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(HANSARD)

Monday, November 15, 2010

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 15, 2010

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.) moved that Bill C-481, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code (mandatory retirement age), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Laval—Les Îles, I am proud to rise in this House to speak to Bill C-481 at second reading. The bill we are discussing today would amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code regarding mandatory retirement age.

My bill has three main objectives. The first is to repeal subsection 9(2) of the Canadian Human Rights Act. This amendment would ensure that unions and federal employees' organizations would no longer have the ability to exclude, expel or suspend an individual from membership in the organization because that individual has reached the normal age of retirement for individuals working in positions similar to the position of that individual. To clarify, this means within the same professional group, but not necessarily in the same organization.

The second objective is to replace paragraphs 15(1)(*b*) and 15(1)(*c*) of the Canadian Human Rights Act with the following for paragraph 15(1)(*b)*:

It will be possible to terminate the employment of an individual who has not reached the minimum age that applies to that employment by law or under regulations that may be made by the Governor in Council.

The third objective is to repeal paragraph 235(2)(*b*) of the Canada Labour Code. By repealing this paragraph of the Canada Labour Code, the legislator is ensuring that the employer will be obligated to pay severance pay to an employee who reaches an age at which the individual is entitled to receive a retirement pension from a complementary pension fund.

[*English*]

Many public service employees subject to union agreements do not want to give up their severance pay, which is a one-time payment. For many people, particularly single mothers or newcomers into the Canadian labour force, being able to stay at work longer is an important part of their career plan. Many who have been unable to save enough for retirement are depending on the extra money as part of their transition into retirement.

[*Translation*]

According to a 2008 Statistics Canada survey, only 29% of older workers indicated that their workplace pension would be their main source of income and only 14% have RRSPs. These preliminary results were recently presented by Jean Pignal, from the surveys division of Statistics Canada, at a workshop in Ottawa.

[*English*]

For the information of members, according to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada website, approximately 12,000 federally regulated businesses and industries are employing 840,000 people, or 10% of Canadian workers under the Canada Labour Code, who would be affected by this bill if it were to become law.

Before I go further in the time I have, I will briefly inform the House of the genesis of Bill C-481. I will not go into lengthy detail about the cases that sparked my bill because there are several layers to these cases, including a Federal Court judicial review.

On August 28, 2009, in its second decision, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that it was discrimination based on age for Air Canada to force two of its pilots to retire because they had reached age 60. According to the tribunal, the Air Canada Pilots Association had knowingly signed a union agreement with Air Canada that violated section 15 of the charter prohibiting discrimination on a number of grounds, including age.

[*Translation*]

The tribunal also ruled that not only had the Canadian Human Rights Act been breached because it prohibits discrimination based on age, but paragraph 15(1)(*c*) of the Canadian Human Rights Act is contrary to the charter because it perpetuates the prejudice with the following statement:

> an individual's employment is terminated because that individual has reached the normal age of retirement for employees working in positions similar to the position of that individual;

Bill C-481 aims to revoke that paragraph.

[*English*]

The tribunal based its first decision, which was set aside by the Federal Court in its judicial review, on its perception of what was normal, especially whether other airlines had the same requirements. In fact, not all airlines have the same requirements, at least not all Canadian airlines.

The earliest available statistics show us that between 1920 and 1922 it was normal for males to have an average life expectancy of 59 years and for females 61 years. However, in the 21st century we have a vastly different Canadian population than in the early 1900s. Today, life expectancy for males is 78.3 years and for females 80.7 years on average. In other words, what was normal then in terms of age is certainly no longer normal today.

[*Translation*]

The original conditions for mandatory retirement were unquestionably based on the social reality. Following the second world war, workers demanded stable jobs, better access to health care and safe workplaces. Workers asked for permanent economic security despite dips in the economy. The government listened to these concerns and created a number of social programs.

● (1110)

[*English*]

However, as unions gained strength in speaking for workers' rights, the mandatory retirement age of 60 became normal practice in union agreements. Today, in the 21st century, our social environment dictates a different course of action.

As federal legislators, it is our duty to set the standards in our laws. Our charter gives us that guidance. Transport Canada, in case my colleagues are not aware, sets the licensing policies for all our pilots. There are very stringent rules.

If this section of the Canadian Human Rights Act remains, it would continue to set a blanket standard for all organizations without paying attention to the charter or the specific norms that dictate policies within that organization, even though work positions may appear to be similar.

[*Translation*]

Just a few days ago, on November 8, 2010, the tribunal ordered Air Canada to compensate George Vilven, 67, and Neil Kelly, 65. Air Canada must reinstate these two former employees with the level of seniority they would have reached had they continued to work. They must also be compensated for lost wages and benefits associated with their seniority as well as for the pain and suffering they endured.

[*English*]

In fact, the tribunal was even harsher in its criticism and called on Air Canada and its union to pay for wilful and reckless damage. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Tribunal does not have the power to extend its decision to other cases. The decision rendered is only pertinent to these two complaints.

The tribunal cannot force Air Canada and the association to stop signing agreements that include mandatory requirements. Therefore, this clause, according to the tribunal in its remedial actions, remains operative. Only we as legislators have the power to repeal the defence now being used to terminate employees in any federally regulated employee organization by amending the law as it now stands.

It has long been recognized by the courts that this is a complex issue and can only be resolved by the legislature.

[*Translation*]

In 2006, when the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was considering gradually raising the maximum age limit for pilots to 65 years, the Government of Canada said it agreed with the idea but its official response was negative because Canada wanted to eliminate the age limit, given that section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination on the basis of age. Canada does not reduce the privileges of a pilot who has reached the age of 60. Canada does not object if a pilot who is over 60 and holds a valid medical certificate from an ICAO contracting state pilots a registered foreign aircraft in Canadian airspace.

Research shows that, according to current trends, abolishing mandatory retirement should not have a significant impact on the average age of new retirees or on the total number of years worked. For people concerned about the consequences—I have spoken to many of them—the research indicates that two-thirds of older workers choose to retire before age 65, 43% of all workers retire before 65 and the average retirement age for all workers was 61 in 1991. In addition, 11.8% of Canadians between 65 and 69 years of age were part of the labour force in 2001. Immigrants and women may remain in the labour force longer to build up larger pensions. Employers are better able to plan for turnover.

[*English*]

I call upon my colleagues to pass the bill as quickly as possible so we can continue to uphold the hard-won rights of citizens of Canada and all those who fought and continue to fight for the type of democracy in which we are so privileged to live today.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

I would like my colleagues opposite to remember that Brian Mulroney's Conservative government, in 1986, accepted the principle that served as the basis for the sixth recommendation in the report of the Parliamentary Committee on Equal Rights, which suggested that the Canadian Human Rights Act be amended so that employers could not invoke certain grounds.

Since then, we have made a number of changes and we must continue to build our labour force. The unions I have spoken to are prepared to implement these changes. A number of them went before the Canadian Human Rights Commission on behalf of their members and won their cases.

[*English*]

History holds our everyday lives together. Let us not be stuck in tradition because of the implemented laws that were necessary then. Let us use reasoned experience to guide us as legislators in the 21st century to continue to do the right thing for Canadians.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very impassioned appeal for those who want to continue to work beyond the mandatory age of retirement. I understand the sensibilities of folks who want to do that.

Unfortunately, the examples often used are for less onerous professions. It is not for people who have been slinging blocks for the past 45 years and think they can continue to do it, or for others who do manual labour.

My question is from a human resource perspective because I have had this discussion with resource managers before. When an employee has reached the age of mandatory retirement but does not want to retire, sometimes the resource management team of the company or the agency the person works for will keep that long-standing employee even though the employee is about to reach the age of retirement.

However, if the person is no longer capable of doing the job but the person wants to continue working, what happens if the employer says that the person cannot continue working?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I had no audio during the member's question. I heard the preamble, but I did not hear the question itself. Would the member mind repeating the question? The audio was not working properly.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, this is on the question of an employee who has reached the age of mandatory retirement under the present legislation, but wishes to stay beyond retirement age. However, the employer does not wish the employee to stay because the employer is fully aware that the employee is no longer capable of performing the essential duties of the job. If the employer says he or she does not want the employee anymore because the employee cannot do the job, what does the employee do? Where does that leave the employee if the employee does not intend to retire?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about two different things. I am talking about one thing and I think that my hon. colleague is talking about another. I am talking about equal circumstances where the employee is doing a good job and there are no complaints on the part of the employer.

We are talking about a certain type of employer. We are talking about the Government of Canada and companies that are linked to the Government of Canada but are at arm's-length.

The kind of situation I am talking about is when an employer has no complaints, but tells an employee who is now 65 years old that he or she must retire.

Bill C-481 is not concerned with people who are not doing their jobs correctly. If an employee is not doing his or her job correctly, then the onus is on the employer to present that to him or her.

● (1120)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the age of 65 actually has its genesis back at the time of Bismarck when people at the age of 65 were referred to as the "unnecessary eaters", but as the member pointed out, we have a longer life expectancy. In fact, some people who have not been sufficiently able to provide for their pensions need their job, and so I very much support this bill.

The gist of the previous member's question was whether or not there is a presumption here that in all cases, for example, a firefighter or police officer, although those are not federal, the employee would still have the physical and mental capability to do the job, and would in all other respects be able to discharge the responsibilities of that position, with the only issue being that the individual has reached the age of 65.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, 65 is not a magic age. It does not happen that the employee does his or her job well at the age of 64 and nine months, but all of a sudden at the age of 65 can no longer perform his or her job. If the employee is not performing the job well, it tends to be a progressive deterioration. It is not a black and white issue.

As I said earlier, if the employer is not satisfied with what the employee is doing, then it is up to the employer to let the employee know before the age of 65. The age has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to Bill C-481, tabled in this House by my hon. colleague from Laval—Les Îles, with some background with respect to the government's position on this bill.

The bill proposes to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code. It would, in effect, put a stop to allowing mandatory retirement within the federally regulated private sector.

I commend my hon. colleague for having reintroduced this bill, which was first introduced in this House last November.

The matter of whether we should continue to have mandatory retirement in the federally regulated private sector is something that should be explored. It is timely. Therefore, this matter can be debated and must be debated here in Parliament. Mandatory retirement, as an issue, is taking on more importance for a number of reasons. Among them is the fact that our population is aging and our birthrate is in decline.

My view, and the position of the Government of Canada, is that there is a lot of merit in pursuing what is being proposed in Bill C-481. Provided that some additional amendments are made, the government would be prepared to support this bill.

I will identify those necessary amendments in a moment but first I would like to take a few moments to talk about why the provisions in this bill are important. The worker's right to choose is one of them.

Forcing someone to retire because of age is a form of discrimination. Unless there are compelling reasons, such as health and safety concerns, workers should have the right to choose when they retire. It should be a choice based on lifestyle and financial and health circumstances. It should not be decided for someone because they have reached a defined age.

Today, approximately 10% of Canada's population continues to work after age 65. The average age of retirement in Canada is 62. Given these facts, it is worth noting that mandatory retirement policies in the federally regulated private sector currently affect very few employees in practice. How few are affected by the mandatory retirement? Less than 2% of the federally regulated employers. Among large employers with 100 employees or more, about 10% have a mandatory retirement policy. That is a major drop from about 25% in the late 1990s. Within the federal public service, the practice of mandatory retirement ended in 1986. There has been consistent progress.

Turning to my next point, Bill C-481 is important as it represents consistent progress toward current employment practices. By eliminating blanket exemptions and exceptions for mandatory retirement in the federal jurisdiction, we would help align federal rules so that they are consistent with the provincial and territorial human rights legislation.

Having said this, some modest amendments are necessary before the government can give full support to this bill. Specifically, we must consider what the repeal of paragraph 15(1)(b) of the Canadian Human Rights Act would entail. It would remove the ability of the Government of Canada to enact regulations that could set out maximum age requirements for those groups for whom specific age requirements are necessary. That regulation-making power is important, so it needs to be maintained.

There is a regulation enacted under the authority of paragraph 15 (1)(b) of the Canadian Human Rights Act that supports the mandatory retirement policy currently in place for the Canadian Forces. This poses a concern to the government in Bill C-481, in its current form.

Repeal of this paragraph would pose significant challenges to the operational capability of the Canadian Forces. It also could have an impact on their ability to contain costs and to manage military personnel effectively and efficiently.

To maintain an effective and ready force, the Canadian Forces must recruit from within its ranks. It requires a continuous flow of personnel to ensure appropriate experience and expertise throughout the ranks. The longer members serve, the more wear and tear they will incur due to the physical and psychological demands of military service and the greater the risk will be of individual performance failures with consequences for mission success and the health and safety of others.

For these reasons, the Canadian Forces seeks to maintain its existing mandatory retirement policy. Therefore, amendments are needed to safeguard the government's ability to effectively manage the Canadian Forces.

There are other areas, such as interprovincial and international transportation activities where there may be circumstances that warrant a mandatory policy.

● (1125)

Moreover, departments whose mandates cover the affected stakeholder group, for example, Transport Canada with respect to the airline and maritime industry, may wish to propose regulations for consideration to allow mandatory retirement policies for those industries as long as they are necessary and proportional under the charter.

With respect to severance pay, the bill also proposes to amend the Canada Labour Code to remove the provision that denies employees severance pay upon involuntary termination if they are eligible for pension benefits, whether public or private. Age should not be a determinant of eligibility for severance pay. All workers should be eligible for severance pay when they are involuntarily terminated. For this reason, I support repealing this provision as proposed in the bill. Further, an adjustment period is required.

We also propose that a provision be added to Bill C-481 so that there is a transition period. This is important. It would help unions and employers make adjustments to adapt to the changes. It would give them time to review their human resource policies, pensions, benefit plans, and collective agreements to ensure compliance. This is a sensible thing to do. It would ensure a smooth transition.

Abolishing the practice of mandatory retirement within the federal jurisdiction would be consistent with current Government of Canada policies regarding older workers. Canada is facing the challenges of an aging population. It is projected that the proportion of Canadians aged 65 or older will increase from 13% to roughly 25%.

In addition, the ratio of workers to pensioners is expected to shrink from four workers for every retiree to two workers for every retiree. All of this would happen by 2030. Within that period of time, these massive demographic changes will mean added fiscal pressures on Canada's ability to manage increasing health care and pension plan costs. Canada will need to retain its skilled, seasoned workers and make greater use of their talents for longer.

These measures would also benefit women and immigrant workers in Canada, two groups that are more likely to re-enter the workforce or join it later in life than others. By prohibiting this workplace practice, these workers will be able to accrue additional years of service and strengthen their financial security should they wish to continue working beyond the fixed retirement age.

Let me restate the Government of Canada's position on Bill C-481. We would be prepared to support it provided that the following three amendments are adopted. First, the bill should be amended to maintain the regulation-making power in paragraph 15 (1)(b) of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Second, the bill should include a transition provision to allow employers and unions to adjust to the changes. Third, the bill should include a coming into force provision.

The proposed approach makes good policy sense. Although in practice it will affect only a very small number of federal jurisdiction private sector employees, it would remove barriers to continue labour market participation for older workers. This approach would also allow the government to retain its regulation-making power with regard to imposing mandatory retirement in exceptional cases for certain industries due to health, safety, and operational reasons and to ensure compliance with international laws and regulations.

With those exceptions, we are prepared to support the bill as proposed by my hon. colleague.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is our turn to speak to the bill before us here today, Bill C-481. Basically, I believe I can sum up our feelings, our response to this bill, by saying that it is long overdue.

I find it quite interesting that, at the end of 2010, and with a bill from the official opposition no less, the government seems to accept this idea. However, we must be wary of the recent proposed amendments, because the government has already played that game, specifically, by giving the power to create regulations and implement legislation, although that is usually its way of evading the issue. It says that we can do whatever we like in the House, that we can pass any bills we like, but it will not necessarily implement them.

When a bill is introduced in the House and supported by the majority in this House, it should be implemented. However, I do realize there is a transition period.

At this time, human rights laws and the Canada Labour Code allow both employers and unions to tell people celebrating their 65th birthday that, while they may have been good workers yesterday, tomorrow they will be too old. So those workers are thanked and shown the door. The Canada Labour Code allows this. And this does not apply only to a limited number of employers; it also applies to all Government of Canada employees. Thus, when anyone who works in the public service or for any Crown corporation turns 65, he or she can be told, "Thank you and congratulations, but we no longer need you, so, good bye".

This is one of the best examples of the difference between Quebec society and Canadian society and it must be respected. We have to wonder how this came about. It is quite simply because we are different. When we say that Quebec is not like Canada, of course that is because of language issues, because of the way we regulate our markets and because of many other things, especially because Quebec was given that right in 1982. We have been different in that respect for nearly 30 years. We are different because we said, why not? Just because someone celebrates their 65th birthday does not mean they suddenly become incompetent, that they are not needed and that we can get rid of them. Since 1982, we have not seen this type of behaviour in Quebec by either employers or unions. No one in Quebec would ever consider the idea of wishing someone a happy birthday and then never seeing them again.

Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, a person can be prevented from joining a union and a union has the right to expel or suspend a union member. Remarkably, the Canada Labour Code makes it possible to get rid of those people. In Quebec, we have the fundamental right to live and the fundamental right to keep working. It is the way attitudes evolve. Earlier we heard some statistics. In 2001, the Government of Canada conducted studies that found that in 20 years—in 2021—or 10 years from now, there would be as many Canadians 65 and older as children. We know that the baby boomers are beginning to retire now.

In the provinces, there has been every manner of tax and fee possible and unimaginable in order to have a health care system. What does it accomplish? Among other things, it allows us to live longer.

● (1135)

It also makes it possible to tell people that 65 is not old. It is one year older than 64 and one year younger than 66. It is a number; that is all. The age of 65 is not synonymous with incapacity or incompetence.

Some would say that there are dangerous occupations that require a certain amount of dexterity. I agree, but a loss of dexterity does not necessarily occur at age 65. It may occur at age 50. Very few of us here could play hockey in the National Hockey League, not because we are old but because we no longer have the ability to do so, and it is not at age 65 that this happens.

Unelected senators can serve until they are 75 years old, while MPs can serve in the House as long as the voters continue to elect us to office. So, in Quebec, we determined that the people should also be able to work until they freely decide to retire.

Are we able to live off our retirement pensions at age 65? I am the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Finance. A number of people have come to see us here in Ottawa to tell us that they cannot retire at age 65 because of a lack of income. They want to be able to continue working to achieve their full potential, because they are fit and because they want to pass on their knowledge. Why not?

Before I was elected to Parliament, I taught at the HEC Montréal, where people passed on their knowledge. People are asked to pass on their knowledge to younger generations. There is a problem if the mandatory retirement age is set at 65. On the other hand, people need to have the means to retire at 65. The people who came to see us said that because of what they get in Canada and Quebec pension plan benefits and the fact that the guaranteed income supplement is not paid automatically in Canada, they have a hard time making ends meet once they reach 65. Why not let these people keep on working? But the way to do it is not by making regulations and asking the government to implement this legislation when it sees fit. Canadians want this bill to be passed in 2010. Quebec has had similar legislation since 1982.

I am currently touring Quebec with some of my Bloc colleagues and talking to people about our budget expectations for 2011. A number of people told us we should carry on with our work, and that is what we are doing. In Quebec, no one is telling us that the mandatory retirement age should be 65, except for people working in labour relations in Canada.They wonder why their neighbours should have the right to keep on working when they do not because of the Canada Labour Code. That is discrimination.

The minister or the parliamentary secretary is saying that he could support such a bill with these amendments, but that basically the Government of Canada does not want to. Canada is free to prevent people from working after age 65. In Quebec, we saw the light 30 years ago. That is one more reason to respect each other despite our differences.

● (1140)

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-481, a bill which would amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code to prohibit federally regulated employers, and that is private sector employers subject to federal acts and regulations, as well as the federal public administration from setting a mandatory retirement age.

I welcome this debate because it allows us to finally take a closer look at the myth of mandatory retirement in our country. In fact, there is no universal prohibition in place now that would stop all Canadians from working past the age of 65. People over 65 are working all over the country. They are university professors, doctors, lawyers and, as I look around this chamber, apparently quite a few politicians too.

Those of us in these professions are blessed. We make up a small percentage of working adults who actually enjoy our work, at least I hope we do. For me, the work that I do right now is gratifying and I am excited about the chance to do it on a daily basis. I know most other members in the House feel the same way.

However, we are fortunate, and we are definitely in the minority. Most of the world, most of the working people in our country, are not like us. Most working men and women do not have jobs that are clean and safe. Working for them is not a vocation or a calling; it is simply a necessity.

I think about the industrial workers in my home town of Hamilton. I think about the tens of thousands of men and women who have worked in the steel mills. They are not desk jockeys. They were walking along catwalks around furnaces, molten steel flying and splashing and they have the scars from 20 and 30 years of being burned by it. It is hotter than Hades and they are inhaling particulate matter that will impact them for the rest of their lives.

They are not there because they love the smell of molten steel. They are there so they can take home a paycheque at the end of a long week's work. Despite the fact that their bodies are no longer as strong in their 50s as they were in their 20s, they keep working because they need the money to pay off their second mortgage, not a new mortgage for a better home, but the second time they have taken out a mortgage on their existing homes so they can finance their children's college or university education. They are desperate for an exit point.

It is not just about steelworkers. It is about workers in hundreds of occupations in jobs from coast to coast to coast. It is about miners in Sudbury and Voisey's Bay. It is about construction workers whose back-breaking work exposes them to the cruellest of elements. It is about nurses whose physical jobs give their profession the highest rate of workplace injuries in the country.

The bill before us today is about federally regulated workplaces, but the same physical strains exist for many of the proud members of the teamsters or the CAW, CEP, CUPW, CUPE, PSAC, and I could go on. Their jobs are not like ours. There comes a time when their bodies just cannot do it anymore, and that is to say nothing of their souls.

That is why pensions are always at the forefront of negotiations in organized workplaces. People are not looking to work past the age of 65. They want to be able to retire as early as possible, and as early as possible usually means a time when their pensions will have accrued to a sufficient amount to allow for a retirement with relative income security.

The normal age for retirement in Canada has therefore become 65. Age 65 is when the old age security pension benefits begin, and most private and public retirement plans have been designed to provide income to people starting at 65. A specific age is needed because people have to select premium payments by contributors to calculate how much money is available to retirees when they leave the program, which is to say, when they retire. In that way retirement age and retirement income are inextricably linked.

We have had a number of debates in the House about the inadequacy of public pensions and the increasing incidents of solvency insufficiencies in private pension plans. To date, the government has merely paid lip service to improving those pension systems. While they wait for the government to act, literally thousands of Canadians, who have worked hard all their lives and who have played by the rules, are finding it impossible to make ends meet on their meagre pension incomes.

Therefore, what do they do? They go out and find another job to supplement their pensions. The now iconic Wal-Mart greeter is but one example. Thousands of seniors are now working in the retail sector and at fast food places, not because these are their dream jobs but because they have to survive.

Let us be absolutely clear. These seniors are not working by choice. They are working these minimum wage jobs in their golden years because it keeps the wolves at bay. It is not about choice. All too often that is the language the mandatory retirement debate wraps itself in, but this is really a debate about values.

● (1145)

For decades, trade unionists and other activists fought hard and struggled to ensure that future generations would not have to work until they dropped dead in the workplace. They fought for pensions and a retirement at a reasonable enough age that older Canadians could spend their senior years doing all the things they did not have time to do while they were working, perhaps volunteering, perhaps teaching English as a second language, perhaps helping raise their grandchildren or perhaps even going back to school. Those options offer real choices, and they are an integral part of the fulfilling retirement we promised workers in exchange for the wage concessions and taxes they contributed toward building their pension funds.

When women work past the age of 65, it is not because they would not rather be pursuing other interests. To paraphrase American Democrat Paul Tsongas, nobody on her deathbed ever said "I wish I'd spent more time at the office". But women's work in the home has been so devalued by successive Liberal and Conservative governments in Canada that many women do not have adequate pension contributions to be able to survive without a paying job in their golden years.

However that is not a so-called choice that women should have to make. The solution to that is not the abolition of mandatory retirement. The solution is to recognize, value and compensate the incredibly hard work women do in their homes and revamp the system to take into account late entries into the workforce or interrupted participation. Only when such a system is in place would women have a real choice about whether or not to work past the age of 65.

So again, debates about retirement age and retirement income are inextricably linked.

Herein lies the real fear about legislation that seeks to abolish mandatory retirement. As I said before, thousands of Canadians are already working past the age of 65, and there is no law that prohibits that. But 65 is the accepted age for pension calculations. So by doing away with what is described as mandatory retirement, the fear is that it will allow pension fund managers, both public and private, to raise the age for pension eligibility. Let us be clear. There is a huge lobby from the corporate side for precisely that, because there are huge cost savings at stake for employers. For every year that the retirement age is raised beyond 65, the employer's pension liabilities are reduced dramatically.

Heck, I would wager that the only reason Canadian pension legislation passed with an age limit of 65 in the first place is that, at that time, the average life expectancy of a Canadian, predominantly male, worker was 57 years of age. Clearly, it is not a great risk to offer pensions at 65 when a third of eligible workers would never, ever reach it.

Fortunately, life expectancies are now well into the eighties for Canadians. But existing pensions are proving wholly inadequate. Two-thirds of Canadians do not have a company pension plan. One-third of Canadian families have no retirement savings, and management fees from some mutual funds can consume as much as 35% to 45% of RRSP savings over a period of 40 years. Canadians are looking to their government for help.

However, the government is looking at the issue through a different lens. Life expectancies into the eighties mean that both governments and employers are looking for a way out of meeting their pension obligations, and the abolition of the mandatory retirement age is the first step down on that slippery slope.

I cannot wait to hear from Canadians when this bill is dealt with in committee. I can well imagine that there will be some who do sincerely want to continue their research or other professional pursuits well past the age of 65, and I acknowledge that the typical justification for mandatory retirement may not be appropriate. After all, if the argument is that certain occupations are either too dangerous or require too high a level of physical or mental skill for most people over the age of 65, then the age does seem somewhat arbitrary since it is not based on an actual physical evaluation of an individual person. That is where arguments about discrimination or ageism legitimately enter the debate.

Unless there are meaningful reforms to the pension system first, I find it hard to believe that the abolition of mandatory retirement would be in the interests of the hardworking Canadians I represent in my riding of Hamilton Mountain, and I cannot wait to hear from them on this important issue when the bill comes to committee.

● (1150)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Laval—Les Îles for bringing forward Bill C-481, which has been before this place in the past. I am pleased to hear the input of other colleagues and other parties as well.

As we know, the bill itself is seeking to repeal subsection 9(2) of the Canadian Human Rights Act, to replace paragraphs 15(1)(b) and (c) of the Canadian Human Rights Act and, third, to repeal paragraph 235(2)(b) of the Canada Labour Code.

Ultimately this all has to do with the subject matter of mandatory retirement age, and in fact, recently courts have ruled that the case of Air Canada and a couple of pilots was a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What I would like to talk about is why we should do this.

Pragmatically, the last speaker raised some interesting points about what some employers would do to take advantage of that situation, but this bill in no way amends pension plans that organizations have established. Pension benefits and defined pension benefit plans lay out the number of years of service necessary to accrue the vesting that is necessary to get maximum benefits. Should any employer decide it wants to propose changes to any of its benefit plans, including its pension benefit plan, that is a matter between the employer and the employees and the existing pensioners, to determine whether it is in the best interests of the employees and the long-term benefit of a pension plan for that organization.

However this is a situation where we have a life expectancy in Canada that has increased enormously over the last few decades. As I mentioned earlier in a question, the age of 65, in terms of the age at which people were no longer useful, came up during the time of Bismarck, and the people at age 65 were referred to as the unnecessary eaters. They were the burdens of society.

My father-in-law passed away at age 65. He virtually worked for the same company all his working life, but when he reached the age of 65, all of a sudden he did not go to work. The door was closed. There was this barrier. It was mandatory and he left that job. He was dead within three months. I think it was the culture shock of having lost that life and that involvement. He was a sharp, bright guy who did an extremely good job for his company, but that is just what the rules were.

I have to wonder whether or not this is another reason that we have to deal with this, because there are people who have the capacity and the physical and mental ability to do excellent jobs. When we look at some of the fundamentals, for example, that today about 70% of the jobs in Canada require post-secondary education and in 10 years 77% of jobs will require post-secondary education, we cannot keep up with the demand for qualified people to do jobs. Therefore there is a lot of pressure from companies to keep employees longer, because they have the experience and the expertise. They are going to allow that flexibility to companies to be able to have that expertise, to bring along and train those to take over important positions.

As the mover of the bill mentioned, this particular bill is only going to affect about 10% of employees in Canada, but I have a feeling that it will be a subject matter that will be taken up in all jurisdictions as it relates to retirement age.

I must admit that there will be some arguments. We heard some from the last speaker, the arguments some people might have in opposing this bill, and in fact there are a number that the mover has identified. One is that unions might have some concern because they fought to protect workers' rights.

● (1155)

There is this concern about a slippery slope, that somehow this bill would give them a foundation or a route to be able to use and that companies would start to erode away pension rights under the plans they operate. This bill has nothing to do with that. That is really a matter that is the purview of other jurisdictions and in fact of the company and the unions representing the employees in these matters.

Every plan lays out, in detail, the criteria necessary for people to qualify for benefits, how many years they have to serve and at what age they can start to collect. Many plans emulate some of the things the Canada pension plan has, where people can elect to take early retirement at an actuarially reduced amount or may defer their pension. A lot of teachers do. In fact, with an OMERS pension, people can defer their pension and even after they have retired can make additional premium contributions to top up by having additional investments in the plan.

There are many issues here. I would not be too concerned about the slippery slope argument. This bill is not suggesting, in any way, shape or form, that other jurisdictions would have to look at the impact. It is their responsibility to look at that.

The displacement of younger workers is another issue that will come up, I suspect, as the labour markets expand. As I indicated, we do have situations now where we are unable to fill all of the skill sets necessary in jobs that are available in Canada now, which is why we have had a significant increase in the demand for new Canadians to come, who have those skill sets. We need a better balance, obviously, of training and education for people who are in Canada so that we can, as a normal course, fill those jobs.

This is not an issue now. In fact the flexibility in the system for people who have reached age 60 or 65, depending on the institution we are talking about, has that latitude.

As I pointed out earlier, we have come through some very difficult times. Clearly the adequacy of pensions for today's retirees is a very serious issue. There are a lot of people who have not been able to accrue sufficient pension benefits.

What do we expect people to do under a mandatory retirement system, when they can no longer have the continuity of their job? If they leave this job, where they are an engineer making $150,000, trying to make sure they have their retirement, what do they do?

They have to go to some other employer to see if that employer will hire them under its rules. How many of these people go to nominal jobs that do not really match their skill sets and do not make them feel useful? This makes no sense.

It does make sense when people have choices. Workers have the right to choose to stay and to continue to provide good service.

I do know that there are provisions in certain elements of society where people cannot go on beyond a certain age. One of the ones I was involved in was firefighting. There was an amendment made to allow firefighters to qualify for full Canada pension benefits earlier than the normal age of 65. The reason was that the life expectancy of firefighters is substantially less than the national average, because of the dangers and the risks to health associated with that profession.

There are others. I think one of the concerns that may come up is with regard to pilots. We have a 67-year-old pilot who was forced out of his job. We have to presume here, very clearly, and it is not a presumption; it is a requirement. We have to presume that for those who choose to continue to work in a job, the understanding is that they continue to be fully qualified, fully trained, up to date, physically and mentally fit as necessary to be able to do the job in a perfectly satisfactory fashion in accordance to the criteria of the employer.

This is not to say that a pilot who has lost the edge can continue to be a pilot. The issue is that meeting the job criteria fully is the presumption here and we are really talking about choice for workers.

This bill from the member for Laval—Les Îles is a bill that is well worthwhile to move forward quickly and get the full support of this House.

● (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-22.

Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-22 be amended by restoring Clause 1 as follows:

"1. This Act may be cited as the Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act."

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to restore the short title of the bill to its original form: the Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act.

At committee it was ruled by the chair that a motion to amend clause 1 was out of order and therefore the motion was not debated. This, I believe, resulted in the rejection of this clause. If there had been the opportunity to debate the importance of the short title, the following could have been noted:

Bill C-22 requires the mandatory reporting of child pornography by providers of Internet services. This will enhance Canada's capacity to better protect children from online sexual exploitation, period. I emphasize this is not to limit the bill's scope, but to underline the importance of the bill and its breadth.

The committee heard from the Minister of Justice and Ms. Lianna McDonald, the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. Both emphasized the potential effects of this legislation and how it will protect children from online sexual exploitation.

It will do so in a number of ways. First, it will strengthen our ability to detect potential child pornography material. Second, reports generated under the bill will help block child pornography sites through Project Cleanfeed Canada. Third, the bill will facilitate the identification, apprehension, and prosecution of child pornography offenders. Fourth, and most important, the bill could help to

identify the victims so that they may be rescued from sexual predators.

That is why the government had proposed the Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act as a short title for Bill C-22. This is clearly the ultimate objective of the bill, and the short title should be restored.

I am pleased to note that this important bill received all-party support and was improved with only two minor amendments for clarification.

Before I get to the specific amendments, I would like to say a few words generally about this piece of legislation and its purpose. I think everyone in the House would agree that there is no greater duty for us as elected officials than to ensure the protection of children, the most precious and vulnerable members of our society.

The creation of the Internet and the World Wide Web have provided new means for offenders to distribute and consume child pornography, resulting in a significant increase in the availability and volume of child pornography.

While Canada has one of the world's most comprehensive criminal law frameworks with which to combat child pornography, we can and must do better in protecting children from sexual exploitation.

The bill is a simple and straightforward approach to help achieve that goal in that it proposes to compel providers of Internet services to become active participants in the fight against child pornography and child sexual exploitation.

Bill C-22 will strengthen Canada's ability to detect potential child pornography offences; help reduce the availability of online child pornography; facilitate the identification, apprehension, and prosecution of offenders; and, most important, help identify the victims so they may be rescued from sexual predators.

It is my hope that reducing the amount of this vile material on the Internet will prevent other children from being abused, both in Canada and around the world.

I will now turn back to the committee proceedings and the amendments that were passed. Both amendments were for clarification and do not change the substance of the bill. The first change relates to the definitions and the definition of "Internet service" in particular. There was some concern that the enumeration of the services covered under the bill could be interpreted in a manner that would put the average citizen under a duty to report. However remote this interpretation may have been, the committee agreed that it should seize the opportunity to make the definition of "Internet service" crystal clear and consistent with the French definition.

The second amendment relates to the provision concerning laws of provincial or foreign jurisdictions. In essence, Bill C-22 imposes two duties on those who provide an Internet service to the public.

First, providers are required to report to a designated agency Internet tips that they might receive regarding websites where child pornography may be available to the public.

Second, if a provider has reason to believe that a child pornography offence has been committed using its Internet service, the provider is required to notify police and to preserve that evidence for 21 days.

The purpose of Bill C-22 is to ensure that service providers report child pornography that comes to their attention. Therefore, if the service provider has reported the child pornography incident under a similar duty, under either a provincial law or a law in a foreign jurisdiction, it has complied with the objective of the legislation, and, through this provision, with the legislation itself.

● (1205)

The intention of Bill C-22, however, was not to duplicate reporting to a designated agency where a service provider has already reported the same incident in accordance with the laws of a province or a foreign jurisdiction. In other words, the provision relieves a service provider of its duty to report under the proposed legislation if it has already reported the same incident under the legislation of another jurisdiction.

However, the committee was concerned that the provision related to more than just the reporting duty and could be interpreted as relating to the duty to notify. The duty to notify police arises when a service provider has a reasonable belief that a child pornography offence may have been committed on its system. Accompanying this duty to notify police is the duty to safeguard computer data that may result in evidence of the offence. This jurisdiction provision was never intended to relieve service providers of their duty to notify or preserve evidence. Therefore, the committee took the opportunity to clarify the issue and make specific reference to the section number relating to the duty to report.

Those were the two amendments made in committee, but I would like to touch on some important testimony that was given during the committee study of Bill C-22. The committee heard from representatives from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, which operates cybertip.ca, Canada's national 24/7 tip line for reporting the sexual exploitation of children on the Internet.

At present, most reporting of child pornography across Canada is done through cybertip.ca or, in French, cyberaide.ca. Within 48 hours, cybertip.ca reviews, prioritizes, and analyzes every report it receives. Cybertip.ca verifies the report by collecting supporting information using various Internet tools and techniques. It also identifies the location of the material in order to determine the appropriate jurisdiction. If the material is assessed to be potentially illegal, a report is referred to the appropriate law enforcement agency for follow-up and investigation.

Each month cybertip.ca receives an average of over 800,000 hits and triages over 700 reports. Approximately 45% of reports are forwarded to law enforcement. As of June 2009, cybertip.ca had triaged over 33,000 reports since becoming Canada's national tip line in 2002. Over this period, more than 90% of the reports received by cybertip.ca were related to child pornography. At least 30 arrests have resulted from these reports, approximately 3,000 websites have been shut down, and, most important, children have been removed from abusive environments.

Finally, I would like to note that Bill C-22 was crafted with the following overarching principle in mind: that the legislation should not contribute to the consumption or further dissemination of child pornography. I submit that it has adhered to this principle. It is a simple bill that can do much good without unduly affecting the business practices of those who are compelled to comply. It strikes the necessary balance between public safety and the privacy rights. It is also another example of how this government has made the safety and security of Canadian children a top priority.

I urge the House to give its full support to this bill, as amended, so that it can be referred to the Senate and we can adopt this important piece of legislation without delay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we will vote against one of the proposed amendments that would change the title of the bill and has nothing to do with the substance of the bill. This amendment was already rejected in committee. I will come back to this when it is my turn to speak.

I would like to know why the government keeps on coming back to this short title, which was rejected in committee at the request of the members. This title seems more like populism than anything else.

● (1210)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, because he was in committee, there was no debate on the attempt by the opposition to delete the short title. This bill addresses the sexual exploitation of children on the Internet. Representatives from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection were present the day committee met to debate the bill. In fact, they submitted a report in which they stated that in running the website cybertip.ca they examine what is on the Internet and take steps to protect children from online sexual exploitation.

Justice must not only be done; it must also be seen to be done. We believe that the people of Canada need to know that this legislation has been passed and that there is now a positive duty on Internet service providers to report sexually exploitive material that comes to their attention. We want everyone to know that. That is why this title is so important to the bill.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have participated in the debate on this bill before and I want to know if the member can help us understand better.

I was always concerned about placing the onus on others to report and how that can arguably be “I did not know” or “I was not sure”, or whatever. Is there a concern about the approach of off-loading the responsibility to others rather than proactively looking at areas? With the tremendous number of investigations, should we be balancing the approach by looking at it? There is an obligation, yes, but the thrust of protecting our children must be that the officials are enforcing existing laws and looking for the abuses.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not need to be concerned. This bill only requires Internet service providers to report child sexual exploitative material that is brought to their attention. They are not required to go out searching for it. When somebody reports it to them, they report it to the authorities.

In addition to that, I can assure the member that our police and law enforcement officials across Canada are constantly searching the Internet, looking for this material. In fact, the Centre for Child Protection is doing likewise. There are a number of agencies that constantly look through all the material available on the Internet and determine whether any of it constitutes child pornography and would put children at risk.

We think the combination of law enforcement activity and this requirement to report will make children safer in Canada and around the world.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill C-22.

In terms of background, the bill would make reporting Internet child pornography mandatory for Internet service providers and other persons providing Internet services. This is a very important concept whose time is long overdue.

The government has taken a very long time to reintroduce the bill. It has lost time in presenting the bill, due to prorogation. The bill's first iteration was Bill C-58. We all understand the issue of child pornography and we all know that children have to be protected. Children are an important asset. They need to be protected. They are vulnerable and they are easily misled.

My question to the government is, if protecting children from exploitation, as the short title says, is really a priority of the government, why then, after prorogation, did it take it four months to reintroduce this bill?

In fact, there was no change to the bill. The only thing that changed was the short title. Why? Regarding sexual exploitation, if protecting children is really a priority of the current government, then let us stick to the business of protecting children. Let us stick to the right law. The long title of the bill is, "An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service". This is exactly what the bill would do. This is the formal title. It is an accurate title. The aim of legislation is to protect children from pornography and for the people who provide Internet services to report it.

So why is the government playing games?

The government has repeatedly changed the names of bills, without making any real changes to the bill itself. It has either changed titles or prorogued Parliament and reintroduced the same bills over and over again. Changing titles to political sound bites is not really protecting the kids.

The long title is precise. It describes exactly what Bill C-22 is supposed to do.

The short title is misleading. It overstates what the bill would do.

I would like to make it clear that the bill is a good bill. What we are debating here is why the government is wasting time to change the title of the bill.

The Liberals support the bill. We do not support the title. It is a step in the right direction to address the issue of child pornography and the issue of Internet predators and to make it the responsibility of the providers of Internet services to give us the information.

However, the bill would not completely solve any problems. That is why the short title really is not accurate. It does not reflect accuracy.

The Liberals attempted, at committee, to change the short title to represent what the bill would actually do. The Liberals proposed the "child pornography reporting act", because that is exactly what this bill attempts to do. The amendment was rejected, so the Liberals decided to remove the short title completely.

Other opposition parties agreed at committee with the content of the long title, because as I said previously, it is what the bill would actually do.

This is not the first time that governments have tried changing or modifying titles. They have done it in Bill C-21, the bill to modify the Criminal Code in regard to sentencing for fraud. It was then replaced by a short title, saying it is the law to defend the victims of white-collar crime. The short title is really longer than the long title, which is the correct title.

If the government is serious about defending victims of white-collar crime, why did it take it 215 days after prorogation to commence the debate for the second time on this bill?

There was another bill, Bill C-16. It went through the same process.

● (1215)

It is obvious that the government is not really serious. The Conservatives claim to be the government with the law and order agenda, but we see the repeated bills, over and over again. If nothing gets passed through Parliament, the Conservatives prorogue Parliament and bring bills back to the House under different names. My question is then, why does the government not get serious about dealing with this issue? It should stop trying to score cheap political points.

In the stakeholders' view of the bill itself, the commissioner of police and the provincial police support this bill. The director of Cybertip.ca states that the bill is a step in the right direction. It is the good first step. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection states that this is a good, right step. Companies such as Bell, Rogers and Telus all agree that this is important.

Statistics Canada indicates that the illegal action of the people who rely on child pornography has increased from 55% in 1998 to 1,408% in 2008.

These images of pornography that are being accessed are horrifying. We all can probably give examples of children and young people who have been enticed on the Internet to do things that they would normally not do. Children are vulnerable. Children seek affection. Children think the person is telling the truth. When children are getting enticed by the Internet, it is important that this bill be put in place immediately.

Cybertip.ca made a presentation at committee and provided the committee with some very interesting information. What it said was very disconcerting. It said: 36% of the images analyzed by the centre depicted sexual assaults on children, and 64% depicted children in a deliberate sexual manner; 76% of web pages analyzed had at least one child abuse image where the child was less than eight years of age; and of the children abused through extreme sexual acts, including bestiality, bondage or torture and degrading acts such as defecation, 69% occurred against children under eight years of age.

What are we doing to protect our children? These are horrifying statistics.

Cybertip.ca also said 83% of the images were of female children.

Liberal members support this bill, but we do not want games being played on the backs of children. We want the law to be passed. We want the law to be effective. We want the law to be there so that, with the technologies that develop, the Internet users, the criminals who use these measures, are put to the test. We need to get them behind bars. We need to protect our children.

It was the former Liberal government in 2002 that made it illegal to deliberately access a website containing child pornography, rather than just having possession of such materials. It is important that we do it.

It was also the former Liberal government that put in place the law allowing a judge to order a service provider to supply the information to authorities when there are reasonable grounds to believe that child pornography is accessible through an Internet service provider.

It was the Liberals who put Cybertip.ca in place, an online reporting tool for child pornography.

The United States and Australia passed similar legislation in 2002 and 2005.

I urge the government to stop dragging its feet, stop playing games with short titles, and let us go forward with the bill.

● (1220)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her remarks, the hon. member mentioned cybertip.ca. I wonder if she has had an opportunity to read the report that the Canadian Centre for Child Protection presented to the committee when this bill was before the committee and the statements made by the executive director, Ms. McDonald, at the committee. I take it from what she said that she has not because, if she had, she would know that we asked her directly why she used the term online sexual exploitation of children and not simply child pornography. She made a very good and fulsome argument about how the material itself leads to the exploitation of children. She said:

> This bill is about more than just restricting a picture. This bill is about putting in place criminal provisions and sanctions against people who use this material and who therefore may actually be abusing the children in order to create this material. We want to be able to use this legislation to rescue children who can be identified by the images that are disseminated on the Internet. We want to be able to prevent other children who have not yet been abused from being abused, because the people who get this material, who see other children being abused, might get the idea that maybe somehow that's okay. That's what this is about. ... For the life of me, I can't understand why any reasonable person would object to that.

● (1225)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I do not think my hon. colleague was listening to what I said. I quoted cybertip.ca and its presentations and gave all the statistics that it provided.

Why is the government playing with titles? In 2002, the former Liberal government introduced a bill that said that it was illegal to deliberately access a website containing child pornography. However, accessing it and possession were both things that needed to be put in.

In 2005, the U.S. and Australia did this. Why is Canada waiting? What is it waiting for? Why are we playing with titles when the bill is so important? It must go through.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

The title of Bill C-22, which is the former Bill C-58—I will get back to this later and I hope that the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles will stay where he is, because we have some business to attend to—is "An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service." This title seems perfect to us. But the government wants to call it by the short title, the "Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act". In committee, we felt that this short title did not properly describe the objective of the bill. The Liberal Party agreed, and I believe that is also the case with my colleague. I hope that is what she understood.

I would like to know if that is why the Liberal Party and the other opposition parties will vote against the proposed amendment.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, what I did mention is that the long title of the bill, which is An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, is exactly what the bill does. The short title the Conservatives are proposing is "protecting children from online sexual exploitation act", but that is not what it is doing.

The long title is exactly what the bill says. While we are debating titles, the long title should have stayed. If the government were really keen on protecting children, it should have stuck with the long title and moved forward because this bill is due and it is important that we get on with the work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles is listening to what I am saying to him. I would like to tell him that the comments he—the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice—made about the Bloc Québécois were unspeakable. He made these comments during an interview with GoFM RadioX in Abitibi—Témiscamingue on November 10, I believe.

The member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles made statements completely unworthy of his role. He is supposed to be the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice. He should have been more respectful of us but he dared to say that the Bloc Québécois does not support Bill C-22 and that the Bloc members—especially the members for Abitibi—Témiscamingue and Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou— need a swift kick in the you-know-what because they do not stand up for children.

I believe that the parliamentary secretary should be immediately relieved of his duties. And I hope this message goes all the way to the Prime Minister's Office.

I invite the public to read Vincent Marissal's blog from November 10, 2010. He writes for *La Presse* and he is not a federalist and definitely not a sovereignist. He said that the parliamentary secretary, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, is nothing but an overblown orator and that the follies on the Internet need to stop. On his blog, he repeated the disrespectful comments—which is the only way I can think to describe them—made about the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and me, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

I want to tell the member, the parliamentary secretary, the real story. He should listen and be more attentive at the meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, of which he is supposedly a member. He is there regularly; I see him. Maybe he is sleeping or recuperating from an illness, but we are working. And the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-22. Not only does the Bloc support Bill C-22, but it has already told the government, through its revered House leader, that this bill needs to be brought back quickly and passed because the police have been asking for this for a long time.

I have here Bill C-58, which is exactly the same as Bill C-22. Bill C-58 was introduced a year ago, in November 2009. If Parliament had not been prorogued, which is what the Conservatives do when things do not go their way, the former governor general would have long since given royal assent to Bill C-22. It is not the opposition members' fault; quite the contrary. I hope the parliamentary secretary will correct his remarks and at least apologize to the Bloc Québécois members, who are very concerned about child protection. When we look at Bill C-22, we see that the amendments do not reflect the will of the committee. That is why we will vote against this amendment, which would restore the short title. We will do so quickly.

The title of the bill is "An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service." That and only that is the objective of Bill C-22. But with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, because this does not apply to you, the Conservatives do not understand anything. Unfortunately, some of your colleagues do not understand anything.

● (1230)

They do not understand that that is not what the short title says. The short title is the "Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act". But this is not the purpose of the bill. I will explain for the benefit of the parliamentary secretary, who does not understand anything either. The bill would force Internet service providers to report people who may be using the Internet to distribute all sorts of pornography, not just child pornography. That is what the bill says, and that is what our Conservative colleagues do not understand. I am sure you understand, Mr. Speaker, but they do not.

At the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we tried to explain this to them, but they did not get it. So we will be voting against the amendment, and the short title will disappear. That is clear. We want the public to understand that the idea is to force Internet service providers to make a report if their Internet service is used to distribute any pornography, not just child pornography. Unfortunately, all the people who appeared before the committee told us that in fact there was more child pornography on these sites. So obviously there is a need for tools.

Now I would like to talk about real things. I challenge the parliamentary secretary and the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, and even the anglophone parliamentary secretary, whom I cannot name, who spoke earlier. I challenge them to tell us how much money they are prepared to invest, for that will be the main issue. We asked them if they were prepared to implement this extremely important bill that police forces have been calling for for some time.

Special squads to track down these sexual predators will have to be created. This includes the Ontario Provincial Police, the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP, the Montreal police and so on. Squads will have to be created within all police forces. People who appeared before the committee told us that is what it would take. Accordingly, the government needs to provide the necessary funding immediately. There is no doubt that the House will pass Bill C-22 very quickly and very soon, probably either today or tomorrow. It is very important.

This bill is being called for not only by police forces, but also by Internet service providers, who have indicated that they are currently under no obligation. Often when they discover something, it is too late. Indeed, we know how it works and it is extremely complicated. Some people explained that now is the time to fight this.

I am nearly out of time, for 10 minutes go by very quickly. I would simply like to tell those watching us that we will do everything we can to ensure this bill passes quickly, because we need to give police forces the means to fight the crimes that are unfortunately committed in cyberspace using 21st century tools. For that reason, and that reason alone, I urge all members here to vote in favour of this bill, so it can come into force immediately.

● (1235)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. I was listening to what he said about the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and I am trying to find a word to describe this member's behaviour.

So, I wrote down five words and I would like my colleague to tell us which of them is most appropriate. Is it "incompetent", "insignificant", "ignorant", "dishonest" or "lying"?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I do not know. I think that he may have just got carried away. Sometimes the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles does not behave like a parliamentary secretary, as was the case during the interview that aired on GO Radio X FM in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

I can tell him that this interview has made the rounds. If he wanted to take the populist approach and tell us that we are worthless because we are not taking care of our country's children, he dropped the ball. And I hope that he heard how I picked it up during the three subsequent interviews I gave to all the media in the region.

I find that the parliamentary secretary sometimes goes too far. This is one of those times. In my opinion, he should choose his words more carefully in the future and, more specifically, verify the accuracy of what he is saying, which he clearly did not do.

I remember speaking to this chamber about Bill C-22 for 20 minutes and being questioned by him during the 10-minute question period following my speech, so something is amiss.

Not only is the Bloc Québécois in favour of Bill C-22, but it also insisted, through its revered House leader, that this bill be brought back quickly so that it could be implemented quickly.

Perhaps the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and parliamentary secretary should choose his words more carefully and verify his sources in the future.

● (1240)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to a second question, I want to remind all hon. members that they ought to use parliamentary language in the chamber when they are referring to their colleagues. What one is not allowed to do directly, one is also not allowed to do indirectly simply by listing out a laundry list of words that are not considered parliamentary language. I would ask all members of this chamber to show the respect for their fellow members that is their right in this place.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should really be interested in the fact that what we are debating is a short title.

However, what we should really be debating is the motivation of the government to take a bill, which has a title that very clearly states it requires the reporting by Internet service providers of matters relating to sexual exploitation of children, and change it to the short title of protecting children from online sexual exploitation.

I do not understand how a government can get away with suggesting that a bill does something that it does not. That is the issue, and this is not the first time. It happens virtually every time. These bills continue to be recycled and continue to be changed.

I do not believe the government is really serious about this bill or about any of the other justice bills. It simply wants to give the illusion that it is doing something it is not. Maybe the member would like to comment on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very interesting question and I would respond with a quote. Maybe they should call it the "protecting children from the Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP" act.

I am searching for the right words in order to respect the Speaker's decision, but that is exactly what he said. They want to appeal to the people by saying that they are fighting crime and doing everything they can. That is not true. The Bloc Québécois supported Bill C-22, formerly Bill C-58, from the very beginning. Four years ago we were saying that the police have to be given the tools to deal with 21st century crime.

The short title of the bill is "Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act". It does not do that, and I especially do not want our Conservative friends to use this misleading title to spread unwelcome propaganda.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the proposed amendment by the government, which is a pretty straightforward one. All it does is put back the short title to Bill C-22.

In committee, the opposition parties, after analyzing the bill, unanimously came to the conclusion that the short title was just a piece of propaganda on the part of the government with really very little, if anything, to do with the content of the bill. For that reason, the committee voted to delete the short title. From a procedural standpoint, quite frankly, it does not make any difference in terms of the bill going through.

All opposition parties, as well as the government, are supportive of the bill. It is one that should have gone through the House years ago, but with the calling of prorogation and other stalling that the government did on its crime bills, it sat for years, and I mean that literally, before it came forth.

It is not a significant amendment in deleting the short title in terms of the content of the bill and the bill going forward. What it does is ask the government to get serious and stop playing partisan politics, especially with issues of online child pornography, with this. It asks the government to stop its propagandizing, to be honest in terms of its legislation and to stop using these silly titles.

This is not the first and probably not the last time that I will take some offence to this as a lawyer who practised in the courts. In court, as a practising lawyer, as an advocate for our clients, we obviously refer to legislation that is before the court on whatever issue we are dealing with. Historically in the courts we have used the short titles rather than the long titles to refer to the law. Just imagining myself in the court room using some of the short titles that the government has used, both in this bill and in other bills, I would be embarrassed as a practising lawyer.

I do not see myself as a practising lawyer doing anything other than protecting my client's interest when I am in the court room. I am not there, nor are the prosecutors and defence counsels in the country, to push the propaganda role that the partisan Conservative government wants to push when it comes to these short titles. We are not there for that purpose. That is demeaning, quite frankly, to our role as advocates.

We are there to deal with serious issues that are before the court, especially when we are dealing with an issue like online child pornography. We do not see ourselves as agents for the Conservative Party of Canada and its propaganda machine. For that reason alone, I have taken some offence to a number of the bills that have come forward with these short titles that are often misleading, and this is another example of it.

The short title the government is proposing to put back in, that we voted out at committee, talks about protecting children from online sexual exploitation. However, the long title, and the more accurate one by far, is Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service. The bill, in its entirety, is all about forcing, cajoling and encouraging Internet service providers to report if they identify it. Then, if on request or under warrant, that they provide additional information so it can be tracked. It is a tool that our police and prosecutors have needed for some time.

● (1245)

As I said earlier, for years we have been hearing from them. I know the justice minister regularly has heard from the other provincial justice ministers and attorneys general for this need for quite some time at their annual meetings or semi-annual meetings.

The bill has been before the House in the past. It has been sitting here waiting to be dealt with. Then we had either an election called or, on two occasions, prorogation and the bill just sat.

It is quite clear this is a valuable tool. It is why all the opposition parties are in favour of it. However, to trivialize it by throwing these silly titles in, which are either irrelevant or misleading, is something that we should not as legislators countenance. The government should be ashamed of itself for bringing this back. Had it brought a more meaningful short title back, it probably would have had support from this side of the House. All it did was bring back exactly the same wording, which as I said earlier is grossly misleading as to what the bill would do.

It is really a technical bill. It is one that is absolutely needed. To suggest that somehow this is the be all and end all of sexual exploitation over the Internet of our children is grossly misleading and not one that we should countenance as opposition parties or as the legislature as a whole.

Therefore, we will be voting against the amendment of the government. It does not advance the cause of fighting the issue of child pornography at all.

It was interesting when the parliamentary secretary asked a question earlier of one of my colleagues. In the course of the question there was at least an implication, if not an outright statement, that somehow we would be able to protect children from being abused in Canada. What came out in the hearing, when we dealt with the issue of online child pornography, was there were very few exceptions, and I think we have had three to five cases in Canada, where the child who was abused in the online material was in Canada.

That is why this title is so misleading. The reality is this abuse of the children is not occurring in Canada to any significant degree. Almost all of this material is coming in from international sources. The abuse is occurring in Asia, Africa, Europe and some places in the United States. In those countries when we identify the source, and we will be able to do that much better if we finally get the bill passed, through the Senate and get royal proclamation, it will allow us to help jurisdictions where the abuse has actually occurred.

The point I want to make, and this is why I am taking issue with the parliamentary secretary, is we know that in a number of the jurisdictions, and in fact a vast majority of the jurisdictions where this material is being produced, even if we do share the knowledge that we will obtain as to the source, the police forces, the prosecutors, the justice system will either be unwilling to respond or will not have the capacity to respond.

I think Canadians need to be aware of that. We fight it as much as we can in Canada, but this is an international problem and it is one that we cannot deal with entirely by ourselves. We need that co-operation at the other end and it is not always there. In fact, in a lot of cases it is not there at all.

● (1250)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the word I am going to remember from the member's speech is “trivialize”, because it really is reflective of how the government approaches legislation and how seriously it takes it.

I want to ask the member about the government's responsibility, and in particular the Minister of Justice, vis-à-vis ensuring that legislation that comes before this place not only is charter proof, but in fact follows all the rules of the game with regard to being legislatively correct. It would appear to me that there is a vast body of opinion in this place, other than the government members, that the claims of the short title are false and misleading.

How is it possible that the government does not take things seriously enough that even something as modest as a short title is not in proper form?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the question from my colleague from Mississauga South allows me to hammer home a point.

This week is another crime week in the House. If the Conservatives were really serious in stopping the politicization of the Criminal Code, stopping the propaganda war and stopping the use of victims for their propaganda war, which they do all the time, including in this bill, they would be doing a major revamp of the Criminal Code. Rather than dealing with this on a piecemeal basis where they can play these kinds of political games, it would save a lot of time if we had a complete review of the Criminal Code to bring it into the 21st century and do it in one massive approach.

With the prorogations and early election calls, we have wasted a lot of time on crime bills. If we were to bundle them together in large bills, maybe all in one but certainly no more than two or three, we could have expedited almost everything that the government has put before us two and three years ago.

● (1255)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we look at what the government is doing here in playing with nomenclature and, as my friend said, trying to propagandize legislation, we see today that it is trying to undo something that was proposed by opposition and the majority of the House.

In light of the fact that the government saw this go through committee without the content or purpose of the bill being changed but to actually have some truth in advertising to ensure the nomenclature of the bill actually reflects the contents, I wonder if the member knows if there were any consultations at all with opposition members as to their proposition.

I say that because the government is clearly playing games if it did not come forward and say that it understands there are problems with the naming of the bill, that it sees the amendment and that the majority of the House does not approve of the nomenclature of the bill, so let us talk so we can find an alternative or compromise here.

Did the government actually came forward and say that it would like to talk to see if we could come to a meeting of the minds before it brought forward what was in front of us before?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the answer for my colleague from Ottawa Centre is no, we did not have that.

The House should be aware that the Liberal member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe did propose an amendment to the short title which was determined by the justice committee chair to be out of order. There was a real opportunity at that point for the government to say to the opposition side that we should talk about this and maybe we can reach a mutual agreement with unanimous consent of the committee to change the short title to one that is meaningful and reflective of the content and substance of the bill.

As the justice critic for my party, I can say that we did not have any of those overtures. I do not believe the other two opposition parties had any overtures from the government. However, there was the opportunity as a result of that amendment moved by the Liberals to open the door and there was no response.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-22 at report stage and third reading.

[*English*]

I have been listening to my colleagues on both sides of the House with regard to Bill C-22 and the considerable comments that have been made about the government's attempt at third reading to bring back its original short title.

I want to discuss very briefly what the bill does because the Liberals support the bill. We think it is a positive step in the right direction. It would make reporting Internet child pornography mandatory for Internet service providers and other persons providing Internet services.

[*Translation*]

The government took too long to introduce this bill. We lost precious time when the former version of the bill—Bill C-58—died on the order paper when the Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament last year.

[*English*]

If protecting children from exploitation, as the government's original short title proclaimed and which the government is attempting to re-establish in the bill, were really a priority for the government, why did the government not only kill its own bill through prorogation but then take four months after Parliament resumed to reintroduce the bill? When it reintroduced the bill, the only change to its previous version, Bill C-58, was the short title.

The long title of the bill, which is An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, is exactly what the bill does. It is the formal title and an accurate title.

However, when one looks over the landscape of government legislation, it is becoming increasingly clear that the government is now instituting a new political ploy, which is to change the names of its bills, those long, boring titles, to political sound bite titles in an attempt to oversell what the bill actually does and what the government is doing with regard to criminal justice.

The long title is precise and accurately describes what the bill does, whereas the government's short title that it put in its bill and which it is now attempting to re-establish in this bill, even though opposition members in committee voted it down, is deliberately misleading. It overstates what the bill actually does.

I want to make it perfectly clear that the Liberals believe this is a good bill, which is why we support it. However, we find it objectionable that the Conservative government is attempting to play political football with the lives of our children. This is too serious an issue for the government to politicize the issue by making a short title, which is nothing but a political sound bite and which overstates what the bill does.

The bill is the right step in the right direction in addressing this issue. We are pleased that the Conservative government has finally given this bill and this issue enough priority to no longer kill it through prorogation and no longer delay reintroducing it. When the government finally reintroduced the bill and moved second reading, it had the full co-operation of all three opposition parties to debate it quickly and comprehensively and get it to committee. In committee, we gave it priority and heard witnesses in a rapid fashion. We heard from the minister and proceeded to clause by clause because the opposition parties, particularly the Liberals, saw the importance of giving priority to this bill, something we did not originally see from the Conservative government.

The bill will not completely solve the problem, which is why the government's proposed short title is not accurate. As my colleague, the NDP justice critic, mentioned, the Liberals attempted in committee to change the short title so that it would accurately represent what the bill would do, which is child pornography reporting.

My colleague, the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, proposed an amendment to the bill to change the short title of the bill to the child pornography reporting act. Unfortunately, the chair ruled the amendment out of order because we had not amended the content of the bill due to the fact that we were 100% in agreement with the content of the bill. Under the rules, in order to change a short title, even if the original short title does not accurately describe and represent the content of the bill, the chair has no choice but to rule a change to a short title out of order. Therefore, the chair did as he had to do, which was to rule the Liberal amendment out of order.

● (1300)

At that point, as my colleague, the NDP justice critic, mentioned, if the government had been serious about the content of the bill and the objective and aim of the bill and not interested in giving a higher priority to politicizing and attempting to use the issue for political gain on its part, it would have immediately said, "Look. You have a problem with the short tile. Let us work with it. Let us find a short title that we all agree with and we will put it through".

The government did not do that. It did not approach me, and I am the Liberal critical for justice. I know for a fact that it did not approach my two colleagues who also sit on the committee. We just heard from the NDP justice critic that he was not approached by the government to try to come to some agreement as to the issue of the short title. Therefore, we decided to remove the short title completely.

We are content with the long title because, as I said, it actually states and describes accurately what the bill would actually do.

● (1305)

[*Translation*]

This is not the first time that the government has added a short title. We need only look at Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing for fraud), to which the government gave the so-called short title of Standing up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act. The Conservative government's short title is actually longer than the real title. That is ridiculous.

If the government truly wanted to defend victims of white collar crime, why did the government and the Minister of Justice wait 215 days after prorogation in December 2009 before starting debate at second reading of Bill C-21?

This government claims to be the government of law and order.

[*English*]

It says that it is the party of law and order and yet, if we look at virtually every criminal justice bill, the government has played political football. It has either delayed tabling legislation or, if it tables it, it lets it sit on the order paper without moving second reading debate. It has prorogued the House knowing that its bill will be killed and then, when the House and Parliament comes back, rather than immediately re-tabling the bill, the government lets it sit before it actually tables it. The government is not actually interested in defending Canadians and ensuring they are safe. It is more interested in trying to gain political capital with playing with the lives and the safety of Canadians. That is a shame and it is despicable.

We do not like cheap political points that the government attempts to make with victims. We call on the government to stop doing that and it will get the co-operation of the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I will speak to Bill C-22. Most of my opposition colleagues have made very interesting remarks about the government's desire to restore the short title. If I may, I would say that this is pure propaganda to make people think that the government is especially concerned about victims. I am not saying that the bill is bad, far from it. Earlier, my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue, the Bloc Québécois justice critic, presented the position of the Bloc Québécois, which is in favour of this bill. The real title, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, describes what is found in the bill. The government added a short title for publicity purposes, which is totally inappropriate in this case.

The purpose of Bill C-22 is to require Internet service providers to report child pornography activities they are aware of, which makes perfect sense. It is amazing to us that it takes a bill to require Internet service providers to do that. It seems to me that, based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, any good citizen has to help out anyone in danger. That could also apply here. Statistics show that Internet service providers are already doing this type of reporting when they discover they are hosting child pornography sites.

Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, is the successor to Bill C-58, which was introduced in November 2009 and died on the order paper. Today, I will have the opportunity to speak about another justice bill. A staggering number of justice bills died on the order paper, and now the government is in a hurry to bring them all back. Yet it is the government's fault because it prorogued Parliament and called elections. It cannot blame the opposition for that. These bills did not move forward because the government scuttled the work of parliamentarians.

Bill C-22 would require persons providing Internet services to the public to report if they are advised of an Internet address where child pornography may be available to the public or if they have reasonable grounds to believe that their Internet services are being used to commit a crime related to child pornography. Failing to comply with these requirements constitutes an offence.

This bill is aimed not just at Internet service providers, but also at well-known social media, such as Facebook. These media have also become tools for sexual predators who prey on children and those who wish to disseminate horrible images of sexually abused children. The bill must cover all aspects because the Internet is unfortunately one of the tools used by ill-intentioned people and low-life criminals.

The Bloc Québécois is surprised that a law is required to make Internet service providers do the obvious, that is, report people who decide to use their services and their links to disseminate that kind of filth, if I may call it that.

Some provinces have laws, and some service providers are already doing this. Did the government introduce this type of bill just to score political points? I do not know.

● (1310)

In any event, it is better to be safe than sorry. Even though Internet service providers are already doing what they ought to, with this bill we are assured that they will report what is happening right under their noses. They will have no choice because the bill includes fines. Increasing the likelihood of getting caught is much more of a deterrent than increasing punishments, which are often immaterial to this type of criminal.

Given the importance of improving law enforcement's ability to deal with one of the most despicable forms of organized crime, the Bloc Québécois fully supports the principle of the bill. In committee we will look at all the ins and outs of the bill and we would like to pass it as quickly as possible. We are against the amendment to change the title. Whether one title is used instead of another is not the most important point of discussion on this bill.

We urgently need to do as much as possible to protect the child victims of these acts. This bill will not protect children directly, but it will have a deterrent effect if those who host such awful images are forced to report the criminals. This will go a long way toward helping the police and will contribute to fighting perverse crimes perpetrated by bad people who use children for sexual purposes.

The current child pornography provisions in the Criminal Code prohibit all forms of making, distributing, making available and possessing child pornography, including through the use of the Internet. The Code even prohibits looking at child pornography.

In September 2008, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice met and agreed that Canada's response to child pornography would be enhanced by federal legislation requiring any agency whose services could be used to facilitate the commission of online pornography offences to report suspected material.

Children are currently protected from sexual exploitation through provincial and territorial child welfare legislation. In Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia, all citizens are required to report all forms of child pornography. The new federal bill provides for a uniform mandatory reporting regime across Canada, which will complement provincial and territorial child welfare legislation. This bill is an add-on to the legislation that already exists in certain provinces.

Bill C-22 is simple enough and has only 14 clauses. Under the bill, providers of Internet services—Internet access, email, hosting and social networking sites—will now be required to report to a designated organization, to be determined at a later date by regulation, any information they receive about websites that make child pornography be available to the public. They will also be required to notify the police and preserve the evidence if they believe that their Internet service has been used to commit a child pornography offence.

That change is the whole point of this bill. Companies can no longer bury their heads in the sand and say that they did not know that one of their sites was being used. As soon as they have reasonable grounds to think that their services have been used by this type of sexual predator, they need to report it or they will be fined. I believe all members of the House agree that Bill C-22 needs to be passed as quickly as possible.

● (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the report stage motion before the House is to restore the former clause 1 of the bill that was referred to committee, which states

> This Act may be cited as the *Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act.*

If Canadians were advised that this is what the act actually did, they would be very disappointed to find out that this was not a comprehensive, well thought-out, effective strategy to address sexual exploitation of children. What they would find out is that it is merely, merely, an act to require Internet service providers to report it if they become aware of any misuse of the Internet.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on whether or not the government has been honest with Canadians about this legislation, whether or not the government is in fact showing contempt for Canadians by trying to perpetrate this fallacy that the bill does one thing when it does another thing, that the government is being disrespectful of Canadians and that this is actually being done simply for political and partisan reasons.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I do not imagine that the member is surprised by the Conservatives' way of doing things, especially when it comes to justice. They often resort to theatrics, grandstanding and, unfortunately, misrepresentation.

Everyone is in favour of the bill itself. That is what the member just said. According to the bill, companies that host Internet sites and social networks, whether it be by email or any other way, will from now on be obliged to report even the slightest suspicion of anything that might be child pornography or anything that might allow people to access child pornography. It is a good thing, but we have to say what it is. The short title chosen by the government suggests that the goal is to protect children from the crimes committed by sexual predators and other such crimes.

As I said earlier, in the end, this will definitely enhance the work of law enforcement officials. It will help. It does not mean, however, that it will eliminate the problem of child pornography altogether, far from it. Accordingly, we should use the real title, and the real title indicates that it is a bill that will allow and compel reporting of such criminal behaviour.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's statements, and I want to commend him on a well-constructed speech.

I think in this House we all agree that doing everything we can and taking whatever steps we can to protect our children from child pornography, particularly over the Internet, is something that is long overdue and well considered.

I want to ask my hon. colleague a question more to the point of the matter under discussion, which is the politicization of the short titles of bills, which has become a hallmark of the government. The government has shown an absolute marked trend to interjecting partisan considerations into our legislation itself, and that is an alarming trend to a lot of parliamentarians and I think to a lot of lawyers who have to interpret these bills in the courts of our land.

I am wondering if the member might comment as to his feelings or thoughts on the politicization of short titles of government legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I heard another NDP member say earlier that as a lawyer, he could not imagine going to court and using the Conservative government's proposed title, the Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act. We all agree that it is a lovely title, but it is not what the bill is about.

The real title of the bill is An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service. Earlier, the member said that for a lawyer to go to court and say that he is trying to protect children against exploitation would not be truthful.

In response to an earlier question from the Liberal member, I said that this is not the first such bill and not the first time the Conservatives have tried to misrepresent things just to make political hay. That is unfortunate, because we are talking about very serious, sensitive and important issues. To really protect children against child pornography, we need to create bills accordingly and give them appropriate titles.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the report stage motion of the bill. The subject matter of Bill C-22 was before Parliament shortly before the 2006 election when the current government took over.

It is important to note that since January 2006 when the Conservative government took over, the subject matter of the bill and the importance of a bill dealing with the sexual exploitation of children has been before Parliament, and four years later we still have not passed a bill that could have dealt with this very linear approach to a very serious problem but important enough that all the parties are supporting the substance of the bill. It speaks volumes about the commitment of the government to be honest with Canadians about what its priorities are.

I wish the media would do an analysis and look at how the various justice bills have come forward and have died due to prorogation or due to the 2008 election and what happened to them when they came back. We note first that the government has one member speak on a bill and then nobody else speaks on the government side. Government members are muzzled, handcuffed, and have no authorization to even speak in Parliament about legislation that the government has brought forward unless it is approved by the Prime Minister's office or by the Privy Council office. That is the level of participation in legislative debate that we can expect from government members. They cannot speak. They will not speak. They do not ask questions. They do not care to get involved because they cannot. They have been told not to.

We should look at the facts. For a number of bills, the Conservatives have had an election platform of getting tough on crime and they continue to repeat the theme that they are tough on crime. Then they have all these bills, instead of saying there are a number of areas they would like to deal with in terms of the Criminal Code and then put them together in an omnibus bill, which is normally the case, the four, five or six different areas in which they want to toughen up sentencing, identify new offences, or whatever. The Conservatives put them out there, they table them, but we never hear about them again. They just languish there, and then we go along on other business. What happens? As soon as there is a crisis on some other business, the Conservatives come back with crime awareness week. They get their bills back out there to see if they can distract Canadians from the problem they have somewhere else in legislation so that Canadians will say, “Yes, the government is tough on crime; we like that”. However, it never finishes.

When we had the last election and the prorogation, the options of the government were to be able to bring back a bill that would be repositioned at the stage it was left at when prorogation occurred. Did the government do that? No. As a matter of fact, the Conservatives decided the bills would all start again, or they took two or three of them and put them in one bill. That changed the mechanism with which they were working and they had to start at the beginning. Therefore, all the debate, all the work that was done, all the prep work, all the printing, and all the consultations with all the stakeholder groups was basically set aside and we started again.

Here we are, four years later. What was Bill C-58 last time is now Bill C-22, and what is hanging the bill up is the government.

I would like to read into the record what Bill C-22 would do. Every bill, on the inside cover, states in very distinct terms the purpose of the bill.

● (1325)

It says:

> This enactment imposes reporting duties on persons who provide an Internet service to the public if they are advised of an Internet address where child pornography may be available to the public or if they have reasonable grounds to believe that their Internet service is being or has been used to commit a child pornography offence. This enactment makes it an offence to fail to comply with the reporting duties.

It is pretty straightforward. Internet service providers, whether they be individuals or businesses, must report if they become aware, and there are some penalties. For individuals, it could be up to $10,000 in penalties. For corporations, it could be $100,000.

It is not a big deal, but why we are here today and what we are debating is a report stage motion to reinstate clause 1. Clause 1 is a short title. If the media were watching, they would say, and a lot of the members have mentioned, that the short title would be used; the courts would often refer to the short title rather than the long title.

The short title that the government put in Bill C-22 is the Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation Act, compared to Bill C-58, the last iteration of this bill, which stated in clause 1:

> This Act may be cited as the Child Protection Act (Online Sexual Exploitation).

As a number of hon. members have said already, this bill does not do that, in terms of being the piece of legislation that is going to deal with sexual exploitation online. It is one aspect, one small aspect of activity that one would expect in a comprehensive, serious strategy to address exploitation of children.

Why would the government do that? It goes back to probably the reason underlying virtually everything the government does. It has not been governing since 2006, it has been campaigning. To the government, everything in this place is slogans: "We are getting tough on crime"; "We are going to deal with protecting children from online sexual exploitation". But the bill does not do it, because there are other jurisdictions. If the Conservatives were serious about it, they would not trivialize it like this. They would not make us go through another debate on this bill about a clause that supports that the bill would do something that in fact it does not.

How is it that the Minister of Justice gave the opinion to cabinet that the bill is in good form? It is not. It is misleading. It is false. It is deliberately misleading. The government has deliberately misled the House, deliberately misled Canadians. The government seems to lie so naturally. It really does. It looks so very natural. It does not even flinch anymore. It is too comfortable, because it knows it can get away with it. It is time to call the government on misleading Canadians and misleading Parliament, and to take legislation seriously.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh has given some very eloquent speeches over the years about the need to do a comprehensive review and amendment of the Criminal Code. We did not need 10 bills to adjust the sentencing provisions related to 10 different offences. We could have had one bill dealing with everything the government wanted to do on sentencing, on house arrest, on parole, on the faint hope clause, everything. If we wanted to deal with it, it could have been in one bill.

It is going to be the same committee, and in fact, by and large, the same witnesses who would come for that omnibus bill as it would be for each and every one of those individual bills. But it does not serve the political, partisan reasons that the government is here today. It is not governing, it is campaigning, and we have to call a spade a shovel. The government is campaigning. It is sloganeering. It thinks people are stupid. It thinks Canadians are stupid. Well, Canadians are not stupid. They deserve respect and we should deal with legislation in a responsible fashion.

Maybe the hon. members would like to participate in the debate and defend the change to something that is so misleading. The government members had better start doing their job, or maybe it is time to look for another job.

● (1330)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a lot of stupid speeches in my time, but that has to be at the top of the list of the most ridiculous speeches I have ever heard in the two years that I have been here.

The Liberals talk about the length of time it takes to do things. The reality is that the member for Mississauga South was a member of a government that was in office for 4,745 days. What did his government accomplish in that time?

The Liberals are not known for attacking the criminal justice system and attempting to balance it. They are known for their attacks on provincial governments. They are known for their decade of darkness for the Canadian armed forces. They are known for being entitled to their entitlements.

The member talked about slogans. One of the great slogans in the 2006 campaign, of course, was to "throw the bums out who are entitled to their entitlements". That is what Canadians did. They put a government in office that actually respects Canadians and is actually on the same side as Canadians.

What we have here today is a spectacle of the opposition parties knowing yet again that they are on the opposite side of Canadians. Opposition members are doing everything in their power to make it seem that they actually care about criminal justice matters, that they actually care about Canadians. The reality is that for 13 long years the Liberals did absolutely nothing.

Canadians know for the first time that they have a government that actually respects them and understands what they want, which is a criminal justice system that puts victims of crime first and protects our communities.

Instead of his nonsensical diatribes, that member should come on board and do what is right for Canadians and support this legislation and all legislation that would help the criminal justice system restore balance and put the victims of crime first.

● (1335)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I respect the member's opinion. I have been here for 17 years and I do know good legislation when I see it.

We have to look at the evidence. We are talking about a bill to deal with the sexual exploitation of children. The member wanted to talk about something else.

In 2005, the justice committee looked at this issue. If we look at the committee transcript, we will see that some Internet service providers actually refused to provide information when they were asked. The prosecutor said they refused to provide information.

That was an identification in 2005 that there was a problem to be dealt with. The Conservatives took over in January 2006, very shortly thereafter, and here we are today still without having passed this piece of legislation that would require Internet service providers to provide information.

If the member believes the government is doing the right thing and is serious about criminal activity, this bill should have been passed a long time ago. The government gets an "F" with regard to Bill C-22.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member commented that he has been a member of this House for 17 years.

I would like to focus on the matter under debate here, which is the short title of the bill, and once again, the increasing and disturbing propensity of the government to inject partisan politics into our very legislation itself. There is plenty of time and room for politics in this chamber, of course, but to actually inject partisan hooks and try to slant the legislation in a partisan manner is very disturbing.

I wonder if my hon. colleague, who has been in the House so long, can share with us whether he has seen an alarming trend in this regard since the current government has been elected and whether it is something that has always been a feature of the House or something that has just developed under the Conservative government.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member's question speaks for itself. That is for others to judge.

However, when we have serious issues to deal with in this place, I honestly believe the government looks for ways to milk it. It does not want to pass legislation quickly but wants to drag it through, and if it means proroguing and starting bills all over again rather than reinstating them, then so be it.

This bill requires a substantial number of regulations, which means that the in-force date will not be until governor in council says it is in force. I think it is going to take a long time before the government goes through the process of drafting the regulations and promulgating them and making this bill come into force. The government should have dealt with that. This whole process should have been a lot tighter so that we would have legislation a lot more quickly.

The fact that it is probably going to be another year or so from now before we see this legislation in force shows that the government really is not committed to it. It is just using this legislation for political purposes.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand on behalf of the New Democratic Party and speak to this motion.

The matter under debate in the House concerns a recommendation from the committee to return to the House Bill C-22 with the recommendation that we remove or alter from it the proposed short title as proposed by the government.

The title of C-22 is "An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service". Before I go any further, I commend the government on bringing in the bill, which I think we all support. I know the members of the New Democratic Party do.

The bill deals with the issue of imposing a mandatory responsibility on the part of Internet service providers and other companies that provided services to the Internet that in effect make the Internet function. The bill specifically requires both individuals and corporations, and it will be almost all corporations I think, to report incidents of child pornography on the programs and hardware equipment that they identify. That is a laudable goal and it is something we all support.

I pause and say that it is equally important to protect children from poverty, from homelessness, from having substandard housing and from having increasing lack of access to education of all kinds in our country. I urge the government to spend as much time and effort on those issues as well as on protecting them from child pornography.

The matter under debate concerns the short title. The short title of the bill included in the act says that the bill may be cited as "Protecting Children from Online Exploitation Act".

There are really two issues raised by the matter under debate. First, it has to do with the politicization of our legislation by the government. Second, there is a fair question to be asked about the accuracy and honesty of the particular title chosen.

I will deal first with the first aspect, and that is the increasing politicization that is creeping into our legislation by the government. I have said that we are in Canada's democratic federal chamber and Lord knows we have an abundance of politics in the chamber as we properly should. This is Canada's premier place of debate on the federal scene and that is as it should be.

However, there is a place for partisanship and a place where partisanship should end. When we draft legislation, the laws of Canada that we publish for all Canadians, that will be interpreted and used by lawyers, our courts and that our citizens are expected to know and conform with, we have an obligation to draft that legislation in a responsible manner. It is not a place for cheap politics. It is not a place for hyper-partisanship.

Using the short titles to inject partisan political messages has been a hallmark of the government. It is done to score political points.

I have done some research, and I will give some examples for Canadians to hear the kinds of short titles that the government has put into bills in the past two years. It has put in the title "Sébastien's Law (Protecting the Public from Violent Young Offenders)", which is injecting the actual name of a person into an actual piece of legislation; "Standing Up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act"; "Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act"; "Keeping Canadians Safe (International Transfer of Offenders) Act"; "Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act"; "Serious Time for the Most Serious Crime Act"; and "Fair and Efficient Criminal Trials Act".

What all of these short titles have in common is that they are unprecedented in Canadian history in terms of injecting subjective and qualitative commentary into a piece of legislation itself. Traditionally the title of a bill should objectively describe what the bill does. It should not attempt to persuade the reader of a certain partisan leaning or a certain way of looking at the legislation. It should fairly and objectively describe what the bill does.

● (1340)

The government has gone so far as to actually put in parenthesis what the bill does. So obvious is its hyper-partisanship. It has a bill called "Keeping Canadians Safe, (International Transfer of Offenders) Act". So partisan is the government to title a bill "Keeping Canadians Safe", which describes nothing about a bill other than a conclusion that it may want the reader to draw about the bill, that it actually has to put what the bill does in parenthesis, (International Transfer of Offenders), and it has done that twice.

Another bill is "Keeping Canadians Safe (Protecting Borders) Act". The government tends to be fond of the expression "keeping Canadians safe". The bill actually puts Canadian police personnel onto boats with American personnel patrolling shared waters like the Great Lakes. Who would ever get that from the title of the bill? This is consistent with what Canadians have come to expect from the government in terms of its hyper-partisanship.

The government has fired civil servants who have done nothing more but to offer their opinions not to the government's liking. It has stacked the Senate with failed Conservative candidates and subservient lackeys of all types. It was caught issuing government cheques with the Conservative logo on them for stimulus at a time when Canadians and communities were suffering. So tenuous is the government's connection with ethics, so hyper-partisan is it, that it does not actually know intuitively that there is something wrong with putting a political party logo on a Government of Canada cheque that comes from all Canadian taxpayers. That is the kind of hyper-partisanship that the government has displayed.

However, I am so proud of the committee, and I hope I can be proud of this chamber, when we say enough is enough and stop the government from taking its hyper-partisanship to permeate and infect something as serious and important as the laws of our country. Surely all parliamentarians can agree that we can stop our political partisanship when it comes to the actual drafting of our laws. Laws should be made in this chamber that are sound, that are responsible, that are needed.

We all have different ideas on what laws should be drafted and that is why we have these debates in this chamber. That is why we hopefully listen to each other so we can maybe influence and form better legislation. When it comes to the actual drafting of the bill itself, it should reflect an objective, lawful and responsible drafting of that law. It is no place for cheap politicking. This is the message that I think the committee has sent back to this chamber. It is saying "enough is enough". It will no longer tolerate this silly, puerile and infantile attempt to infect our legislation with Conservative jingoism.

"Cracking down on crooked consultants" is an actual phrase in a piece of Canadian legislation that we expect lawyers and judges in the courts of this land to express. With the greatest of respect to every member of this chamber, I beseech all of us to stop this.

One day the government, hopefully soon, will be on this side of the House. I wonder how it will react if the government on that side of the House takes the kind of partisan approach to drafting legislation that it is trying to impose on all of us today. I seriously doubt the Conservatives would like it.

I want to talk briefly about the accuracy of the bill. Again, it has been pointed out by many of my colleagues that it is actually a dishonest title for the bill. The bill is one aspect of cracking down on child exploitation and being subjected to pornography from the Internet. It does not have the magic bullet answer.

I want to end with the phrase, "for every problem there is an answer that is simple, easy, cheap and wrong". That epitomizes the government's approach to crime. It thinks that every issue of crime can be fixed with some simple jingoistic answer, some easy phrase. That is not the case, and Canadians know it.

Canadians want parliamentarians to act responsibly and maturely in this chamber. That is why I hope we can all support the committee and reject this short title that is so irresponsible and so inaccurate.

● (1350)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote stands deferred until tomorrow after the time provided for government orders.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PROTECTING CANADIANS BY ENDING SENTENCE DISCOUNTS FOR MULTIPLE MURDERS ACT

Hon. Gail Shea (for the Minister of Justice) moved that Bill C-48, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak in support of the important Criminal Code amendments contained in Bill C-48, Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act. If passed, this bill will directly amend several provisions in the Criminal Code and will make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act.

In essence, the amendments to the Criminal Code proposed in Bill C-48 will permit a judge to increase the time that multiple murderers must serve in custody before having any chance to apply for parole. This will be accomplished by authorizing judges to impose on those who take more than one life a separate, 25-year period of parole ineligibility—one for each victim after the first—to be served consecutively to the parole ineligibility imposed for the first murder.

Before I go on to discuss Bill C-48 in more detail, I want to take a moment to thank the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for her unceasing efforts to keep this issue alive over the past decade. Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing right up to the present, she has sponsored a series of private member's bills with the same purpose as Bill C-48, namely to ensure that multiple murderers serve consecutively the full parole ineligibility periods applicable for each murder. I applaud her for her pioneering efforts in this regard.

As honourable members are no doubt already aware, upon conviction all murderers receive a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment with the right to apply for parole after a set period of time. The period of time during which a convicted first degree murderer is barred from applying for parole is 25 years. In the case of a second degree murder, it is also 25 years if the offender has previously been convicted either of murder or of an intentional killing under the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

Otherwise, it is 10 years. It is important to note, however, that 10 years is a minimum, and that a sentencing judge may always raise the normal 10-year parole ineligibility period for second degree murder up to 25 years. This is authorized by section 754.4 of the Criminal Code and is based on the offender's character, the nature and circumstances of the murder, and any recommendation to this effect made by the jury.

Nonetheless, the nub of the issue before us today is that 25 years is the maximum period during which a convicted first or second degree murderer may be prevented from applying for parole. And this is so no matter how many lives that person may have taken and no matter how much pain and suffering that person's crimes may have inflicted on the families and loved ones of those whose lives have been so cruelly taken.

The only exception to the 25-year limit occurs through the interaction of the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Together they mandate a new 25-year parole ineligibility period on any already-sentenced murderer who commits another murder, whether it is in the first or second degree. This new 25-year ineligibility period will be added to the parole ineligibility period that such a person is already serving. This is essentially the situation of an incarcerated murderer who commits another murder while in prison and is obviously a rare situation that does not cover the vast majority of multiple murders.

Many Canadians share my view that the current parole ineligibility period of 25 years for murder set out in Canadian law symbolically devalues the lives of multiple victims. In this regard, the current state of the law lays itself open to the charge that multiple murderers in Canada receive a volume discount for their crimes. The measures proposed in the bill before us today will change this.

● (1355)

These measures will allow judges to ensure that, in appropriate cases, those who take more than one life—whether they commit first or second degree murder—will serve longer periods without eligibility for parole.

As I mentioned earlier, Bill C-48 will accomplish this by authorizing judges to add separate 25-year periods of parole ineligibility to the sentence of a multiple murderer, one for each murder after the first. These extra periods of ineligibility for parole would be added to the parole ineligibility period imposed for the first murder, which, as I have already mentioned, ranges from 10 to 25 years.

As a result, those who kill more than once could well serve their entire life sentence in prison without ever becoming eligible to apply for parole. Allowing judges to impose additional parole ineligibility periods would counter any perception that multiple murderers get a sentence discount under Canadian law and thus help to restore public confidence in the criminal justice system.

In proposing these Criminal Code amendments, I am mindful of the suffering endured by the families and loved ones of murder victims. On October 5, when he introduced Bill C-48, the Minister of Justice stated outside the House that we could not bring back those who had been so callously murdered nor repair the hearts of those who had lost loved ones to murder, but we could ensure that those who commit the most serious crime of all—taking the life of another—pay a more appropriate price.

Other measures that our government has proposed, such as those contained in Bill S-6, the Serious Time for the Most Serious Crime Act, are also directly aimed at alleviating the suffering of the families and loved ones of murder victims. Bill S-6 would completely eliminate the right of future murderers to apply for faint hope after serving a mere 15 years.

It would also place severe restrictions on when and how often those with the present right may apply. In this vein, the measures proposed in Bill C-48 reinforce the measures set out in Bill S-6. They send a strong message of support for the families and loved ones of the victims of multiple murderers by recognizing the lives that have been lost.

Moreover, the measures proposed in Bill C-48 will also ensure that in those cases where a sentencing judge elects to impose consecutive periods of parole ineligibility on a multiple murderer, the families and loved ones will not have to suffer through a seemingly endless series of parole applications that in too many cases accomplish little other than to stir up painful memories.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

FLOODING IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with the people of southwestern Nova Scotia as they deal with the aftermath of last week's severe flooding.

Unprecedented rains over several days have damaged bridges, roads and homes in several communities. Last week, along with local officials, I visited some of the affected areas and talked to residents impacted by the storm.

We are all relieved that the situation is beginning to improve throughout the area. There are a lot of repairs still under way and there is much more to be done.

I would like to commend Emergency Measures, the RCMP, volunteer firefighters, the Red Cross, and many others for providing support and services to residents in need in many communities.

As the Prime Minister said, we are in close contact with provincial authorities, and the Government of Canada stands ready to provide assistance once the province has completed an assessment of the damage.

The people of Nova Scotia have experienced severe weather before, and I am certain that by working together we will weather this storm as well.

* * *

● (1400)

ATLANTIC AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today in Canada's Parliament to congratulate Urban Laughlin of Sherbrooke, P.E.I. on his induction into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame.

No one is more deserving, given Urban's lifetime dedication to bettering the livelihood of family farms. He has always spoken truth to power, be it with the 4-H, the Federation, Junior Farmers', or his long career with the National Farmers Union. He attended the founding NFU convention and has been present at all 40 conventions since, a feat made possible through a team effort with his wife Mary on their dairy and mixed farm operation.

Mr. Laughlin is the most principled farm leader ever in standing up for policy dedicated to farmers and against compromise that could undermine the family farm.

He quotes Frederick Douglass, “Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them...”.

Urban challenged those oppressors, fought for cost of production, and is a passionate voice for social justice. Canada needs more Urbans.

We congratulate Urban.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AU BAS DE L'ÉCHELLE ORGANIZATION

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a collective reflection day on equal treatment for non-standard workers organized by the Au bas de l'échelle organization was held on November 12.

According to this organization:

> In the workplace, the most significant change in the past decades has been the diversification of the forms of employment and employment statuses. As a result, more than one out of three workers are now in non-standard employment situations... Non-standard employment often goes hand in hand with precarious employment.

Since 1975, Au bas de l'échelle has been offering a number of information and training services on rights in the workplace and carrying out political activities to enhance the rights of non-unionized workers, especially in connection with the Labour Standards Act.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the Au bas de l'échelle organization, which is celebrating 35 years of advocating collectively for the rights of non-unionized workers in Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Prime Minister made a promise to the people of Canada and our brave soldiers serving in Afghanistan. He promised to end Canada's military mission in 2011. He and his Liberal backers promised to refocus the mission on training.

The wording approved in Parliament at the time was that "the military mission shall consist of...training the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can expeditiously take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole".

Seventy-two Canadian soldiers have died since the promises to train the Afghan forces and to end the mission in 2011 were made. Wounded soldiers return home to a government that seems indifferent to their suffering and more concerned with saving money than providing real help.

After nine years of fighting, life has not changed much for two out of three Afghans, who are still living in poverty.

It is time to end the war, not extend it. I am calling on the government to keep its promise and bring all our troops home.

* * *

MICHAEL STARR WEEK

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today to speak about a true trailblazer in Oshawa.

Yesterday, November 14, was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Michael Starr, the most distinguished, prolific, and successful politician that Oshawa has ever produced. Yesterday Michael Starr had his star unveiled on Oshawa's Walk of Fame.

This week has been declared "Michael Starr Week".

Michael served as a city alderman and went on to be the mayor of Oshawa from 1949 to1952. He was also the federal member of Parliament from 1952 to 1968, and was the first Ukrainian Canadian ever to serve as a cabinet minister.

Michael also served as an honorary colonel of the Ontario Regiment, honorary president of the Oshawa Boy Scouts, honorary chairman of the Oshawa Folk Arts Council, and a founder and later president of the Ukrainian Business and Professional Club in Oshawa.

Michael was considered by many ethnic leaders as their spokesman in Ottawa on both national and international issues.

I stand here today to honour the legacy of Michael Starr.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

LOUISE LEMIEUX-BÉRUBÉ

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to an immensely talented artist from LaSalle—Émard.

Louise Lemieux-Bérubé is a pioneer, internationally renowned for her works and her innovative use of jacquard weaving techniques. In addition to being a world-renowned artist, she is known for her involvement in education. She is a co-founder of the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, where she teaches students from around the world.

Ms. Lemieux-Bérubé innovates and creates her works with ultramodern techniques. One example is her use of a process that blends new digital technologies with traditional hand-weaving techniques.

Her work has been exhibited around the world. This fall, the Canadian embassy in Tokyo is exhibiting Louise Lemieux-Bérubé's creations along with the works of artists who have worked in her studio.

I would like to congratulate Ms. Lemieux-Bérubé and tell her that we are very proud of her and the way in which she represents us on the international stage. Bravo!

* * *

[*English*]

OPERATION RED NOSE QUINTE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Christmas season will soon be upon us before we know it, I would like to take this moment to pay tribute to a group of volunteers in my riding who go above and beyond in their quest to make everyone's holiday a safe and happy one.

I am referring, of course, to the volunteers of Operation Red Nose Quinte. In the days leading up to and during the Christmas season, they give many hours of their time providing complimentary rides home to yuletide merrymakers.

Operation Red Nose Quinte has been a wonderful community service since its inception in 1997, and last year alone the volunteers provided more than 3,000 rides and logged more than 46,000 kilometres.

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give". The volunteers of Operation Red Nose Quinte embody that quotation.

On behalf of the residents of Prince Edward—Hastings, I wish to commend the tireless efforts of past chairs, this year's honorary chair, Boyd Sullivan, and the volunteers at Operation Red Nose Quinte.

I thank them all for keeping so many of us safe during this most magical time of the year.

[*Translation*]

2010 BERNARD HUBERT PRIZE

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 1, 2010, this year's Bernard Hubert prize was awarded in Longueuil, in memory of Bishop Bernard Hubert, a man who was very committed to his community and cared about those living in poverty and on the margins of society.

The purpose of the Bernard Hubert prize is to recognize and commend the contribution of community organizations to the development of human values, particularly through the defence of human rights, charitable giving, public education and the social economy. I am proud to congratulate three organizations from my riding that received three out of four honourable mentions during the event.

The Maison de la famille LeMoyne, which works with underprivileged families in LeMoyne, received the honourable mention and a cash prize. In addition, Aphasie Rive-Sud, which helps people who have aphasia return to employment, and Envol, which provides assistance to young mothers in distress, both received special mentions.

Once again, I would like to congratulate them all and sincerely thank them for their exceptional commitment to our community.

* * *

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRIFOOD

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some very special guests have joined us in Ottawa today, young farmers from across Canada who are in town for the National Future Farmers Network, which is taking place today and tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

These young people represent the future of an industry that is a cornerstone of our economy and labour market and one that literally puts food on our tables.

Currently, fewer and fewer young people are getting into farming for a number of reasons including the significant financial investment needed to get started in this sector.

That is why the government is working hard to give our young farmers the tools they need to raise their families and achieve their dream of farming.

[*English*]

We are cultivating a réflexe jeunesse to ensure our programs are developed with the needs of young farmers in mind. We are working with young farmers to build a better future. We are listening and we are putting farmers first.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are in shock following yesterday's horrific explosion at a Mexican tourist destination, which claimed the lives of so many while seriously injuring so many more.

We particularly mourn the five Canadians who were tragically taken from their families and their friends. This tragedy is made all the more painful and poignant knowing that among the fatalities were a nine year old child and a newly wedded couple who were forever taken in the blast.

Now at this time we wish a speedy and successful recovery for those Canadians who remain in hospital and for all who were hurt in the explosion.

Our sympathies go out to the families of all those who lost their lives yesterday, and our thoughts and prayers go to all who were injured.

* * *

● (1410)

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of Canadian families is important to this Conservative government.

Over the last 25 years, there has been an alarming rise in the number of overweight and obese children. Obesity rates among children and youth have nearly tripled. It is an issue that affects children everywhere in Canada.

Our government has already taken action to encourage physical activity through great initiatives like the child fitness tax credit and the eat well and be active toolkit.

The ministers of health and intergovernmental affairs announced today additional funding for projects across the country that will examine ways to combat childhood obesity and keep our kids healthy and physically active.

For Canada's Conservative government, family comes first.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past weeks, I held town hall meetings all across my riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North, in Terrace Bay, Marathon, Nipigon, Longlac and Geraldton, in many first nation communities and in Thunder Bay. The people have all asked that Parliament help control their rising costs of living. Many are earning less these days but are paying more for necessities like electricity, home heating, transportation and gasoline. They are even paying more for services vital to our far-flung communities, like Internet access and postage. These things cost more now because of the harmonized sales tax brought in by the Conservatives and the Liberals and rushed through virtually without debate in this House.

On behalf of my constituents, I must ask members of this House to support rolling back the HST tax hike on necessities like home heating, electricity and gasoline. It is time for this Parliament to lower the cost of living for Canadian families instead of increasing taxes.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, five Canadians were killed and six others were injured and hospitalized following a tragic incident yesterday at the Grand Riviera Princess hotel in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

On behalf of all Canadians, I offer my condolences to the families and friends of those who died and I wish the injured a speedy recovery.

I offer my sympathy to all those affected by this terrible explosion and I want to assure all Canadians that the government will continue to support all those who have been affected by yesterday's explosion.

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AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Aung San Suu Kyi, the iconic figure of opposition and democracy in Burma, was released on Saturday.

Leader of the National League for Democracy party and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, the “Lady of Rangoon” has spent 15 of the last 21 years behind bars or under house arrest.

This political leader has already announced that she will help investigate charges of fraud in the November 7 legislative election. Her party had boycotted the election, which led to its dissolution by the authorities. Western nations and independent observers have called the election a sham designed to prop up the military junta and stated they were “neither free nor fair”.

The Bloc Québécois is asking the Canadian government to continue to exert pressure on the Burmese authorities to implement a political system that is completely democratic and transparent.

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[*English*]

YOUTH SUICIDE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today with a heavy heart, to pay tribute to the Richardson family of Ottawa. This past Friday, their beloved 14-year-old daughter Daron took her own life. A beautiful girl, an excellent student, a competitive athlete, Daron was well known and well liked, which makes her passing all the more difficult to comprehend and to come to terms with.

Unfortunately, Daron's story is not unique. Canada's youth suicide rate is the third highest in the industrialized world.

I would like to commend the Richardson family for their courage and their valiant effort to raise awareness of the need to make further investments in research and treatment of mental illness for all our teenage kids.

I would ask all members to join me in extending our sincerest condolences to Daron's father, Luke; her mother, Stephanie; her sister, Morgan; and the entire Richardson family.

● (1415)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in a tragic incident at the Grand Riviera Princess Hotel in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, five Canadians lost their lives and six remain injured in hospital.

On behalf of all Canadians, we offer our most sincere condolences to family members and friends of those who lost their lives and wish a quick recovery to those who were injured.

Canadian officials in Ottawa and embassy staff are on site in Mexico and continue to monitor the impact of the explosion and are providing consular assistance to those affected.

I extend deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives on Sunday in this terrible explosion. I can assure all Canadians that our government will continue to support those affected yesterday and their families.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we learned last week that the government is going to commit Canada to a new, non-combat mission in Afghanistan after 2011. But Canadians are still waiting for a clear, detailed proposal from the government.

People are entitled to know exactly what the government has in mind for Canada's commitment in Afghanistan after 2011.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have said repeatedly that Canada's combat mission will end in 2011, in accordance with the motion adopted here in the House in March 2008. As we transition out of the combat mission, we will continue to provide aide and focus on development. A non-combat training role will ensure that the progress made by the Canadian Forces to date continues.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are still waiting for clear answers to detailed questions. For example, how many trainers will there be? Does training exclude combat? Where will the training take place? Will it be within a secure area? Would the trainers be in Kabul?

These are all important details. Canadians cannot be content with the government's vague proposals. They demand clarity. When will the government give us that clarity?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, Afghanistan remains Canada's top international security priority. The government is reviewing Canada's development and diplomatic efforts post-2011. Regardless of the results of that review, Canada will continue its development activities and maintain diplomatic relations in Afghanistan through the Canadian embassy in Kabul.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those answers are genuinely absurd. We are five days away from the Lisbon summit and the government is unable to stand in the House and tell us exactly what the post-2011 combat mission looks like.

How can the government explain this silence? How can it explain its improvisation? How can it explain its secrecy? How can it explain its lack of transparency with the Canadian people?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been repeatedly clear on this particular issue. In accordance with the parliamentary motion that was adopted here in March 2008, Canada's combat mission will end in 2011. As we transition out of the combat mission, we will continue to provide aid and focus on development in Afghanistan. As I mentioned before in French, a non-combat training role will ensure that the progress made by Canadian Forces to date continues.

● (1420)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I could try again and ask a very specific question of the minister.

Could the minister tell us how long he expects the training mission to last, how many trainers he expects to be there and how much he anticipates this training mission will cost on an annual basis?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister responded to the question in terms of length and indicated that this role would go until 2014.

As well, as we speak we are still reviewing the role that Canada will play. When we have completed that, we will be able to inform the House.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's spokesperson, Mr. Soudas, who was one of the spokespeople last week, said there were options for training, for assistance and for development. I therefore have a very simple question for the minister. The time has come to make decisions. What exactly is the plan for assistance, for development and for training? Those are very clear questions, and the answers should also be clear.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's impatience, but as I said, we are reviewing Canada's development and diplomatic efforts. When the time is right, we will be able to make the appropriate announcements.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions, the Prime Minister and other government members have stated that no Canadian soldiers would be present in Afghanistan after 2011. On January 6, 2010, the Prime Minister even said, and I quote, "we will not be undertaking any activities that require any kind of military presence, other than the odd guard guarding an embassy."

Does the Prime Minister realize that by announcing the extension of the military mission until 2014 while Parliament was not sitting he has broken a promise made to the people?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Not at all, Mr. Speaker. We have said on a number of occasions that Canada's combat mission will end in 2011. We have always been very clear about this and have stated that we will comply fully with the motion passed by Parliament in March 2008. As I mentioned earlier, we are obviously reviewing a number of things. This review, which I referred to a few moments ago, is continuing. When we are in a position to make announcements, we will do so.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs should stop playing with words.Since the Prime Minister's announcement, it appears that 600 to 1,000 soldiers would remain in Afghanistan as part of a mission that is most definitely military in nature. And yet the Prime Minister promised that after 2011, this mission would become strictly civilian.

Yes or no, will the government keep its promise to withdraw Canadian troops, no later than the end of 2011?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, assuming a non-combat training role obviously will ensure that the progress made by the armed forces to date will continue. I would like to remind my colleague that the sacrifices of brave Canadians have made it possible to build a safer, more stable, more prosperous Afghanistan, which is not a haven for terrorists.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims that he does not need the House to vote on sending 600 to 1,000 soldiers to Afghanistan. But in his 2005-06 election platform he said, "A Conservative government will...make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over the...commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations".

Will the Prime Minister admit that by announcing that he is extending Canada's military mission in Afghanistan without consulting Parliament, he is reneging on an important election promise?

● (1425)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not at all, and it is important to make that distinction. In situations that require legitimacy, for example, when the Government of Canada commits to sending soldiers to combat, it makes sense for the government to obtain the support of the Canadian Parliament. However, I will remind my colleague that just recently, at the beginning of January, when we sent Canadian Forces to provide assistance in Haiti, we did so without first having the approval of the House.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only did the Prime Minister promise in his election platform that Parliament would be consulted before any military mission, but on May 10, 2006, in response to a question from the Leader of the Bloc Québécois, the Prime Minister also reiterated his promise of "holding votes on new commitments", a promise that came up again in the 2007 throne speech.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he broke his promise by announcing that the military mission would be extended without consulting Parliament?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech, the Prime Minister indicated that at the end of our military mission in 2011, our effort would focus on diplomacy and development. We are in the process of reviewing the situation, and we will inform the House once that review is complete.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised to bring our troops home from Afghanistan next July and to put military deployments before this House for a vote. That makes two broken promises. Instead of listening to Canadians, the Prime Minister is taking his advice from the leader of the Liberal Party.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to submit to the democratic process of a parliamentary vote?

Why such lack of accountability?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction. In fact, the Prime Minister indicated in this House that the combat mission would be ending at the end of 2011 and that we would make sure to adhere to and fully comply with the motion passed in this place in March 2008. That is what were are doing.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, anyone who goes around saying that the deployment of troops in Afghanistan does not entail great risk is sorely underestimating the intelligence of Canadians. That is the truth of it.

I would like to read a quote that states:

> The Prime Minister made a sincere commitment in an election campaign to allow parliamentarians...to vote on whether our troops should be deployed abroad....

Who said that? It was the government House leader. Does the government House leader still believe his own words?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for this government and for parliamentarians, our Afghan mission remains extremely important. It is a top international security priority.

We continue to make considerable sacrifices and devote significant resources in the interest of helping Afghanistan, as well as the Afghans themselves, to become a more stable and self-sufficient country and state.

As I mentioned before, we are reviewing Canada's development and diplomatic efforts in post-2011. When we have completed that we will be able to make the House aware of that.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was evident in the easygoing exchange back and forth between the Liberals and the Conservatives a few minutes ago that they are working side by side to extend our military mission in Afghanistan.

Are the Conservatives also learning from their new Liberal friends about arrogance, flip-flopping and avoiding accountability? How far is the training going?

If the government really believes what it often says when it extols the virtues of parliamentary democracy, why is it allowing a mission costing billions and three more years of danger for our troops to go ahead without a vote?

● (1430)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, as well as the government, has been very clear. If we are going to put troops into combat, into a war situation, for the sake of legitimacy the government has made the practice of asking the support of Parliament. We have done that and we were the first government to have done that.

The point that I am making is that, for instance, our recent deployment of military personnel to Haiti following the earthquake in the month of January is a perfect example of deploying troops in a non-combat role without requiring a vote of the House of Commons.

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G8 AND G20 SUMMITS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the government dumps documents on a Friday before a break, we know it is to cover up an embarrassment.

When it comes to the G8 and G20 spendfest, it reveals an addiction to lavish spending.

Why did the government saddle taxpayers with a $1,900 bill for frosted glasses, and over $16,000 for opulence catering? With this excessive spending, is it any wonder the minister of opulence over there has run up a record $56 billion deficit?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as host nation of unprecedented back to back G8 and G20 summits we are proud of their success.

As we have said all along, the majority of the costs for the summits were security related. Approximately 20,000 security personnel were tasked with safeguarding both summits.

Disclosing the full to date details of the costs of these summits is further proof of our government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister can explain to Canadian taxpayers how spending $12,000 on tablecloths added to security. Did the $19,000 24-place setting make summit leaders safer? No wonder the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt recently boasted, "we are spending like it was Christmas"; over $1 billion for 72 hours.

Will the Conservatives now admit that much of this spending spree was to puff up the Prime Minister's image and not for security?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was responsible for the safety and security of world leaders, delegates, visitors, and Canadians living and working near where the summits took place. We took this responsibility very seriously, and we are proud of the men and women who ensured their protection.

Disclosing the full to date details of the cost of these summits is further proof of our government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for three days of meetings the Conservatives spent nearly $20,000 on flowers and centrepieces. They spent nearly $300,000 on gifts and promotional items; $57,000 on pins.

The Conservatives managed to spend more money on zipper pulls and lapel pins than the average Canadian family earns in an entire year. No wonder the Conservative member for Saskatoon—Humboldt said that they were "spending like it is Christmas".

When will the Prime Minister apologize for wasting so much taxpayers' money?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hosts of large international meetings, such as the G8 and the G20 summits, traditionally have stationery, lapel pins, and other souvenir items made to give to members of the media, delegates, and others who wish to take home memories of their participation in these events. In Muskoka and Toronto these items were a popular component of our community outreach activities.

Many of the promotional items were used in the youth program associated with the summit. That is why there are T-shirts, zippers, and bottles of water.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they were expensive memories on taxpayers' borrowed money.

Canadians now know about the $20,000 ice sculpture, but they are still only seeing the tip of the iceberg. For instance, it was discovered that the Conservatives spent nearly $100,000 buying a table for the two-day G20 meeting. The Conservatives "inadvertently" forgot to include the $100,000 table in the list of costs for the summit.

Just how many other items have been left off the list, and how much did these forgotten expenses cost taxpayers?

● (1435)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike any other nation, Canada has been complete in detailing the costs of these summits. It is further proof of our government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

As the host nation of unprecedented, back-to-back G8 and G20 summits, we are proud of the success of these two summits.

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[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, veterans used Remembrance Week as an opportunity to show their opposition to the government's changes to allowance payments. Veterans do not want a single lump sum payment; they want the government to restore the lifetime monthly pension.

Will the government listen to veterans' arguments, respond to their needs and restore the lifetime monthly pension as a means of compensation?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, we announced that numerous changes were being made. We will add a second chapter to the new veterans charter. A lump sum payment will obviously be one of the options that will be offered to our veterans. Those who prefer not to receive a cash payment, but would rather have it spread out, can do so. We will be introducing that very soon.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister can talk all he likes about a new chapter and more announcements, but veterans are still not satisfied. In September, the minister promised additional measures over the coming weeks, even days. But we are still waiting.

Can the government confirm that it intends to amend the legislation and restore the lifetime monthly pension, as veterans are calling for?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have announced changes to the earnings loss benefit so that a modern vet coming back from Afghanistan, for example, who participates in a rehabilitation program or who is seriously injured, will receive at least $40,000 per year.

We have also announced a permanent monthly allowance that is similar to the former pension but that complements all of our measures. They can receive between $509 and $536 per month, plus $1,000 for those who cannot return to work. All of this will be happening very soon.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with the next conference on climate change less than three weeks away, we still do not know what Canada's targets are. What we do know is that one of the big banks that invests in the oil sands has rolled out the red carpet for the former environment minister. This illustrates the close ties this government has with the industry.

Will the Prime Minister stop hiding behind the Americans to justify his inaction, be more transparent and immediately reveal the position Canada will defend in Cancun?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be asked by the Prime Minister to be the environment minister, particularly because of the opportunity to work with my friend from the Bloc Québécois once again. That was a great privilege of mine.

We are going to go to Cancun as a government and we are going to strongly support the Copenhagen accord. What else can we do with respect to showing leadership, particularly on getting rid of and phasing out coal-fired electricity-generating stations? We are going to talk about the $400 million in financing that Canada has put forward to fight global warming. We are going to talk about adaptation. We are going to talk about mitigation and we are going to continue to push to move the ball forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives is urging the Prime Minister to lay the foundation for a real policy to fight climate change. The leaders of 150 of Canada's largest corporations are growing impatient.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to listen to the Bloc Québécois, environmental groups and now business people, too? What is he waiting for to announce a plan?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always been proud to talk about what our government has done for the environment. Our government took part in negotiations for the Copenhagen accord. We have harmonized our targets with those of the United States. We are going ahead with a continental standard for greenhouse gas emissions from new cars. We have proposed regulations regarding the renewable content in gasoline. We have proposed regulations regarding waste water treatment. We are working hard to protect the environment and we will continue to do so.

* * *

● (1440)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, John McCain, the former Republican presidential candidate, says the F-35 cost overruns have been "absolutely outrageous". Why irrevocably commit Canada to a project whose costs are out of control, when other companies could also build the jets we need, on schedule and at fixed costs, and leave more money for things such as much-needed beds for our veterans?

Will the Prime Minister show respect for the Canadian taxpayer and launch an open competition that will maximize value for money?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is light on his facts as usual. In fact, when I spoke to John McCain last week, he was extolling the virtues of the F-35 and saying what a great investment this was going to be.

Why is it that the Liberal Party continually reverses itself, swallows itself whole, acts so cynically when it comes to the funding of the important equipment for the Canadian Forces? We will not take any lessons from the member opposite, the member whose party cancelled the Sea King replacements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even the Republicans in the United States and the Tories in Britain are reassessing their F-35 purchases. Canadian taxpayers are the only ones who cannot count on their government to protect them from billions of dollars in cost overruns. Worse still, Canada is going to lose out on precious economic spinoffs because the Prime Minister refuses to launch a competitive bidding process.

Our military personnel and all Canadians have the right to know that our defence budget is being spent properly. Out of respect for our taxpayers, will the government launch a competitive bidding process?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after we continued the program on the F-35, which was started and invested in by the members of the Liberal Party when they were in government, we have now ensured that we will see upwards of $12 billion in contracts that can come to the Canadian aerospace industry, which is certainly good for some of the companies that exist in the riding of the member opposite.

Why does the Liberal Party continually cave in and cancel military contracts to the detriment of the Canadian Forces and the detriment of the Canadian aerospace industry?

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The minister will know that the heads of state of NATO are going to be meeting on Afghanistan starting on Friday. Is the minister seriously asking this House and Canadians to believe that the government is going to go into that meeting without having a clear plan, without knowing what specifically it intends to do between 2011 and 2014? Why will the minister not share the plan with the people of Canada before he goes to Lisbon and not afterward?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to my hon. colleague a few moments ago, and as we indicated in the Speech from the Throne, we are committed to continuing our diplomatic relations as well as our development with Afghanistan.

As well, I indicated that we are reviewing our position in terms of training. We will get this information to members of the House at the earliest opportunity.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Canadian public is seeing is that the Prime Minister has already made an announcement, that his assistant, Dimitri Soudas, has already made an announcement and that the Minister of National Defence has made an announcement without providing any details about the future. The minister responsible for development has not made any announcement concerning plans for development.

There is a meeting scheduled to take place in Lisbon four days from now. It is imperative that the government clearly tell the Canadian public what its plans are, and that it do so before sharing them with NATO leaders in Portugal.

Why does it not do so now?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand my hon. colleague's legendary impatience. However, I will remind him that, as I indicated, we are currently reviewing various aspects and options. When we are in a position to get this information to our colleagues in the House, we will do so.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Pakistan floods have been the worst in recent history. The scale of the disaster has overwhelmed the population. The United Nations estimates that over 20 million people have been affected and almost two million homes have been destroyed.

We know the Canadian government has already provided $52 million in flood relief so far. Could the Minister of International Cooperation tell the House how much was raised through our Pakistan matching fund program?

● (1445)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again Canadians have demonstrated their amazing generosity and compassion. Their contributions to the victims of the floods will provide much-needed food aid, emergency medical care, as well as support for the devastated agricultural sector.

Today I am pleased to tell the House that individual Canadians contributed $46.8 million to help the Pakistani people.

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FOREIGN TAKEOVERS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the foreign takeover of Stelco, U.S. Steel has played the government for a fool. It has flouted its agreement with the industry minister from day one.

When the blast furnace was shut down, we were told that it was because of a lack of orders. That must be interpreted as a shortage of work. So, regardless of the subsequent lockout, the workers of Local 1005 must be entitled to EI.

Will the government act now and extend EI benefits to these innocent victims of the government's failed foreign takeover laws?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the principle of EI involves one of strict impartiality in all labour disputes. The system is designed to remain neutral and to not interfere in labour disputes, and that will be the case in this case as well.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nowhere is the government's failure in dealing with foreign takeovers more clear than in Hamilton.

U.S. Steel shut down the blast furnace, halted production, slashed 800 jobs, and has locked out the remaining workers. Taking U.S. Steel to court after the fact is too little, too late. It is obvious the Investment Canada Act must finally be fixed.

Will the Conservatives agree to support our motion tomorrow that would amend the act by making it more transparent and include Canadians in the decision-making process?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will be supporting the NDP motion tomorrow.

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[*Translation*]

FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 10, in Seoul, the Minister of Finance signed an agreement with the China Insurance Regulatory Commission allowing Chinese insurance companies to invest in financial products on the Canadian financial market.

Can the minister tell us who negotiated on behalf of Canada's financial markets and who signed this agreement, and why he omitted these details from his press release? Who?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the discussions were conducted by the Government of Canada.

I am very pleased that the Government of the People's Republic of China has extended this initiative to Canada. It is good for foreign direct investment in our country. It is good for our financial services industry.

It is one of several items that we discussed as finance officials with our Chinese colleagues last August, and every one of those items has been fulfilled by the People's Republic of China.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, his response is shameful. If the minister knew what he was doing, he would know that the agreement signed last week is the second one between China and the Canadian Securities Administrators, that is, the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec and the administrators of the other provinces, whose jurisdiction has just been recognized internationally.

What is the minister waiting for to drop his shameful and predatory project, which will only strip Quebec of its financial independence? Let him stay out of it. He does not know what he is doing.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought the member opposite cared about Beijing. He is clearly concerned about Toronto.

The initiative with respect to the securities regulator in Canada is an issue that will be decided, in terms of jurisdiction, by the Supreme Court of Canada, which has set aside two days to consider it next April.

It is a totally voluntary system. If a province such as Quebec chooses not to join, that is up to Quebec.

* * *

● (1450)

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been skating frantically, avoiding questions that Canadians must have the answer to before the government goes to Lisbon on Friday.

How many trainers? Where are they going to be? Are they going to be out of combat? How much is it going to cost? Why is it impossible for the government to give simple answers to clear questions that Canadians need to have answers to before they can approve any mission by the government?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought the Leader of the Opposition would have indicated to the members of this House his willingness to see the government consider deploying trainers to Afghanistan on a going-forward basis.

We are evaluating all of the options. When it comes time to make these options and the decisions taken by the government known, we will do so.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear for four or five months now. That is not the issue. The issue is the lack of clarity from that side of the House.

My question is the following: why did the Prime Minister say one thing yesterday in Asia and why is the Minister of Foreign Affairs now saying something else? They cannot skate around the question. They have to be clear.

I will ask the question again: how many trainers will there be, where will they be set up and how much will this cost us?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I invite the Leader of the Opposition to bide his time. We are currently reviewing various options. When we have completed our review, we will make these options public.

* * *

[*English*]

CREDIT CARD INDUSTRY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is only a few weeks since Visa debit cards hit the market and already Canadian businesses are being gouged, wrongly charged excessive credit card fees for what should be Interac transactions.

For credit card companies, the Conservatives' voluntary code of conduct has been a gift. For Canadian small businesses struggling to crawl out of this recession, it has been a failure.

Canadian small businesses deserve protection and leadership from the government. Will the Conservatives finally bring forward regulations with teeth, or will they continue to stand by while small businesses get fleeced?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the credit card code of conduct was worked on in consultation with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Chamber of Commerce, and with consumer groups in Canada.

We worked on it over many months. I am pleased to say we had the support of all of the participants by the time we developed this voluntary code of conduct, which is working well for consumers and for the industry in Canada.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have already seen numerous glitches that are costing Canadians dollar after dollar. When will the Conservatives stop standing by their Bay Street buddies who claim that there is nothing to see, while they pick the pockets of Canadian small businesses?

The Minister of Finance promised that if the voluntary code failed, as we predicted, he would bring in regulations. Will the Minister of Finance keep his word, protect Canadian small businesses, and stop credit card gouging?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, business groups, including small business groups, were consulted in the development of the voluntary code of conduct. Each and every one of them supported the code as it was developed. There was some resistance by the industry, but the industry compromised on certain points, and we were able to obtain a voluntary code of conduct that serves Canadian consumers.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian entrepreneurs helped our country through the challenges of the recession.

[*English*]

Small businesses are outperforming the rest of the economy, and that trend is likely to continue. Both the IMF and OECD forecast that our economic growth will be at the head of the pack among all G7 countries this year and next.

As we celebrate Global Entrepreneurship Week, can the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell the House how the government is helping to support entrepreneurs?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my thanks go out to Canadian entrepreneurs across the country, some of whom I met with today, for keeping our country in such an enviable position. Our government is working to make it easier to do business in Canada. That is why we are increasing access to financing, lowering taxes, and cutting red tape.

I would like to thank our entrepreneurs for their enormous contribution and their hard work. Our government will continue to stand with them.

* * *

● (1455)

MEMBERS' FRANKING PRIVILEGES

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the best efforts of the House to clean up the practice, the Conservatives continue to circumvent the roles of MP mail-outs and waste thousands of taxpayers' dollars. The member for New Brunswick Southwest used his franking privileges to ask Conservatives to vote for his hand-picked successor. That successor just happens to be the Prime Minister's former communications director.

How can the Conservatives not see that this is cheating?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are rules in place and those rules should be followed. In addition to eliminating out-of-riding ten percenters, our party and this government are prepared to go further to save taxpayers' dollars in this regard, and we call upon all parties to support our long-standing proposal to eliminate political subsidies to the parties in the House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has had no involvement with the Montreal financial round table project, which will be launched shortly. Canada Economic Development was invited to participate but did not respond. The minister's office does not even seem to be aware of the project.

Instead of trying to take away Quebec's financial autonomy by imposing a Canada-wide securities commission, should the federal government not participate in the development of Montreal's financial round table project instead?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very surprising to see the Bloc's critic defending the banking system, when nearly every question period he attacks the banking sector. An organization's partners are what create an institution like that. We analyze the merits of every funding request our department receives. We will continue to do so diligently.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was recently called by Fort McKay First Nation members, who were alarmed that a toxic tailings pond is open ended, with creeks running through, wildlife feeding in contaminated areas, and spillage into fish-bearing creeks. Despite the government's promise of improved surveillance and enforcement, it took a complaint from a first nation community to trigger an investigation.

What will it take for the government to act on the recommendations made by two parliamentary committees for federal action on the health and environmental impacts of the oil sands development?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the member, her constituents, and the first nation group involved, we are deeply concerned about the reports that we have learned of. I have spoken to my deputy minister, and Environment Canada officials will be on the ground tomorrow to get a first-hand look at the situation.

Anything affecting water quality, migratory birds, fish habitat, or wildlife causes us significant concern. We have a panel that is looking at water quality in Alberta. We look forward to the work that the panel will do and the recommendations it will bring forward.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has done more to improve the lives of aboriginal Canadians in four and a half years than the Liberals did in thirteen, from settling land claims to economic development to working in partnership to reform education. Can the minister tell the House the latest commitment to reconciliation and moving forward together?

Hon. John Duncan (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, aboriginal leaders in Canada have spoken with passion on the importance of endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and we have listened to them. We are proud to endorse this aspirational declaration in a way that balances the rights of all Canadians. National Chief Atleo calls this endorsement "an important shift in the relationship between first nations people and the federal government".

This government will continue to demonstrate leadership by advancing the cause of indigenous rights around the world and creating opportunities for a better future for all aboriginal peoples here in Canada.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is about cheating, and the cheating does not stop with the member from New Brunswick Southwest. First a Conservative senator gets direction from the PMO to send out flyers attacking opposition MPs. This is a flagrant abuse of the new House rules. Now the member of Parliament for Barrie is caught using taxpayer dollars to promote a Conservative councillor. Will the government order its members and its senator to repay these wasted funds?

When will the cheating stop?

● (1500)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are rules in place, and we expect all of the rules to be followed.

That being said, I encourage the member, given the degree of enthusiasm that she has shown on this subject, to come with us even further and save $25 million for all Canadians by cancelling the subsidy that political parties receive.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec government has its own interdepartmental action plan on homelessness. Its plan harmonizes and coordinates the efforts of departments and agencies. The federal government wants to use the homelessness partnering strategy for its own goals and impose the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Will the government commit to respecting Quebec's general-interest approach and the community plans in the regions?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in developing a homelessness plan we have consulted with all levels of government, local communities, and organizations. The government used this feedback to improve the program and we have developed it further. We have continued the homelessness program for an additional number of years, to 2014, at $390 million per year. That is $1.9 billion over five years. We are looking after the homeless.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after promising $10 million to address violence against aboriginal women, this Conservative government has cut $4 million of that funding without even consulting the Native Women's Association of Canada. Sisters in Spirit was praised by this government. Now it is being ignored.

Will the Conservatives reverse this disgraceful decision and commit the full $10 million as promised?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. We are fully supportive of this organization. In fact, we have funded it to the tune of $5 million. In addition to that, we are now putting forward $10 million to create a new RCMP centre for missing persons. We have introduced new law enforcement databases to investigate missing and murdered women. We have also included new funding to boost victim services and support the creation of community and educational aboriginal safety plans.

This is a good-news announcement for aboriginal women and women across this country. In fact, the Native Women's Association of Canada said that this is a significant investment.

* * *

VACANCY

CALGARY CENTRE-NORTH

The Speaker: Order. It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation: Mr. Jim Prentice, member for the electoral district of Calgary Centre-North, Alberta, by resignation effective November 14, 2010. Pursuant to subsections 25(1)(b) and 26(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, a warrant has been addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the course of question period, I allowed my emotions to take over the calm, studied aspect of my personality that I am usually able to exhibit. The Minister of National Defence, responding to a question, in his typical fashion was going down to the lowest common denominator—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Now that the members of the government have stopped heckling and making untoward comments, I will continue with my point of order.

In the heat and the anger at listening to the Minister of National Defence make his comments, I called him a "slime". I wish to unreservedly withdraw my remarks calling the minister a slime and offer him my sincere apology for having called him a slime. It was unparliamentary. I apologize unreservedly.

● (1505)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, the House leader of the Bloc Québécois, the House leader of the NDP and especially my friend from Ottawa South, the Liberal House leader, are really working hard to try to increase the level of decorum and debate in this place. I would suggest the statement that the member has just made is not in keeping with that commitment. It says more about her than it does about her party.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 43 petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[*Translation*]

This report concerns Bill C-20, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts.

[*English*]

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

AIR CANADA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition signed by several hundred Air Canada employees, many of them employed at the Montreal maintenance centre, as well as some of their family members and friends. They are worried about the looming possibility that their jobs could be exported to places like El Salvador or South America.

[*English*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today that is indicative of the groundswell of support for a bill that has been put forward by my NDP colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior. That bill would ban horse meat for human consumption.

The petitioners point out that horses are not raised primarily as food-producing animals, but rather are ordinarily kept and treated as sport and companion animals. As such, they are commonly administered drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used at any time in all other food-producing animals destined for the human food supply. As a result, Canadian horse meat products that are currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are very likely to contain prohibited substances.

The petitioners are rightly outraged by that fact and call upon Parliament to give expeditious passage to Bill C-544, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act (slaughter of horses for human consumption), so as to prohibit the importation and exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption as well as horse meat products for human consumption.

While I know it is against the rules of the House to endorse a petition, I am delighted to table this petition here today.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians, again, are showing that they love to read and they are sending petitions to me.

I am pleased to present seven petitions today from people in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and other areas in support of Bill C-509, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which would protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audiovisual materials.

PASSPORT FEES

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition calls on the Canadian government to negotiate with the United States government to reduce the United States and Canadian passport fees. Dozens of Canadians have signed these petitions.

The number of American tourists visiting Canada is at its lowest level since 1972. It has fallen by five million visits in the last seven years alone, from 16 million in 2002 to only 11 million in 2009. Passport fees for an American family of four can be over $500 U.S. While 50% of Canadians have passports, only 25% of Americans do.

At the recent Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments, which is comprised of states from North Dakota to Illinois and three Canadian provinces, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

> RESOLVED, that [the] Conference calls on President Barack Obama and [the Canadian] Prime Minister...to immediately examine a reduced fee for passports to facilitate cross-border tourism; and be it further
>
> RESOLVED, that [the Conference] encourage the governments to examine the idea of a limited-time two-for-one passport renewal or new application;

To be a fair process, the passport fees must be reduced on both sides of the border. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government to work with the American government to examine a mutual reduction in passport fees to facilitate tourism and, finally, promote a limited-time, two-for-one passport renewal or new application fee on a mutual basis with the United States.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition that refers to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms concerning the fact that:

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law...

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that

> No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy...

The signatories, citizens of Canada, are calling on the House of Commons to reaffirm and recognize urgently and specifically the fundamental rights of children, their parents and grandparents to the full and entire protection and equal benefit of the charter.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition is addressed to the Government of Canada by Canadians of all ages and from all walks of life who genuinely support and value the contributions of our veterans. They regard a veteran as a veteran, regardless of where or in which deployment he or she has served.

Senior officials, including former veterans ombudsman Pat Stogran and General Walter Natynczyk, have publicly condemned the new veterans charter and the Department of Veterans Affairs for creating barriers to serving Canada's veterans.

Veterans' hospitals are not able to properly serve modern-day veterans because their mandate is restricted to World War II and the Korean War, despite the more than 200,000 members who have served abroad in peacekeeping missions since the Korean War. There is also a profound concern that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has publicly raised the possibility of merging the Department of Veterans Affairs with the Department of National Defence.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to extend the mandate of veterans' hospitals to include veterans who have served in conflicts and peacekeeping operations since 1953, to end the clawback of veterans' pensions, to eliminate the reduction of veterans' pensions at age 65, to change the widows' benefit to a non-taxable benefit, to create a veterans advisory panel to provide input on the selection of future veterans ombudspersons and to ensure that Veterans Affairs Canada remains a stand-alone department.

Routine Proceedings

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on behalf of petitioners who are concerned for the Native Women's Association of Canada, which has, as part of the NWAC Sisters in Spirit campaign, identified nearly 600 missing and murdered aboriginal women whose cases go back to 1970. The equivalent in the whole Canadian population would be 18,000 missing or murdered women. This research has convinced Canadians that violence against aboriginal women must be stopped and that we need to find the strategies, resources and tools to stop women from disappearing.

The petitioners call upon the Parliament of Canada to ensure NWAC receives the funding it was promised to continue the important work of protecting women through its Sisters in Spirit initiative and to invest in initiatives recommended by NWAC to prevent more women from disappearing.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today to submit to the House. The first one is on the eco-energy program that was cancelled in March of this year. I have over 100 petitioners from Marathon, Schreiber, Nipigon, Sault Ste. Marie and South Porcupine.

The eco-energy program was the flagship program of the federal environment department. It provided incentives to test homes for energy efficiency or actually upgrade homes to be more energy efficient. Only a single day's notice was given in the cancellation of the funding for this very popular and very important program. This program actually saved a lot more money to Canada and Canadians than it cost.

● (1515)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on unlocking cellphones.

Today mobile phone companies routinely sell mobile phones that are network locked and it is expensive, difficult and sometimes impossible to get them unlocked at a reasonable cost or even at all. The rules limit consumer choice and competition and it can be very expensive, time consuming and just plain unfair to expect consumers to do this. Many other countries have banned it.

Therefore, I have hundreds of petitioners from across Canada who want their cellphones to be unlocked and to have free of choice and competition in the cellphone service market.

The Speaker: Is the hon. member for Outremont rising on petitions?

[*Translation*]

The hon. member must have the unanimous consent of the House to do so twice.

Does the hon. member for Outremont have the unanimous consent of the House to present another petition?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont.

CONTAMINATED WATER IN SHANNON

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will follow the lead of my colleagues from now on and present everything at once. The petitions are on different subjects so I separated them, but I have learned my lesson.

I would like to present a petition on the contamination at the military base in Valcartier. I have petitioners from across Canada. For decades, the Government of Canada used chlorinated solvents including TCE on the Valcartier base and these products dangerous to human health ended up in the environment, contaminating the water table that supplies drinking water to a number of residences in the family housing sector and public establishments of the Valcartier military base.

Because the government has known since 1978 about the risks of water contamination and did nothing about it and because a number of people have had resulting health problems, the petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to recognize the federal government's responsibility. They want the victims to be compensated, the affected sites to be decontaminated, all those who worked at the Valcartier military base and all those who lived in the family housing sector on the base between 1940 and 2002 to be identified and notified that they may have been exposed to drinking water contaminated by these solvents, including and its degradation byproducts, and administer, on a voluntary basis, an epidemiological questionnaire on their health.

SENIORS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions concerning the FADOQ network. The signatories are demanding the following: automatic enrolment for the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the survivor's allowance; an increase to the guaranteed income supplement of $110 per month for people who live alone and an increase to the survivor's allowance of $199 per month; full, unconditional retroactivity; and a six-month extension of the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance following the death of one of the beneficiaries in the couple.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 381, 383, 386, 389, 392, 395, 396 and 410.

[*Text*]

Question No. 381—**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi**:

> With regard to Canada Revenue Agency's voluntary disclosure provisions, for the years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009: (*a*) how many disclosures were made in each of these years; (*b*) what was the total amount of income declared by these disclosures for each of these years; and (*c*) how much money was recovered by these disclosures for each of these years?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following is the response from the Canada Revenue Agency, CRA, with regard to the voluntary disclosures program, VDP, for the years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. Please note that the number of disclosures processed may exceed the number disclosures received for particular fiscal years. This is because disclosures processed refers to the processing activity completed during a particular fiscal year, whereas the disclosures themselves may have been received in a different fiscal year.

For fiscal year 2005-06, the CRA has received 7,629 voluntary disclosures.

The total amounts of income disclosed through the VDP are subject to an examination to validate the proper amount of income to report per disclosure. Therefore, the CRA captures the information following this examination. With respect to the 7,314 voluntary disclosures processed, $651 million in unreported income has been indentified.

As the recovery of funds is an ongoing process, the CRA is not able to provide final figures on the amount recovered for this fiscal year in the manner requested.

For fiscal year 2006-07, the CRA has received 9,011 voluntary disclosures.

The total amounts of income disclosed through the VDP are subject to an examination to validate the proper amount of income to report per disclosure. Therefore, the CRA captures the information following this examination. With respect to the 8,244 processed, $614 million in unreported income has been identified.

As the recovery of funds is an ongoing process, the CRA is not able to provide final figures on the amount recovered for this fiscal year in the manner requested.

For fiscal year 2007-08, the CRA has received 9,137 voluntary disclosures.

The total amounts of income disclosed through the VDP are subject to an examination to validate the proper amount of income to report per disclosure. Therefore, the CRA captures the information following this examination. With respect to the 8,400 processed, $777 million in unreported income has been identified.

As the recovery of funds is an ongoing process, the CRA is not able to provide final figures on the amount recovered for this fiscal year in the manner requested.

For fiscal year 2008-09, the CRA has received 10,639 voluntary disclosures.

The total amounts of income disclosed through the VDP are subject to an examination to validate the proper amount of income to report per disclosure. Therefore, the CRA captures the information following this examination. With respect to the 11,393 processed, $766 million in unreported income has been identified.

As the recovery of funds is an ongoing process, the CRA is not able to provide final figures on the amount recovered for this fiscal year in the manner requested.

Question No. 383—**Mr. Michael Savage**:

With respect to the Enabling Accessibility Fund and the $45 million announced in Budget 2010, since February 2010 to the present: (*a*) how many applications were successful and received funding under this program; (*b*) how many and which projects were rejected; (*c*) for each successful application, what was the location and value of each project, broken down by province and federal electoral district; (*d*) what is the total cost of administering the program; (*e*) how much funding is left; (*f*) how many major projects under this program expanded or will expand existing centres; (*g*) what is the value of the successful applications for major projects that went towards (i) the construction of new centres, (ii) the expansion of existing centres; (*h*) how many of the successful funding applications for mid-sized projects went towards (*i*) renovating buildings, (ii) modifying vehicles, (iii) making information and communications more accessible; and (*i*) what is the value of the successful funding applications for small projects that went towards (*i*) renovating buildings, (ii) modifying vehicles, (iii) making information and communication accessible?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the enabling accessibility fund, EAF, was first announced in budget 2007 for a government investment of $45 million over three years to improve accessibility in communities by contributing to the capital costs of construction and renovations related to physical accessibility for people with disabilities. The projects must have strong ties to, and support from, the communities they serve. Budget 2010 provided an additional $45 million to extend the program for three years.

In response to (a), (b) and (c), a call for proposal for small projects was launched on July 28, 2010, and closed on September 10, 2010. Applications are currently being reviewed. As of October 15, 2010, no funding has been provided in support of this call for proposal.

In response to (d), the total operating budget of administering the program, as approved by Treasury Board in June 2010 is $4,893,434 over the next three years.

In response to (e), funding in the amount of $40.1 million is available for grants and contributions in support of the enabling accessibility fund until 2013.

In response to (f) and (g), the EAF is composed of contributions for large size projects, grants for small size projects and contributions for mid-size projects. The 2010 budget was exclusively for small size and mid-size projects. As such, there are no major project components under budget 2010.

In response to (h), a call for proposals for mid-size projects was launched on October 28, 2010. Applications must be postmarked by January 13, 2011 in order to be considered for funding. The mid-size project component of the EAF provides contribution funding of $500,000 to $3 million for projects that will create or enhance accessibility for people with disabilities through retrofits, renovations or new construction of facilities within Canada that house services and programs that emphasize integration of people with disabilities.

In response to (i), a call for proposals for small projects was launched on July 28, 2010 and closed on September 10, 2010. Applications are currently being reviewed.

Question No. 386—**Mr. David McGuinty**:

With regard to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC): (*a*) what programs at VAC are currently under review; (*b*) what are the current budget projections for VAC in the next three fiscal years; (*c*) how many staff or contract workers does the department currently employ; and (d) based on the most current projections, how many staff or contract workers does the department project it will employ for each of the next three fiscal years?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), Veterans Affairs Canada's evaluation function is tasked with the responsibility of reviewing various departmental programs, services and benefits that are provided to veterans and their families. Its mandate is to provide comprehensive evaluations of all departmental direct program spending areas on a cyclical, once every five years basis. Currently reviews and evaluations are under way of new veterans charter programs as well as the veterans independence program. For the new veterans charter evaluation, detailed findings and recommendations are expected early in 2011. For the veterans independence program, evaluation is expected to be completed in March 2011.

In response to (b), Veterans Affairs Canada's current budget projections over the next three fiscal years are: 2011-12—$3,317 million; 2012-13—$3,317 million; and 2013-1— $3,316 million.

In response to (c), as of September 30, 2010, Veterans Affairs Canada employed 3,843 indeterminate and 216 term employees. In addition, there were 69 casual employees and 219 part-time workers. Casual employees are individuals appointed for a temporary period of no more than 90 working days. Part-time workers are individuals who work less than a third of the normal hours of work.

In response to (d), decisions regarding future staffing requirements will be part of Veterans Affairs Canada's business planning process. These decisions are expected to take place in late November for the 2010-11 fiscal year.

Question No. 389—**Hon. Maria Minna**:

With regard to Cascade Aerospace: (*a*) how many complaints have been made to the Labour Program from January 1, 2000 to September 28, 2010 and on what date was each complaint received; (*b*) which of these complaints related to occupational health and safety; (*c*) how many inspections have taken place during the period indicated in (*a*) and on what dates did those inspections occur; (*d*) did any of the inspections in (c) result in a stoppage of work or direction to the employer and, if so, what was the reason for the order to stop work or direction; (*e*) following the direction to the employer made by health and safety officer Betty Ryan on September 23, 2009, under subsection 145(1) of Part II of the Canada Labour Code, did the employer terminate the contraventions by the specified date of October 31, 2009, and, if not, what action was taken by the Labour Program; and (*f*) will the Labour Program review its handling of the Cascade Aerospace file in light of the time taken to give a direction to the employer after the initial complaint was received?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Labour Code clearly imposes restrictions on the disclosure by officials of the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's labour program of information collected by occupational health and safety officers in the performance of their duties under part II, see in particular subsections 144(4) to (5.1). For that reason, it is not possible to provide an answer to all of the questions. However, the following is what can be offered in the circumstances:

In response to (a), 17 complaints were received in the reference period.

In response to (b), five of those complaints related to occupational health and safety.

In response to (c), 10 inspections took place. Inspections can occur during various labour program activities, including complaint investigations.

In response to (d), this is not applicable, subsection 144 (5).

In response to (e), this is not applicable, subsection 144 (5).

In response to (f), the labour program remains active on this file and continues to monitor compliance.

According to the labour program compliance policy, employers are required to inform health and safety officers that they have taken action necessary to correct the infractions mentioned in an AVC. In addition, health and safety officers may verify compliance.

Generally, the accepted time frame for compliance will be 15 calendar days for all corrective action. Failure to complete the corrective actions following an AVC will lead to the issuance of a direction.

In both scenarios, it is possible that some infractions will take the employer longer than 15 calendar days to correct. In such cases, the health and safety officer may accept an employer's written plan of action, including projected completion dates as being in compliance with the AVC.

Question No. 392—**Hon. Larry Bagnell**:

> With regard to the creation of a "University of the North" located in one of the territories: (*a*) what action has the government taken to determine the (i) need, (ii) benefit, (iii) costs, (iv) potential federal assistance, (v) best location; (*b*) what efforts have been made to involve each territorial government in such a study; and (*c*) when will the government make its findings known?

Hon. John Duncan (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, in response to (a) (i) to (v), since 2001, the federal government has supported the University of the Arctic Canada as a means of expanding access to university education to northerners while the territories build capacity and explore options for establishing a northern university. The University of the Arctic Canada delivers relevant programming in the north, both virtually and through a consortium of colleges and universities, including the three territorial colleges. In so doing, it reduces the need for students to travel south to pursue post-secondary studies.

As the Government of Canada has focused its energies on supporting an existing institution, no federal study to explore need, costs and benefits, potential federal assistance or best location for a university of the north has been undertaken.

In response to (b), no study has been undertaken; therefore, no efforts have been made to involve each territorial government.

In response to (c), while the government has not undertaken its own a study on the creation of a university of the north, the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation is in the process of conducting a study on options for a northern university. An environmental scan has been completed, and key community members and leaders met in Yellowknife in early November 2010 to participate in a dialogue aimed at outlining a shared vision for a future university in Canada's Arctic. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development participated in the dialogue. It is unknown at this time when the results of the study will be released by the foundation.

Question No. 395—**Mr. Francis Valeriote**:

> With regard to funding by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) awarded to COM DEV International Ltd. in the amount of $5,200,000 through the Southern Ontario Development Program (SODP): (*a*) has the full amount been transferred to COM DEV International Ltd. and, if so, when were the funds transferred and in how many instalments; (*b*) what amount of the $5,200,000 is to be repaid; (*c*) what are the repayment amounts and timelines; (*d*) what was the form of security given by COM DEV International Ltd. for repayment of the loan; (*e*) what conditions were attached to the funding; (*f*) how many jobs were expected to be created through the funding; (*g*) will the government release a copy of COM DEV International Ltd.'s application for funding through the SODP; and (*h*) will the government release a copy of the final agreement with COM DEV International Ltd.?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, FedDev Ontario approved a repayable contribution for COMDEV in the amount of $5,218,293 under the southern Ontario development program.

In response to (a), to date, COMDEV has submitted project expense claims and has been reimbursed $4,696,464 in SODP funding.

In response to (b), COMDEV was approved for a repayable contribution. The final amount of funding reimbursed to COMDEV, not to exceed $5,218,293, is to be repaid. I

n response to (c), repayment for SODP projects is managed consistent with Treasury Board policy and directive on transfer payments.

In response to (d), projects involving repayable contributions entail an assessment of applicant financial track record and cashflow forecasts to determine manageable repayment schedules that are consistent with Treasury Board policy and directive on transfer payments. It is not the practice of regional development agencies, including FedDev Ontario, to secure repayable contributions with recipient assets.

In response to (e), Treasury Board approved terms and conditions for SODP are applied to all funded SODP projects. In accordance with the Access to Information Act, supplementary FedDev Ontario conditions for repayable contributions are not made public without consultation with concerned third parties.

In response to (f), the COMDEV SODP project has surpassed the short-term job projection target of 17 jobs with 20 positions currently in place. Additional jobs are anticipated over the longer term to support growth generated through availability of new technology and supply of data services.

In response to (g), in accordance with the Access to Information Act, applications for funding are not made public without consultation with concerned third parties.

In response to (h), in accordance with the Access to Information Act, contribution agreements are not made public without consultation with concerned third parties.

Question No. 396—**Mr. Francis Valeriote**:

> With regard to the Building Canada Fund (BCF) projects in the riding of Kitchener Centre, what is the total number of jobs created or sustained for each project according to reports submitted to the government pursuant to Schedule "C" of the BCF Communities Component Agreement?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Infrastructure Canada does not collect this information through any sections or schedules of the building Canada fund communities component agreements with provinces. Analysis on the job creation impacts on the Government of Canada's economic action plan was presented in the sixth report to Canadians on the economic action plan released on September 27, 2010.

Question No. 410—**Mr. Rodger Cuzner**:

> With respect to the recommendation by the Special Needs Advisory Group (SNAG) in 2006 that Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) employ veterans: (*a*) what action has VAC taken to implement the recommendation; (*b*) what response, if any, has been provided to SNAG on the recommendation; and (*c*) what analysis has been completed by VAC on the feasibility of this recommendation and what were the conclusions or findings?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to (a), in response to the Special Needs Advisory Group's 2006 recommendation to employ veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada developed a recruitment plan which included a recommendation that veterans Affairs Canada follow the lead of the Department of National Defence and open up internal competitions to Canadian Forces members and that Veterans Affairs Canada open up competitions for executive positions to regular force members and to reserve force members, class B or class C reserve service in excess of 180 consecutive days.

Veterans Affairs Canada's integrated business and human resources plan includes a priority that recruitment efforts will target Canadian Forces members and that Veterans Affairs Canada will "continue outreach to modern-day veterans for employment opportunities".

Medically released Canadian Forces members have been eligible for priority job appointments within the public service since December 31, 2005.

Effective April 1, 2006, the Public Service Employment Act was amended to permit serving Canadian Forces members to apply on internal advertised processes, where they are identified as eligible in the area of selection. As a result of this change, all departments and agencies governed by the Public Service Employment Act have the option of identifying Canadian Forces members in the "open to" statement on internal job notices. Veterans Affairs Canada promotes this practice for job notices. Additionally, Veterans Affairs Canada's area of selection policy specifically addresses the inclusion of Canadian Forces members. When establishing area of selection, human resources consultants provide advice to managers regarding the expansion of the area of selection in accordance with this policy.

The Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada work in partnership to assist Canadian Forces members to transition to civilian employment by making them more aware of, and ensuring that they have access to, public service employment opportunities. Through outreach in veterans publications and veterans-related Web sites, Veterans Affairs Canada provides information on career services and programs, including priority job placement. Medically released veterans are also informed of their priority access eligibility during their Veterans Affairs Canada transition interview at the time of their release from the Canadian Forces.

In response to (b), Veterans Affairs Canada provided a response to the Special Needs Advisory Group on this recommendation at the Special Needs Advisory Group's meeting on June 14 and 15, 2006. In response to the Special Needs Advisory Group's 2006 recommendation to employ veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada developed a recruitment plan which included a recommendation that Veterans Affairs Canada follow the lead of the Department of National Defence and open up internal competitions to Canadian Forces members and that Veterans Affairs Canada open up competitions for executive positions to regular force members and to reserve force members, class B or class C reserve service in excess of 180 consecutive days.

In response to (c), as stated above, Veterans Affairs Canada provided a response to the Special Needs Advisory Group. In terms of tracking, Veterans Affairs Canada does not currently have a means nor a legislated mandate to identify or track the application or the appointment of veterans, other than medically released Canadian Forces members, to the department. However, Veterans Affairs Canada is currently exploring options to conduct a survey for employees or prospective employees to self-identify any former military background. Legal, and access to information and privacy issues, are being considered before a possible implementation of this survey.

As for medically released Canadian Forces members, the Public Service Commission has analyzed the number of referrals of medically released Canadian Forces members to individual departments along with the number of subsequent appointments by these departments. The Public Service Commission advises Veterans Affairs Canada rated highest of all government departments in terms of appointment in ratio to the number of referrals: 13.2% of those referred being appointed to positions. Since December 31, 2005, Veterans Affairs Canada has hired 19 medically released Canadian Forces members who were eligible for priority job appointments within the public service.

[*English*]

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. 376, 377, 378, 380, 382, 388, 390, 391, 393, 394 and 406 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 376—**Mrs. Josée Beaudin**:

With respect to the Canada Summer Jobs program: (*a*) for each of the 308 federal ridings in Canada, how much money, how many positions and how many hours of work were allocated for the fiscal year 2010-2011; (*b*) for each of the 308 ridings, how many positions and how many hours were requested for the fiscal year 2010-2011; (*c*) in mathematical terms, and with all variables defined, what was the formula used in the fiscal year 2010-2011 to determine the funding granted to each riding; and (*d*) what share of the overall funding, in both percentage and dollar terms, has been paid to ridings in Quebec, for every fiscal year since 2006-2007?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 377—**Mrs. Josée Beaudin**:

What is the total funding allocated by the government to the Saint-Lambert riding, for each fiscal year from 2007-2008 up to and including the current fiscal year, and, in each case, what was the specific department or agency, project, amount and date involved?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 378—**Mrs. Josée Beaudin**:

What is the total funding allocated by the government to the constituency of Saint-Lambert through the Economic Action Plan since its inception, up to and including the current fiscal year, and in each case, what was the specific department or agency, project and amount involved?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 380—**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi**:

With respect to transportation for Ministers and their staffs: (*a*) what is the total amount spent by each minister's office on taxis from the 2005-2006 fiscal year up to and including the current fiscal year; (*b*) how many employees in each minister's office have access to taxi vouchers; and (*c*) what is the overtime cost for each minister's driver, from the 2005-2006 fiscal year up to and including the current fiscal year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 382—**Mr. Michael Savage**:

With respect to the Enabling Accessibility Fund: (*a*) what is the current construction status of the Abilities Centre Durham and the North East Centre of Community Society, two projects announced in September 2008 in the amount of 15 million dollars; (*b*) when did the construction of the centres in (*a*) begin; (*c*) what is the construction or modification status of all projects approved from April 2008 to the present, including completion dates; (*d*) which projects included funding from provincial or municipal governments; and (*e*) what are the amounts provided by those provincial and municipal partners?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 388—**Mr. Michael Savage**:

With regard to transportation costs for ministers and their exempt staff, since February 2006, broken down by month and year, what is the total cost incurred for ground transportation for all domestic and international travel, including, but not limited to, limousines, taxis or car service for the following ministerial portfolios: (*a*) Minister of State and Chief Government Whip; (*b*) Finance; (*c*) Transport, Infrastructure and Communities; (*d*) Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); (*e*) Citizenship and Immigration; (*f*) President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs; (*g*) National Revenue (Canada Revenue Agengy); (*h*) Human Resources and Skills Development; (*i*) Industry; (*j*) Canadian Heritage; (*k*) Environment; (*l*) Natural Resources; (*m*) Labour; (*n*) Fisheries and Oceans; (*o*) Minister of State (Sport); and (*p*) International Trade?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 390—**Hon. John McCallum**:

With regard to the one-third of projects funded by the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund that will not be completed by the end of 2010, as indicated on page 66 of the government's report entitled "Canada's Economic Action Plan — A Sixth Report to Canadians", for each project: (*a*) what city was it in; (*b*) what is its description; (*c*) what was the total federal contribution; (*d*) what was the estimated cost of completing the project at the time of application; (*e*) what is the current estimate of the total cost of completing the project; (*f*) on what date was the project approved for funding by the government; (*g*) on what date was the project publicly announced; and (*h*) on what date was the contribution agreement for the project signed?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 391—**Hon. Larry Bagnell**:

With regard to social housing needs in the territories of the Yukon, Northwest and Nunavut: (*a*) did the government conduct an audit in order to determine the social housing needs of each territory, (i) if so, what are the results, (ii) if not, what are the government's plans to conduct such an audit; (*b*) how does the government determine the social housing needs in each territory; (*c*) how are the needs of aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations determined; (*d*) what mechanism does the government have in place to ensure that aboriginal and non-aboriginal social housing needs are addressed on an equitable basis; (*e*) what is the average age of social houses in the three territories; (*f*) how many social houses have been constructed per territory since 2006; (*g*) what is the average occupancy per social house; (*h*) what is the projected lifespan of a social house; (*i*) how many social houses have been constructed per territory that are now deemed uninhabitable; and (*j*) what, if any, plans does the government have to replace uninhabitable social homes?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 393—**Hon. Larry Bagnell**:

With regard to government funding of programs for victims of crime in the territories of the Yukon, Northwest and Nunavut: (*a*) which programs have received funding; (*b*) what is the government's portion of funding; (*c*) what is the status of these programs; (*d*) what is the take up on the programs by an aboriginal versus non-aboriginal clientele; (*e*) what is the level of funding from these progams that went towards domestic violence victims; (*f*) how much money is dedicated to the promotion of these programs; and (*g*) how are these programs promoted?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 394—**Hon. Larry Bagnell**:

With regard to global warming and its impact on the permafrost and northern infrastructure: (*a*) what plans does the government have to provide assistance for the costs of repair and replacement of affected infrastructure such as (i) buildings, (ii) highways, (iii) runways, (iv) bridges; (*b*) will the government conduct an audit of the level of damage and, if so, when; and (*c*) what is the projected lifespan of the infrastructure affected by global warming?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 406—**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes**:

With regard to requests for financial assistance made to the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec for each of the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 fiscal years, distributed by regional office, for requests submitted for the authorization of the (i) Regional Director, how many did the Director approve, and how many did the Director reject, (ii) General Director for Regional Coherence, how many did the General Director approve, and how many did the General Director reject, (iii) Vice-President of Operations, how many did the Vice-President approve, and how many did the Vice-President reject, (iv) President, how many did the President approve, and how many did the President reject, (v) Minister, how many did the Minister approve, and how many did the Minister reject?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

PROTECTING CANADIANS BY ENDING SENTENCE DISCOUNTS FOR MULTIPLE MURDERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-48, Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice had the floor before question period, and he has 11 minutes for comments.

● (1520)

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by ensuring that people who commit the most serious crimes serve an appropriate period of incarceration, the amendments contained in Bill C-48 are another example of the government's ongoing commitment to protect the families and loved ones of murder victims.

Permit me to dwell for a moment on the policy underlying Bill C-48 to counter any possible criticism that the proposed measures are overly retributive in nature. Far from it, Mr. Speaker, for the measures set out in this bill have been carefully developed to balance the need to protect society and denounce unlawful conduct with the need to ensure that sentences in Canadian law respond to individual circumstances.

The measures in Bill C-48 will therefore not be mandatory. The government recognizes that the circumstances of every murder are different, and that a one-size-fits-all approach could well produce injustice in individual cases. This is because of the fact that patterns of multiple murders are extremely varied. They range from cold-blooded serial killings and contract murders to unplanned killings in the heat of passion, parental killing of children, workplace killings of fellow workers, right through to killings by persons in delusional states caused by alcohol, drugs or mental illness.

Many multiple murders, especially parental or workplace killings, are accompanied by extreme mental and emotional stress and often followed by a desperate attempt to commit suicide once the perpetrator has come to his or her senses. In short, the government clearly recognizes that the mental state of those who kill—even those who kill more than once—may vary widely and may carry differing degrees of moral culpability and be accompanied by varying degrees of remorse.

By allowing judges to make the decision whether to impose additional periods of parole ineligibility, the proposed amendments reflect the fundamental principle of sentencing that a sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. For let us not forget that judges who have presided over a trial and who have therefore heard all the evidence and been in a position to assess the character of the accused are in the best position to make such a decision.

However, in making this decision, judges will be required by Bill C-48 to have regard to the criteria that already exists in section 745.4 that they are now using to extend the parole ineligibility period for second degree murder up to 25 years, namely, the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the crime and any recommendation in this regard made by the jury. However, given the inherent seriousness of the offence of murder and the fact that more than one life will have been lost, the measures proposed in Bill C-48 go farther than simply providing judges with this new authority and obliging them to conform to strict criteria that have been developed and are being used for a similar purpose.

Bill C-48 would also require judges to state orally or in writing at the time of sentencing why they may have decided not to use their authority to impose consecutive periods of parole ineligibility on a multiple murderer in a particular case. This is only fair. The public, and particularly the families and loved ones of victims, have an absolute right to know why those who have killed more than once are not being forced to spend a longer time in custody before being able to apply for release back into the community.

In addition, by requiring judges to immediately make the basis of their decisions public, it will allow for an appeal in those situations where Crown counsel may conclude that the discretion afforded to sentencing judges may not have been properly exercised.

● (1525)

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the measures proposed in Bill C-48 will be supported by police and victims advocates who have long been generally opposed to what they view as the relatively easy availability of parole in Canada for violent criminals.

Although the provinces and territories will not be directly affected in terms of correctional resources, I am equally confident that they too will be supportive because another group of violent criminals will be kept in custody for a longer time.

Nonetheless, some may criticize this proposal because murderers, and particularly multiple murderers, already find it more difficult than other offenders to obtain parole. To this I say simply that if there is any crime that justifies putting the interests of the families and loved ones of victims first, it is that of murder. And this is especially true in the case of those who have killed more than once.

In this respect, I can only repeat what the Minister of Justice said outside this House on October 5: each and every murder of a human being diminishes us as a society. Multiple murders are that much more repugnant.

In short, the government will continue to stand up for victims of crime. It will continue to be vigilant in protecting Canadians from violent criminals, and it will continue to put the interests of law-abiding Canadians ahead of the rights of criminals.

Before I conclude, I would like to address another issue that has been the subject of recent controversy in this House: the question of the costs of the government's law and order agenda. In this regard, I am pleased to report that, for the present and for the next 25 years, the measures set out in Bill C-48 are entirely cost-neutral. Shortly stated, Bill C-48 will not lead to increased costs for the federal government for the foreseeable future.

Nor will they entail significant costs for our provincial and territorial partners. Crown counsel in all jurisdictions will be required to address the proposed criteria I have already described in making their submissions on sentencing should they wish to recommend that a particular multiple murderer receive consecutive periods of parole ineligibility upon conviction and sentencing. These are criteria with which they too are already familiar.

There are no surprises in Bill C-48. The only surprise will be if it is not passed into law as soon as possible to respond to the concerns of those Canadians who wonder why offenders who are convicted of the most serious crimes seem to end up getting sentences that do not fully reflect the gravity of their crimes.

I empathize with ordinary Canadians. I understand why they may find it hard to understand that the justice system gives the most serious criminals–those who have committed multiple murders–access to parole despite the horrific circumstances of their murders and the number of lives they have taken. I understand why concerned Canadians may question why an unrepentant serial killer should have the same access to a parole hearing as a sincerely remorseful offender who killed once in the heat of passion.

Giving those who have killed more than once the same access to parole as those who have killed once erodes confidence in the integrity of the justice system. It also threatens to undermine the commitment of this government to protect Canadians by keeping violent offenders in custody for longer periods. We will not let that happen.

Canadians continue to tell us that they want a strong criminal justice system. They want to see decisive action to address violent crime. They want to see laws passed that will make this country safer and more secure.

Our government is following through on its commitment to make Canadian streets and communities safer by ensuring that offenders who are found guilty of serious crimes serve a sentence that reflects the severity of those crimes. The amendments to the Criminal Code in Bill C-48 are an important part of this commitment. We are standing up for Canadians who have repeatedly called on us to get tough on crime. We call on all members of this House to stand up with us.

Bill C-48 proposes to reform the approach to sentencing multiple murderers in a way that balances respect for the principles of sentencing with respect for the rights of victims and their families. For this reason, it deserves our careful consideration and the members' support.

● (1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge my colleague's speech on Bill C-48. We are giving this legislation due consideration.

What we are seeing more and more from the government is that everything is politicized. The short title of the bill, which is "protecting Canadians by ending sentence discounts for multiple murders act", just reeks of politics. Everything is a show, as opposed to actually making a difference for Canadians.

Does the member think it is appropriate to take politics to this level by making the bill a political prop as opposed to strictly something that would improve the lives of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Through you, I would like to say that all bills starts with politics. When we arrived in 2006, we had an agenda. It was political and clearly stated that we would put the most dangerous criminals in prison.

Terms have been used that could, in some ways, make it seem as though we are biased. I would say that our political agenda is perhaps the most biased, but in victims' favour. That is always our goal when we introduce bills, including this one.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the comments by the parliamentary secretary on the issue of respect for the judicial system, or our justice system generally. I understand his argument on the one side, but maybe it is my exposure to the U.S. system, because I am located geographically in the country looking north to Michigan and the United States and the impact that the media on the U.S. side has on us and the amount of information we get.

We hear about people in the United States being sentenced to 100 years and 200 years. I remember one case in the United States, which may have been early on in my practice, where somebody was sentenced to 600 years consecutive.

Does the parliamentary secretary not feel, considering cases like that, that we could, with this bill, be in danger of bringing into ridicule the justice system if we were to have sentences that exceed any possible life expectancy of any human being on this planet? Does he not see that that could bring into disrepute and disrespect the justice system?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague who, like me, is a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We value the work he does. We have worked together for about four years.

This topic raised questions in our government. However, I would like to say that the authority known as a judge's arbitrary power is left in the judge's hands. The judge must justify, orally or in writing, what he does or does not want to apply. In all cases, the judge will have heard the trial and the testimonies. He will have been able to see if the accused was remorseful. He will have seen the entire file. So it will be up to him to say, orally or in writing, whether the principles of Bill C-48 should be applied or not.

I believe that we have covered my colleague's question about sentences that can be as high as 600 years for one person.

● (1535)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his answer, which was a good one. I sometimes work with him, and in this instance, my party will be supporting the bill at this stage. Indeed, it is important for our country that the committee have an opportunity to hear testimonies with respect to this bill.

Let us now look at the situation where an individual is found guilty of two or three murders. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice knows that when someone receives a life sentence, it is really a life sentence. As a lawyer, could he address that matter? How can a sentence lasting the entire life of an individual be imposed more than once? As a lawyer, can he tell us how that works? That is my question.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member. Indeed, a person convicted of first degree murder, or premeditated murder, is sentenced to 25 years with eligibility for parole after 10 or 15 years. It is up to the judge. Take for example someone who commits three first degree murders and shows no remorse. Currently that person would not receive a sentence any longer than 25 years. The only difference is that instead of being released on parole after 10 or 15 years, they will not be released for 25 years. Nonetheless, their sentence is no longer than 25 years. Whether they killed 10 people or 50, the sentence is still 25 years.

When a judge sees that an individual is truly unworthy of living among us, we would like for him to declare and justify, because he always has to justify things orally or in writing, the fact that he is handing down a 25-year sentence. What is more, he will have the right to increase, not consecutively but in some other way, the number of years the individual will have to stay in prison before being released on parole. This may not happen in the person's lifetime, but let us not forget that the murderer took another person's life.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is doing a good job of answering my questions, but I want to challenge him with this one.

We just had evidence before the justice committee, the week before the break week, that 25 years, minimum, is how long one has to spend in custody, except for the faint hope clause, which the government is trying to get rid of.

Just so that we are clear, when the Minister of Justice was in front of the committee, he made it clear that if this bill goes through and judges do assign two life sentences, the minimum amount of time spent in custody before people will be able to apply to get out will be 50 years. It will be 25 years plus 25 years.

Right now, the average time for a first degree murder conviction, multiple or not, is 25 years. The minimum time people spend in custody for first degree murder convictions is 25 years.

I would ask the member this. Is the government really serious, with absolutely no reservations, if the judge uses his discretion, about wanting people to spend 50 years in custody? Are we really accomplishing anything?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, that is indeed a question that remains.

When an individual has committed two first degree murders, at present, he or she will receive only one 25-year sentence for both murders. If he or she commits three, even if they are premeditated, the same sentence applies: 25 years.

When someone commits second degree murder, early release is possible. Depending on the circumstances, the judge can say that the individual is eligible for parole after 10 or 15 years. What we must bear in mind is that it is up to the judge. He or she is master of the facts and master of the law.

It is possible to have a first degree murder and a second degree murder, what is known as collateral damage. In such cases, the judge can order a 25-year sentence for the first murder, but after that could allow a request for parole 10 years later. So in reality, the individual would serve 35 years. In the past, it was only 25 years—no more, no less.

● (1540)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have risen in regard to Bill C-48, a government bill on the parole inadmissibility period of offenders convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole for 25 years.

This bill would change the current parole inadmissibility system so that judges can sentence offenders convicted of multiple murders to consecutive rather than concurrent life sentences.

This government took power on January 23, 2006, and it is now November 15, 2010. We are therefore almost in the fifth year of its term. I really wonder now whether this government is serious when it comes to criminal justice, whether it is serious when it says it stands up for the victims of crime, whether it really is a party of law and order, a party that wants to protect Canadians and ensure public safety. Looking at just this bill—although it is virtually the same as nearly all the other criminal justice bills the government has introduced—I can only conclude that the government is playing political games with crime victims and with the lives and safety of Canadians.

The government originally introduced this bill in the previous session. Instead of immediately suggesting we go to second reading so that there could be a debate and vote at that stage, the government left the bill lingering on the order paper for 64 days. On the 64th day, instead of suggesting a debate at second reading, the Prime Minister went instead to see the Governor General to ask her to prorogue Parliament, knowing full well that he would thereby kill all his own bills. So the bill was killed by the Conservative Prime Minister when he prorogued Parliament.

Giving him the benefit of the doubt, one might say he did not realize he would be killing this bill. One might think that as soon as Parliament resumed after the throne speech, the first gesture of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada would be to rise at the first available opportunity under the Standing Orders, reintroduce the bill, and suggest going immediately to second reading.

Do the people listening to this debate have any idea how many days the Conservative government took after the resumption of Parliament and the Speech from the Throne to reintroduce its own bill? It took 216 days. This party likes to pat itself on the back and say it is the only one that speaks up for victims, the only party interested in law and order in Canada.

● (1545)

In actual fact, it is the party that plays political games with the safety of Canadians, our fellow citizens. It is disgraceful that we have had to wait 216 days for the Conservatives to reintroduce their bill. Not a thing has changed. All that has changed is the number of the bill, and the government has no say on that. All the government had to do was reintroduce its own bill, but it waited 216 days to do it.

We Liberals do not play political games with people's lives, and so far as I can see, the other opposition parties also do not. We Liberals want serious time for people who commit serious crimes, murder for example, with limited eligibility for parole. However, we are not sure that sending people to prison for 50 years without any possibility of parole is a good way to rehabilitate them and ensure that Canadians are protected. That is the first thing.

If we look at the actual facts, people convicted of multiple murders generally are not granted parole as soon as they become eligible. This bill addresses a relatively minor concern, therefore, and would affect relatively few people.

For this reason, we Liberals are prepared to vote for the bill to send it to committee, without being able to say whether we will support its purpose. We want to know what statistics and data the justice department has on the number of cases to which the bill would apply. We also want to know who would be primarily affected if it passes. We also want to know how many offenders have received parole after committing more than one first degree murder and receiving a life sentence without any possibility of parole for 25 years. If they did get parole, how many years did they serve first? That is the information we want to have.

We think it is contrary to the principle of rehabilitation to completely eliminate any possibility of parole in sentences that could reach more than 50 years. That being said, though, we are keeping an open mind. We want to hear the witnesses, the minister himself, the experts in the justice department and at the Correctional Service of Canada, and the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, which represents the people who work day after day, 24 hours out of every 24, with offenders convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life in jail, to find out whether they think this bill is going in the right direction.

As I said, we want to study it in committee to see whether it really responds to an urgent public safety concern.

● (1550)

[*English*]

As has already been mentioned here in terms of what is the current law, today a conviction for first degree murder carries with it a parole ineligibility of 25 years. The individual found guilty of first degree murder is sentenced to life imprisonment with a possibility of parole after having served 25 years.

Someone today who is found guilty of second degree murder is sentenced to life imprisonment with a possibility of parole after serving 10 years and no more than 25 years. That does not mean that the individual gets parole but that he or she can go before the National Parole Board and seek parole. As of now, the sentencing judge has the discretion to determine the precise length of ineligibility for parole in the case of second degree murder.

Under the current system, individuals convicted of multiple murders serve their life sentences concurrently and are therefore subject to only one 25-year parole ineligibility period. Bill C-48 would tack on further parole ineligibility periods. It would amend the system so that judges would have the discretion, and that is important to repeat, judges would have the discretion to ensure that parole ineligibility periods run consecutively. The judges would make the decisions, and the judges in making that decision, whether to apply a second parole ineligibility period to run consecutively or not to do so, would be obliged to provide reasons for their decision.

In the current law, the only exception to the single parole ineligibility period rule occurs when a convicted murder commits another murder while in prison.

That is very interesting, if our criminal justice system has already been adjusted to ensure that if an individual has already been convicted of first degree murder or second degree murder and therefore is already under a parole ineligibility, and that individual while serving the sentence in prison commits another murder, is found guilty of another murder, the parole ineligibility of that individual for the new sentence will run consecutively.

If that already exists in our current law, there is justification to look at the possibility that Parliament and society may wish to extend that current practice to other cases. However, as I said, we wish to see if this is a real problem and if it will ensure better safety for Canadians. That is why Liberals will support sending this bill to committee.

In terms of stakeholders, we have already heard from defence lawyers who point out that very few serial killers, if any, are actually released after serving 25 years of their sentence. According to them, this bill is window dressing for a problem that really does not exist.

The Correctional Service of Canada and Statistics Canada, who provide the legal or criminal statistics, are the ones who will be able to tell us whether these defence lawyers are right, whether there have been or have never been serial killers released after 25 years, and if there have been cases, what were the circumstances of the case.

As well, anyone who has been declared by a judge a dangerous offender is held in custody indeterminately. Normally, if we are talking about a serial murderer, a multiple murderer, someone who has killed more than one person and is accused of more than one first degree murder charge or even second degree murder charge, one would hope that the prosecution would have looked at all of the circumstances to determine whether it would be appropriate to apply for a dangerous offender designation.

● (1555)

What is quite interesting is that prior to the 2008 election and shortly afterwards, the government had actually brought in legislation to amend the dangerous offender system under our Criminal Code, and with all the hoopla that the government built around it, it was still not mandatory for the prosecution to seek dangerous offender designation in certain cases.

I actually brought forth amendments to make it mandatory and the government did not support it. Go figure. It would have ensured that our prosecution, in specific cases, would have had no choice but to apply for dangerous offender designation, and the government and the members who were sitting on the justice committee at the time did not support those amendments.

Someone who has been declared a dangerous offender by the courts will never see the light of day. So, in a way, this bill may be a bit of smoke and mirrors.

According to testimony from justice department officials before committee just last month when we were looking at the bill regarding the faint hope clause, which is a whole other issue, the average amount of time that someone spends in prison on being convicted for murder in Canada is approximately 28 years. So even under our current system where someone convicted of first degree murder is sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole before 25 years, the actual facts are that, on average, those first degree murder offenders will spend 28 years before they actually get parole. When one looks at the average in other developed countries, they spend 15 years.

If any of the government members wish to disagree with me, I would urge them to go back and read the transcripts of the Standing Committee on Justice hearings, the witnesses from the Department of Justice on the faint hope clause legislation. They are the ones who provided these statistics.

The Liberals will be supporting sending this bill to committee because we believe the issues need to be further studied. We want to hear from the experts. We want to hear the actual facts, because facts and figures are important to us. We believe solid government policy, social policy and criminal justice policy should be based on facts and statistics, scientific facts or facts that have been established in a scientific manner.

We know sometimes it is inconvenient for the government and therefore it throws facts by the wayside, but we as Liberals believe it is important if we want sound, effective social policy, particularly in the area of criminal justice. Therefore, we have no objection to studying this issue further, and again, it makes me wonder why it took the government 216 days after prorogation to reintroduce this bill.

There is another point that I wish to touch on. The parliamentary secretary to the minister talked about how his government was really concerned about victims and that is why it is bringing forth this bill and that is why the issue of criminal justice is a priority, along with the economy, for the government. I find that interesting.

I find it interesting that the government's words with regard to criminal justice do not seem to support its actions.

The crime rate is dropping. Government wants to spend billions of dollars on ineffective megaprisons. In the last full year of a Liberal government, the National Crime Prevention Centre supported 509 crime prevention projects in 261 communities, for a total of $57 million.

● (1600)

Under the Conservatives, we now have 285 fewer projects being funded and the actual spending on crime prevention has been slashed to just $19 million. I would ask government members, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety, if the issue of public safety for Canadians is so important, why have they slashed funding to crime prevention and support for our victims? Why?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member explained rather well that at the end of the day this really is about the Conservative government's public relations campaign on crime.

We saw the same bills introduced five years ago when the Conservatives became the government. They passed a fixed election date law and then turned around in short order and called an election in 2008, thereby eliminating all of their bills before getting them passed. They prorogued the House shortly thereafter and killed all the bills again. A year later, they prorogued the House a second time and killed the bills yet again.

The question is, why are the press and the people in this country not holding the government to account for what is essentially gross incompetence in the presentation of these bills? I would like the member to comment further on that and then I will ask another question.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct that this is a government that talks big and loud and beats its chest on how it is the party of law and order, that it is the only party interested in protecting Canadians from criminals and helping victims of crime and it is the only party that actually supports law enforcement. It is also the party that campaigned and in a throne speech committed to 2,500 new police officers across Canada, which still has not materialized. It is also the party that, in several throne speeches to date, given the prorogations and elections called in violation or disrespect of its own fixed election date legislation, represents Canadians.

The member asked me why that is. I cannot explain it, except that when one looks at the amount of advertising that the government does using taxpayer money in order to, in my view, pull the wool over Canadians' eyes, highly partisan advertising, which is unusual with a government, that may be part of the reason.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and tireless work in this area.

We know that in criminality in our country, particularly serious crimes, drugs play a huge role, particularly drugs connected to organized crime. Portugal has just done a very interesting experiment in which it liberalized drug laws. What it found is that there was a significant decline in drug use, criminality, cost and incarceration.

I would ask my colleague, does she not think that what the government ought to be doing is putting an initiative together to change our drug laws in Canada, one that is results based, like the work that is being done at St. Paul's Hospital by Dr. Julio Montaner and others, and focus on implementing policies that would be far less expensive and would save lives? The connection between organized crime gangs and the moneys they receive from illegal drugs is a contributor to the kinds of murders that we have seen in Canada and in other countries such as Mexico.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to be asked that question because I believe that part of the current government's policy is very shortsighted and wrong.

There are studies that have been done in Canada and in other countries that definitely show that if government puts resources into appropriate social policy, when it comes to the issues of drug use and drug trafficking, we are going to be helping people get off drugs. It means supporting projects like Insite in Vancouver rather than fighting in the courts to try to shut it down. It means putting more resources in communities to deal with these issues. It means drug rehabilitation programs and detox programs being more available not just in urban centres but in rural and remote communities as well.

We need to establish drug courts so that there is a team in the judicial system that is expert in dealing with people who have drug problems, who are not big time traffickers but have become hooked on drugs and need help to get off them.

Yes, I think Canada should be looking at progressive examples that are effective and actually work like what is happening in Portugal and in other jurisdictions, including some jurisdictions in the United States.

● (1605)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is suggesting that it wants to reinstill a new respect for law and order in Canada by toughening up the crime laws. However, as the member for Windsor—Tecumseh said when he broached this issue, in the United States there are examples of judges handing down sentences of 100 years, 200 years and 600 years.

The question I have for the member is this. Does that not in some way present a case for disrespect for the system? The public recognizes that people are not going to live that long. People can be sentenced to 600 years, but no one is going to live to serve those 600 years.

Therefore, if they are trying to find a new-found respect for the system, this may backfire on them. I do not think many American citizens respect a system that gives out sentences that are totally unrealistic to the lifespan of the people who are supposed to be serving these sentences. Does the member agree?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the NDP has raised an important point and that is the respect Canadians have for our criminal justice system.

One of the problems with our criminal justice system is it has been close to 40 years since there has been a major comprehensive overhaul of the entire criminal justice system with well organized, dedicated consultations with stakeholders, communities, experts, non-experts, people who live in communities where crime may be a real issue, people whose family members have been swept into crime and pulled into the criminal justice system, others who have been victims of crime.

One thing we have to remember is when we go into neighbourhoods where there is a high crime rate, there are families that may have members who were victims of crime and they may also have members who were the perpetrators of the crimes, not necessarily against a family member but within the community. There are families who are grappling with both issues.

This is something the government is not looking at. A comprehensive overhaul and reform of our entire criminal justice system is needed. We have to bring it into the third millennium. We cannot do so piecemeal because when it is done piecemeal, we are increasing the chances of commiting errors, resulting in unintended consequences one piece of the system may not work well with another piece. If we do a comprehensive overhaul, we are going to be looking at everything. The member raised a serious question. It is the kind of issue I would like the House to debate rather than piecemeal legislation, which is what we are getting from the government, unfortunately.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-48, which concerns the possibility of imposing consecutive parole ineligibility periods in multiple murder cases. My colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue was supposed to be speaking, but he has gone back to committee and will return a little later, so we will not miss any of his eloquent words.

When Bill C-22 was introduced, I may have inadvertently misled the House. That is not a serious offence and I will not have to apologize to the entire House. I said that my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue was the Bloc justice critic. He sits on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but he is not the justice critic. My colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin is the justice critic. I just wanted to clarify what I said.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you.

Mr. André Bellavance: I see that some colleagues are satisfied with my apology. In any event, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue is well equipped to handle this. In his former life, he was a criminal lawyer. He is very familiar with these matters, and we will have an opportunity to hear him a little later.

Allow me to review this bill briefly. The Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle. Certainly we will hear everyone in committee who is interested in debating it. It is, however, another recycled bill. We know that it died on the order paper when it was called Bill C-54. This is a problem with the Conservatives. They introduce a series of bills dealing with crime and they boast of their crime-fighting prowess. But they are the authors of their own misfortune. They prorogue Parliament and trigger elections, killing their own bills on the order paper. Then they have to introduce them again.

I am sure that my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine will not mind if I reiterate the statistics she gave a moment ago. She said, and quite rightly, that the government is always blaming the opposition for the fact that justice bills do not progress fast enough for them. She calculated that after Parliament resumed, 216 days went by before the government brought Bill C-48 back to the floor. This is the kind of bill that will not encounter tremendous opposition and will make the cut because most parties support it. This is another example of the government itself causing its own problems and causing delays in introducing bills and, most importantly, in bringing them into force.

The new provisions of Bill C-48 would allow judges to impose consecutive periods of parole ineligibility on persons convicted of multiple first or second degree murders. In contrast, under the present rules, individuals convicted of multiple murders are sentenced to concurrent parole ineligibility periods.

With this new bill, however, judges will not be required to impose consecutive periods; rather, they will have to make their decisions based on the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the offences, and the recommendation, if any, made by the jury. Judges will also be required to state, either orally or in writing, the reasons why they did not impose consecutive periods. We think that it might be added, as an amendment or otherwise, that judges should state reasons for every decision they make with respect to imposing consecutive ineligibility periods or not.

For transparency's sake, judges should have to explain exactly why they make their parole ineligibility decisions, both to the person who is convicted and accused and to the victims of that person's crimes and the general public. I am sure that everyone would benefit.

One important aspect of this bill is that it does not tie judges' hands. They will still be at liberty to examine all the ins and outs of a case, determine exactly what happened and find out what the mitigating or aggravating circumstances are, and so make an informed decision. By making its recommendations, the jury will get its own say, since it will have had the opportunity to follow everything that went on during the trial. The jury will also be able to identify mitigating or aggravating circumstances. That will enable it to give the judge an opinion so the judge can make an informed decision about parole for an individual convicted of serious crimes who may even, unfortunately, be a repeat offender.

● (1615)

This is an important aspect of this bill, one with which we agree. What I find unacceptable on the part of the government is the fact that it constantly introduces bills that pay no attention to rehabilitation and express no openness or new ideas when it comes to potential rehabilitation.

We agree entirely that someone who has been convicted of a serious crime must be severely punished, but the Bloc Québécois looks to the example of the Quebec justice system. We know that there are people who can be rehabilitated and we must help them rehabilitate themselves. We want these individuals to serve their sentences. The evidence is that we were the first to call for automatic parole after one-sixth of sentence to be eliminated. Now, that does not mean we do not want people to return to society and become contributing members. What we do not want is for them to get out of prison and then at the earliest opportunity start committing crimes again and cause further serious harm to society.

During the debate on young offenders, the Government of Quebec reported very telling statistics indicating that 85% of young offenders are successfully rehabilitated. That is nothing to scoff at. The government needs to recognize this and acknowledge the importance of giving people who have made mistakes an opportunity to get back on track. We are therefore in favour of the principle of Bill C-48. As I said, the bill gives judges some leeway, which is important in this case.

Bill C-48 would give judges the option of stacking parole ineligibility periods at the time of sentencing in the case of multiple murders. We know that it does not make sense to have two successive life sentences. If an individual is convicted of murder, he will get 25 years in prison. He will be handed a life sentence. Canada is not like the United States, where a person can end up with a 250 or 400 year prison sentence. In any case, that is absurd. I do not know anyone who has lived long enough to serve that kind of a sentence.

Under Bill C-48, judges will at least have the option of stacking parole ineligibility periods. This might occur in the case of a repeat offender who has committed two first degree murders. The judge would be able to decide that the individual will not be eligible for parole after a 25 year period, a decision which is not currently permitted. The judge may decide that parole will be an option only after 50 years. That is a long prison sentence, but depending on the circumstances, and based on all the evidence presented, the judge will be able to ensure that the individual will not get out after 25 years and will serve a much longer sentence.

However, as I said a little earlier, we believe that punishment must not become the judicial system's sole objective at the expense of social reintegration and rehabilitation. That is what is missing in this bill and in most of the justice bills introduced by the Conservative government.

The Bloc Québécois supports this bill because it will give judges more options when punishing people for their crimes. We are aware that such a measure will not serve as a deterrent, especially in the case of repeat offences which are, in any case, very rare. Now, some may say that one repeat offence is one too many, but I will shortly read out a few statistics to demonstrate that this bill will not be particularly useful to judges since, fortunately, there are not many repeat offenders out there. There are already too many of them though. The fact is that this is not a bill that we will hear that much about.

It is, therefore, an exceptional measure for exceptional cases where the jury will give its opinion and the judge will have the final say. When the minister introduced this bill, he said he would put an end to sentence discounts. What I read in the press regarding these remarks demonstrates that the Minister of Justice himself runs down the justice system when he is in fact supposed to be its greatest advocate. That does not mean that he is not entitled to make improvements to it.

● (1620)

In short, the Minister of Justice has stated that judges always hand down discount sentences and that the situation has to be corrected. This is not true. When one considers the decisions in all these major crimes, it is clear that the sentences are often completely adequate.

However, in many instances people get out too early. Earlier, reference was made to parole after serving one-sixth of a sentence. Judges are not the ones making mistakes. This practice must quite simply come to a stop, and convicted offenders with sentences to serve must serve those sentences. That does not rule out the possibility of parole. That flexibility must obviously be maintained. Rather than speaking of discount sentences, it would be more honest to say that Bill C-48 is going to give one more tool to judges so that individuals who commit extremely serious crimes in very exceptional circumstances will not be entitled to get out after a 25-year period. They will get out later if parole is granted. Some may never get out.

Nor is this bill about victims, just as most of the bills introduced by this government are not. Should prison be seen as the only solution to dealing with crime? I do not think so. Victims and their pain must also be taken into consideration. Now, on the matter of victims, my colleague, the member for Compton—Stanstead has introduced a bill on employment insurance. It calls for employment insurance to be paid to the families of victims of crime over a 50-week period, which will give people a chance to get back on their feet.

Currently, in Quebec, victims of crime have guaranteed employment for a two year period. This means that employers are not permitted to lay off victims because of a family tragedy. These people were victims of a crime and they find returning to work very hard. They have to look after other family members in the aftermath of the tragedy. It is all very well to have guaranteed employment, but everyone knows what happens when a person is without an income. People are forced to go back to work. They are often not in a suitable psychological state to do so. As decision makers and legislators, we have a responsibility to ensure that victims' families and the victims themselves have access to employment insurance.

Currently, a maximum of 15 weeks' employment insurance is available with a medical certificate. The bill introduced by my colleague, the member for Compton—Stanstead, would increase the number of weeks to 50. That is a step in the right direction. I would call on all members of the House, and particularly those on the Conservative government side, to support my colleague's bill. She is also the member for one of my neighbouring ridings, and she sits with me on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri Food. This only makes the bill more important to me. In fact, it is an excellent bill. I would invite everyone to support it.

If we look at the current sentencing system, the Criminal Code is clear:

> Every one who commits first degree murder [that is, premeditated murder] or second degree murder is guilty of an indictable offence and shall be sentenced to imprisonment for life.

Only the parole ineligibility period can vary, depending on whether we are talking about first degree or second degree murder. A person convicted of first degree murder cannot apply for parole for at least 25 years.

For second degree murder, the judge must set the time period—a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 25 years—during which the offender is ineligible for parole. The maximum sentence for manslaughter is life in prison, but there is no minimum sentence, except where a firearm is used—there is a distinction here—and no minimum parole ineligibility period. Those are the rules that apply now.

If we look at the bill and the changes it would make, we see that once in effect, the bill would allow the judge to impose consecutive parole ineligibility periods on individuals convicted of multiple first degree or second degree murders.

● (1625)

So as I said, judges would not be required to impose consecutive periods, but would have to base their decisions on the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the offences and any recommendation by the jury. In addition, judges would also be required to state, either orally or in writing, the reasons for any decision not to impose consecutive ineligibility periods.

Earlier, I talked about the Minister of Justice, who said he wanted to make sure serial killers and repeat offenders would pay the appropriate price for what they had done. He said that the purpose of the bill was to put an end to what he calls "sentence discounts" for multiple murderers. I gave my opinion about this moments ago. By acting in this way, the very person who should be standing up for the justice system is doing just the opposite. We do not believe we can really talk about sentence discounts, but it is strange that the sentences for such crimes are systematically served concurrently at present. That is why the measure in this bill strikes us as appropriate and acceptable.

Let us look at the facts. Concerning recidivism, I said a little while ago that I had statistics and this is not the kind of bill where we will hear about a lot of cases and see a lot of grandstanding by judges who would say that a certain offender will not be eligible for parole for 50 or 60 years or more. The statistics show that between January 1975 and March 2006, 19,210 offenders were released into the community on either parole or statutory release, of whom 9,091 had served a sentence for murder and 10,119 for manslaughter. Of these 19,210 offenders, 45 were later convicted of another 96 homicides in Canada. The latter 45 offenders amounted, therefore, to 0.2% of the 19,210 people who were convicted of homicide and released into the community over the last 31 years. So 0.2% of the people convicted of murder unfortunately reoffended and committed murder again. These are the people targeted by Bill C-48 before us today.

Over the same period, police forces in Canada were apprised of more than 18,000 homicides. The offenders convicted of another homicide while on conditional release accounted, therefore, for 0.5% of all the homicides committed in Canada over the last 31 years. It is clear, therefore, that the minister's safety arguments, if not exactly false, are greatly exaggerated.

In listening to the minister and reading the documents released by the department after the introduction of this bill, we would think there is a multitude of criminals and we must ensure they serve long sentences because they will re-offend, as so many have done. Well no, that is not statistically true, because what the statistics prove is that not many people re-offend. It is very important, therefore, to ensure that people accused and convicted of serious crimes serve lengthy sentences but also have an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves and become active members of society again, rather than continuing lives of crime.

In regard to sentence length, since the last person was executed in Canada back in 1962, the time that offenders convicted of murder serve before receiving full parole has been increasing by leaps and bounds. People given life sentences for murders committed before January 4, 1968 served seven years. People given life sentences for murders committed between January 4, 1968 and January 1, 1974 served 10 years. Since then, the time served has varied between 10 and 25 years, depending on the type of murder.

We are therefore tougher now than we have ever been. This does not mean that we should stop being tough but that the bill should at least give judges a certain amount of latitude. We are in favour of it so long as judges do not have their hands tied. That is the important thing in this bill. I want to repeat my request, therefore, that the government ensure that there is still a possibility for offenders to be rehabilitated, rather than just thinking about punishment.

● (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Random—Burin—St. George's, Lighthouses; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, G20 Summit.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I wish to commend my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska on the clarity of his remarks on Bill C-48.

We know that the Conservative government has on its agenda for this Parliament a series of bills dealing with law and order. We do support a number of bills, but evidently, this is clearly excessive, especially considering that most of these bills are ideologically driven.

We, however, want to make sure that the victims of crime are protected. Those who commit violent crimes must be punished, but at the same time support has to be provided to the victims of violent crimes.

The member referred to the bill put forward by our colleague from Compton—Stanstead, near Sherbrooke. Would it be entirely appropriate for the Canadian government to establish a fund for the support of victims of crime? Proceeds of crime could help provide for this fund. As members know, the House has already passed a Bloc Québécois bill designed to reverse the onus, particularly with respect to crimes committed by organized crime. Money from seizures, for instance, could be put into a support fund for the victims of crime. Would the member be in favour of such an approach?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Chambly—Borduas. That is an excellent suggestion. That is the kind of idea we might expect from a responsible government that treats the justice system as it should be treated. We should be trying to strike a balance by imposing punishment that is fair and severe enough to fit the seriousness of the crimes committed, and by helping the victims of those crimes. I studied law for a year and a half, and I always saw justice represented by scales. Then I changed tack and went into another field, but when I started out in law, I learned that the rights of victims and the assistance we must give them are also part of the balance.

Apart from the slew of bills the government keeps introducing with grandiloquent titles to show the public it is going to crack down and put everybody in prison, it is introducing nothing, zip, zilch, zero, to provide more assistance to victims. For victims, the fact that the people who made them victims are in prison is a good thing, but that does not help them. My colleague's suggestion is entirely appropriate, and I urge him to continue working on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the title of the bill is another one like those we have seen from the government; it seems to almost demean the issue when it talks about discounts. As one of my colleagues said, it almost feels as if he is at a supermarket when that kind of terminology is used.

I wonder if my colleague from the Bloc would comment about that and tell us what he thinks the families of murder victims would feel when they see that kind of wording used on a bill that is as significant to them as this one is.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question. He was here a little while ago when we were debating Bill C-22, and the opposition criticized the short title chosen for the bill. In reality, the subject matter did not reflect the title chosen by the government, simply because it offered more than people want.

When they do this they mislead the public because the title suggests that the government is introducing a bill about a particular thing that it is going to do and stand up for, but upon reading the title of the bill, no need to read the details, clearly that is not at all the subject matter it deals with.

To answer the member, as I said just now in my speech, the sentence discounts the Minister referred to have nothing to do with the purpose of this bill. In fact, the bill is going to give judges an additional tool to ensure that people do not get parole as quickly as they might want. There will be changes in that regard. What the minister is saying is that, currently, judges in Canada always give sentence discounts. Victims' families are going to look at this and believe that there will be harsher sentences. But that is not what the bill does. The public must not be misled.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to what is now Bill C-48, which was previously Bill C-54. I essentially support the bill, which our critic, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, has already indicated that our party supports. In fact, all opposition parties support the bill.

It is interesting to note that over the last couple of years the Conservatives have been able to get away with the argument that they are tough on crime and the opposition is not. All opposition parties are in favour of sending this bill to committee but the government has been dragging its feet on this bill and many others.

The Liberal critic pointed out that after proroguing the House on two occasions and calling a needless election in 2008, the government, after coming back in March of this year, took 216 days to reintroduce a bill that all parties had agreed to.

When the public asks which group is tough on crime and which group is not, it would be valid to say that the government is either just plain incompetent or opportunistic in the sense that when the chips are down it will prorogue the House, call an election and do anything but deal with its so-called tough on crime agenda.

We see this as a lot of public relations. I have been reading press articles that the government has out on this bill right now. I just read an article in a Winnipeg newspaper dealing with this issue. The press has been taking the government line in support of this bill and some of the other government bills, but I have yet to see the press in this country write balanced stories about how the government has delayed its own legislation, how it has torched its whole legislative agenda, not once, not twice, but at least three times.

I do not know how many times we will need to repeat it, and I know people are watching the debate and reading the copies of *Hansard* that we send out, but over time they will understand that the government talks a good line but at the end of the day it is not really big on delivery.

Several of my colleagues have mentioned, not only today but on other days, that after 100 years of having our criminal justice system in place without making any major changes, maybe it is time we did. It has been at least 40 years since a major overhaul of the system has been made. Maybe we should be taking an all- party approach to a major revamp of the system, accounting for best practices in other parts of the world so we do not have this decidedly pro-American approach. I do not have a problem with that approach if we could demonstrate that it actually worked. If we could demonstrate that it worked, then I would say that we should look at that system.

However, we have been following a system that has been proven not to work. Even the Americans themselves are trying to roll back some of the mistakes of the past 20 or 30 years. We would like to work on the basis of a co-operative approach, a best practices approach.

● (1640)

I do not believe the member for Souris—Moose Mountain was around during the two years of a minority government in Manitoba. However, he was a minister for a brief period in the government of Premier Filmon and will attest to the fact that Premier Filmon did get his majority government in 1990. He got it largely because in the two years prior to that, in a minority situation, he actively worked with the opposition parties on any controversial issue, whether it was Meech Lake, bills on smoking in government places bills or numerous other issues. The first thing he would do was call the opposition leaders into his office and set up a committee. He defused controversial political issues right at the beginning. He was able to resolve issues in a favourable way and he benefited by doing that.

That is what the government's approach on the whole issue of crime legislation should be. The government showed some signs of this in dealing with Afghanistan a couple of years ago. It reached out to a former Liberal cabinet minister to come up with a report. It put the government in good stead.

Obviously the government over there is of a different mind than the previous Filmon government in an attempt to get things done. It does not seem to be concerned about results. It is all about public relations, polling and how it can somehow squeeze out a majority in the next election.

In actual fact, Premier Filmon did get his majority and he did it by having a correct and proper approach to a minority government situation.

With regard to the specifics of the bill, as I had indicated it was Bill C-54 and it is now Bill C-48. Once again the government has given it a special name, “protecting Canadians by ending sentence discounts for multiple murders act”. We find this with most of its legislation now.

When it was Bill C-54, it had first reading in the House of Commons on October 28, 2009. The bill would amend the Criminal Code with respect to the parole inadmissibility period for offenders convicted of multiple murders. It would be done by affording judges the opportunity to make the parole ineligibility period for multiple murders consecutive rather than concurrent.

I guess one of the good things about the bill is that it does leave discretion to the judge, which the opposition members have been consistent in supporting in the past. Perhaps the government recognized that by allowing the judge discretion it made it certain that the bill would actually go somewhere in the House.

There are also some amendments to the National Defence Act in this bill. Consecutive parole ineligibility periods for multiple murderers would not be mandatory under the provisions of this bill. Judges would be left with the discretion to consider the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the offence and any jury recommendations before deciding upon whether consecutive parole ineligibility periods are appropriate. The bill would require judges to state orally or in writing the basis for any decision not to impose consecutive parole ineligibility periods on multiple murderers.

In terms of the current law, in 1976 the Parliament repealed the death penalty and imposed a mandatory life sentence for the offence of murder. Offenders convicted of first degree murder serve life as a minimum sentence with no eligibility for parole before they have served 25 years. I have statistics, which hopefully I will get to before my time runs out, indicating how Canada compares with other countries and what the real figures are for time served in prison as opposed to the storyline that the Conservatives like to propose, which is that somehow people are put in prison for just a few years and then they are back out on the street again.

For offenders convicted of second degree murder, a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment is also imposed, with the judge setting the parole eligibility at a point between 10 and 25 years. As I had indicated before, we are already talking about life imprisonment. The issue becomes, if someone is already sentenced to life imprisonment, how can the person serve three or four life sentences? this gets into the whole question that people have about the American system where people get sentenced to 200 years and 300 years.

● (1645)

In some ways that throws the system into disrepute as well because people will say that is great. However, whether people receive a sentence of 200 years or 600 years, what does it matter. At the end of the day, we only have one life to live. I have not seen too many 200-year-old people walking around lately. Perhaps the government has some evidence to the contrary.

Those serving a life sentence can only be released from prison if granted parole by the National Parole Board. Unlike most inmates who are serving a sentence of a fixed length, for example, two 10 or 20 year sentences, lifers are not entitled to statutory release. If granted parole, they will, for the rest of their lives, remain subject to the conditions of parole and supervision of a Correctional Service Canada parole officer. Parole could be revoked and offenders returned to prison at any time they violate conditions of parole or commit a new offence.

Not all lifers will be granted parole. Some may never be released on parole because they continue to represent too great a risk to reoffend. We hear about Clifford Olson and other people in prison. These people are not likely to be getting out of prison any time soon and—

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Ever.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Ever, as my colleague points out. They will never get out of prison, and they were dealt with under the current laws.

How this law would affect the Clifford Olson case would be to rack up a much longer prison sentence. However, the reality is under the current law he is not going anywhere anyway. Therefore, what would we gain by taking this measure, other than making the government look a little better in the eyes of members of the press who are writing articles on this issue.

Another exception to the 25-year parole ineligibility period for first degree murder or to a 15 to 25-year parole ineligibility period for second degree murder is the faint hope clause. We are dealing with that in a different bill.

During the years following its initial introduction in 1976, the faint hope provision underwent a number of various amendments. Now the criteria for the possible release on parole of someone serving a life sentence are as follows. The inmate must have served at least 15 years of the sentence. An inmate who has been convicted of more than one murder, where at least one murder was committed after January 9, 1997, when previous amendments came into force, may not apply for a review of his or her parole ineligibility period.

To seek a reduction in the number of years of imprisonment without eligibility for parole, the offender must apply to the chief justice of the province or territory in which his or her conviction took place. The chief justice or a Superior Court judge designated by that chief justice must first determine whether the applicant has shown there is a reasonable prospect that the application for review will succeed. The assessment is based on the following criteria: the character of the applicant; the applicant's conduct while serving the sentence; the nature of the offence for which the applicant was convicted; any information provided by a victim at the time of the imposition of the sentence or at the time of the hearing under this section; and any other matter that the judge considers relevant in the circumstances.

If the application is dismissed for lack of reasonable prospect of success, the chief justice or judge may set a time for another application not earlier than two years after dismissal or he or she may declare that the inmate will not be entitled to make another application. If the chief justice or judge determines the application has a reasonable prospect of success, a judge will be assigned to hear the matter with a jury.

In determining whether the period of parole ineligibility should be reduced, the jury should consider the five criteria I mentioned before. The jury's determination to reduce the parole ineligibility period must be unanimous and the victims of the offender's crime may provide information either orally, or in writing or in any other manner that the judge considers appropriate.

If the application is dismissed, the jury may, by a two-thirds majority, either set a time not earlier than two years after the determination when the inmate may make another application or it may decide that the inmate will not be entitled to make any further applications at all.

If the jury determines that the number of years of imprisonment without eligibility for parole ought to be reduced, a two-thirds majority of that jury must submit a lesser number of years of imprisonment without eligibility for parole than the number then applicable. The number of years without eligibility for parole that it may assign can range from 15 to 24 years.

● (1650)

Once permission to apply for early parole has been granted, the inmate must apply to the National Parole Board to obtain the parole. Whether and when the inmate is released is decided solely by the board, based on a risk assessment, with the protection of the public as the foremost consideration. Board members must also be satisfied that the offender will follow specific conditions, which may include a restriction on movement, participation in treatment programs, which is very important, and prohibitions on associating with certain people such as victims, children and convicted criminals. Therefore, we can see that it is not a simple process by any means.

In addition, the Criminal Code requires that a sentence for using a firearm in the commission of an offence shall be served consecutively to any other punishment imposed on the person for an offence arising out of the same event or a series of events. Section 83.26 mandates consecutive sentences for terrorist activities other than in the case of a life sentence. Section 467.14 requires consecutive sentences for organized crime offences. Therefore, we have examples in the code where consecutive sentences already are the case.

Another example when a consecutive sentence may be imposed by a sentencing judge is where the offender is already under a sentence of imprisonment.

A sentence of a term of years imposed consecutively to a sentence of life imprisonment is not valid in law. Life imprisonment means imprisonment for life, notwithstanding any release on parole. We dealt with that issue before. The consecutive part of this is that a consecutive life sentence could not take effect until the offender had died. The courts have held that Parliament could not have contemplated this physical impossibility, which would tend to bring the law into disrepute.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh has already asked this question on more than one occasion today. He was trying to get a response from the minister on this very point, but I do not believe he received a 100% satisfactory answer from the minister in this situation.

A single parole ineligibility period for multiple murders can be increased when someone who is serving a life sentence receives an additional sentence. In such a case, the offender is not eligible for full parole until beginning on the day on which the additional sentence was imposed. There is a general rule that the maximum period of additional parole ineligibility is 15 years from the day on which the last of the sentence was imposed.

In terms of the prevalence of multiple murders in Canada and the United States, and several other members did speak about this, we are not talking about a lot of individuals. This is more or less a fairly rare event where this application will in fact be used. We have a chart which deals with the number of victims. We are dealing with an average of 21 cases where we have 2 victims, an average of 3 cases where we have 3 victims and only 1 case where we have 4 victims. The press kind of exaggerates and makes the average homeowner believe that somehow this is a daily occurrence, when in fact it is not. The statistics show that not to be the case.

I realize I only have another minute left and I do have quite a number of other points to make.

In 1999 an international comparison of the average time served in custody by an offender with a life sentence for first degree murder showed that Canada exceeded the average time served in all countries surveyed, including the United States. With the exception of the United States, for offenders serving life sentences without parole, the estimated average time that a Canadian convicted of first degree murder spent in prison was 28.4 years, and that is a very important point.

● (1655)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague from Manitoba wants to put the figures on the record. I will ask him to continue with regard to what in fact is the practice in Canada, and has been for a good number of years, that puts us at the top level in the world in terms of sentencing people to time to be served in our prisons.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the fact is the average time spent in custody in countries comparable to the Canadian experience is as follows: in New Zealand 11 years; Scotland 11 years; Sweden 12 years; Belgium 12 years; England 14 years; Australia 14 years; and life with parole in the United States is 18 years. Life without parole in the United States is 29 years. In Canada, it is 28 years. That is not something of which the average member of the public, or the press—

● (1700)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Member of Parliament.

Mr. Jim Maloway: —or even a member of Parliament, as the member points out, is really aware. I believe that figure certainly bears repeating.

In England and Wales, the ministry of justice has published more current statistics on the average time served by those given life sentences. The statistics indicate the amount of time served for a life sentence by prisoners varies considerably. In addition to being released on life-licensed parole, a life sentence for prisoners can be discharged for other reasons such as successful appeals, or transfers to other jurisdictions or to psychiatric hospitals. The mean time served by mandatory lifers or murderers first released from prison in 2008 on life licence was 16 years and there was no change from the previous year.

There are some very interesting pieces of information available from other countries. In fact, a recent study in the United States found that 140,000 individuals were serving life sentences, representing 1 in every 11 people in prison and 29%, or 41,000, individuals serving life sentences have no possibility of parole.

While every state provides for life sentences in the United States, there is a broad range of severity and implementation of the statutes. In six states, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Pennsylvania and South Dakota, and in the federal system all life sentences are imposed without the possibility of parole. Only Alaska provides the possibility of parole for all life sentences, while the remaining 43 states have laws that permit sentencing most defendants to life with or without parole.

I hope I have answered the member's question.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, when we get down to the fundamentals of this bill as proposed by the government, there is a serious lack of knowledge of some of the statistics that my colleague just read in the chamber. Fundamentally, this bill tells people that if there has been a multiple murder, it will be treated more seriously.

Does he have any sense of what one says to members of families who have been victims of a murder with regard to what they should take into account when they analyze what penalties they would like to see imposed, not just with regard to individual cases but generally in society? How do we approach that: from the perspective exclusively of the victim or from the perspective of society as a whole?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I think some studies have been done indicating that, even when we are dealing with victims, when they get involved, oftentimes they do not take as extreme a position as we would think, over time. When we involve the victims in the process, when we ask the victims what they would consider a proper punishment, there have been some big surprises. Some have said that they were really angry about it in the beginning, but after looking at it, they realize that this person needs rehabilitation and that there has to be a longer range, a better result.

I think that we have to reflect what society wants. But we have to do this with a full range of information. The idea is that somehow we are supposed to send out a little news clip, tailor-made for the local press columnists, who simply regurgitate it word for word and fire it out in their editorials and stories without presenting the other side. I think we would see a totally different approach if we actually involved the public. We should involve the public more, which is why I think we should do a re-write of the whole system. We should develop a multi-party approach and send it across the country for hearings. We might come up with something different.

When the public sees that the government solution is to put in $9 billion in new prisons, they tend to think a little different about it. The government presents them with the facts that we need this bill, this bill, and this bill, without proper costing and accounting. The press should be taking these government members to task. When they announce a bill, the first thing a responsible member of the press should be saying to the government member is, "What will it cost?" They certainly ask us. They ask opposition parties constantly when we announce something new. They ask us what our costing is. We do not have the ability of the government to get the costing done. The government has already been embarrassed a couple of times, because the facts have come out that it will cost a lot more than it suggests. In fact, government members do not even know what it will cost, and yet they are announcing all these initiatives.

● (1705)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, on the point of the government's being embarrassed, I want to share this story of what happened at committee on the faint hope clause, which is back before committee again, because the government prorogued and we are having to go through it all over again.

Two individuals showed up, called by government members to, in effect, testify. The government believed that they would testify that we should do away with the faint hope clause. What was interesting was that one of the two, a gentleman whose daughter had been murdered, had recently been on a panel with an individual who had been convicted of murder, had been released early, and had devoted the balance of his life to helping society, especially people coming out of prison. As a result of his experience, he came before the committee and made it clear that he had changed his mind. He was no longer sure that we should be getting rid of the faint hope clause. That was his testimony.

There is a Harvard study showing that when people, including the victims, heard all the facts, and it was explained why the judge had made the decision, whether it was a murder case or some violent crime, 80% of them changed their minds and supported the judge's position.

I am wondering if the member has given any thought to trying to get this information, perhaps through a committee travelling across the country. Does he think this would result in a more reasoned approach to sentencing?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I simply take the member back to a point I made earlier about the Filmon minority government from 1988 to 2000 in Manitoba, where the government was against the wall and the premier came up with a reasonable solution. With each and every controversial decision, he would call the opposition leaders together and set up a committee, which travelled around the province and resolved these controversies. I thought it was pretty amazing that they were able to do this. Why this government would not want to is beyond me.

The fact of the matter is, the Conservatives do not want to hear contrary arguments.

The Deputy Speaker: I will stop the member there as he is out of time. We will move on with debate, with the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-48. I commend the minister and the government for advancing a cause that I know has as much support among victims and Canadians as any bill we will address this session.

For decades, victims of crime have come to this House seeking the justice the Criminal Code has denied them. Sharon and Gary Rosenfeldt, Debbie Mahaffy, Theresa McCuaig, and Don Edwards have all been denied too long in their simple struggle for a measure of proportionality in sentencing. They came here bearing the memory of personal tragedy of the most brutal order and bearing witness to a justice system that was no less brutal regarding their right to justice.

The bill today could rightly be called a tribute to the courage and dedication of victims who rose above their personal suffering and sought to prevent others from suffering the same injustice. Regrettably, this bill does not come in time for Gary Rosenfeldt and other family members of victims who have died seeing neither justice for their children nor any change in the justice system that failed them.

Today, the Minister of Justice has renewed their hope.

Volume discounts for rapists and murderers is the law in Canada today. It is called concurrent sentencing. It cheapens life. The life of the second, the third, or the eleventh victim does not count in the sentencing equation. The lowest price is the law every day in our courts.

A family must still watch as courts hand down a conviction for the murder of their child, spouse, or parent, and then reel in the reality that not a single day will be served for that crime. Judges cannot be blamed as they have no latitude to impose consecutive sentences for serial killers. When a multiple murderer walks into court, it is justice that is handcuffed.

Fourteen years ago, I introduced a bill calling for an end to this bulk rate for murder. For the next four years, the issue was debated widely in the House, the Senate, and across the country. The effort drew the support of major victims groups, police associations, and eminent lawyers like Scott Newark and Gerry Chipeur. Members from all parties offered support, even attending Senate committee hearings. Among them were Chuck Cadman, John Reynolds and the current ministers of National Defence and Transport.

We learned in that journey that Parliament had what would be called "a democratic deficit". We learned that average Canadians were a decade ahead of Parliament in their thinking. We learned that too many predators, released because of concurrent sentencing, had found new victims and spawned even more tragedy.

A decade ago in North Bay, Gregory Crick was found guilty of two murders. Mr. Crick had murdered Louis Gauthier back in April, 1996. A witness to that murder went to the police. Gregory Crick proceeded to murder that witness in retaliation. However, when he was finally sentenced, not one day could be added to Mr. Crick's parole ineligibility for the murder of that witness.

In the summer of 1999, there was one particular case where the Crown actually tried to delay sentencing in the hope that the changes I was pursuing in Parliament might be rapidly passed. It was the case of Adrian Kinkead, who was tried and convicted of the brutal murders of Marsha and Tammy Ottey in Scarborough, a process that took three and a half years. Mr. Kinkead was given a mandatory life sentence with no parole for 25 years. However, Mr. Kinkead was already under a life sentence with the same parole ineligibility after being convicted of a completely unrelated murder.

The crown prosecutor in the case, Robert Clark, asked the judged to delay sentencing until a bill similar to the one before you today could be passed.

● (1710)

His stated intent was to permit the judge to extend the period of parole ineligibility to reflect these additional murders. That bill did pass the House of Commons and had the committed support of most of the Senate, but it was stalled in committee. Sixteen months passed without a final vote and an election was called.

There has been a decade of outrage since then. A year ago, on the eve of the first scheduled debate on the government's current bill, the murders of Julie Crocker and Paula Menendez have led to a first degree murder conviction. Then as now, the families would soon realize that only one murder could count in the sentence, that the murder of one of these women would not yield a single day in jail.

This injustice will continue every day that the bill is stalled in this place. Just weeks ago, Russell Williams was able to thank the inertia of Parliament for a future parole hearing. Families of victims were put through a graphic and unnecessary court spectacle so that the Crown and the police could put evidence on the record that could be seen by a parole board 25 years in the future. Those families will have to hope their health permits them to appear decades from now, time and time again, to object and argue against the release of Russell Williams. His case is not unique.

There are no special circumstances that make him different from other multiple murderers. He was a colonel and there are pictures and videos of his crimes that made his situation infamous. But make no mistake: just about every victim of a multiple murderer went through the same horror. It is only that the obscurity of their victimizer is more likely to allow him to be freed.

The statistical fact, as early as 1999, was that multiple murderers are released into the community, on average, just six years after they are eligible for parole, some within a year of their eligibility. So much for the exhausted notion that life is life and that multiple murderers never get out of jail. Most do.

Another absurd crutch is the myth that somehow multiple murderers are rehabilitated in jail, as if they have an addiction that can be easily treated.

Wendy Carroll, a real estate woman, survived having her throat slashed and being left for dead by two paroled multiple murderers just 10 minutes away from my own home. They had both been convicted of two murders. Both were on life sentences. And both were freed in Mississauga and tried to kill again.

Life only means life for the victims of these offenders. Some in the House may still spout the bizarre and unfounded contention that Canadians somehow approve of concurrent sentencing, that they view it as a way to be different from the United States, as if letting multiple murderers back on the street were an act of patriotism or an endorsement of Canadian culture.

In fact, 90% of Canadians polled by Pollara supported mandatory consecutive sentencing for multiple murderers, with none of the judicial discretion currently contained in the bill. So we remain with a system supported by less than 10% of Canadians.

Then there are the skewed parole statistics. Through some digging years ago, I discovered that Francis Roy was in those statistics as a successful parolee. He had murdered Alison Parrott while on parole after receiving a discounted concurrent sentence for raping two girls. But since he was not returned to custody until after his parole expired, he was just another statistical success story and an example of low levels of repeat offenders.

● (1715)

While criminal lawyers and a few senators still support concurrent sentencing, even our most notorious serial killers mock it. I had occasion to witness the obscene spectacle of Clifford Olson's section 745 hearing. It was a 1997 summer day in B.C., not far from where Olson had victimized 11 children. There Olson read out a letter from his lawyer advising him to admit to all his murders at once. This way, the lawyer indicated, Olson could take full advantage of concurrent sentencing. Olson mocked the court, saying, “They can't do nothing. They can only give me a concurrent sentence”.

To this day, Olson is right. The obstruction of Bill C-25 in the Senate in 2000 has allowed a decade of multiple murderers to similarly mock their victims and mock justice.

I encourage members to look past the usual opposition from the predator protection industry and pass this legislation without delay or obstruction. Perhaps then we can finally put an end to volume discounts that deny justice to victims, deny peace to their families and deny safety and security to Canadians.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a very impressive speech, and as a criminal lawyer for over a decade in this country, I had the opportunity to see many times injustices and miscarriages of justice as a result of exactly what the member speaks of.

Based on the passionate nature of her speech and what I thought was a very accurate depiction of what actually takes place at the courthouses across this country, I am wondering if the member has any other positive comments to make in relation to this and indeed whether she has first-hand knowledge of what has taken place in the past other than what she has mentioned, because it certainly seems she is well versed on these particular issues.

● (1720)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, if the bill is about putting proportionality in sentencing when it comes to murder and the best support for victims is to get them justice and closure, endless parole hearings punish the families and releasing their offenders puts families at risk.

I am imploring all members in the House to put closure to this issue by advancing this issue speedily in committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will come back to that in a few minutes with my speech and I hope that the member will be present. Although my colleague across the floor may have been a criminal lawyer for 10 years, I was a criminal lawyer for 30 and dealt with some murder cases.

I have some issues with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville. It is not that we are against Bill C-48. We will most likely and almost definitely vote in favour of it. I will be commenting on certain things. However, she is forgetting one thing: before a criminal can apply, he must show a judge in the legal district where he was convicted of murder that he could potentially present evidence or apply. What the Conservatives have not said—you have to read sections 745 onwards of the Criminal Code—is that a parole application is not automatic, especially in the case of murder, which is the most serious crime under the Criminal Code. I will come back to that in a few minutes.

I am wondering if the hon. member is playing into the Conservatives' hand. I do not know if she read it, but if not, I would suggest that she read section 1, which is the bill's short title. It is completely demagogic in comparison to the bill's objective, which is completely rational. The title, "Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentencing Discounts for Multiple Murders Act", is untrue. I have never seen a more misleading bill title. I am wondering if my colleague agrees with my observation.

[*English*]

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, I highlighted in my speech a number of cases where having proportionality in sentencing would have provided some measure of justice for those victims.

I do not understand my hon. colleague from the Bloc, and I implore him to look at those cases I cited as examples. If we had had proportionality in sentencing, perhaps in the case of the Crick murder the witness would have been spared. In the case of the Ottey sisters, I recall viewing the obscene spectacle of the trial that subjected the families to further hardship, and the individual in question did not serve one additional day in jail. The cost of going through a trial and the cost to the victims was obscene, to say the least.

I implore the member to think about this. I am not playing politics with this bill. I implore members not to play politics with this bill. Fundamental justice should be above politics. Victims have waited far too long for such a small measure of justice.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to salute the hon. member who just spoke, our colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville. As an MP, she has spent a great deal of time considering this major issue that the House must address.

[*English*]

The hon. member from the Bloc may suggest that he has been a lawyer for 30 years, however it goes without saying that the hon. member's work in this area for 30 years, and certainly in the last 15 years or 16 years, has been vigilant and diligent. We on this side of the House, certainly in this party, salute her for her efforts, because it is time we had legislation that looks a lot more like this.

We can talk about window dressing in terms of the title, but the fundamental principle that has been enunciated by the member of Parliament is important. It is without avarice. It is certainly not partisan-based. It is in fact logically based.

I was with the hon. member at the section 745 hearings on Clifford Olson. There was a concern expressed by committees in the past about judicial discretion. Can the hon. member clarify that this legislation will, in fact, allow that in this circumstance?

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for his support over the years. Certainly my colleague has championed victims and victims' rights. He was very instrumental in helping this bill get to the Senate in 2000. I want to commend him for his hard work.

I certainly hope that this bill will go to committee and get a fair hearing. I will leave it to the government to further highlight the judicial discretion element of this bill.

I think it is imperative to give the judges discretion. Currently the judges have no discretion when it comes to multiple murderers. I recall a renowned judge from Nova Scotia. In my haste I did not bring the quote, but I recall that Justice MacKeigan said that a judge in giving a concurrent sentence is not doing his duty.

I thank the hon. member for his hard work in this endeavour.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. For a decade or so, she has been working with her colleagues, and with us to move this bill foward. We have now reached the point where this bill will soon be up for consideration.

So that it is clear, I would like her to tell us whether we are meeting the wish she has been expressing for the past 10 years or so in her riding.

At present, the sentence for multiple murders, for an individual who has killed several people, is only 25 years. With this bill, that sentence could be extended by 10 or 15 years, depending on what the judge decides.

Bill S-6 from the Senate provides for the elimination of the faint hope clause for offenders who have committed multiple crimes because the victims did not get the chance to be heard. Is the hon. member in favour of removing the faint hope clause as set out in Bill S-6?

[*English*]

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, it is my fervent belief that there should not be disclaimers or fine print when it comes to the justice system. We should not have a judge proclaim himself or herself in court with one sentence and then suddenly find ourselves with a loophole and a way of circumventing what the judge has declared in court.

A judge hears the testimony, is there to witness the obscenity of the crime and is in a position to make a good determination about a fitting sentence.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-48.

I also believe that this is a very important bill and that it is very difficult to play political football, as I call it, with this long-awaited bill. This is the reincarnation of Bill C-54, which died on the order paper in late 2009. We are now dealing with Bill C-48 which, when we first looked at it, seemed to be a very difficult bill. When I saw it for the first time, my initial comment was that it did not make sense and that, as usual, it was being sneaked in the back door by the Conservatives. I said that because I had read the first clause of the bill, which is the short title and which really does not make sense, "Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act". I can say that this first clause will obviously not get through committee.

I concur with the hon. member who spoke before me; we will not play political football with this bill. The subject of this bill requires us to study it and vote in favour of it. The Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this bill so that it can be studied in committee as quickly as possible. I am putting the House on notice that clause 1 of this bill is not acceptable. We are not going to do more advertising and say that we are concerned about the victims when that is not the case. That is not the intent of this bill. It is rather surprising, but its intent is rather heretical. Yes, there are mistakes. I respectfully affirm that there mistakes in the Criminal Code. A person who is found guilty or who pleads guilty today to two, three or four murders, will serve no more than 25 years. That is odd because it is one of the things not found in the Criminal Code. If someone pleads guilty to one, two, three or four break and enters or automobile thefts, the judge will generally say that he has understood nothing, that not only did he commit a break and enter, but that since he committed two, three or four, he should be given additional sentences.

If my memory serves correctly, in 1976, when the death penalty was abolished, the government said the most serious crime was murder. Since it is the toughest sentence, a mandatory minimum sentence of 25 years would be imposed and after that, if the individual is rehabilitated, the subsequent articles state he or she could return to society. Except that people forgot about—and this is what Bill C-48 aims to correct—repeat offenders and multiple murderers. Now, people have the nerve to call these sentence discounts. I do not believe they are sentence discounts, with all due respect to my Conservative colleagues who are completely on the wrong track. I believe that when section 745 was created—and I will quote it in a moment—something was overlooked. Perhaps it was not intentional. I was not here in 1976; I was arguing cases, so I do not know. I think it is a mistake that must be corrected today.

● (1735)

People need to understand what happens in a murder case. When an individual is found guilty of murder, his or her trial is generally held before a jury, and it is the jury that reaches a verdict and determines whether the accused is guilty of first or second degree murder.

First degree murder is premeditated murder. If someone plans a murder, he or she will be found guilty of first degree murder. Second degree murder is an unplanned murder. It might involve someone who, in a fit of anger, picks up a guns, shoots someone and kills that individual. I am summarizing quickly, but that is called second degree murder.

Subsection 745.21(1) of Bill C-48 is extremely interesting. It states:

> Where a jury finds an accused guilty of murder and that accused has previously been convicted of murder, the judge presiding at the trial shall, before discharging the jury, put to them the following question:
>
> You have found the accused guilty of murder. The law requires that I now pronounce a sentence of imprisonment for life against the accused.

Freeze the picture here. The judge is required to impose a minimum sentence of life in prison. If an individual is found guilty of murder, he will be imprisoned for life. The judge's question continues:

> Do you wish to make any recommendation with respect to the period without eligibility for parole to be served for this murder consecutively to the period without eligibility for parole imposed for the previous murder?

That is the crux of the change, which has been requested by a number of jurisdictions over the past few years. I have an example of the sad case of a woman who made a suicide pact with her husband. They had two children and they decided to end their lives. It is sad, but so it goes. Unfortunately in life, things happen. The woman ingested the same drugs as her husband and two children. The three of them died, but unfortunately she survived and was convicted of a triple murder.

The interesting thing about this bill is that it does not provide additional automatic minimum sentences. It provides the judge with the possibility to ask the jury what it thinks. I am utterly convinced that a jury would never have asked a judge for an additional sentence. The woman has to serve 25 years because it was a premeditated murder. The jury will be consulted and the judge could impose an additional prison sentence. This bill is interesting because it focuses on the victims.

Regardless of what our Conservative friends, especially the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice—and I point the finger at him—might think, the Bloc Québécois is concerned about the victims and is voting in favour of this bill. I hope my dear colleagues and the parliamentary secretary are not going to phone Go Radio X FM in Abitibi to say that we are voting against Bill C-48, because they will be mocked, just as they were on Bill C-22.

● (1740)

That said, I suggest that they listen when we speak and that they listen in committee. We will vote in favour of this bill, except with respect to the short title in clause 1.

These things need to be said. When we are talking about someone who has committed multiple murders—think of Colonel Williams or Pickton or Olson—I think that even if this bill had been in force, they would still serve 25 years in prison. That seems highly improbable. That is what the Conservatives do not understand because they have never or rarely worked in criminal law. They have never made a request. They have never, especially not the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, appeared before the National Parole Board. They have certainly never appeared before a Superior Court judge to request a sentence reduction in order to be able to apply.

I will explain because I am sure that he does not understand. I will explain how it works. Someone who is found guilty of murder is sentenced to life in prison. End of story. The Conservatives, and especially the parliamentary secretary, should stop twisting words. The person is sentenced to life in prison and must serve at least 25 years. That is what the law currently says. After 17 years in prison, that individual may make a request to a judge, in the jurisdiction in which he was sentenced, to have the sentence reduced. That does not mean that it will be reduced. On the contrary. There are figures, and I will be able to share them in another speech, but it is clear: there are currently over 4,000 people imprisoned for murder in Canada, and of these 4,000, 146 have made a request and only 123 of those have been allowed to appear before the National Parole Board.

That is what my Conservative colleagues do not understand and, with all due respect, neither does the parliamentary secretary. Not just anyone can apply and Bill C-48 will not change that. It is not true. An eligible person will still be eligible, but the court, taking into consideration the horrible crime—because murder is always horrible—decides. Does someone who committed a double or triple murder deserve an additional prison sentence? That is up to the jury. Obviously we need to make a distinction between a hired assassin, a psychopath and a woman who, in a moment of acute distress, kills her husband and her two children. The Conservatives do not understand that. They will not understand it, but they need to.

That is exactly what Bill C-48 does, regardless of what our Conservative friends might say: it gives a jury that has found someone guilty of a second murder the possibility of recommending to a judge that the person serve an additional five or ten years. That means that the person serves 30, 35 or even 40 years instead of 25. Consequently, that person's chance of applying for parole could be pushed back. With all due respect for my colleagues across the way, there has never, through all these years, been an individual convicted of murder who has been released and then committed another murder. I hope that they understand that and that the people watching understand it as well.

● (1745)

That has never happened, whether my Conservative friends like it or not. We asked the parliamentary secretary about this, but he could not say anything about it. We asked the justice minister to provide us with the figures, but we obtained the figures from the parole board, because we are examining other related bills, including the famous Bill S-6. I hope the parliamentary secretary will have the nerve to rise to ask me about Bill S-6, because I will give him the answer.

I agree with my Liberal colleague, for whom I have a great deal of respect and whom I listened to carefully. I agree that we must not play petty politics with Bill C-48. I agree, we will not politicize it, except for clause 1. We will do so because that is what the Conservatives are doing. Clause 1 must be changed. I hope the real parliamentary secretary, not the one from the Quebec City region, but the other one whom I am not allowed to name—I can name him but I am not able to name his riding—understands that he must amend clause 1. The real title is "An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act". It is perfect; I have no problem with it.

However, the "Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act" is inaccurate. I would like the government side to stop spreading these falsehoods. All the numbers we have show that no one has ever received a sentence discount for multiple murders. Yes, there is a mistake. Yes, under section 745, a person receives one 25-year sentence, but that is how the Criminal Code was drafted. That section still exists.

Neither the judge nor anyone can do anything about it. When the death sentence was abolished, no one noticed that this section allowed a murderer convicted of multiple murders to receive the equivalent of a 25-year sentence to serve. However, I can say that the National Parole Board has been monitoring this very closely and will continue to do so to ensure that murderers guilty of multiple murders, psychopaths like Colonel Williams and serial killers like Olson and Pickton will never be released, even if this bill is not passed quickly. I cannot even imagine that.

Obviously, if Bill C-48 is not passed during this session, it will come back in the next sessions and be passed before these people can be released. They will serve 25 years. I do not think that any parole board can release any of the three individuals I just mentioned before the allotted time, which is 25 years because a life sentence is a minimum of 25 years.

Regardless of what my Conservative colleagues, including the parliamentary secretary, might think, the average life sentence served in Canada is 28 years and 7 months, not 25 years. Criminals, especially murderers, stay in prison.

In closing, I would say that this bill fills a major gap in the Criminal Code, a gap that I think deserves our attention, especially in the case of multiple murderers—psychopaths and criminals who have committed more than one murder. Obviously, they might deserve additional sentences. The Bloc will vote in favour of this bill. It will be studied in committee, and quickly we hope.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville talked about justice for victims and their families and friends. I do not know how we can talk about this without looking at what happens in other countries like our own.

Does my colleague agree? Does he agree that Canada has the harshest sentences for murderers?

● (1750)

Mr. Marc Lemay: I thank my colleague for his question.

Whether my Conservative colleagues like it or not, the answer is that it is true. Canada is the country that imposes the longest sentences on its murderers. I am not saying that is a bad thing. That is not what I am saying. I hope the parliamentary secretary will not say that on GO RadioX FM. That is not what I just said.

What I am saying is that Canada currently sentences murderers to longer prison terms than Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and even the United States. Maybe we should look at that more closely.

One thing is extremely important, and I thank my colleague for giving me a chance to point this out. Canada has an organization called the National Parole Board. If there is anyone in Canada who cares about victims, it is the National Parole Board.

Unless the Conservatives want to do away with it and replace it with something else, the National Parole Board must be maintained.

As others have said and as I have always said, people are shocked not by minimum sentences—which are not necessary—but by the fact that offenders do not serve their full sentence.

People are shocked when someone is sentenced to four years in prison and is released after eight months because the prison is full and because the penitentiary says he is a good guy who only defrauded people of $4 million and it was his first offence.

At present, there is a lengthy process to follow before the National Parole Board is asked to consider a case of murder. The murderer will first have to appear before a superior court judge and then convince a jury before going before the parole board.

I can say that not one criminal accused and convicted of murder who has been released has reoffended. There have been no such cases in Canada, and we have the figures to prove it.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for his passionate speech and for the points that he raised about this bill.

I have a question for him regarding the short title.

The member said that in my speech I said that the government should not attempt to play political football with this bill. That was a very accurate summary of what I said about this issue. I was talking about the content of this bill.

I appreciate the fact that he did not twist my words like the Conservative members have done many times.

I think the government is trying to gain political capital with the short title and is trying to mislead the public. It is trying to make the public think that this bill fixes something that it does not.

I would like to know what the member thinks about that. I know that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights already removed the short title of Bill C-22 because it was a politicized title that had nothing to do with the content of the bill.

I would like to hear what the member has to say about that.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

She is quite right. So that it will be clear to the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, I will say it in French. The short title does not make sense. I hope he will convince his colleague, the other parliamentary secretary. The short title makes no sense, because it is false, misleading and does not convey the truth. It is false. Let them give me one scrap of evidence, just one to make me change my mind. They are talking about the Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act. That is not true. That does not make sense. That is petty politics.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville who spoke earlier. She was quite right. We are not going to play political football with this bill. However, they must delete clause 1 because the bill is urgent. The rest is fine, and a number of parties want it. It is time to address an oversight, an omission, that allows some criminals who have committed more than one murder to receive a maximum sentence of 25 years and serve perhaps just a bit more. It is true that it does not make sense. Still, the title is just not right. There are no sentence discounts for murders. They must stop mocking people.

I hope that the Conservatives will realize that they will not gain popularity with that kind of title because it just does not make sense. I will tell them right now that I am convinced that on this side, the Liberal Party, the Bloc and the NDP will vote against the short title. Thus, it should be deleted immediately. We will waste less time and the bill will be studied more quickly. I read the rest of the bill with interest and I find that it makes sense, is well written, and meets the needs of 21st-century society.

● (1755)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to this and I do not understand. To me, what is ridiculous here is that we are dealing with something so serious as murder, which usually involves greed or rape or something where an innocent person's life is extinguished, and the majority of the questions of the members opposite are about the title. They do not like the title. I just do not understand why they would not concentrate on the more important aspects, the substantive part of the bill, which is actually what it is all about. The member's argument is that it has never happened, therefore we should not change it. Even though I believe he is wrong, the reality is that we should be talking about the substantive part of the bill. We are trying to protect Canadians. We should be joining together. They should be coming across with hands open to support this bill, which is actually meant to protect Canadians and to punish those people who take another person's life as a result of greed or as a result of lust or something that they have no business being involved in, in the first place. Why do they not deal with that instead of the title? It is shameful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, hold on tight, you are in for quite a surprise.

My hon. colleague is the one playing petty politics. If you are so clever, get rid of it right away. I do not want to talk about clause 1, on the contrary. My speech was about section 745.21, which is found in clause 4. Read your bill carefully. You will see that we are in favour of it. We are not the ones playing petty politics or introducing government bills; you are. Get rid of the clause right away. You will see that it will not take long for this bill to get through the legislative process. Before you know it, it will be Christmas and it will be through.

However, we know what you are trying to do with the short title. You are continuing the political games. I do not even want to talk about it. I was not the one who started talking about it; that was you. Out of the 20 minutes of my speech, I spent 18 minutes talking about the fundamentals of the bill, and we agree on the fundamentals. But get rid of clause 1. It is urgent.

The Deputy Speaker: I must ask all of the members to address comments through the Chair, not to other members directly.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like the other parties in the House, subject to the short title, we are prepared at second reading to support the bill. However, I want to be very clear that we are doing so because we believe, to counter some of the misinformation that the government party puts out on these issues and some of the hyperbole we have heard both in the House and around this bill, it is extremely important to get it to the justice committee so that there is at least some public education about the reality of this area of the law and the practice that has developed around it since we have moved into the use of the faint hope clause in particular and the use of concurrent sentences, which are long standing in our jurisprudence.

When we are looking at this area of law, what does society do, and we as the legislature in this society, to build a fair, equitable criminal justice system to deal with the most heinous crime that a person could commit, which is taking the life of another person within our society? It is very fundamental. It is fundamental to the criminal justice system, it is fundamental to the Criminal Code, and in many respects it is fundamental to our role as legislators since it seems to me always that our primary role is to protect society. People have elected us to come here, and in many ways, to provide protection. It is the fundamental arrangement we have in a democracy.

So when we are looking at this area, the obvious question is what principles guide us in determining whether we are going to change the law as is being proposed by the government or leave it alone. It seems to me that when we look at those principles, there are subsets of them, but there are basically four. The primary one, as I have already said, is public safety, the protection of society as a whole. That has to be our driving principle.

Unfortunately, that lends itself to a lot of demagoguery, which we see in this bill in the form of the short title, and I am not going to spend any more time on that other than agreeing with my colleague from the Bloc that it is really a demeaning title. I do not know of any judges in this country at the trial level or at the appeal level who see themselves giving out discounts when they are sentencing people for murder, whether it be first degree or second degree, or even manslaughter. The title is a gross insult to our judiciary. There is not one judge in this country who would ever see, at the sentencing process, himself or herself giving discounts.

Coming back to the issue of public safety, yes, it is the guiding principle, no question, and how do we achieve that to the maximum potential? So we look at other principles.

Clearly when it comes to murder we look at the whole issue of denunciation, and included in that, the concept of punishment.

The third principle that we look at is one of deterrence. The denunciation and the punishment, along with deterrence, are very closely tied together. We look within the deterrence area subset at both general deterrence and specific deterrence to the individual who has now been convicted of the crime.

As well, we look at rehabilitation, because we have all sorts of evidence that in many cases deterrence is of no use at all as a guiding principle because it does not work in the vast majority of cases, whether specific or general.

We do know that to maximize the protection we are going to provide to society, if we rehabilitate these individuals while we have them within our custody, while they are incarcerated, the chances of them being a risk to society of committing more violent crime, committing murder, is dramatically reduced.

● (1800)

I know there are members of the government who do not believe that but that is the fact. Since we have instituted the faint hope clause provision which, if the bill goes through will substantially undermine it, plus what is being done in another bill and that goes through, if the Liberals do not get their backbone up and oppose it, we will lose that system.

The system, as it is today, works this way in terms of its consequence: not one murder but two serious crimes. We do not have enough facts to know whether they actually involve violence, but no second degree murder, no first degree murder and no manslaughter, and we believe, the little we know of the two serious offences, that they did not involve violence in the sense of anybody being injured.

In that respect, we have built a system that works. It works because we trust, which we have every right to do, our judges and our juries to come to the proper solution.

I want to take some issue with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville when she was speaking about justice. If the bill goes through and we destroy at the same time the faint hope clause, we are really slapping in the face our juries and our judges.

The way the system works now, if a person applies for early release, which this bill would completely eliminate, along with eliminating the faint hope clause, there is an initial, interim application. A senior judge of the region where the crime was committed needs to make a preliminary decision as to whether there is any merit to allowing the application for early release to go ahead after 15 years of incarceration. If the person passes that test, and a good number of people do not from the figures we have, we then move on to the judge and jury reviewing the current situation. Is this person to be released? All of the evidence that was available at the time of the trial, how serious the crime was, how vicious it was, how heinous it was, all of that evidence goes before the jury, and they are the ones who make a recommendation as to whether that person will be released early. That is the system we are talking about destroying with this bill in combination with Bill S-6, which is getting rid of the faint hope clause.

We come back to what is justice. How do we determine what is justice? Is that not the best way, to let our judge and jury combined make the decision? They make the decision at the time the person is convicted. Has the person in fact committed this crime beyond a reasonable doubt? They make that decision and then the judge makes the decision as to penalties. If the person is to get out early, we go back to the judge and jury. They make the decision deciding the facts as they are at that time. It is a workable system and it has worked.

The other point that has to be made with regard to the way the system has functioned is the length of time that people spend incarcerated for murder, both second and first degree, in Canada. Those applications to get out early, in spite of the fact that people can make them when they have served 15 years, the reality is that just this past year they have served 25 years. That was the average amount of years people spent in custody before they got out under the faint hope clause.

In spite of the fact that we have this legislation that lets them at least potentially apply to get out early, the reality is that last year the average worked out to be exactly 25 years. We also have figures, all of which came out, not because of anything the government did because it does not want these facts out, it does not want the truth and the reality out.

● (1805)

However, the reality is that over the last five to seven years the average number of years has been running between 23 and 25 years that people are released under the faint hope clause. As well, many people never apply for parole in the 25th year when they can first apply for parole under our existing legislation. We have all sorts of people who do not apply and do not get out. Again, that would be done away with if this bill goes through and judges can impose sentences that are consecutive rather than concurrent.

Although we have heard the figure repeatedly here today that the average time a convicted murderer spends in custody in Canada is 28.5 years, I believe the numbers are now higher than that and that it is closer to 30 years.

Also interesting is the average age of people who commit murder, which is close to 45 years old. If we take that and then add on either the 28.5 years or the 30 years, we are talking about people getting out of custody, if they ever get out, and a number of them do not, when they are 75 to 80 years of age. This goes back to the point that I raised at the beginning of my address today about public safety. They would no longer be a risk to public safety in this country at that age.

I will go back to the issue of justice because that is really what we are talking about. What is justice? I have a feeling I may start quoting Shakespeare here. If we really want to achieve some of the justice as perceived by the government, we would need to bring back the death penalty. It is the only way we can avoid having victims face the potential of an application for early release under the faint hope clause or applications under the Parole Act for parole after 25 years.

We also ask the question of how we came to this position where a number of victims, but not all from my experience, and the families of victims have come to the conclusion that we can use propagandized, politicized terms like “discount” of sentences to murder. How did we come to that? The average family member of a victim does not think of that. It is politicians who came up with those words and that concept.

We give life sentences and we give them for every murder. Whether a person was the first murdered or the second murdered by the murderer, both lives are treated equally. The penalties that we impose in this country is the same. There is no injustice there. That is a contrived plot that is completely out of reality with how it functions in this country.

Murder victim one, two and three are all treated the same in terms of us as a society and our criminal justice system meting out a penalty and that penalty is always life. Whether the time spent incarcerated is 25 years, 30 years or, in some cases, for the rest of natural life, it is the same. There is no discrimination here. One murder victim is treated no differently from the subsequent ones. That is a fallacy that is being perpetrated here and it is being perpetrated by some members in the opposition but it is not true.

I have never met a judge who has treated a murder victim any differently because the victim happened to have been killed later in the consecutive order. Not one judge thinks that way in this country. I think we can all believe, knowing our colleagues in society generally, that there would not be a member of the jury who would think any differently. Every one of those victims are to be treated identically.

● (1810)

That fallacy should be put to rest.

This goes back to what is justice and how we determine what is appropriate sentencing. Every society that I have looked at, and there are all sorts of reports and statistics on this, treats first degree murder much less severely than we do in this country. Again, they treat multiple murderers the same way. The period of incarceration is as much as half and, in some cases, even less than half of what our incarceration rate is for first degree and second degree murder.

Are we to say that those societies, basically all the rest of the democratic societies that are similar to ours, treat their murder victims less justly than we do? If we were to listen to the government, the answer to that would be yes, that those societies are all wrong, that they do not treat their people fairly, that they do not care about their people enough and that they are soft on crime. That would be true about every other country in the world that has governments and a criminal justice system similar to ours.

Do we, as Canadians and as parliamentarians, have the arrogance to say that we are absolutely right and everyone else is wrong? That is what the bill is saying.

A good deal of it, I think, when I listen to some of my Conservative colleagues, is based on their lack of knowledge of how the system really works, driven oftentimes by ideology rather than by the facts.

I want to touch on one more point because it has been irritating me for some time. A couple of months ago, the Minister of Public Safety, dealing with one of the government's many crime bills, was asked a question about whether we as a society within our criminal justice system should have a concept of forgiveness. We need to accept that people can be rehabilitated and that there should be a redemption type of concept within our system, which I believe exists within our system. The emphasis that we have placed over the years on rehabilitation has been the proper one and it does have an element of forgiveness.

The minister's response at that time was that it was okay for the churches, for organized religion and for people of faith. However, the concept that he came across with in his response was that the concept of redemption and forgiveness should have no role to play in a criminal justice system.

I want to say for the record, for *Hansard*, that I totally reject that type of an approach.

I want to be clear that we in the NDP are supporting the bill to go to committee. The main reason for that is that we have a saving grace in it of leaving this decision to the judge and, to a much lesser degree, to juries as to what the ultimate penalties will be. However, I want to investigate that much more extensively before I and my party will be prepared to vote for this legislation at third reading.

● (1815)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member.

The member made an excellent point on redemption and rehabilitation. I think the government forgets the fact that virtually everyone gets out but if they are not redeemed or rehabilitated, the government is making society a far more dangerous place through those policies and that attitude.

The member raised the point about respect for judges and that role, and the fact that they are very carefully chosen, they hear all the evidence, they have a lifetime of experience, they have guidelines that they have to follow in sentencing, they are the experts and they can give the best decision as to what will be in the interest of safety for society, including rehabilitation.

Does the member think the government has respect for the judges, in spite of the fact that it has been constantly limiting their powers through bills, limiting their pay rates and limiting the way in which they are chosen?

Could the member comment on either of those items?

● (1820)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be quick and answer both questions.

As I said earlier, a large number of people convicted of murder, first degree murder in particular, are going to get out when they are in their mid to late seventies, assuming they serve 30 years. Just because it is logical and real, we have to assume they will no longer be a risk.

There are others who commit murder at a young age, in their twenties, who may very well be eligible to get out when they are younger. We want to be sure that when they get out that they have been rehabilitated.

Taking this kind of an approach, where we say they have to stay in for 50 years, which is probably the logical extension of this bill, there is any number of cases where that is not appropriate.

I want to be very clear that this is why I was prepared to recommend that this bill go to committee to be looked at further.

If we consider Clifford Olson, and if I place myself in the role of the judge, I may very well say that for murdering 10 young people the person in front of me is never going to be rehabilitated. I may very well say that I want to be sure that guy never gets out, or if he does he is going to be so old that he is no longer a risk. There may be one, two or three cases every few years where we may want that. However, if we are going to do that, it seems to me that this bill has to be tightened up in that regard.

On the second point of judicial discretion, obviously I am a strong supporter of the quality of judges we have in this country. We know from any number of things that members of the government, from the Prime Minister on down to backbenchers, have said that those members do not trust the judicial system in Canada. They do not have respect for the judicial system. It is kind of strange that the government is doing this bill in that regard.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to commend the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for an excellent presentation on this bill. We have come to expect that of him. He was not voted the hardest working member in this place for no reason.

I also want to talk about the whole question of redemption and rehabilitation, and maybe take it a step further. We do not get a chance very often to do that with these justice bills that come forward.

There is rehabilitation for the person who has committed the crime, but there is also a benefit for the whole of society when we move in that direction, when we try to create a situation where healing is possible. At the end of the day, not only does the person who has committed the crime benefit by being rehabilitated or redeemed, but society benefits as well. The person and the family who have been hurt also stand a better chance of being redeemed.

Before healing comes forgiveness, and before forgiveness comes rehabilitation and a lot of hard work.

Perhaps the member could speak to the whole question of healing society, and the question not only of rehabilitation but of forgiveness.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the labels people are tainted with when they speak in terms of forgiveness, such as being soft on crime, force some members to avoid speaking in those terms. If Canada is the caring society that I believe it is, then we have to have that as part of our criminal justice system.

I want to go back to that story I have told repeatedly about that man whose daughter was killed. When he came before the committee, all of us were expecting that he would maintain a position that the faint hope clause should be gone and that people should be incarcerated forever. Because of his contact with a murderer who had gotten out earlier than the 25 years, and what that person had done in being rehabilitated and the contribution that person was making to society, that father of the woman who was killed had gotten to the point where he recognized that he could forgive murderers in certain circumstances.

● (1825)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh, who is always very impassioned, clear and logical in how he talks about the criminal justice system. What I find absolutely amazing is the body of knowledge he has around criminal justice and how he is able to look at it as a whole rather than what we see coming from the government, which is piecemeal recommendations on how to change a particular piece of the act, which really becomes the band-aid solution. Unfortunately, rather than being a band-aid of solution, it becomes a band-aid of partisanship.

I would ask my colleague to comment on what he thinks we should be doing in terms of a holistic approach to changing the criminal justice system as a totality, rather than trying to simply use it for partisan purposes. I wonder if he would care to make a quick comment on that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, right now before the House and in committee there are five separate bills that are intertwined around this issue, including the bill on the transfer of foreign prisoners. One of the consequences of these two bills, Bill S-6 and Bill C-48, is that a number of people are going to be coming back into this country from other countries, who are not going to be under any supervision because we are in fact foreclosing them from thinking of coming into Canada, because if they do, they may be faced with extended periods of time in custody that they would not be faced with in the jurisdiction they are in. They will be coming into this country and will be a major risk to us because they probably have very little rehabilitation services in other countries compared to what Canada has, which is not great but better than most countries. They will not have a criminal record in Canada and there will be no supervision of them whatsoever.

When we are doing this work, we should be doing omnibus bills. Of course, the government would forgo all the politicization it does on each one of these bills, trooping out victims and using them to try to push its tough on crime agenda, which in most cases is just dumb on crime.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, violent offences are probably most frightening to members of the public. They are scary. We read about them and they are most disturbing.

If we look at the people who commit these violent offences, many of them have been abused or have suffered in deplorable conditions when they were children. While this does not exonerate them from the actions they have taken, it certainly makes us understand where they came from and perhaps provides some insight in terms of what we could do to make our streets and the public safer.

Dr. Clyde Hertzman from the University of British Columbia is giving a talk on his amazing work on early childhood learning, the impact of subjecting a child to good parenting and a safe and secure environment with good nutrition. In those conditions, the trajectory of a child's life generally becomes quite positive. If children are subjected to violence, sexual abuse and terrible things, the trajectory changes. That is why an early learning head start program is really important. It would change the trajectory and give children the best chance of having a positive outcome.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have 19 minutes left to conclude his remarks the next time this bill is before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1830)

[*English*]

LIGHTHOUSES

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on June 17 I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans a question regarding the government's wholesale dumping of lighthouses. Instead of protecting lighthouses, the Conservative government is identifying close to 1,000 that it considers surplus and is expecting communities or organizations to take responsibility for them.

People who are familiar with lighthouses and the value of lighthouses, both on the most easterly coast of our country in Newfoundland and Labrador and on the most westerly coast in British Columbia, are finding this deplorable. They are looking to the government to change its mind and see if we cannot come to some kind of resolution in terms of ensuring that these icons are protected.

Ironically, this announcement of the government's plan to dump approximately 480 active lighthouses and 490 inactive lighthouses across Canada came at the very same time the Conservative government was wasting taxpayers' dollars to construct a fake lighthouse in Ontario for the G8 and G20 meetings. While we see the government dipping into taxpayers' money for reckless and irresponsible spending that supports its own partisan objectives, the government turns it back on the heritage lighthouses that are so important and treasured in Canada's coastal communities.

The Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act came into force on May 29, 2010 with the stated purpose of ensuring the protection and conservation of heritage lighthouses. I contend that the Conservative government's announcement to get rid of close to 1,000 heritage lighthouses that it considers surplus is inconsistent with the intent of the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. The federal government instead should be looking to preserve these Canadian icons, not get rid of them.

The wholesale dumping of lighthouses shows a complete disregard for the importance of these historical buildings. If the government had a plan or the intention to preserve heritage lighthouses, the minister had the perfect opportunity to share that commitment with Parliament in response to my question, which she chose not to do.

Instead, when I asked the question, she refused to say what financial assistance, if any, would be available to ensure that lighthouses do not fall into a state of disrepair once the government has washed its hands of them. This is frankly offensive to those of us who live in communities where a lighthouse is a well-loved symbol of our rich maritime history and our present maritime activities. It is further aggravated by the fact that the government spent money on a fake lighthouse in Ontario made out of a tree stump as part of the over $1 billion spent for the 72 hours of meetings for the G8 and G20 summits.

The federal government wants to offload these lighthouses and expects someone else to assume responsibility for them while it displays a complete lack of prudence and responsibility in spending taxpayers' money.

Many of these lighthouses are rundown. That is why the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act received support in this House as it contains a commitment to set out a federal process to preserve heritage lighthouses.

A spokesperson for the Canadian Heritage Foundation, Carolyn Quinn, was quoted in the Moncton *Times & Transcript* as saying, "The intent was never that there would be a massive unloading. It really has undermined the intent of the act".

Some of the lighthouses will be taken over by communities. However, in my own hometown of Grand Bank, where the lighthouse is a symbol of safety and is widely used, the town would more than likely take over the lighthouse than see it fall into a state of disrepair. But there is no indication at this point in time that the government is even willing to do anything to ensure that the lighthouse is in a state where it can be carried on and maintained in good condition by anyone who wishes to take care of it.

If the government is going to ask organizations and communities to take responsibility for lighthouses, I am asking it to seriously consider making money available so they can do so.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take the time to thank the Conservative member for South Shore—St. Margaret's, my seatmate, for his education. He has taught me a lot about lighthouses across the country.

I am very happy to have this opportunity to talk to the implementation of the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. The purpose of this act is to preserve and protect Canada's most iconic lighthouses for the benefit of future generations.

My constituents are very interested in this as well. As members are aware, I represent some 30,000 Newfoundlanders, 5,000 Nova Scotians, 5,000 New Brunswickers and some 5,000 Quebeckers. This obviously is a very important issue to them as well.

Canadians, particularly those living in coastal regions, such as my constituents who come from those areas, care deeply about lighthouses. The way the member spoke, I am certain the she also cares, as do her constituents. They are reminders of Canada's culture and history and are part of the heritage of our country and our landscape.

Lighthouses have made a significant contribution to maritime communities and to the development of our nation. This contribution deserves to be commemorated and to be respected. That is exactly what this Conservative government is doing.

Despite their historical contribution to the economic development of our country, the role of the traditional lighthouse has evolved over time as a result of advances in marine navigational technology.

In many instances, the principal function of the community-based lighthouses can now be reflected in tourism-based ventures that have been established at these sites, to which the member previously alluded. That is good news again because it creates an economy where there was not an economy before.

The Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act requires that the federal ministers publish a list of all lighthouses that could subsequently be made available for ownership by outside interests, and there is a lot of interest in that. These new owners would be committed to preserving the heritage character of the lighthouse and maintaining an ongoing public purpose for the property. This is very important. I just had a chance to look at the lighthouse at Peggy's Cove. I had many opportunities to visit the east coast. They are beautiful things and they need to be preserved.

The publication of the list of surplus lighthouses under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act is an extension of existing practices related to lighthouse divestiture. There is quite a history to that. In fact, the history goes back to previous Liberal prime ministers. In fact, this started under a Liberal prime minister. Since 1995, over 20 operational lighthouses have been successfully divested for ongoing public purposes and further facilitation of such opportunities is one of this act's main purposes. Communities all across the country have assumed control over the conservation of their historical landmarks, and many more are willing and able to take upon this task.

I would also like to take this opportunity to discuss lighthouse automation in Canada.

Lighthouse de-staffing began in 1971, under the leadership of Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. In fact, in the early 1970s, 189 lighthouses were automated. This process continued over three decades, most recently in 1997, under Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien when he de-staffed 51 lighthouses.

The results of automation throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is that manned lighthouses remain in only two provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia.

I will get to the rest of my speech in a moment.

● (1835)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the concern being expressed by my colleague in terms of the lighthouses and their importance, particularly to safety, for those who travel on the sea, whether they do it as tourists or for a livelihood.

While there are communities and organizations that will take on responsibility for these lighthouses, the question remains whether there is any kind of support for an organization or community that may wish to do so.

The problem is in a lot of these rural communities where these lighthouses exist the communities just do not have the financial resources to maintain them on an ongoing basis. They are saying that if we expect them to take over responsibility for a lighthouse, because they do not want to see it go by the wayside or see it fall into a state of disrepair, will we not at least offer something upfront in terms of making it possible for them to do that.

That is what we are asking the government to do. If it must insist on offloading what it considers to be surplus lighthouses, please—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that over the years some lighthouse keepers have taken on services in addition to their regular function of keeping the lights operational, which is of course very important. Mariners and aviators have grown accustomed to these additional services, which actually add quite a value to these communities.

That is why the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has asked the Senate Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to look into these issues and report back by the end of 2010. We anticipate hearing from the Senate committee before Christmas and that report will help instruct the minister and coast guard as they move forward.

In conclusion, our government understands that lighthouses have made a significant contribution to our history as a nation. Lighthouses have stood tall as constant reminders of our maritime heritage. The Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act provides an opportunity to ensure that an important part of our history is preserved for future generations of Canadians, and at the same time, we will keep mariners safe and secure throughout this country.

● (1840)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to a question I raised in the House in September around first nations education. I raised a couple of different issues and I am going to focus mainly on post-secondary today.

There was a news release about an educational rally that was happening in Garden River. It was on the *SooToday* website. In that news release, Garden River First Nation talked about the fact that:

> The current education system is failing our youth.
>
> Quality culture-based education is the key to addressing the educational achievement gap.
>
> Changes to First Nations education requires meaningful First Nation consultation.
>
> Short-changing First Nations education affects us all.
>
> We are the fastest growing population in the country.
>
> Statistics Canada has predicted that Canada will face a labour shortage by 2017.

It went on to say:

> Access to a university degree will triple one's earning potential, therefore creating an opportunity for prosperity among First Nation people that will eliminate the employment gap and inject billions of dollars into the Canadian economy.

I want to touch on an article by Paul Wells, on November 12, entitled “One school's native intelligence”. In his article he says:

> A February 2010 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards suggests that if the gap in educational attainment and labour-force participation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians vanished by 2026, total tax revenue would increase by $3.5 billion and government spending could decrease by $14.2 billion.

Clearly, that is the kind of example of an investment in education that not only benefits the bottom line in government coffers but will substantially increase first nations' participation in the labour force. We often hear that if we want to lift people out of poverty what we need to do is provide them with education.

There are some very good examples out there where people are doing creative things. The University of Victoria has a program called LE,NONET. It is a Straits Salish word referring to “success after enduring many hardships”.

The bottom line about this program asks, does all this fuss keep aboriginal students in school? Participants in the program were less than one-third as likely to drop out as aboriginal students who were not selected for the pilot program.

There was also a national working summit of participants committed to improving aboriginal education across the country and they had some very specific requests. This is a working group involving a number of organizations, including the Association of Universities and Colleges and the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation that provides substantial scholarships and bursaries to first nation students. With their working summit, the AUCC and the foundation and summit participants committed to the following objectives: to take a holistic approach to ensure successful transition for students; to continue to seek increased federal funding for aboriginal students; to continue advocating for increased federal funding for aboriginal-focused support programs at universities and colleges; to work collaboratively seeking opportunities to partner with other interested organizations to share knowledge about what approaches are most successful, and so on.

My question for the government is, when will it come forward with a post-secondary education program that has been developed in consultation with first nations across this country?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, without question, I agree with my hon. colleague in her assessment that one of the priorities for our government, and any government, is to ensure that first nations people fulfill their potential when it comes to educational opportunities and integrating themselves into our economy and our workforce.

I point out for my hon. friend that the government has made unprecedented contributions and investments in aboriginals, whether it be on infrastructure, or on clean water or in educational investments and opportunities.

I certainly point out that in my home province, the government has continued with direct funding to First Nations University at a time when many critics of the FNU were pointing out the vast cost overruns of that institution. Our government stepped up to the plate and continued funding. We discussed the previous problems with the administrators, with those involved in the First Nations University on campus and through intelligent, targeted and focused funding, we have ensured that students at the First Nations University are continuing their studies. That is just one example of the government's commitment to educational funding for all first nations people.

Unfortunately, too many times we hear members of the opposition criticizing the government in a fashion, which I consider to be overly partisan. I believe it would behoove all members of this assembly if we could agree on a couple of very simple priorities: first, that all members of this place feel a commitment to educational opportunities for our first nations people from coast to coast to coast; and second, that we work in the best interests of aboriginal and first nations children to ensure, as we move forward into this century and beyond, that they will be given every opportunity to get the education that they not only need, but deserve.

● (1845)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I am very familiar with First Nations University. I was the one who asked questions about it in the House. The government needs to acknowledge that there were others working on this file.

I did an inquiry on spending around the post-secondary students support program, commonly known as PSSSP. An answer came back indicating that in 2008 nearly $300,000 was paid for a preliminary survey on post-secondary education and another $15,000 on an applied research program. We have heard consistently from the government about the review that it is doing to the PSSSP, yet we have seen nothing.

The question I asked in the House originally back in September was when would we see the results of that program. In addition, I asked how first nations would be included in any of the recommendations that would come as a result of the studies that were done.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my original intervention, our government understands the importance of education. We certainly understand the importance of aboriginal and first nations education. That is why we are investing vast amounts each and every year in first nations' education.

Although we recognize how vital a good education is to a healthy, prosperous future for first nations, our government is working primarily hand in hand with first nations communities and with provinces and territories to strengthen those relationships to ensure that first nations communities across the country are given the proper tools and sufficient funds to advance their educational aspirations.

G20 SUMMIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many months after the billion dollar Toronto G20 photo op, Torontonians are still waiting for answers from the government.

Businesses in downtown Toronto lost millions in damages and lost revenue, and they deserve answers and they deserve compensation.

Canadians saw the largest mass arrest in Canadian history, and nearly 900 of those 1,100 individuals taken into custody were never charged.

The Conservative billion-dollar security budget was supposed to prevent property damages and keep people's rights protected. Clearly this did not happen and Canadians deserve to know why.

No one has answered for the appalling conditions in the detention facility or for the systematic violations of many individuals' rights to counsel. The government still has not adequately explained the decision making behind the planning of the summits or who was calling the shots for on-the-ground security decisions.

More than 200 people were surrounded by police in a kettling, as they call it, at the corner of Queen and Spadina, right in the heart of my riding on Sunday, June 27. It forced many to spend hours in the pouring rain. Whether they were just walking by, whether they were buying pizza, whether they were minding their business or whether they were just ordinary pedestrians, they were not told what was happening or why they were being held. Some were peaceful protesters and many were just innocent bystanders.

The public needs to know who ordered this confinement and why these individuals' civil liberties were taken from them. Was it the former head of the OPP, who is now the Conservative candidate in Vaughan, or was it the RCMP or was it the Toronto police?

Respected journalist Steve Paikin described the events on Saturday night at the Toronto G20 in real time on Twitter, and his first-hand account demonstrated the heavy-handed conduct of police during a very peaceful gathering on the Esplanade.

He said, via his tweets:

> cops tightening their perimeter. why? they are forcing something they don't need to force.... cops moving closer why? ... arresin people.... weapons are rubber bulles....

Why? Who gave this government the right to suspend our civil liberties for a weekend?

The public deserves to know. Ordinary Canadians have the right to a public inquiry to get to the bottom of what occurred in Toronto during the G20. They need to know why the federal government ignored the concerns and suggestions of the City of Toronto in holding the summit in downtown Toronto on a weekend.

What role did federal officials play in the integrated security unit policing the summit? Who made the strategic decisions on how the stores were protected and how peaceful demonstrators and journalists were treated?

When and how will the government compensate Toronto for damages, and why is it that if there are broken windows, owners are not compensated? Who made the decision on these boundaries, in that ordinary business people outside the boundaries are not compensated, even though a recent survey said 93% of downtown businesses lost a tremendous amount of money in those few days? They are told there is no guarantee they would get compensated, even if they put in an application. That is—

● (1850)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the G8 and G20 summits held back to back in Muskoka and Toronto a few months ago were unprecedented on a number of different fronts.

It was the first time the G8 and G20 summits were held back to back. We were very proud to host country these two summits. In a time of economic upheaval worldwide it was critical that Canada lend its voice not only to the recession, but to try and get a worldwide consensus and plan to work our way out of that recession.

Canada has the enviable record of being the one country in the world, I would suggest, that was least affected by this recession. That was due to sound economic policies, banking procedures and other policies of this country that allowed us to be a world leader in that respect.

I take some issue with my hon. colleague's characterization of what happened during the G20. Canadians from coast to coast to coast can remember vividly the images of professional protesters and the carnage they wreaked on Toronto.

Who can forget those images that were on all television stations of professional protesters? Perhaps they were not average members of our society or even of our country, but their sole purpose was to disrupt the G20 and cause as much damage and create as much havoc and chaos as they possibly could. We saw the images of police cars on fire and of protesters jumping up and down on those cars and throwing flammable liquids to try and create that havoc and chaos. That is something I do not think any Canadian who paid attention will ever forget.

That is why the security budget we brought forward to deal with those incidents is as high as it is. Security comes at a price. Thank goodness our government had the foresight to bring in a budget that anticipated these types of actions and reactions from these protesters.

I would add that as we stand here today, the budget for the G8 and G20 summits was approved by this Parliament, and the costs seem to be coming in well under budget. Not all the costs are in; we appreciate that some costs will be coming in over the coming weeks and months, but I am very confident in stating that we will be under budget. That is one thing I think many other countries would aspire to.

● (1855)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, the G20 summit budget was approved by the Conservatives with the help of their Liberal friends. The New Democrats certainly did not vote in favour of it.

I note that the G20 summit did not deal with climate change, or make poverty history, or help the children with AIDS who are having trouble in getting new drugs to prevent their death.

I quote a recent article in which the columnist talked about rights:

> First it was the anarchists, who deserved the draconian measures. Then the protesters. Then anyone wearing black. Then anyone on Queen Street. Then anyone in a cab who casually said something nice to a police officer. Rights are not easily gained. Nor should they be easily withdrawn, for a weekend, for an evening, for a moment.

It is important for us to remember that 98% of the protesters were there peacefully—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not surprising to hear my hon. colleague say that the NDP did not vote for the budget that concerned itself with G8 and G20 summit expenses. That is not surprising because the NDP has not voted in favour of any initiative this government has brought forward in a budgetary sense.

It is well known that because of the tax cuts implemented by our government, the average Canadian family has benefited from over $3,000 in tax savings over the course of our administration. Did the NDP members vote for those tax cuts? No they did not.

The NDP has one and only one agenda and that is to tax more and spend more. That is a direction this government will never follow.

The Deputy Speaker: A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:57 p.m.)

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