, we heard from various experts and witnesses, some of whom said that they produced the costing associated with Bill C-311 through their various reports.

Has the member asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer or any other third party, or any party at all, for a cost analysis of what this proposed bill would cost the taxpayers of Canada?

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, the question asked by the hon. member for Wetaskiwin is one that the Conservatives like to put to the opposition when in fact they do not do the costing for their own bills.

I would like to advise that the cost that has not been calculated is the most important one, which is, the cost to the government for not taking action to protect the environment.

The member will notice, if he goes through the bill, that it provides that citizens will intervene only when the government does not deliver on its duties. Presumably, the government has budgeted to make sure that it delivers all of its environmental obligations. If it does, there will be no additional costs incurred.

• (1750)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the member on an excellent speech and on her work on the bill. She obviously has the government concerned because it is already dealing with the royal recommendation issue.

She mentioned some other countries in the world that have legislation of this type. We are always interested in best practices here in the House. Which governments in the world have, in the member's opinion, the best legislation of this type and how does her legislation compare with that other legislation?

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, that is an extremely tough question.

I could not possibly go over the 130 countries that have taken the effort to actually enshrine in their constitutions the right to a clean, healthy environment.

I can advise the member that I had the privilege of working in Bangladesh. That country, which operates under a similar system of law as Canada does, has taken that measure and actually enshrined that right. India has as well. I would be here all day if I listed all the countries. A better way to put it is that Canada is among the few nations that have not taken that step, and that is precisely why I have tabled the bill.

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I was a little puzzled by the answer that my colleague gave to my question. I think her answer to my question was that presumably, if nobody did anything wrong or the government did all it was supposed to do, there would be no cost to the government. This begs the question of why the bill is needed in the first place, but I digress.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to the issue of environmental rights and Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights.

In 1972, the delegates to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment recognized the connection between economic development and the environment. Some 15 years later, the World Commission on Environment and Development took this concept further when it defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

That definition has helped shape public policy, business strategies and individual choices for nearly a quarter of a century. It envisions a world where all decisions, including what we produce, what we buy, where we live and what we value, are informed by the need to take care of our planet. The concept of sustainable development is powerful because it recognizes the need to pay attention to and support three mutually reinforcing pillars: economic, social and environmental.

This is why our government has committed to the protection of the environment while maintaining a balance with the social and economic priorities of Canadians. Particularly in this context of economic recovery, our government wants to ensure that our economy remains one of the strongest in the industrialized world and that Canada is able to succeed in the modern economy. This is why in the last Speech from the Throne our government committed to building the jobs and industries of the future by completing the second year of Canada's economic action plan.

Bill C-469 recognizes in its preamble that Canadians understand the close linkages between a healthy and ecologically balanced environment and Canada's economic, social, cultural and inter-generational security. However, the government is concerned that the bill may not give appropriate emphasis to each of the three pillars of sustainable development. Bill C-469 sets out rights and government responsibilities related to environmental protection and it is not clear whether these are appropriately balanced with other socio-economic goals.

The bill introduces a series of substantive environmental rights. First, it would amend the Canadian Bill of Rights to include the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment as an element of the right to life, liberty and security of the person. It would also place an obligation on the government to protect this right. Finally, it would recognize the Government of Canada as the trustee of Canada's environment and oblige the government to preserve it in accordance with the public trust.

Bill C-469 establishes these rights in a much stronger, less balanced way than other similar environmental rights laws. Other Canadian jurisdictions that have adopted environmental rights

legislation have taken an approach that allows the government to manage environmental, social and economic priorities together.

For example, the right to a healthful environment in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms is limited to what is provided by the laws of Quebec. Similarly, the protection of the right to a healthful environment, referred to in the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights is limited to the means provided by the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights.

In addition to the substantive environmental rights proposed in Bill C-469, the bill proposes a series of procedural environmental rights and obligations meant to improve public participation in environmental decisions and enforcement as well as access to environmental information. These include an obligation on the Government of Canada to ensure effective access to environmental information by making such information available to the public in a reasonable, timely and affordable fashion.

The bill could also oblige the government to ensure opportunities for effective, informed and timely public participation in environmental decision making, the right to request an investigation of an alleged environmental offence, whistleblower protection and the right to take action against offenders who cause environmental harm. It is important to keep in mind that the objectives of public participation in environmental decision making and access to environmental information are already provided for under existing federal legislation and policies.

• (1755)

For example, the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators initiative, renewed in budget 2010, provides Canadians with regular information on the state of our environment.

We have recently passed the Federal Sustainable Development Act, which requires the development of a sustainable development strategy that makes the government more accountable to Parliament for environmental decision-making.

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, also provides for many of the rights promoted in Bill C-469, including access to proposed and existing policies, guidelines and regulations through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, environmental registry, provisions for public participation in various stages of decision-making under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, whistleblower protection and the right to request that the Minister of the Environment conduct an investigation of an alleged offence and potentially to proceed with an environmental protection action against an alleged offender.

The procedural rights provided under existing federal law contribute to the goals of public participation and access to information while recognizing responsible management of government and court resources.

While placing meaningful obligations on government and providing opportunities for recourse to the courts, the existing rights are tailored to ensure that procedural rights do not overwhelm government capacity or judicial resources. In turn, this ensures the three pillars of sustainable development are taken into account.

*Private Members' Business*

The procedural rights under existing federal laws are similar to the approach in other Canadian jurisdictions. For example, similar obligations and rights related to access to information and public participation are provided under the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights.

Bill C-469, on the other hand, lacks similar limitations and could therefore have significant impacts on government resources.

Other procedural rights are also included in Bill C-469. For example, the bill would authorize any resident of Canada or entity that believes that an act, regulation, other statutory instrument or policy should be amended, repealed or made in order to protect the environment, to apply to the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development for a review by the appropriate minister. This raises concerns over the extent and scope of the review to be undertaken, as well as the roles and accountabilities of Parliament, the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development, the governor in council and ministers.

Finally, Bill C-469 would require that government bills introduced in the House of Commons and all new regulations be examined by the Auditor General to identify inconsistencies with the proposed environmental bill of rights. This would fundamentally change the role of the Auditor General by imposing on her a duty to provide legal opinions to Parliament. In contrast, under the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights the obligation on the government to respond to such a request applies only to prescribed ministers.

In closing, while the government believes in the protection of the environment and the recognition of environmental rights, it is important to stress that the principle of sustainable development includes a balancing of environmental, economic and social goals.

It is also important to stress the existing environmental procedural rights under federal laws. Transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making, access to environmental information, and environmental accountability are already entrenched in our environmental laws in a manner that promotes financial responsibility and access to justice.

• (1800)

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am more than happy to be here this evening to participate in this very important debate about this very important bill.

I would like to commend the member of the NDP caucus for bringing the bill forward. I would also like to congratulate Ecojustice, one of Canada's more prominent legal non-governmental organizations with a focus on ecological issues, which has been essential in helping to draft this early model legislation for a Canadian environmental bill of rights for two of its own clients.

It is interesting to follow on the heels of the member for Wetaskiwin because I am little surprised. After all, he is a member of the party of Mr. Diefenbaker who in 1960 brought in a bill of rights.

I was heartened, however, to hear him refer to a number of initiatives, from the sustainable development indicators initiative, which is now under way, to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and the Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainable

Development, all of which are either legislation or offices created under the watch of a succession of Liberal governments.

I think this legislation is timely and here is why. Canada has fallen behind other nations in terms of environmental policy and, more importantly, in terms of environmental performance.

We are now ranked 15th of 17 nations by our own Conference Board of Canada. We are 28th out of 30 OECD nations ranked by Simon Fraser University researchers. We have dropped from 8th place to 46th place on the Yale-Columbia Environmental Performance Index between 2005 and 2010, tellingly, since the arrival of the Conservatives in government.

Here is what we know about jurisdictions. There are now dozens that have a bill of rights or some kind of constitutional right enshrining the right to a healthy environment. We heard from our colleague from the NDP that no fewer than 130 countries around the world today already recognize the right to a healthy environment in their constitutions, something that was debated feverishly when our Constitution was being repatriated and the Charter of Rights was being brought forward by Prime Minister Trudeau and his administration.

It is also timely because important new research indicates that in countries where there are not constitutional provisions that force them to require environmental protection, including the right to live in a healthy environment, the absence of those provisions is associated with inferior environmental performance.

I am again troubled by references raised by the Conservatives asking for costing of the bill, for example, asking whether the bill has been referred to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. This would be the same Parliamentary Budget Officer whose budget was cut by the Conservative government and is hardly in a position to conduct the work should it be referred to him anyway.

It is richer still because the government, having no climate change plan, for example, or any iteration of what it claims to be a plan, has sent nothing to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for costing of its own measures.

Therefore it is a continuing ruse put forward by the Conservatives to try to hold up the accountability, the value-for-money proposition, instead of dealing with the important merits of a Canadian environmental bill of rights, in this case.

A couple of things have been going on. Among some of the most significant reforms worldwide have been, as I was saying earlier, the rewriting of national constitutions in 140 countries, 132 of which now provide for a government duty to protect the environment. That is not 2, not 32, but 132. There is a substantive individual right to live in a healthy environment in 86 countries, an individual duty to protect the environment in 78 countries and new procedural environmental rights such as access to information in yet another 28 countries.

*Private Members' Business*

•(1805)

I will quote Dr. David Boyd from Simon Fraser University, one of Canada's leading authorities in research in this area. He said that the presence of these constitutional provisions demonstrates a vital commitment to environmental protection, given that constitutions are the supreme law of nations and represent citizens' most cherished, deeply held values.

Another 115 countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East have signed legally binding regional treaties that explicitly recognize the right to a healthy environment. It turns out that Canada is now 1 of fewer than 50 nations on this planet whose constitutions remain silent regarding this fundamental matter.

We look at the evidence, the evidence that we hope Parliament will be focusing on in examining the merits of this bill, not ideology here, not false claims of value for money or costing, but the evidence, the environmental legislation and jurisprudence and the relative performance of countries that do have constitutional environmental provisions.

We know that the evidence tells us that in these countries we have, one, stronger environmental laws and policies. Surely no one in Canada today would be opposed to stronger environmental laws and policies.

Two, we see an improved implementation and enforcement of existing laws. The government itself brought in some progressive and positive changes to environmental enforcement in this country. I cannot imagine it would be opposed to seeing progress there.

Three, we see increased public participation in environmental decision-making, something we are already doing with the Commission for Environmental Cooperation through NAFTA in Montreal. It is also something we are doing with our Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development trying to enhance the role of our citizenry in making sure, as a legacy question, as a quality-of-life question, as a natural wealth question, that we are actually protecting the natural wonders that surround us.

Four, we know that in those jurisdictions where this exists, there is a more prominent role for the courts in environmental governance. This is a far cry from the federal Conservative Party and the government here, constantly running to the Federal Court to challenge calls for the implementation of their own legislation and binding laws.

Finally, we know that in those countries that have constitutional environmental provisions, there is increased accountability. Everybody in this House wants to see progress when it comes to accountability on so many different fronts.

Most importantly we know that in those jurisdictions, and there are hundreds as I mentioned, constitutional provisions are making a substantial contribution to improving people's lives and their well-being, through clean drinking water, cleaner air, better sanitation, better waste management practices, recycling and healthier ecosystems.

There is a reason why this country is reporting on sustainable development indicators. It is previous prime minister Paul Martin who, as minister of finance, asked me in my capacity as president of

the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy a decade ago to produce these so we could tell Canadians, truly, what the state of our wealth was, what the state of our health was.

It is not just a question of GDP; it is a question of functioning ecosystems, whose worth we have not yet been able to figure out in terms of monetizing it, but we know these systems are worth a lot more than zero.

This bill is timely because Canada is slipping, because we are falling, as I said earlier, from 8th place to 46th place on the Yale-Columbia Environmental Performance Index. Imagine. The Yale-Columbia group is hardly an ideological group, hardly a group with an axe to grind in Canada. I am very concerned when I see this kind of empirical data showing that we are falling behind.

It is timely. I am looking forward to seeing this matter, hopefully, end up in the environment and sustainable development committee. I commend my colleague from Edmonton once again for bringing this bill forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in today's debate, which is very important—fundamental even. I would like to thank the member for Edmonton—Strathcona for having introduced Bill C-469.

First of all, we support the underlying principle of the bill. We need to thank and congratulate a number of civil society groups, such as Ecojustice, which the Bloc Québécois leader and I met with over a year ago. The group helped us understand how important it is to have a Canadian environmental bill of rights.

We wholeheartedly support the five principles stated in this bill because we need to make fundamental changes to what I would call governance. We need to move toward a new form of environmental governance. Bill C-469 clearly moves us toward that goal because it incorporates the precautionary principle. This principle was developed in 1972 as part of the Stockholm convention, and it took root in 1992 at the Rio summit. This principle is fundamental. Lacking scientific certainty in various fields of human activity, we must act according to the precautionary principle.

This issue has been incorporated into some legislation. We would like to see it included in even more laws. Several environmental laws include the precautionary principle in their preamble, but we would like to see it in the laws themselves. That would force departments to make decisions about issues such as genetically modified organisms, for example. The precautionary principle is therefore fundamental.

The polluter pays principle triggers an important debate about what I call a green tax system. We have to ensure that every dollar spent is invested in renewable economies. That is not what Canada has done in the past. Since 1970, over \$60 billion has been spent on tax breaks for the oil industry, while renewable energy has received just a few hundred million. We need changes to taxation in Canada; we need a green tax system.

*Private Members' Business*

If we undertake this change, we would respect the second principle in this bill, which is the polluter pays principle, and encourage true sustainable development. We have some tools at our disposition. For one, we have the strategic environmental assessment, which was passed in the early 1990s and which is a directive in the Prime Minister's Office. In theory, it forces each department to evaluate its plans, policies and programs to ensure that more than just economic issues are taken into consideration. Social and environmental aspects must be considered as well.

The third main principle in the bill is intergenerational equity. How can we guarantee that the resources we use today will also be available for future generations? We cannot make decisions based on a short-term outlook. We have to look at each decision and ensure that it will allow us to ensure a future, and better intergenerational equity as well as environmental justice.

We agree with part 1 of the bill, which says that every citizen has a right to a healthy environment. That is obvious. It is the right to life. It is the right to live in an environment where the air and water are of the highest quality so as to ensure human survival.

• (1810)

This is a fundamental right in part 1 of the bill.

Second, we agree with the principle in part 2 of the bill, which would put in place various mechanisms allowing for legal and civil action against the federal government and entities under its exclusive jurisdiction. I want to emphasize that. We support this bill because we believe that it and the bills of rights would apply to areas under federal jurisdiction. That is one of the reasons we are supporting this bill.

The third principle is the protection of employees. Mechanisms to protect employees are clearly set out in part 3 of this bill, and they are important. Why? Because scientists who become aware of a situation have to be able to tell the public about it when it poses a threat to humankind or the environment. Europe and especially France have what are known as “whistleblowers”. These people, who are sometimes ordinary citizens but more often scientists who work in government and become aware of something that could have a negative impact on the environment and humankind, decide to speak out publicly. We have to ensure that these scientists and ordinary citizens are not fired the next day, because in becoming aware of a situation they would run afoul of a government approach or ideological policy. So scientists are protected. I would hope that part 3 also protects these whistleblowers so that the public can find out about the real state of our environment.

Part 4 of the bill ensures greater independence by subjecting the government's messages and policies to analysis by independent parties. The Auditor General has a greater role to play. We have seen this in three bills: first, Bill C-288 on the application of the Kyoto protocol; second, Bill C-311 which aimed at following through on the Kyoto protocol; and finally, the sustainable development strategy that was adopted and that gives the Auditor General a clear mandate to independently analyze and verify the government's policies.

This is important because this independence is not always a given. We saw this with the instructions given to scientists. As we saw, scientists were not necessarily allowed to speak up. So this is about

allowing independence. In a new environmental governance, independence is important. The media, businesses and scientists must all be independent in order to really engage in this new approach towards a real vision of sustainable development and to give scientists a chance.

• (1815)

I am thinking of GMOs in particular. Over the past several years, successive governments have refused to ask the Royal Society of Canada, an association of Canada's best and most eminent scientists, to assess the impact of GMOs on health and the environment. A government that valued independent thought and allowed scientists to do their work would have referred the GMO issue to the Royal Society of Canada for a truly independent analysis.

I will close with a brief quote from Albert Jacquard's latest book, entitled *Le compte à rebours a-t-il commencé?*, or “Has the countdown begun?”

For ages, humans have lived as though their time would never run out, as though progress would never cease to make the world a better place for us, as though humans would always grow richer, more beautiful and more capable, as though we could create an infinite number of nuclear bombs without ever having to use them, as though we had the right to plunder the planet's riches at will without ever making a dent in an endless supply. Those days are past. We now know that our time is running out and that if we continue to work against ourselves, we may well create a planet on which none of us want to live.

• (1820)

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House to support a historic federal bill, Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights. The bill would give Canadians the legal right to a healthy environment.

National governments across the globe are stepping forward to recognize the right to a healthy environment in their national constitutions. International bodies, regional authorities and local municipalities all over the planet are declaring rights to clean air, clean water and uncontaminated land. Environmental rights are enjoyed in over half the countries of the world, either through international agreement or by provisions of national constitutions.

Despite this global trend, environmental rights remain largely unconfirmed in Canada. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not address environmental protection or environmental health. In light of the momentous vote in favour of Bill C-311, the climate change accountability act last night, now is the time for Canada to step up to the plate.

Environmental rights are recognized by only four provincial and territorial laws: Quebec, Ontario, Northwest Territories and Yukon. I would like to congratulate these provinces and territories for being ahead of the federal government on this issue. In fact, Quebec's environmental quality act has been in place since 1978. The act recognizes the right to a healthy environment and to effective environmental protection. It allows for Quebec residents to seek an injunction or to stop unauthorized activity that is harming the environment.

*Private Members' Business*

The bill would create a federal and therefore national-wide framework to recognize and seek to protect the quality and health of the environment essential to human life and dignity. The bill recognizes that it is simply not enough to tell people that the government will protect the environment on their behalf. Instead, it would compel the government to protect the environment and it would give Canadians the ability to hold the government to account, not only at election time but whenever environmental offences occur.

Specifically, Bill C-469 would require the federal government to take action to protect the right of all Canadians to a healthy environment. It would ensure access to environmental information and grant the right for all Canadians to participate in environment-related decisions. It would compel the government to investigate and prosecute environmental offences. It would give all citizens the ability to take the government to court if it failed to enforce environmental laws. It would provide whistleblower protection to employees who reported environmental offences. These rights and duties are already found in the laws of over 130 other countries.

Let me provide the House and Canadians watching some examples. The constitution of Argentina recognizes that all inhabitants enjoy the right to a healthy, balanced environment which is fit for human development so that productive activity satisfy current needs without compromising those of future generations, and have the duty to preserve the environment. Damaging the environment generates the obligation to repair it as a priority in the manner that is established by law.

In 2005 France amended its constitution to include a charter for the environment that recognizes, among other things, a person's right to live in a balanced environment that shows due respect for health.

Most recently Ecuador passed a new constitution that recognizes the individual and community right to a healthy environment as well as direct rights for nature.

Recognizing environmental rights in Canada gives a voice and power to those most vulnerable to the harmful effects of environmental degradation.

• (1825)

For example, the Argentinian court ordered the government to provide drinking water to poor families living along the Suquia River after years of ongoing pollution from a malfunctioning sewage treatment plant. A court in the Philippines has ordered the cleanup of the highly-polluted Manila Harbour based on the constitutional right to a balanced and healthy environment.

There is support from the other opposition parties on this bill, in addition to prominent members of the environmental community who helped author this bill: Ecojustice, the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth. Let us review what these environmental champions have to say about this legislation.

Margot Venton, an Ecojustice lawyer who played an instrumental role in this legislation, stated:

We are calling on our political leaders to rise above the gridlock of a minority government to embrace this transformative piece of legislation. Passing the Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights is both a rare and urgent opportunity for all parties to show political leadership at a time when it is sorely needed.

Jean Langlois, the national campaigns director of the Sierra Club of Canada, stated:

This is a historic opportunity for Parliament. The interests of individual Canadians are compromised when decisions run roughshod over our common natural legacy. Our legal system currently provides limited and costly opportunities for the public to address such injustices. The CEBC [this bill] would finally give all Canadians the tools necessary to protect their environmental rights.

Beatrice Olivastri, CEO of Friends of the Earth Canada, stated:

It's time that Canada caught up with the rest of the world in recognizing the rights of citizens to a healthy environment. Canadians, everywhere in this country, deserve protection against environmental destruction and its negative impacts on their health.

We must listen and we must show leadership. It is time we caught up with the rest of the world in recognizing the rights of Canadians to a healthy environment.

By voting against Bill C-311 last night, the government again showed its complete disregard for the environment. The government has already weakened the environmental assessment process, silenced scientists who disagree with it and failed to act to protect species at risk. Yesterday, parliamentarians showed they can act when the government will not.

It is vital that we, as representatives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, work together to act to protect the environment and pass this bill for the future of all Canadians.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today to the issue of environmental rights and Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights.

Bill C-469 proposes to create a number of environmental rights and government obligations related to the protection of the environment. The bill stipulates that five emerging principles of environmental law would guide its interpretation: the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle, the principle of sustainable development, the principle of intergenerational equity and the principle of environmental justice.

Those principles are already supported and implemented through existing government legislation and policies. For example, the Species at Risk Act, the Oceans Act, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act all refer to the precautionary principle. Through this principle, the government may, in certain situations, where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, take cost effective measures to prevent environmental degradation even if there is a lack of full scientific certainty.

In 2008, Parliament also passed the Federal Sustainable Development Act, which requires the Government of Canada to develop comprehensive federal sustainable development strategies based upon the precautionary principle.

*Private Members' Business*

In March of this year, our government presented to Canadians a consultation paper outlining a proposed federal sustainable development strategy for Canada. That strategy will both strengthen how government promotes environmental sustainability and improve the transparency and accountability of how we do it. The proposed strategy constitutes an effective and balanced approach for the government to meet many of the principles and goals advanced by Bill C-469. These include the precautionary principle, transparency and accountability, and the goal of sustainable development.

The proposed federal sustainable development strategy represents a major step forward for the Government of Canada by including environmental sustainability as an integral part of its decision-making processes. It replaces a system that was established in 1995 when amendments to the Auditor General Act required key federal departments and agencies to table in Parliament their individual strategies and other actions for sustainable development. That system lacked an overarching, government-wide strategy. It lacked the key elements for government-wide goals, targets and common ways to measure federal accomplishments.

The three key elements of this strategy represent the first major improvement in the system since 1995. First, the strategy will provide an integrated, whole of government picture of actions to achieve environmental sustainability in Canada. Second, we are linking sustainable development and planning and reporting with the government's core expenditure planning and reporting system. Finally, we are establishing effective measurement, monitoring and reporting in order to track and report on progress to Canadians.

Our government welcomes this opportunity to improve planning and reporting for environmental sustainability. Taking into account international best practices and the purpose of the Federal Sustainable Development Act, Canada's first federal sustainable development strategy will take a pragmatic approach based on key priorities.

The proposed approach is one of responsible, practical progress. It will deliver a significant advance in terms of sustainable development in Canada and will also allow the government to build on it as we learn over time. It will allow the government to address environmental sustainability in a clear and coherent way, while at the same time placing an emphasis on getting the framework correct. It will help Canadians and Parliament identify whether there are gaps in the system and how effective government has been in hitting the targets it has set. It also will become a valuable tool to help governments set ambitious goals that will lead to a more sustainable Canada.

The strategy will streamline the way departments and agencies report and put sustainable development at the heart of government decision-making throughout the body of government. It will enhance transparency for Canadians, hold government departments and the ministers more accountable and will deliver better results.

Our government is also supportive of another principle advanced by Bill C-469, the polluter pays principle. This principle, also known as principle 16 of the Rio declaration, provides that national authorities should endeavour to promote the internalization of environmental costs and the use of environment instruments, taking into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear

the cost of the pollution they create with due regard to the public interest and without distorting international trade and investment.

• (1830)

In June 2009, Parliament passed the Environmental Enforcement Act, an act that amends the offence, penalty and enforcement provisions of nine environmental protection and wildlife conservation statutes. These include the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999; the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994; Canada's trade in endangered species legislation; and the Canada National Parks Act.

The Environmental Enforcement Act would ensure that enforcement and sentencing of environmental offences achieve the goals of deterrence, denunciation and, of course, restoration. This last goal reinforces the polluter pays principle by ensuring that offenders contribute to the restoration and remediation of the damage that they have caused to the environment.

Reflecting on the polluter pays principle, the Environmental Enforcement Act introduces minimum fines for offences that involve direct harm or risk of harm to the environment and obstruction of authority, not just the harm they caused but the harm they potentially could have caused. The act also adds a purpose clause to the sentencing provisions of the statutes it amends which would set out the fundamental purposes of deterrence, denunciation and restoration of that harmed environment. The act also emphasizes the importance of accounting for aggravating factors when determining appropriate penalties. It ensures that courts take into account damage to both the use and non-use values of the environment, ensuring that polluters pay the full value of any environmental damage they cause.

The Environmental Enforcement Act also directs environmental fines to the environmental damages fund, a special account in the accounts of Canada, from where they will be available to the community and other organizations for environmental restoration, improvement, research and development, and public education and awareness. This is a suiting penalty for someone who causes such degradation to our environment.

In closing, by its proposed federal sustainable development strategy and by the introduction of the new Environmental Enforcement Act, our government has already shown great support for the key principles of environmental law that Bill C-469 proposes to adopt as its guiding principles.

Therefore, our party, would like to see the debate on Bill C-469 continue in order to see how the bill would complement these and other existing measures and laws.



*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

As an elementary school principal, a new school that I built was environmentally friendly. It was called a green school. It was one of the most modern green initiatives built by any federal or provincial government in Nova Scotia. The children who attended that school were versed in the green abilities of that school: the ability to take rain off the roof and use it to flush the toilets; and the ability to hydrate itself by taking moisture out of the air, reconstituting it and putting it back into the air of the school.

The children who go to school in a building like that will emerge from that school, after years of education, with a sound sense of protection of the environment and what a green school can do, what a green country can do, what a green nation can do and what a green world would do.

The next generation is something we need to concentrate on, which is why we are here in Parliament today talking about the environment and about protecting the sustainable development for the future. Anyone who chooses to ignore the next generation and to pollute our environment will have to pay. They need to ensure that any damage they do to our environment is restored by them. They may also have to pay penalties for the harm, not only that they have committed, but the harm they could have potentially committed. Those are the principles our government has put in place in several pieces of legislation. Those are the principles that are also contained in this bill.

On behalf of our government, we wish to see the debate on this bill continue. There are many good principles in this bill, many principles in this bill that our government supports.

However, there is a question we need answered? Would this bill cause redundancy in the other bills that have already been produced, both by our government and previous governments? How would those redundancies be overcome? Would they put unnecessary issues at work so that our government and future governments would have to deal with redundant statutes, redundant bills and redundant policies?

Not only must we ensure that we support the principles contained in Bill C-469, we also must ensure that any redundancies in current legislation or in current statutes do not impact the future of our environment, our children's environment and their children's environment. It is our responsibility to work together in this House to ensure, not only that the environment is safe and green for this generation and the next, but for all future generations in this country. Stewardship is very important.

As a parliamentarian, I ask us all to take a good look at the—

•(1835)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the bill is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

## VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand this evening on this adjournment proceeding and speak about Veterans Affairs issues, in particular the new community war memorial program and the question I had asked. I am glad to see the parliamentary secretary is here this evening to answer some questions. I encourage him to take his pre-written speech and throw it out the window and let us get some really good answers on some real questions on this issue.

To set the tone on the community war memorial program, there is no disagreement from this side of the House. The Liberal Party fully supports the initiative by the government to institute a community war memorial program. We think it is a worthwhile initiative, so we will be supportive of that.

I want to ask some questions on it and get to the bottom of exactly how this community war memorial program will work. We will get to the facts of the matter and I will run my questions together and hopefully the parliamentary secretary will be able to address them and answer them correctly.

What the government does, and most governments have done this in the past, is make announcements on things, but then when we get into the finer detail of it, we realize it is not as good as what we first heard.

In the budget the Conservatives announced \$2 million for a community war memorial program and then we later found out this would be spread over two years. We are dealing with a \$1 million new community war memorial program. Hopefully the parliamentary secretary will be able to correct that or agree with it.

The second part is this is not to be confused with the cenotaph and monument restoration program. In some documents the deputy minister provided us with answers to our committee the figure was correct. The cenotaph and monument restoration program for 2010-11 is \$1 million. It is good to see that we have both programs where one is for new and one is for renewing the old cenotaphs and memorials. I want to ensure it is correct that both programs will be proceeding as announced.

This is where I get to my questions that I had asked the minister and they were brought up at committee. War memorials, whether they be new or old, are focused around one part in a particular town. Most towns have war memorials that need repairs, for which they apply to this program, and it is a good program. I have no qualms about it. It is a fabulous program for repairing those memorials. Communities that want to add on to their war memorial programs could apply under the new program and make application for this initiative.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Under the old program for renewing and updating war memorials, there is an independent committee. I will quote from the Veterans Affairs guidelines on this committee. It states:

Once all required materials have been submitted, they will be forwarded to a review committee which will include representation from national Veterans' organizations as well as experts from organizations or institutions involved in reparations and conservation of this type.

It sounds great. There is a program where an independent committee will review this. Is my time up already?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** It appears to be. I will check with the Clerk.

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** I was just getting going. I will sit down and listen to the parliamentary secretary.

• (1840)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

**Mr. Greg Kerr (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am sorry the member for Avalon was just getting started. I was just getting intrigued. I was going to compliment him on his tie and attire, but time will fly right by. The member was much gentler than our colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore earlier today. He was very calm in his approach.

The member is absolutely right. There is a brand new initiative coming in, a \$1 million a year program. Details will be coming out within days or weeks, I am not sure exactly when.

The reason this is considered an important initiative at this time is that we have had a lot of comments and correspondence from organizations and groups across the country saying that they really appreciate the fact that the existing program has repaired some thousands of monuments that were damaged or hurt in some way or aged because of the length of time they have been up.

As the member knows, the committee is in place. It is a good committee, chaired by a former parliamentary secretary as a matter of fact, and it has done a lot of good work.

People are saying they would like an opportunity to see brand new memorials to reflect some of the newer issues, newer challenges, newer veterans, et cetera. The minister came forward and said that we really should have a separate initiative to deal with that. The existing restoration group has done a phenomenal job; there is no question about that. These are veterans groups and so on that are represented so I would expect we would see a lot of similarity in approach. I expect the same kind of success should take place on behalf of the people of Canada.

I am not sure where the member would have gone next with his comments or questions as we did not hear them. I know from his questions and comments at committee that he certainly is very interested in the process and in the initiative. I hope we will get a chance to exchange comments in more detail in the coming weeks when the initiative has actually started.

I am not going to go any further because I do not want to go over my time.

It really is an example of good ideas coming in a non-partisan way and working well. I look forward to the start of this initiative.

• (1845)

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** Madam Speaker, I am going to cut right to the chase on my question now.

My point was that this new program will now be at the purview of the minister. He alone will make the decisions. That is what he said in committee and confirmed here in the House.

Rather than have the minister make this program political, I would encourage the government to let the existing independent committee allocate the funding.

Why will the parliamentary secretary and the minister not commit to let the committee handle the requests for new war memorials? It is set up and ready to go. The criteria would probably be very similar. I am glad to hear we are moving forward with this.

Will the government allow the committee to select the requests for funding with respect to the \$1 million over the next two years? If not, why not? It would make the process totally non-partisan so that war memorials would not be political decisions of a minister, and we know that would happen.

**Mr. Greg Kerr:** Madam Speaker, I failed to point out that the present chair is a former Liberal parliamentary secretary. The committee has managed to be non-partisan by keeping some of the players from the former government in place. Fairness is there.

I would like to correct one misconception, which I hope is just a misunderstanding. All of the recommendations, close to 6,000 on restoration, were decided by the minister's office. Every one that came forward went through a recommendation review process but all had to be signed off by the minister.

The minister is confirming that the intention is to follow the very successful process already in place. I do not know how different the committee will be. It will be a separate process, probably a separate committee, but I think it will follow the same kind of mandate. I just wanted to correct that. The minister is not politicizing this. The former Liberal minister had to sign off on each and every application on behalf of the government, not on behalf of the committee. The exact same process will be followed this time. It will not be any more politicized. It will follow the very successful process that is in place already.

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House regarding a question that was raised concerning the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. There is one very simple fact: The Conservative government is about to scrap the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was a program that was designed by aboriginal people. It was delivered by aboriginal people for aboriginal people to deal with the healing needs that have arisen as a result of the Indian residential schools experience.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The Conservatives want to replace that program with a program of their own design. It raises the question: Does the Conservative government think that it knows better than aboriginal people themselves what they need in their communities, for themselves and for their families? When we look at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, it has exceeded expectations. The results have been good. There have been lower suicide rates. There has been more intergenerational communication, less child apprehensions and lower alcoholism rates. All of these things have been positive about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It has been accountable and transparent.

These are facts that have been borne out by the government's own independent audit that was done in the fall of 2009. We have to ask the question: Why scrap success? Why scrap something that was working, vitally needed and urgently needed in communities?

The government is scrapping it when the need is rising. This is evidenced by the figures themselves. Claims from the common experience payment program were originally projected to be around 66,000. The actual applications are now 95,000 and counting. The independent assessment process claims were supposed to number somewhere around 12,500. They are now at 14,900 in the first two years.

The need is rising. Just when there is a need in our communities and people are reaching out for help, the government changes the program. To whom is it giving the supposed program? It is giving it to Health Canada. Nobody disputes that Health Canada has done some good work, but it does not have the expertise the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has developed over the last 12 or 13 years.

Health Canada's approach is not community based. Health Canada's approach is one of individualism. Health Canada's approach is one that is narrowly constructed. It does not reach out in the way the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has to families, groups and communities.

What has the initial impact of this change been? I will use some of the examples in Nunavut and Clyde River. When the government said that it was scrapping the program, it said that there would be no land-based healing, no counselling and no therapeutic programs. Seven counsellors have been laid off. Women's healing, youth drop-in and counselling, men's healing and family counselling have all stopped.

That is not helping the individual. That is not helping the community. The government is doing a disservice to those aboriginal Canadians who vitally need the help at this pivotal time in their lives.

● (1850)

**Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the extension of the question from March 31 of this year.

There is quite a background to all of this. Members will recall we had a take note debate in this House on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It has been ongoing at committee. As recently as today, the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee met on this subject.

In order to sort of inform, I can go into some background. Four years ago the Indian residential school settlement agreement earned the approval of all key parties: Canada, former students, churches, the Assembly of First Nations, and Inuit organizations. This was a long process that was exhaustive and included research, conciliation and negotiation.

Implementation of the Indian residential school settlement agreement began more than two years ago and aims to resolve a painful legacy. There are five main elements of that agreement: a common experience payment for all eligible former students who resided at recognized Indian residential schools; an independent assessment process to resolve claims of sexual and serious physical abuse; the truth and reconciliation commission; commemoration initiatives; and measures to support healing, such as the Indian residential schools resolution health support program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was initiated in 1998, long before this, and was never intended to last forever. As part of the foundation's 2010-15 corporate plan, it outlined a wind-down strategy and will continue to have 12 healing centres across Canada until March 2012.

The government's decision to fund the Aboriginal Healing Foundation beyond its original mandate of 2007 demonstrates a commitment to accountability for the legacy of Indian residential schools. The good work of organizations funded by the foundation informs the reconciliation with aboriginal peoples.

The government continues to ensure that appropriate supports are in place. This includes \$199 million over two years in budget 2010 for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Health Canada to address the increased demand for services due the common experience payment and the independent assessment process. Part of this money, \$66 million over two years, has been allocated to Health Canada's programs. This program provides mental health and emotional support services directly to students and their families.

It is important to note this is new money. It does not re-allocate existing funds once allotted to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. These funds enable Canada to fulfill its ongoing legal obligation to provide emotional and mental health support.

The government will continue to support a range of programs and initiatives that aim to improve the quality of life by aboriginal people in this country. Today at committee, I think we came to a very good understanding of how to move forward on this.

● (1855)

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Madam Speaker, nobody has even asked that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation last forever.

The government can honour its legal obligations and still fund the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. There are other obligations, moral and ethical, to the people who suffered during residential schools.

Let us look at the experience of Health Canada when it just started out. Health Canada now has its regional co-ordination headquarters for the people of Nunavut who might need help in Whitehorse. It is three time zones away.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

When Health Canada handed out its first pamphlets about its new program for health support, it was not in Inuktitut, the first language of many of the people in Nunavut or in Nunatsiavut, Labrador, or other places across the Arctic, it was only in English and French. When Health Canada mentioned the programs, it did not even mention Inuit or Métis. They were not even referenced in the pamphlets.

This is not the way to start a new healing program that is supposed to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of people.

I would end with this, and this is very poignant. At committee today an elder said, "We were brave children". I ask the government to show some bravery, to stand up and to support these people.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Madam Speaker, we recognize the importance of trying to bring closure to the legacy of the Indian residential schools. We know the importance of our legal, ethical and moral obligations. We are going to fulfill all of that.

One of the values of our committee and working together with other parties, working together with stakeholders, is to ensure that the kinds of shortcomings that were just described are things that we can address when we move forward.

For example, on the language issue, I concur. We need to be Inuit sensitive and not just provide literature but speakers who can be part of this program. That is a strong recommendation that we can make to Health Canada, to ensure that programming in Nunavut and other parts of Canada work properly.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the question I asked the minister was clearly about supply management, primarily in the dairy industry, and the new trade agreement that the government has entered into with the European Union and how we intend to ensure supply managed farmers that indeed we are going to maintain the system we have in place.

There are three pillars that are talked about when it comes to supply management: import controls that help plan production so that the level of imports must be known and the predictability is achieved through tariffs high enough to prevent imports above the agreed level of market access; producer pricing, acting together farmers are empowered to collectively negotiate fair prices for their products and production discipline; and producers plan and adjust their production to match consumer demand.

I raise those three pillars because my experience in the past in collective bargaining is that when we put things on the table, there is a give and take in the bargaining process.

The government may say to not worry about it, but the reality is it is on the table. In negotiations the understanding is that everything is on the table. What we find out is the EU's common agricultural policy is not up for debate. Therefore, everything is not on the table.

When we put something on the table, to get it off there is a price. The other side that bargains never lets us take things off the table that may be of benefit to them unless we pay the price to remove it.

That is why when we have things we want to keep, do not put them on the table. We put things on the table that we want to simply let them have because we no longer have value in them anymore.

The government clearly has said that it values supply management. What we have heard is that it believes in the program, it wants to support the program and yet it placed it on the bargaining table.

If that is the case, then what assurances can the government give supply managed farmers and what guarantees can it give that the government offer on supply management will be taken off the table. How will it come off the table and when will it be removed?

Those are critically important questions for supply managed farmers who, I might add, are one of the few farm groups across the country who are able to sustain themselves because of what they do on the farm.

Too many other farmers across the country, and we are seeing it in the agriculture committee and seeing it on the road talking to young farmers, are not making any money. They are digging themselves a deeper hole, going into more debt to sustain the farm or going off farm for second jobs to keep the farm.

One of the things we all recognize is that we eat. The other thing we also recognize is that the things we buy in the grocery store to feed ourselves come from somewhere else, other than the grocery store. They come from farms and farmers.

We need to ensure that these things are protected. We need to understand that supply management works. This is one area across the entire farm sector of this country that is working for farmers. It is working for consumers as well.

As someone who lives less than 30 minutes from Buffalo, I know that to save 50¢ I am not driving to Buffalo to get milk. Let me say that I will pay 50¢ for four litres of milk more than what is paid in the U.S. to ensure that we have farmers who can sustain themselves, stay on the farm, continue to farm, and provide the quality food that they do for us. They will continue to do that for us into the future because that is what they want to do.

Again, I ask the parliamentary secretary, what guarantees can the government offer that supply management will be taken off the table? How and when will it be removed?

• (1900)

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am a little bit puzzled that we are here tonight in the House talking about supply management. Certainly, no government in the history of this country has ever been more clear and more direct in its support for supply management.

The current Minister of International Trade, the former minister of international trade and the minister of international trade before him, all Conservative ministers, have supported supply management. We have debated it at committee. We have debated it in the House. Our position has never changed. We have been behind our farmers in supply management 100%.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I spoke on supply management myself at the WTO in Delhi. I have spoken at committee many times. I have to ask the question myself. Why are we speaking about supply management again, unless somebody is trying to spread misinformation about the position that this government has taken on supply management? The former government put supply management on the table in Doha. We fought against that in opposition, and certainly supply management has been defended every day by this government.

What we have here is a negotiation with the EU. Of course, the member would not want to talk about a free trade agreement or a comprehensive trading agreement with the European Union because his party has never support any free trade agreement that has come to the House.

The reality is that we are negotiating a trade agreement, a high quality, ambitious agreement with the EU. It is a priority for our government and for Canada. These negotiations represent a huge opportunity for all Canadians, including Canadian farmers. But specifically, in regard to supply management, our government has made it very clear we strongly support supply management.

We continue to defend interests that are important to these industries in particular. The hon. member mentioned milk, but he would also realize that the feather and egg industry also supply manage. It is specific to those industries. We also look out for the interests of farmers who are not supply managed. That is the job of government and that is a job that we take very seriously in our ongoing negotiations with the European Union.

The reality is that we live in a country that is based on trade. We have tremendous potential to expand opportunities for Canadian businesses, to expand opportunities for Canadian workers, to supply more dollars in Canadian homes, and open up opportunities for European businesses, families, workers and homes as well.

This is not a one-way street. Supply management is not on the table and the hon. member knows that. He is being a bit disingenuous when he tries to say that it is, but it is a fulsome and complete negotiation that will have discussions on a number of issues. At the end of the day we hope to be able to agree on a comprehensive trading agreement with the European Union that will benefit both the European Union and Canada.

● (1905)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Madam Speaker, if I heard the parliamentary secretary correctly, he said it is not on the table. I would ask him,

when he gets up again, to clarify, is he stating for the House categorically that supply management is not and will not be on the table in the negotiations between the EU and Canada?

When it comes to free trade, he is right. I do not agree with free trade agreements, but I agree with trade policies and fair policies.

I would also remind him that the Minister of Agriculture said that he is also a strong supporter of supply managed systems, and so is the Minister of International Trade, who went on to talk about the fact that he too supports them.

The question is, is the hon. parliamentary secretary guaranteeing in the House this evening that supply management is not presently, nor will it be, on the table during these negotiations with the EU at any point during this round of negotiations? Can supply managed folks in the dairy sector, and all the other sectors that are supply managed, breathe a sigh of relief tonight, knowing that he has guaranteed that supply management is not on the table for negotiation?

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** Madam Speaker, I guess a direct answer is the best answer for the hon. member. However, to be fair, I did not ask him to clarify his position. I am glad he did. He does not support trade agreements. His party has never voted for any trade agreement that has come to the House. I do not know how it expects Canadians to have jobs and feed their families. We are a trading nation. I am glad he clarified his position on that.

I do not need to clarify my position on supply management. I can tell the hon. member and everyone else in the House that our party has defended and supported supply management at every negotiation and opportunity in this place and abroad.

The reality is the supply management industry is not knocking down my door. It is not asking for meetings with the parliamentary secretary or the minister on a regular basis. The reason for that is it knows the position of this government and this government supports supply management.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:09 p.m.)





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