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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 15, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 15, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

NUCLEAR-WEAPONS-FREE ZONE IN THE CANADIAN ARCTIC ACT

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-629, An Act respecting the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Canadian Arctic.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a private member's bill that calls for the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Canadian Arctic.

With the melting ice cap and the opening of Arctic passages and trade routes, this is the strongest declaration we can make about our sovereignty in the north. Because of the fragile Arctic ecosystems, the harsh climate making clean up impossible and indigenous peoples depending on country foods, this bill is critical.

It is also my hope that other countries will review the bill and take its intent to the next logical step and begin the process necessary to declare the entire Arctic a nuclear weapons-free zone. If the government truly wants to preserve and protect our Arctic, then I encourage it to endorse the bill and let us act quickly to implement such legislation.

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

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[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

SOCIÉTÉ D'HABITATION DU QUÉBEC

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of residents from all of the municipalities in my riding. As you know, there are 26. This petition was initiated by the Fédération des locataires d'habitations à loyer modique du Québec. It states:

We, the undersigned, are calling on the Government of Canada to provide the public funds needed by the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its low-income housing renovation plan and to cover the accumulated maintenance deficit.

I am very happy to present this petition on their behalf.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present three petitions from the people of Hull—Aylmer, who are calling on the Government of Canada to provide the public funds needed by the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its low-income housing renovation plan and to cover the accumulated maintenance deficit. Some 500 petitioners are urging the government to meet this social housing objective, which would help improve the quality of life of tens of thousands of households in Quebec.

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present, on behalf of constituents from Two Hills, Innisfree, Ranfurly and elsewhere, a petition that calls upon Parliament to maintain the 10-year residency requirement for Canadians to collect old age security. They call on the House to defeat Bill C-428 which would reduce that requirement to three years.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first is signed by literally hundreds and hundreds of constituents in my riding who are concerned that their pensions and retirement security may not be there for them in their retirement years. I know my colleague from Thunder Bay—Superior North has the same concerns.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to expand and increase CPP, OAS and GIS; establish a self-financing pension insurance program; and ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings.

The second petition is along the same lines. It is signed by hundreds and hundreds of petitioners who ask the government to affirm that pension benefits are in fact deferred wages, to elevate defined pension plans, benefit plans, to secured status in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the creditors protection act, and to pass into law any legislation before it that will achieve these objectives.

Government Orders

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present yet another petition on cerebrospinal venous insufficiency.

Last week I was joined by Dr. Mark Haacke, Dr. David Hubbard and Dr. Sandy McDonald, leading researchers in CCSVI in North America. We asked the government to ensure proper health care is not refused to a patient who has chosen to seek or has obtained the liberation procedure outside Canada, to provide funding to undertake clinical trials for the liberation procedure in multiple centres across Canada, and to track patients who have received the liberation therapy whether inside or outside Canada.

The petitioners call for a nationwide clinical trial with diagnosis, treatment and follow up for MS patients.

[Translation]

MINERAL EXPLORATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to present three petitions, including two petitions regarding the operations of Canadian mining companies abroad. People across Quebec, including some of my constituents, are calling on the government to urge the Secretary-General of the United Nations to develop an international mechanism for obtaining prior consent, freely given with full knowledge of the situation. Consent should be a prerequisite for all exploratory projects.

STE. ANNE'S HOSPITAL

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would also like to present a petition from my constituents regarding Ste. Anne's Hospital. The petitioners are calling for the eligibility criteria for veterans to be expanded to include members of the allied forces.

[English]

PUBLIC TRANSIT SAFETY

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, today I would like to table an important petition from residents in northwestern Ontario, mostly in Thunder Bay and Dryden. Many of them are transit workers and members of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 966.

The petitioners ask that the growing incidents of violence against public transit operators, school bus drivers, paratransit and intercity bus operators be recognized formally in the Criminal Code. Violence against these vital operators is not just a workplace safety issue, but it places the safety of the travelling public at risk as well.

Both I and the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River encourage action to be taken on this important issue.

• (1010)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my petition is signed by dozens of Canadians calling for Canada to end its military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with help from the Liberal Party, broke his oft-repeated promise to honour the

parliamentary motion and, furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in this House.

Committing 1,000 soldiers to a training mission still presents a danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when our country is faced with a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

In fact, polls show that a clear majority of Canadians do not want Canada's military presence to continue after the scheduled removal date of July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

Hon. Steven Fletcher (for the Minister of Public Safety) moved that Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this motion, just another in a series of extraordinary justice legislation that has been brought forward by this government to restore balance to our justice system. I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the good people of Oak Ridges—Markham.

I want to take a moment to commend the hon. members who have already demonstrated their support for Bill C-59 and are ensuring that these important changes receive quick passage into law. Those hon. members are showing their commitment to ensuring the safety and security of our communities.

All offenders must be held accountable for the crimes they commit. Bill C-59 is all about accountability, about offenders serving appropriate sentences for the crimes committed. That is what we call justice.

Government Orders

Bill C-59 would ensure that all offenders will be treated equally, regardless of the nature of the crime they commit, when it comes to eligibility for parole. Currently, there is a distinction made between crimes committed with or without violence. Parole, in cases of non-violent crime, is presumptive, meaning that the Parole Board of Canada must automatically release the offender into the community under supervision unless it has reasonable grounds to believe that the offender will commit a violent offence if released.

That does not seem fair to me. Fraud and white-collar crimes must not have been committed with violence but the victims are harmed nonetheless. Lives are ruined, entire life savings are lost and the physical, psychological and emotional harm resulting from these crimes can be equally as devastating.

Can we honestly say that justice has been served when an offender who has received a sentence befitting the crime walks out of jail well before the sentence has been served? In essence, many victims are essentially re-victimized by the relatively short amount of time that offenders spend behind bars for their crimes.

Canadians have spoken loud and clear. They are outraged that the rights of offenders seem to be put ahead of the rights of law-abiding citizens. Our government is listening and we are taking the necessary action to crack down on crime and stand up for those who have been victimized. We are ensuring that victims' voices are heard and that their concerns are being addressed. Bill C-59 is just one step in that direction.

Our government has already introduced several initiatives that demonstrate our commitment to victims' rights. The federal victims strategy was introduced in 2006 to improve the experience of victims of crime in the criminal justice system. Since its creation, the government has committed over \$50 million to this strategy. We created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime in 2007 to ensure that the federal government meets its responsibility to victims of crime.

Under our leadership, the truth in sentencing law was passed, which eliminates the two-for-one credit that offenders receive for time served in custody prior to sentencing. We have gotten tough on organized crime, including drug crime, with stiffer sentences and we have passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act, which better protects Canadians from those who commit serious and violent crimes.

In addition, we are facilitating access to EI benefits for family members of victims of crime and the right to unpaid leave for workers in federally regulated industries. The victim surcharge is also being made mandatory to provide better financial support to victim services.

There are several more examples I could give that demonstrate that this government is making victims' rights a priority, but now I want to turn to the accelerated parole review challenges, the very rights that we are working so hard to uphold. By allowing accelerated parole review to continue operating in the justice process, we are, in essence, undermining the rights of victims and trivializing the suffering that they may have suffered at the hands of their offenders.

The current system of accelerated parole review grants parole to offenders convicted of non-violent offences after serving only one-

sixth of the sentence and full parole after serving just one-third. This means that a white-collar criminal who has received a sentence of 12 years would actually spend very little time in jail. With accelerated parole review, these offenders can be back in our communities on day parole in just two years and be on full parole in just four years.

• (1015)

The current system requires that the Correctional Service of Canada refers the case of offenders eligible for APR to the parole board. This is done before the offender's day parole eligibility date so that they can be released into the community as early as possible. Parole hearings are not held in these cases, as there is no requirement for the parole board to hold a hearing to determine whether offenders eligible for APR may be released on day parole and full parole.

I, like most Canadians, would expect that the decisions around parole for white collar criminals would entail more than a simple paper exercise. It does not work that way for violent offenders, so it should not work that way for fraudsters either. They should not simply be let out on day parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence, as they essentially now often are.

Other offenders must convince the parole board that they will comply with the law and the conditions of their release. These offenders must make their case at an actual hearing. Unfortunately, as it now stands, white collar offenders do not actually have to explain to anyone why they should be granted parole. They only have to go through a paper review with the parole board.

Compounding the problem, the parole board has no choice but to grant parole to an offender who is entitled to APR, except in those instances where the parole board believes the offender may commit a violent offence before the sentence is up.

This situation is unlike the one facing other offenders and, thankfully, Bill C-59 will put a stop to it.

Let us think about the current scenario again because it offends both me and many of my hon. colleagues in the House. Under the present law, only the prospect of an offender committing a violent offence will prevent that criminal from receiving automatic parole.

Those fraudsters, the ones who may have duped many and literally destroyed lives, will not be denied parole and will only serve a fraction of their time behind bars. Without grounds to believe a violent offence will be committed, the Parole Board of Canada simply has no other choice but to grant parole.

Government Orders

The special treatment afforded to these offenders has to end. All other offenders are subject to a very different standard, one that instills, rather than undermines, confidence in our justice system. Right now, for all other offences, the parole board has set criteria to guide its approach in deciding whether they grant or deny parole.

In these cases the parole board will assess whether an offender poses an insurmountable level of risk to commit any type of an offence if released. If that risk exists for any type of offence, parole is denied.

Let us not miss the importance of that principle; it is one that warrants repeating. With the troubling exception of white collar offenders, all other offenders are not granted parole if the parole board is convinced that any type of offence will be committed once a person is released, whether violent or not.

There are no justifiable grounds for the existing exception for white collar criminals. These are the offenders who have bilked many, washing out entire savings and crippling lives in the most extreme cases. These offenders must no longer enjoy the different standard they face under the current law. The scales of justice seem unfairly tilted in their favour.

This government has made it quite clear that it will not put the rights of any offender ahead of the rights of others. We will stay committed and remind ourselves of a few clear cases where these white collar criminals have benefited from the current APR system. These are cases that make us all question whether justice is being served.

The parole board simply does not have the discretion is so sorely needs in these cases. Bill C-59 would bring about that change, which is why I stand here in the House and turn to my hon. colleagues and ask them to ensure timely passage of this bill.

I for one feel compelled to see the changes proposed in Bill C-59 put into place so that we put victims first. In my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, we have certainly not been immune from the scourge of white collar crime. Indeed, not long ago a fraudster was at work within my community. After being convicted of her crime, she spent very little in jail and was released back into the community and was quickly found to be in violation of her parole. The police had to track her down and put her back in jail.

● (1020)

I know this person's victims. They are from my small home town of Stouffville. I see the stress they have faced. As this continued to be in the local papers, I watched the person who committed these acts flaunting our current system. It is absolutely positively unacceptable that we have a current justice system that would allow people who commit this type of crime to walk our streets after serving only one-sixth of their sentence.

However, this speaks to the many different things that this government has done.

Of course, when we came into office in 2006, we found a criminal justice system that was tilted not toward the victims but more toward the perpetrators of these crimes. Since then we have been rebalancing our justice system. The Minister of Justice, the Minister of Public Safety and this government have focused on restoring

balance to the justice system so that the victims of these crimes can feel that the government is truly working on their behalf to give them a system of justice they can be proud of and so that Canadians can understand that the government will always stand for them and the rights of victims before those of criminals.

There are so many different programs and justice bills that we have brought forward. We have Bill S-10, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act and Bill C-39. As I said, it is part of this government's focus to restore people's confidence in their justice system.

However, when we talk about Bill C-59, it is sometimes forgotten that it deals with incredibly serious crimes. There are fraudsters out in the communities who are seeking vulnerable people in a lot of instances and taking advantage of them and their life savings, the things they have worked so hard for their entire lives. Yet there are fraudsters out there who are doing this and who have no shame. Then the victims are victimized again when a court pronounces a sentence and then the person is released back into the community after serving only one-sixth of their sentence. That is clearly unacceptable to the people I represent in Oak Ridges—Markham. That should be unacceptable to every single member of this House.

It is unconscionable that we have had delays in getting this bill passed and have been spending so much time at committee on what should be a common sense bill. The people from my riding have been calling me and asking why it is taking us so long to deal with this. They do not want to hear about delays. They do not want to hear about the stalling tactics the opposition have been using to try to thwart the bill being passed. They want us to get it done and get it passed so that people will pay the price for the crimes they have committed. They do not want us to make a distinction that would have us treating the criminals better than the victims. They do not want to be re-victimized. They want to know that this government and the Parliament of Canada will stand up for victims' rights ahead of criminals. That is what this bill does; that is what all of the legislation we have brought forward does.

It is interesting that before the government operations committee, we had the head of the Correctional Service of Canada. He was asked if he had the resources required to keep convicted criminals in jail longer so that they could serve the sentences they had been given by the people of Canada. He of course said that he could continue to provide one of the best criminal justice systems in the world, a system that has been looked at by other nations as an example. He talked about the savings that he has been able to find within the correctional service by computerizing scheduling and finding other efficiencies so that he could put that money into keeping offenders in jail longer.

Therefore, I am pleased to support this. I hope that all of my opposition colleagues will join with the government in passing this bill so that the Canadian people can feel confident that the government, and Parliament and the people they elect are putting them first.

Government Orders

● (1025)

When I was asked to speak on this bill, the first thing that came to mind was the individuals in Stouffville who were victimized by this unscrupulous person who took them for thousands of dollars and was later found back on the streets with the exact same group she had used to abuse these people and take their money.

People call me and talk to me and send emails asking how this can be allowed to happen in Canada. How can we allow these victims to go through this time and time again? Why should their names be in the paper again? Why should they be re-victimized? Why can members not get their act together and pass this bill?

Canadians, the people in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, find it completely unacceptable that this bill has been stalled and delayed. They have sent me a very clear message to get the bill passed, get it through Parliament and start focusing on all the other crime legislation that has been brought forward in this House to restore balance to our criminal justice system. I am proud that I can do that, and I will be working with colleagues, at least on this side of the House, to make sure that all of those criminal justice issues are brought forward.

The delays to this particular piece of legislation and all of the legislation that we have been trying to get through this House speak to the sad reality of some individuals on the opposition benches who think more of their entitlements than they do of the people of Canada. If we were truly putting the Canadian people first, we would have passed this bill. We would not have spent a full day debating and talking about how we could delay this bill. It would have gone through committee.

In the government operations and estimates committee last week, we had an opposition witness who was talking about some of the crime legislation we had brought forward. It is something that stuck in my head as the father of two beautiful girls. The opposition was very happy with the group of witnesses before the committee. These witnesses did not support this government's agenda to keep violent criminals in jail. They did not support this government's agenda to keep white collar criminals in jail. They did not support our agenda to rebalance the Young Offenders Act. The opposition thought they had a great witness who would counter all of the arguments for keeping violent criminals in jail, but when the member for Peace River asked the witness whom the opposition had been so happy to bring forward, "Do you believe that people who rape children should be put into prison?"; that witness said, "Not necessarily."

I know that members, at least on this side of the House, had to take a step back and make sure that the person truly understood the question. The member for Peace River asked again to make sure the witness has understood the question. The answer came back the same: "Not necessarily".

Imagine having to go back to a riding and trying to explain that there are people in this House who support groups and organizations that do not feel that somebody who rapes or victimizes a child should necessarily go to jail. I can say that as a father of two, I found that completely unbelievable. I still find it unbelievable. It was testimony from a witness brought forward by the Liberal Party of Canada. It was jammed through committee in such a quick rush; they

had to have this witness in front of the committee and now I know why.

When it comes to standing up for victims of crime, we can never rely on the Liberals to stand up for the victims. They will always find a way to stand up for the criminals, whether it be the member for Ajax—Pickering or others who tour our prisons and talk about how upset they are that the criminals are so demoralized in prison because they have a government that is getting tough on crime.

I can assure the residents of Oak Ridges—Markham that they have a member of Parliament who will always stand up for them. They have a member of Parliament who will always stand up for the victims of crime. I implore the opposition to once and for all vote the way their constituents are asking them to vote. Get tough on crime and do the right thing for victims.

● (1030)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am deeply disappointed by the member's comments. The idea that there would be a person in the House who feels that somebody who rapes a child should not go to jail is offensive. The assertion that anybody in the House would support that idea is offensive. It does a great disservice to this debate. It is particularly dishonest when we are talking about a bill that deals with first-time non-violent offenders. It is mind-boggling that the member would talk about whether people in the House support rape victims when we are dealing with a bill concerning first-time non-violent offenders.

On the bill that we are actually dealing with, fearmongering and hyperbole aside, I wonder if the member could provide three very simple answers.

One, what is the cost of this bill? We have been asking again and again and we have yet to get that answer.

Two, every jurisdiction that has tried longer periods of incarceration for first-time non-violent offenders has found that it has led to more recidivism. In case the member does not know what I mean by that, that means more crime, more victims, more victimization. It has been highly unsuccessful. I wonder what statistics he has and what he could provide in terms of rehabilitation.

Three, the Liberal Party, some two years ago in justice committee, presented amendments that would end the practice of accelerated parole for individuals who commit large-scale fraud. We have been pushing for that for years and yet the government has not acted. Now the government is trying to eliminate it all. Why?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, the question actually speaks to the arrogance of the member and the Liberal Party.

The member is trying to separate victims. Is a victim of a violent crime any worse off than somebody who has been defrauded in some way, who has had millions of dollars or thousands of dollars taken from him or her? The Liberals are trying to make different classes of victims.

That is what happens with members opposite. They do not care about victims. What they care about is trying to score some cheap political points. They have been trying to out flip-flop the NDP, so they have found themselves in a bit of a dilemma on crime legislation.

Government Orders

The Liberals know that Canadians do not trust them when it comes to anything to do with crime. They know that Canadians look to this government and to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety to finally restore balance in the criminal justice system. They find themselves in a bit of a quandary.

What do Liberals do when they find themselves in a quandary? They steal from the NDP. They think they should go back to their coalition partners and support the NDP because nobody believes the Liberals will ever get tough on crime.

The member talked about more criminals. I love the Liberal position on this issue. The Liberals are comparing Canada to the United States. It is absolutely unbelievable they would make that type of comparison. I would suggest that our societies are completely different. We have public health care in this country. We have a system that supports victims. We have all kinds of systems that help people avoid turning to crime. The problem is that the system was so tilted toward the people who commit crime during the years the Liberals were in power that we have to try to restore some semblance of balance.

While the member for Ajax—Pickering completely ignores what his constituents want, this side of the House will make sure that the people of Ajax—Pickering have representation from this side of the House. We will make sure that the criminals who commit crime, whether that member thinks it is a serious crime or not, will be put in jail because we feel it is serious even if the Liberals and the member for Ajax—Pickering do not.

• (1035)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives are raging about the Liberals speaking out against closure and yet only five years ago they were routinely raging at the former Liberal government for doing the same thing. That is rather rich coming from them.

The Conservatives talk about getting their act together. I would suggest they get their act together and start providing the costing that we and the Liberal member for Ajax—Pickering have been asking for consistently, not only on this crime bill but on other crime bills the government has brought forward.

All the Conservatives have to do is look at their American cousins, the Republicans in the United States. Newt Gingrich, one of the leaders, recognizes there is a way to be smart on crime, which that country is doing. For five years Republicans and Democrats in Texas have been working on being smart on crime. They are working in South Carolina. The Conservative government is totally out of sync.

If the Conservatives really want to do something about white collar crime, they should toughen up the financial services rules in this country to stop the fraudsters before they steal the money. The horse is already out of the barn and they are only now introducing legislation.

That is not to say the government should not be introducing legislation like this. We support the principles behind the legislation. What is the government doing about tightening up financial regulations so that guys like Earl Jones cannot steal money in the first place?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, it strikes me that the NDP members are learning to flip-flop from their Liberal coalition partners. I am a bit confused. They are now supporting it.

Regarding the cost, I bring it back to the member, it is the cost to the victims that we have to worry about here.

Crime costs this country \$70 billion a year. That is a fact. That is what Statistics Canada says crime costs the Canadian economy, \$70 billion a year. Under the Liberals things had gone so far in trying to support the criminals against the victims that we now have to try to restore some balance, and we will do that.

The head of Corrections Canada was at the government operations committee. He was asked continuously by the Liberals whether he could manage the tough on crime agenda of the Conservatives. He said, "I am confident, with the exceptional staff I have across the country, we will manage in a way that we can deliver good, effective corrections". He said he could have it done.

When we talk about strengthening financial securities and having a financial securities regulator, every single thing we bring forward to strengthen financial management in this country, every single bill that we have brought forward, the member's party has voted against it.

The NDP should join with us, try to convince their coalition flip-flopping Liberal partners to actually see the light and stand up for victims ahead of criminals. Perhaps we could have a bill that all Canadians are proud of in a Parliament that Canadians can say—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, a brief question.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was not planning on speaking, but the member said something that caught my attention. I think what he said, and he can confirm or deny it, was that there are members in the House who support the idea that a person who rapes a child should not go to jail.

The government talks about being tough on crime. If the Conservatives were half as tough on crime as they are on the truth, we would be further ahead.

MPs get together. We go to committee. Somehow it works most of the time, but when we come here or go out on the campaign trail, the truth gets lost in the fog.

I want to ask my colleague very simply, does he believe there is any single member of this House who believes that somebody who rapes a child should not go to jail?

Government Orders

•(1040)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I certainly hope there are no members in the House who would support that, but the evidence tells me that. When I was sitting at the government operations and estimates committee, the chair rammed in a witness from the Church Council of Justice and Corrections. When that witness was asked, point blank, whether people who rape children should go to jail and she answered the question, “Not necessarily”, that gave me pause. Why would a witness like that be brought forward in committee? Why would it be rammed down our throats?

If the Liberals are now saying they do not actually support what the Church Council of Justice and Corrections said with respect to children, then great, and I applaud them for that. They should stand up for victims, vote for the bill and vote for all of the crime legislation we have passed, because that is really standing up for victims of crime.

They are so upset right now because they have been caught on camera supporting groups that do not support victims. That is what is bothering them, because when—

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, it is one thing to have a constructive discourse in this hallowed hall, but it is another thing entirely to utterly misrepresent the positions of another party and to tell untruths.

I ask the hon. member to retract the statements he has made. He is misrepresenting this party. He is telling untruths to the public and he is doing a disservice to his party, our country and this House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has 20 seconds left to end his comments. I hope that during this debate, all members of the House will be mindful of serving the public interest.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, what it really comes down to is that if the Liberals truly respect the victims of crime, they should look at the people they bring before committees who speak on their behalf, question what they are doing and what they are talking about. That is the reality. If they want to stand up for victims, they should not just do it when the cameras are on here in the House of Commons. They should do it at committee. That is when people are watching.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it debases this House when a member, on a bill, says something so patently outrageous as to suggest that any member of this House from any party would not abhor violence against a child, particularly rape of a child. To hold that there is a person in this House who would not want jail time for a person who raped a child is reprehensible. To try to cast an aspersion on any member of this House in that way is despicable and debases this House.

I would say that this is how this argument has degenerated. It is not an honest exchange of ideas about how we can make our communities safer. Instead there is mudslinging, saying that certain members do not care about victims, certain members do not care about criminals. There is probably not a person in this House who has not been touched by violence, whose family members have not been touched by violence. I have stories within my own family that I will not touch on.

However, I can tell members that it brings us all deep pain, whether it happens in our lives, or it happens in the lives of the people we love, or it happens in the communities we serve. Every member of this House steps forward to try to reduce that pain, to try to find a way to reduce victimization and make our communities safe.

When we start a debate, we have to start with that premise, that every one of us comes to this place honestly wanting to make safer communities and better places, that every single one of us, while we may have different perspectives on how we achieve it, wants only the best for our country, for our children and for our communities.

When someone talks about not caring about somebody who has raped a child, when someone talks about somebody not caring about victims, it is such ridiculous, over-the-top hyperbole that turns off Canadians and makes them think that none of us really cares about the work we are doing in this House.

I have said it so many times before. I can respect that the hon. member or any other one disagrees with me, and that is their right, that the approach we are advocating on crime is one that they do not support. However, let us take a look at the facts, and let us come back to this bill.

This bill is about first-time non-violent offenders, but the Conservatives are talking about rape victims. This is what they try to do. We were dealing with the pardon issue and every single one of us in this House said, “Let’s get together and make sure we shut down loopholes that allow somebody like Karla Homolka to get a pardon”. And yet, when we had concerns about the 18-year-old single mother who writes a cheque for groceries that is fraudulent and suddenly is going to be caught up in the bill and we said we had concerns with that and that we should have an honest discussion about it, what was the Conservatives’ response? It was that the member for Ajax—Pickering wanted to let Karla Homolka get a pardon. It is so dishonest, so disingenuous and does such a disservice to the debate that it has to be called out.

On this bill, let us look at the history. While they are trying to vilify this party, the truth is the principal ideas contained at the heart of this bill, which is to go after large-scale fraudsters, were principles that we espoused years ago. In fact, as I mentioned in justice committee, we proposed ending the provisions that would allow somebody who committed large-scale fraud from getting an accelerated parole review. We proposed that a couple of years ago. The Conservatives voted against it at that time. We continued to advocate for that over the last number of years, but it did not go anywhere until the case of Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix was released. There was an enormous amount of publicity in Quebec. The government was caught with its pants down and suddenly, it demanded action overnight, “Let’s go. No debate. Don’t think about it. Don’t you care about victims? This is urgent.”

The Conservatives stand here and talk about rape victims, demanding that we pass their legislation without debate, without discussion. They bring about closure motions when this is something we could have dealt with two years ago.

Those are the facts.

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The concern I have with respect to this bill is that, unfortunately, it does not just deal with large-scale fraud. This bill, as it has now been presented, would eliminate the one-sixth accelerated provisions for all first-time non-violent offenders.

•(1045)

I would point to Correctional Services Canada's own documents. I said a lot of this yesterday but I think it bears repeating. Correctional Services' own document, when it explains the importance of the accelerated pardon review for first-time non-violent offenders, states that the main focus of the accelerated pardon review was to address public safety and reintegration by enabling Correctional Services Canada and the national parole board to focus their attention on dangerous offenders at a high risk of reoffending and that studies have shown there is a tendency for low-risk offenders to be negatively impacted by the prison experience.

What does that mean? It means that for first-time non-violent offenders, long periods of incarceration often turn those minor offenders into major offenders. It means they go in for a more minor crime and come out a major criminal ready to commit major crimes.

More than 90% of people who will walk into a prison will walk out. Fundamentally the question we have to ask is: Who do we want walking out that door? Do we want someone who is rehabilitated, who is ready to make a positive contribution to society, pay their taxes and be a good citizen, or someone who has become a hardened criminal?

I know the answer for me. I would look at evidence and I would suggest that all members do that. One of the questions I have asked repeatedly in the House is for Conservatives to give us the information these decisions are based on. Can they show a single jurisdiction anywhere in the world, where these types of policies of longer and longer incarcerations have been anything but a complete failure?

We are going to be debating Bill S-10 which would take someone who gave away a Tylenol 3 a mandatory minimum. Someone who has six marijuana plants in a dorm room and gives some to their roommate would be treated the same as a Hells Angels member who has 200 marijuana plants.

It is going to make our prisons replete with young people. The problem is that all this has been tried before. I have asked for examples of where these longer periods of incarceration for first-time non-violent offenders has led to anything but higher recidivism.

I point to the examples in California, Florida and other states, and also in the United Kingdom which walked this road for about 20 years. Their experience was that when first-time non-violent offenders had the period of time they were incarcerated extended, the prison population ballooned and the ability to provide rehabilitation was diminished. It becomes a deadly cycle. The more people there are, the fewer dollars there are to be able to make the people who are in the prison better. That money gets stretched and pulled. It means that as people come out, the rate at which they reoffend continues to go higher.

I will add this in because the Conservatives always say we do not talk about victims. I am amazed I have to make these connections for them, but I will. If there is less crime, there are fewer victims. If there

is less recidivism, there are fewer victims. If there is a lower rate of reoffending when people walk out of a prison, that means there is going to be less crime and fewer victims.

In California this began feeding itself. It became bigger and bigger. Then it had to privatize its prisons and things got even worse. Double-bunking became triple-bunking. The recidivism rate, the rate of reoffending, was driven to over 70%. This means that for every 10 people who walked out of a prison in California, 7 would reoffend.

The impact on California was devastating and not only in terms of the fiscal impacts. California was in a situation where it was nearly bankrupt. It had no money for health care, education or infrastructure. And worse, its crime rate had gone up.

I hear many Conservative members saying how dare we question the cost, that we should absorb it no matter what the cost is. That might be an argument we could entertain if the facts did not show that at the same time these costs were soaring, crime rates were going up with it.

•(1050)

A most recent example is with two different states in the U.S., New York and Florida, which took two very different paths. New York focused on prevention, harm reduction and reducing victimization on the front end. Florida took the conservative path of longer periods of incarceration. In the example of New York, there was a 16% reduction in incarceration. In Florida, there was a 16% increase in incarceration. It went in the opposite direction on incarceration.

According to Conservative logic, Florida should have been nirvana. It should have seen its crime rates fall, victimization down and people cheering on the streets. The opposite happened. It was in fact New York which saw a reduction in its crime rate. It was in fact New York which saw fewer victims. It was in fact New York which saw far greater results. Florida saw its crime rate rise. Crime went up. If we are going to walk these paths, why can we not look at evidence and the facts and see where this is driving us?

In the United Kingdom, a new Conservative government was elected which is trying to undo what it calls a punishment agenda, failed policies very similar to what we see the Conservatives pursuing. That punishment agenda did not work. It drove crime rates up and robbed money from the treasury which could have been used for other priorities. That government is finding it enormously difficult to undo.

One of the cases, ironically, it is studying that it wants to emulate is Canada which simultaneously enjoys low rates of incarceration and a low crime rate. Yet we are running from that. In fact, when we look across the board, it is the Conservative Party of Canada that stands alone pursuing these policies. Countries in the rest of the world abhor them. They have looked at the disastrous failed attempts and said they cannot go there and will not do it again.

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That is why this is not a debate in abstraction. This is not some clash of ideas with no precedent or where things have not been tried. This is something that has been proven. The evidence is in front of us, if we were only to look at it.

I read this yesterday, but the debate will continue for the next couple of days and it is worth mentioning. The father of these policies, Newt Gingrich, with a contract with America, led the whole punishment agenda and threw it out there saying that is the way it was going to solve crime. He has now repented all of that and said it was a complete and total failure that states need to run from.

In *The Washington Post* on January 7, 2011, he wrote:

There is an urgent need to address the astronomical growth in the prison population, with its huge costs in dollars and lost human potential. We spent \$68 billion in 2010 on corrections—300% more than 25 years ago.

Think about that. When the Americans commenced this journey 25 years ago, their incarceration rate was 300 times lower. At that time, the rate of incarceration between Canada and the U.S. was fairly similar. Now the divide is enormous. He went on to state:

The prison population is growing 13 times faster than the general population. These facts should trouble every American.

It should be noted that while the rate of incarceration in the U.S. has climbed by 300% over that period, Canada's rate of incarceration has remained stable. Interestingly enough, our violent crime rate and other crime rates have been falling greater than or, in some cases, equal to the United States, despite the fact that we did not embark on this enormous cost of prisons, the \$68 billion that the U.S. is spending on corrections.

Mr. Gingrich continued:

Our prisons might be worth the current cost if the recidivism rate were not so high, but, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, half of the prisoners released this year are expected to be back in prison within three years.

That is an American statistic. As I mentioned, in California it is even higher at 70%. The American statistic overall is 50%. It is hardly something we would want to emulate.

• (1055)

He continued:

If our prison policies are failing half of the time, and we know that there are more humane, effective alternatives, it is time to fundamentally rethink how we treat and rehabilitate our prisoners.

We can no longer afford business as usual with prisons. The criminal justice system is broken—

I will read one more excerpt because it is important.

Some people attribute the nation's recent drop in crime to more people being locked up. But the facts show otherwise. While crime fell in nearly every state over the past seven years, some of those with the largest reductions in crime have also lowered their prison population.

He cites the example I gave of New York and Florida as follows:

Put another way, although New York spent less on its prisons, it delivered better public safety.

When the person who invented this idea and really drove it as a political force in North American politics is abandoning it, is it not time to take a pause, think carefully about what we are doing and wonder if there is not a better way to ensure that we reduce victims and improve community safety?

On this bill in particular I have repeatedly asked some pretty basic questions, but have never received an answer. If the government is going to invoke closure and say we have to deal with things right away, it should have answers to these questions.

One question is cost. I can recall in this House the Minister of Public Safety saying that the cost of the two-for-one remand bill was going to be \$90 million. I mentioned yesterday that I took that to the PBO as it did not sound right. As soon as he agreed to my request to do a study, that number changed overnight from \$90 million to \$2 billion. The minister said that, oops, he had made a mistake and it is \$2 billion. What precipitated it? It was knowing the PBO was going to look at the books.

After eight months of study it was not \$2 billion; it was \$10 billion to \$13 billion. That is one bill. We have 18 other bills on the table. How irresponsible would we be as a Parliament if we voted for things where we did not know the costs? To put a blindfold over our eyes and be asked to vote in the dark with no idea of the fiscal implications of what we are doing is the height of irresponsibility.

The second question that would be obvious to ask is: What data does the government have on the impact that this would have to make communities safer?

The speeches in the House from every party are about how we can make our communities safer. I have given all kinds of evidence from different jurisdictions about my concerns on eliminating the one-sixth provision for non-violent, first-time offenders who have not committed large-scale fraud.

I agree, if it is large-scale fraud, like those by Earl Jones or Mr. Lacroix, let us make sure we eliminate that. We could do that today. That is a debate that should have happened over two years ago.

However, I have asked for the evidence, the science, on which the government is basing the decision to eliminate this for all individuals. Show how that enhances public safety. Show how that reduces victimization. That information has not been forthcoming either because it does not exist or because the results are not very compelling.

I want to briefly mention that we have seen cuts to the RCMP white-collar task force which need to be restored if the government is honestly interested in going after white-collar crime. We have a lawful access bill that would empower police to go after information electronically that has been languishing in the House for years. We have cuts to the national police service on things like CPIC and the sex offender registry. There are all kinds of cuts that the government should be restoring.

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We have seen more than a 70% cut to crime prevention and more than a 40% cut to the victims of crime. We saw the government's hand-picked victims ombudsman, Steve Sullivan, fired after he said the plan for victims is unbalanced and would not work.

I say to the government very earnestly, if it is honestly interested in victims, if it is honestly interested in community safety, there is a path that is evidence-based and involves restoring a lot of the cuts it has made. The most effective way to make communities safe is by stopping crime from happening in the first place.

• (1100)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his defence of a position that most people in the House can actually support because it is based on fact.

My colleague raised the issue of Mr. Gingrich in the United States and the fact that all of us are in favour of reducing crime. However, in terms of cost benefit, one of the most effective and science-based approaches to reducing the number of criminals, reducing the number of victims and reducing crime is through early learning programs.

In Ypsilanti, Michigan, there is more than a 35-year experience with the head start program that showed that for youth crime there was a 60% reduction in youth crime, massive declines in welfare rates and improved access and outcomes in school. All of those work dramatically and effectively to reduce crime and the cost is merely a fraction of what it takes to incarcerate somebody, which can be anywhere upward of \$120,000 a year for somebody in a maximum security prison.

The government literally annihilated a plan that we had put forward, which was signed with the provinces, for an early learning head start program. Will the hon. member comment on the effectiveness of early learning programs from the prenatal stage to age five, which, I might add, would also address one of the major problems that we have in jail, which is the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects?

Would my colleague inform the government that it would be well advised, for the safety of the public and for the wise use of the public purse, to support a national early learning head start program?

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, my colleague's question raises an important point concerning how we think about prevention because prevention is about more than just the programs the Conservatives are cutting, although those are vital. These are programs that help the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, church groups and others to build community capacity so that when somebody is starting to head down a dark path they can pull the individual back and give him or her hope and opportunity.

As my colleague says, early childhood education, early childhood learning, is an essential component to getting a head start in life. We know that the first three years for a child are the most formative, and we know that Canada is lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of what we are providing with regard to early childhood learning and education.

We had reached an agreement with the provinces. It is important to restore that.

I also would point out the work of people like Dr. Irvin Waller who has pointed out that for every dollar we put into prevention we save \$11 in the cost of incarceration and probation. There is an enormous amount of money that could be saved here.

It is ironic that if we do the right thing and invest in prevention, not only do we stop there being a victim in the first place, we also have the opportunity to reduce our costs. We reduce victimization, reduce crime and reduce costs and it becomes a very positive virtuous circle, which is what we want to strive for.

The alternative is that as we cut from prevention, as the government has, and as we cut from victims' services and from rehabilitation in prisons because the population is ballooning and we cannot handle it, we create a vicious downward spiral. It creates the exact opposite impact where we are throwing more and more money toward the punishment and nobody is ever getting better. Therefore, we are creating more and more crime and it becomes a vicious out of control cycle.

The member points to something very important and that is the need to invest in all forms of prevention, which includes ensuring that young people have education and food and are not going to school hungry.

When I was in Regina and had an opportunity to tour some of the worst neighbourhoods in the country with the former chief of police there, we went into homes where children had to pull tarps around an oven for heat. Clearly, that is not a situation that is conducive to somebody having a positive life.

• (1105)

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Ajax—Pickering is very eloquent at putting his point out but he is skirting around the bottom line, which is that it is certainly not fair in any sense that someone who has committed a serious white-collar crime would be eligible for parole after one-sixth of the sentence. I do not think any resident of his riding would find that fair. That is what it comes down to. Someone who has been sentenced to 12 years would be eligible for parole at two years. That is not appropriate and I do not think any Canadian would find that to be an appropriate sentence.

Members can flaunt all the U.S. statistics that they like. They can mention California or New York but this is the House of Commons. We are in Canada. An obsession with U.S. statistics may serve well in the U.S. Congress, but we should look at what works here in Canada. Certainly Canadians and residents in Ajax—Pickering would not believe it is appropriate to simply slap someone on the wrist for a serious crime. We need to take serious crime seriously, and that is what this bill is about.

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, the question from the member for Barrie gives me an opportunity to be very clear on our position, if he did not understand it before.

For serious large-scale fraud, there is no question that we are with the Conservatives 100%. We were with them two years ago when we introduced these ideas and said that we needed to end it. It is something that we feel should not be in place.

The reason I stated not just the United States but also the United Kingdom is that they walked this road of trying a policy for first-time non-violent offenders who are not large-scale fraudsters of giving long periods of incarceration, and it was a disaster.

However, if he wants to talk about Canada, Canada is a remarkable success story. We have a low rate of incarceration and a low rate of crime. It is something that we should look at and be proud of because it is one of the best systems in the world. It could be improved and made better but we should not toss it out of the window for a system that failed.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague. I have to admit that I do not understand the current position of the Liberal Party and the NDP.

The aim of this bill is exactly the same as that of the bill we introduced that we wanted to fast-track in September 2009 and March 2010: to abolish the one-sixth rule and accelerated parole review. The Liberal Party and the NDP had agreed to abolish this almost automatic procedure. We went and convinced the Conservatives to agree to abolish the procedure and now that they have agreed, why are the other parties no longer willing to do so? It is the exact same issue.

• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's question but I think she is missing two important facts. One is that we agree absolutely that for large-scale fraud this has to be eliminated.

However, this bill goes far beyond that. I know the member, who is the critic for public safety and national security for the Bloc, has been very reasonable on other bills but she should take a careful look at what this would do. It would not just eliminate it for Mr. Lacroix or Mr. Jones. It would eliminate it across the board, in every single instance, for first-time non-violent offenders.

We are tossing a program that has been very successful in reducing crime rates and making our communities safer in Canada into the garbage because we want to go after one group. Let us just go after that group of individuals, those large-scale fraudsters.

[Translation]

The Quebec bar association should be consulted because it has stated very clearly that there are major problems with the bill. It cannot be passed as is because there is a problem with the rights conferred by the Charter.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the United States situation and dealt a bit with Texas. However, in 2007, Texas decided against building more prisons and opted to enhance proven community correction approaches, such as drug courts. The reforms in that state

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were forecast to save \$2 billion over five years. In fact, it redirected much of the money into community treatment for the mentally ill and low-level drug addicts. These reforms reduced Texas' prison population. Now there are no waiting lists in Texas for drug treatment programs. Crime has dropped 10% from 2004, a year before the reform started.

I would like to ask the member if he would like to make some further comments on what Texas has done with, by the way, Republicans and Democrats working together.

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, the member for Barrie asked a fair question. Why should we care about what happens in the United States? We should care about what is happening in Texas and what happened in New York because before we embark on something, before we try an experiment, it is worth looking at what has been done before, what was successful and what was not.

Unfortunately, the agenda of just incarceration, incarceration and more incarceration as the only solution has been a failure everywhere it has been tried. Here in Canada, we have had enormous success on investing in prevention, on stopping crimes beforehand. We should look at Texas and other states where they have tried innovative ideas that have reduced crime.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to speak today to Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Finally, we are arriving at the conclusion of this great saga.

I will first summarize the current situation. The procedure for parole after one-sixth of the sentence, also known as accelerated parole review, is set out in sections 119(1), 125, 126 and 126(1) of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

In brief, a criminal serving a sentence in a federal institution—a sentence of two or more years—can be paroled after serving one-sixth of his sentence under accelerated parole review.

According to the criteria, provided that the offender has not committed an offence involving violence related to a criminal organization, terrorism or a crime of a sexual nature or been an accomplice to such an offence, he is not subject to an order requiring him to serve at least half of the sentence for a drug-related offence. The offender must have been sentenced to a federal penitentiary for the first time and must not be likely to commit a violent offence. These are some of the criteria in the current law.

Consequently, an offender who meets all these criteria is eligible for accelerated parole review, which means that he could be released on day parole after serving six months or the equivalent of one-sixth of his sentence, whichever is longer.

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This mechanism is often negatively perceived by the public, which does not understand why white collar criminals or other kinds of criminals serve only a tiny fraction of the sentence given them. This also makes the justice system seem lax. I must admit that I completely understand their position. There is good reason to question this process. People do not necessarily want tougher sentences, they just want the sentences to be enforced.

I feel that this mechanism hurts the parole system as well as the overall justice system. And it also undermines the public's confidence in our ability to protect them.

Before I go any further, I would like to provide a bit of history. The NDP and Liberal members are so surprised and outraged by what is happening today that I will tell them what led to all these events. Then they will understand that this bill did not just come out of nowhere.

It began in July 2006. Paul Coffin—I think the Liberals know him—was involved in the sponsorship scandal and was released after having served one-sixth of his 18-month sentence. This is not a question of fraud; this was pure corruption on the part of those involved in the sponsorship scandal. This is not Vincent Lacroix.

In October 2006, Jean Brault, a second person who was a main player in the sponsorship scandal and founder of Groupaction, was released on October 6, 2006. He served six months of his 30-month sentence.

In June 2007, the Bloc Québécois introduced a justice plan that included a demand for the abolition of this practice that allows fraudsters to serve only a tiny fraction of their sentence.

In December 2007, Vincent Lacroix was criminally convicted for the first time.

In August 2008, Jean Lafleur was released after having served only 7 months of his 42-month sentence. Jean Lafleur is a name that should still ring some bells.

On September 14, 2009, the Bloc Québécois asked for unanimous consent for the quick passage of Bill C-434. That was the first request.

●(1115)

The Conservatives opposed it, once again for partisan reasons. On February 15, 2009, Joseph Charles Guité was released on parole after serving six months of a 42-month sentence. On October 26, 2009, the Conservatives introduced Bill C-53 to abolish the one-sixth of sentence rule. They did not want unanimous consent, so they introduced their own bill. We had no problem with it and were prepared to support it. It was a reaction, but that was fine. Then the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, so the bill died on the order paper.

On March 4, 2010, we again asked the House for unanimous consent for speedy passage of the bill, which had the same objective—to abolish accelerated parole review. Once again, the Conservatives opposed it for purely partisan reasons.

On June 15, 2010, the Conservatives introduced Bill C-39, which is currently before the committee. It aims to abolish the one-sixth of sentence rule, but it also contains a number of other measures. It

needs to be thoroughly examined, but we have not yet even begun to hear any witness testimony. Understandably, it might take some time for this bill to go through the legislative process.

On January 27, 2011, Vincent Lacroix was released after serving one-sixth of his sentence. He served 15 months of a 13-year sentence. On January 31, I was in this House and saw the Bloc Québécois leader go out of his way to see the Prime Minister. They had a discussion. The Conservatives finally changed their minds and we are now working together. It appears that the Liberals would have liked to be the ones to take this initiative. Yesterday my public safety colleague almost seemed ready to issue some criticisms, because his party had not initiated this. We need to forget about that and look ahead to the future. We are working with the Conservatives and now we have Bill C-59.

On February 10, 2011, I asked for the unanimous consent of the House, and what did we hear? From both sides, the Liberals and the NDP clearly said that they were not interested in unanimous consent and they needed more time to examine something that they had already accepted in September 2009 and March 2010.

This bill did not fall from the sky; it did not appear out of nowhere. It took a long time for it to get to where it is now, and I think it is important.

Eliminating what is now virtually automatic parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served will remedy some of the bizarre and most often criticized situations, such as sentences for economic crimes, for example. And the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering is right, it is not just economic crimes that are affected. I saw a good example when I was a parole officer. There was a man who was part of the mafia who had never been caught for violent offences. That is not unlikely because people like him delegate their dirty work to subordinates. A good organizer with a lot of hired people on hand who is not even accused of gangsterism can also benefit from this. There are many other people, who are not necessarily petty fraudsters or petty thieves, who might be rehabilitated. It is true. By the way, these people still have a chance at rehabilitation with Bill C-59. The only thing this bill does is get rid of automatic parole after one-sixth of the sentence. However, these people could very well get day parole six months before they have served one-third of their sentence. That is already a common occurrence.

Bill C-59 abolishes this provision and will ensure that people like Vincent Lacroix serve their sentence. It is too late for Vincent Lacroix because he has already been released and he had to serve only one-sixth of his sentence.

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● (1120)

Abolishing this provision will confirm the role of parole officers, who will be able to assess the risk of recidivism and the risk to society based on criminogenic factors and the ability of this type of criminal to reintegrate into society. They will also be able to determine whether these inmates have to stay at the detention centre to take programs. Let us not forget that assessments take time. When an accused ends up at a regional reception centre, it takes approximately six months of assessment before he is sent to a penitentiary. Then the offender has to take programs, which takes time. It takes more than 15 months to be able to say congratulations, you are rehabilitated, thank you and goodbye to an offender who then goes to a halfway house in Ontario and hides some place where very few people know him. It is okay to do that, but we have to allow these people to take programs, and they can do that when they are incarcerated.

Abolishing this procedure will help create a balance between the credibility of the justice system and the objective of rehabilitation, if we want to really talk about rehabilitation, because the offender has to want to be rehabilitated. I will give some examples of comments made by some judges and prosecutors regarding accelerated parole review. I did not really understand what the member was saying earlier. He should have said it in English. I think he was talking about how the Quebec bar association is not very happy with the bill. I will give him some other examples of people who, on the contrary, think that accelerated parole review is appalling. The best example is Justice Wagner, who presided over the case of Vincent Lacroix. He sent a very clear message to politicians about parole, and it concerns all of us:

The reflection of the Courts cannot and must not take into account the consequences and the terms and conditions of parole, which are not their responsibility and over which they have no control.

Justice Wagner added:

While Mr. Lacroix's crimes were not accompanied by direct physical violence... his crimes caused his victims and their families considerable moral violence because of the stress, insecurity and uncertainty experienced by those who lost their life savings intended for their retirement.

Furthermore, Justice Wagner said:

The Court feels that it is important to point out that parole is the responsibility of Parliament and that it is up to politicians to answer for their acts or omissions.

That is good advice.

In addition, Mr. Brodeur, the crown prosecutor on this case, said, "This judgment sends a clear message that elected officials will have to hear. Parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served is, in some cases, unreasonable." He is talking about us there.

I repeat: abolishing accelerated parole review after one-sixth of the sentence is served will give professionals working in our prisons the ability to recommend to the appropriate authorities—the National Parole Board in this case—the right action plan for each offender, based on the work the individual has done in prison. It will also help restore the credibility of our justice system.

I would now like to direct my comments to the Liberal and NDP opposition. Their attitude is not only inconsistent; it is irresponsible. Ironically, unlike the Conservatives, they agreed to back us twice, once in September 2009 and again in March 2010, in order to secure

swift passage of the bill. And yet, the bill being introduced today is similar and serves exactly the same purpose. It is quite clear that they are simply stonewalling on an issue about which all Quebecers agree. I am sure that if we were to poll Canadians tomorrow morning, they would agree with this assessment.

● (1125)

The Liberals and the New Democrats are the ones trying to stall the process. Here is the clearest example of that: on February 7, 2011, the NDP stated publicly—at least they were quick about it and very frank—that they would not support any fast-tracking on this issue. The Liberals followed suit a few days later. We saw their official response on February 10, when I called for speedy passage of the bill.

And yet, I repeat, not once over the past four years did they speak out against this initiative. The NDP claims that it wants to take its time in considering this bill, but in my opinion they are confusing the expressions to take one's time and to stall.

We pressed ahead to get this bill fast-tracked and we have demonstrated that we are amenable to making accommodations. However, as I see it, the NDP would rather complain. We, on the other hand, intend to move ahead on this issue with a clear conscience.

Yesterday, during debate, a Liberal member argued without much conviction that there was a difference between our previous bill on abolishing accelerated parole review and Bill C-59. That is completely untrue. Also included in Bill C-59 is what essentially amounts to a number of consequential amendments. It is just window dressing; exactly the same process is being considered.

In my opinion, the opposition from the Liberal Party and the NDP amounts to pure partisanship. Furthermore, yesterday—and I will not rehash this—it was clear to me from the speech delivered by my colleague, the critic for public safety, that he was a little disappointed the government did not approach them. But that is another kettle of fish.

I would once again remind Liberal and NDP members that their current fecklessness, if emulated by the majority of parliamentarians in this House—and I hope that will not be the case—would potentially pave the way for the premature release of another financial predator, Mr. Earl Jones. To my mind, these are financial predators.

Need I remind the House that Earl Jones perfected a Ponzi scheme whereby he paid his clients out of their invested capital? He stole between \$50 million and \$75 million from 150 people. He was convicted on February 15, 2010, and sentenced to 11 years behind bars. He is now expected to be released in December 2011—this year, in other words—after serving only one-sixth of his sentence. This, as I made clear yesterday, explains the urgency of the matter.

Government Orders

I will give you another example. In Montreal and Laval, Mr. Kordzian, an unsavoury individual who is actually from my riding, unscrupulously defrauded 25 people of close to \$1 million. These people lost everything: their retirement savings, their homes. I said this yesterday and I will say it again today: the leader of the Liberal Party came to my riding and was five minutes away from the coffee shop where Mr. Kordzian had operated. Had he listened to what the victims had to say, his party would not still be waffling on this issue the way they are now.

I would like to give a few examples of major frauds that were committed in the ridings of some of the hon. members from other parties in the hopes of convincing them to reconsider their positions. In the riding of Ajax—Pickering, a man was sentenced to two years in prison. He defrauded people of thousands of dollars through telemarketing. He was a senior manager at Datacom Marketing Inc. He pleaded guilty to six counts of fraud estimated at several million dollars.

Another prime example occurred in the riding of the member for Vancouver East, who is also the public safety critic. In this case, an individual defrauded 60 investors of \$8.2 million through two companies, CPLC Limited Partnership and CPLC Management Group Ltd.

As you can see, this is not happening only in my riding. It is happening just about everywhere in Canada. Another example occurred in Brossard—La Prairie. One of the five Norbourg employees who were accused of fraud, Mr. Deschambault, a chartered accountant from La Prairie, was accused of 112 counts of fraud. He defrauded—

• (1130)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. member's time has run out, but she may be able to make additional comments during questions and comments.

The Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification.

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the remarks of the member. I would like her to expand on her thoughts because it is a huge issue in Quebec. Why would the Liberal and NDP members from Quebec be so against the bill? What would their reasons be, because obviously they feel they represent their constituents?

Given her thoughts and different examples, could she perhaps enlighten the House as to why she thinks the members, particularly from Quebec, would oppose the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I will respond by saying that I do not understand why they are opposed, especially given that this is the exact same bill that they were willing to support in September 2009 and March 2010.

I do not understand it and, what is more, this directly affects both Quebec and places across Canada. I gave the example of the riding of Brossard—La Prairie, where one of the people accused in the

Norbourg scandal, who faced 112 charges, helped to commit the fraud.

There is an excellent example from the riding of Brampton West, where a couple was arrested and charged with fraud related to a small business loan guaranteed by the Canadian government. They defrauded individuals as well as all of Canada, the entire government and all taxpayers. Defrauding the government is serious because it amounts to defrauding the entire country. That is unacceptable, just as it is unacceptable to defraud seniors and small investors. A total of \$244,800 in bonds guaranteed by the government were stolen in Brampton West. I could go on and talk about many other ridings.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Quebec has done some innovative work in crime prevention. Some of the work has taken place in Montreal. In our province of British Columbia, Dr. Clyde Hertzman has also done some great work.

We see the challenges of members of the prison population. They have committed crimes, but we want to prevent that from happening and we want to reduce the prison population.

Some of the work in Montreal has been really outstanding, particularly in drug policy, as has happened in the University of British Columbia with Dr. Julio Montaner at the Centre for Excellence.

I have a question for my colleague. Should the government not adopt science-based principles that work to reduce crime, thereby reduce victims and save taxpayer money? By doing that, there is a virtuous cycle that we will not eliminate all crimes, but the government has it within its hands to dramatically reduce the amount of criminality within our society, save taxpayer money and reduce the number of victims. Should the government not be adopting those principles, policies and investments that actually work and ultimately achieve the goals of the government?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. When it comes to crime, whether fraud, drugs, prostitution or human trafficking, we need to look at the whole picture. On the one hand, we need to stop taking an approach based on punishment. We completely agree with the Liberal member. Furthermore, most of the bills we pass aim to strike a balance between prevention, rehabilitation and punishment. We cannot ignore the punishment aspect, but it must be balanced with the other aspects. We need to invest as much in research on various kinds of crime as in prevention. I think the NCPC budget should be increased.

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On the other hand, we need to invest in investigations and work more on rehabilitation. We have been told that in prisons, programs for people with mental health and substance abuse problems were subject to quotas. More and more people with mental health issues are in our federal institutions, which have fewer and fewer resources to help them. That all costs money, but I think it is a good investment because it helps protect society. Investing in prevention also helps protect society, because it might prevent people from committing crimes.

I have worked in prisons, and the one-sixth of sentence rule applies to only a tiny fraction of the federal prison population. The least serious cases are in provincial facilities and are serving much shorter sentences. Also, when they are released, they have to do community service. Their crimes are generally minor offences. The cases of inmates in federal institutions are usually more difficult and more serious, and must be treated cautiously.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague said she used to work in the field of probation and parole, as I did. Yesterday, we took part in a panel discussion and I was thinking about this. The NDP believes that the law should be stricter with white collar criminals. Sentences should be strict for criminals who, like Earl Jones, steal savings, often life savings, from small investors. However, this bill will have an impact on all criminals.

My colleague also talked about the difficulties some criminals have, especially mental health problems. Will they end up staying in prison a little longer because of this bill? I think we should be focusing on prevention instead. I would like the hon. member's opinion on that.

When a bill is introduced, we have to review it thoroughly to consider, for instance, whether there is a constitutional challenge with regard to retroactivity. Can the hon. member guarantee that retroactivity of this bill will survive a constitutional challenge?

• (1140)

Ms. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, it seems as if there were 10,000 questions wrapped up in that one, but I will try to answer as well as I can.

I can believe that the NDP wants to study this backwards and forwards, but there is something I really do not understand and maybe I can ask the hon. member. Why were they not very interested in studying this back in September 2009 and March 2010? They seemed convinced. Suddenly now, they want to study it. I think this is just a pretext and all they really want is to delay the passage of the bill. That is all. If they really wanted to study it, that is what they would have said in September 2009 and last March.

We should also be very careful here. What this bill does is simply abolish accelerated parole review, which is virtually automatic after one-sixth of the sentence has been served. Only a tiny portion of all inmates are affected. The NDP talks about 900 people, but I would like to see their figures. We will not talk about numbers because they do not have any. Not only are just a tiny number of people affected, but if society can take these people on, they will be released six months before one-third of their sentence. So nothing changes there.

The bill does not eliminate day parole. It is only accelerated parole review that is abolished. There is a small effect on the amount of time, but apart from that, if a person can be rehabilitated and society can take the risk, that person can go to a halfway house beginning six months from one-third of the sentence. At least parole officers cannot be forced any more to release someone because the law says so. Personally, I have seen that several times. We had people before us whom we thought it did not make sense to release. But the law is clear. They are released if it is a first federal sentence for a non-violent crime.

But we need to be careful again. What does the word violence mean here? It is physical violence. What do we do with moral or psychological violence? The law is silent on that score.

What we are doing, therefore, is restoring the decision-making ability of parole officers on the one hand and the credibility of the justice system on the other. And someone who has—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise on behalf of the New Democratic Party to speak to this important bill. Bill C-59 proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to eliminate a concept called accelerated parole review, APR.

APR allows first-time non-violent offenders to apply for day parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence. Their full parole date remains, as with all offenders, at one-third of their sentence. In addition, parole for these offenders is granted without a Parole Board hearing, subject to the board always having the ability to make the case that the offender is at risk to commit a violent offence in the community.

Generally these applications, while not automatic and while not a rubber stamp, are granted with the protection of having the National Parole Board meet the burden of establishing that the person is unlikely to offend.

Before we get any further into the merits of the bill, I want to talk a bit about the context. The first thing to note is the unusual spectre of seeing the Conservatives propped up by the Bloc Québécois.

In 2008, when the New Democrats and the Liberals sat down at a table to negotiate a progressive agenda for government in our country, supported only by the Bloc's agreement not to bring down that Liberal-NDP legislative agenda for two years, the Conservative government, the Prime Minister went apoplectic. They said that it was wrong, that it was undemocratic and that there was nothing more untoward than seeing the spectre of the NDP and Liberals propped up by the separatists.

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The Conservatives divided the country from coast to coast and used one of the most vile principles in politics, the one of dividing region against region, founding nation against founding nation, language against language. They used it as a political weapon across the country to save their political hide.

Yet what do we have today? It is a backroom deal cut by the Prime Minister with the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the separatists, to get a piece of legislation into the House. My how things change. What kind of hypocrisy is that?

I think Canadians will see it. They are used to hypocrisy from the government. Canadians have seen the Conservatives campaign for years on the absolute unacceptability of an appointed Senate and then have watched them stuff that Senate with party bag people.

• (1145)

Hon. Lynne Yelich: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I think you know that the member going on about the Senate, et cetera, is hardly relevant to the bill. I would like the debate to continue as it should on Bill C-59.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sure the hon. member will tie these comments to the subject at hand.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, of course I will tie them together, because the context of a bill or why it is before the House is always a matter of relevance. I can understand why the Conservatives do not want anyone in the House to remind Canadians of their hypocrisy.

When we see the Conservatives and separatists come together and co-operate today on the bill before the House, I think that what the government has said in the past about co-operating with separatists is entirely relevant. Of course, it is understandable why my hon. colleague would not want us to remind Canadians of that.

Again, on hypocrisy, the Prime Minister talked about Afghanistan and bringing the troops home in 2011. That went down the toilet. Bringing any decision or vote before the House on deploying troops back to Canada also went down the toilet. We are used to hypocrisy by the government.

Today we are debating a bill brought forward by the government, supported by the separatists, but I want to talk about the way it was done. It was done in a way that absolutely subverts democracy. Conservatives cut a deal, brought the bill before the House quickly and invoked closure so that we cannot have meaningful debate on the bill.

It was a backroom deal to cut off debate so that we as parliamentarians cannot perform the due diligence that Canadians want us to do to determine the impacts of this bill, how much it will cost and what effect it will have on our prison system. To me, that shows a lack of confidence in the merits of the bill by Conservatives and the Bloc, because if they were confident in it they would not be afraid of having a fulsome and thorough debate in examining the bill.

Let us talk about the bill. New Democrats understand the concern of Canadians and the sentiments that underlie this bill. Two issues have caused the bill to come before the House. The first is the spectre in Quebec of two high-profile white collar fraudsters, Earl Jones and

Mr. Lacroix, who defrauded thousands of investors out of millions and millions of dollars. The prospect of their coming out of prison after serving one-sixth of their sentences has, quite rightly, made people upset in Quebec and across this country.

The second is that it is a quite reasonable concern of Canadians to raise an issue with the concept of some people coming out of a federal penitentiary and being moved to other places of incarceration after serving only one-sixth of their time. Those are valid concerns.

Canadians may know that accelerated parole is only available to first-time offenders who have committed a non-violent offence. Canadians may also find it relevant to know that those people are not coming out of prison and going into the community. They are not let out jail; it is the place of their incarceration that is being shifted. Instead of being in a federal penitentiary, after serving one-sixth of their time, they generally move to halfway houses, which are places of incarceration in our communities, where they still serve their sentences. If someone gets a sentence of 10 years, they still get that 10-year sentence but the place where they serve the sentence is moved.

I want to point out that the New Democrats have a long and proud history in the House of being tough on white collar crime. The New Democrats worked to strengthen the provisions in Bill C-21 to toughen the penalties for white collar crime and, I might point out, those amendments by the New Democrats were defeated by other parties in the House.

New Democrats also have a long and proud tradition of standing up for strong regulation in the financial sector, standing up against banks and finance companies and stock market behaviour to make sure those are well-regulated industries and that we minimize the opportunity for Canadians to be bilked or defrauded out of their money. Those efforts, I might add, are generally resisted by the Conservatives, and often by their coalition partner, the Liberals, and now by their new coalition partner, the Bloc Québécois, as they usually try to stop the efforts to ensure that we protect consumers in this country.

I also want to say that New Democrats understand the pain in Quebec. We understand the absolute and profound damage that has been caused by these unregulated white collar criminals who have defrauded so many people out of their life savings, and New Democrats believe that we have to crack down on them. The issue, of course, is to do that in an intelligent and targeted way, in a way that will actually help.

• (1150)

I want to go over some of the facts of this bill.

APR was introduced in 1992 and was expanded in 1997. It was considered a measure to help the correctional services focus on more dangerous offenders and thus save money.

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In 2007 the Correctional Service of Canada review panel, headed by the Mike Harris era Conservative minister for privatization, Rob Sampson, recommended that APR be eliminated. We can thus see the genesis of this idea. He argued that parole should be reformed. The roadmap that Mr. Sampson developed and that the panel issued has been widely criticized, comprehensively criticized, as the absolutely wrong approach to our prisons, both in terms of effectiveness and cost.

The Conservatives have introduced measures to eliminate APR twice before, in Bill C-53, which died on prorogation without receiving any debate; and as part of an omnibus CCRA amendment, Bill C-39, which is currently before public safety committee.

I want to review some of the challenges of this bill. On the one hand, we have the spectre of some Canadians getting out after serving one-sixth of their sentence in a federal penitentiary and being moved to a different institution. That is absolutely the wrong message we want to send when talking about serious white collar crimes.

It is important to note that under the current legislation, there are some crimes that are not eligible for accelerated parole. One thing New Democrats ask is that if there are crimes that we do not think should qualify for accelerated parole, then why do we not study what those crimes should be and add them to the already existing list of crimes for which accelerated parole is not available? That is a surgical, intelligent approach.

Right now, out of 13,000 people in federal penitentiaries, there are approximately 1,000 people who currently would be affected by this legislation. Unlike the Conservatives' approach to crime, which is to take one poster person and target a bill to get at that person and to paint a broad brush of everybody else, it is clear that we do not have a uniform sample within those 1,000 people.

Caught up in those 1,000 people not eligible under this bill would be a person like a young aboriginal woman in jail for the first time maybe for passing bad cheques. She may have children in the community. She may have an addictions problem. She may have a mental health issue. It may be advantageous, both for her and for the community's safety, to move her into a halfway house in the community after one-sixth of her sentence were served in a federal penitentiary, where she could get the help for her issues she could not get inside a penitentiary. That is the kind of person who would also be caught by this bill.

I want to talk about services. I have been in 25 federal institutions in this country in the last year and a half. I will tell the House what I found: Our federal penitentiaries are a complete disaster in terms of offering timely and effective programming to our federal prisoners.

This bill would take 1,000 people who would otherwise be eligible to be moved into community facilities at one-sixth of their sentences, where they would get those services, and would make them stay in prison for another one-sixth of their time. Will those people have access to the types of services they need?

We have heard in committee that 80% of offenders in our federal institutions suffer from addictions. We are also just starting to touch the surface on the secondary problem of mental illness, which is also profoundly substantial.

If those people in our federal penitentiaries are not getting addictions treatment in a timely and effective way or treatment for their mental illnesses, this bill would keep them in those penitentiaries longer. Does the government want to put additional money and resources into our federal prisons to deal with that? I have not heard those members say that. No bill has been introduced by the government that would add those kinds of services to our prisons.

● (1155)

I released an internal document prepared by the correctional service. It stated that two bills alone, Bill C-25, the bill eliminating the two-for-one credit for pre-sentencing custody, and Bill S-6, the bill that adds mandatory minimums for gun crimes, would add 4,000 offenders to our prisons in the next two to three years. They would cause the government to hire 3,300 new personnel, which we estimate would cost a quarter of a billion dollars on personnel each and every year. As well, it has been estimated that it would require the government to spend somewhere between \$5 billion and \$10 billion to build new prisons in the next five to 10 years.

This bill would take 1,000 people and make them stay in prison longer. That may be a wise thing or it may not be, but I ask the following questions.

Has the government costed out what this will cost? I haven't heard it say anything about that. I have heard the government tell Canadians it is none of their business what the crime bills cost. It claims cabinet confidence when we ask what the crime bills will cost Canadian taxpayers.

Might I remind the government that it is not its money; the money that it is spending is Canadian taxpayers' money. Canadian taxpayers have the right to know the cost of any legislation. Yet the government hides. Why? It does not want to tell Canadians that the result of its crime agenda will cost billions of dollars. What is worse is that it will not make our communities any safer.

The political right in the United States has tried these policies over the last 30 years, people like Newt Gingrich, people in Texas and the American south. They have built more prisons, locked up people, tightened up parole, made people serve longer sentences and are now reversing those measures as we speak. This is not rhetoric. It is fact. The United States is actually adopting the exact opposite policies of this government because it knows that these are bankrupting its treasuries and not reducing crime rates.

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As a matter of fact, the states that are focusing on crime prevention, on addressing the root causes of crime, such as addictions and mental health, and are putting resources into treating those issues are making their communities safer and reducing crime rates. However, this government is pursuing a policy that is 30 years out of date and proven wrong.

There is another reason that we might want to move someone from a federal penitentiary after a short, sharp experience into a community facility like a halfway house. It might be better for their reintegration. It would put them closer to their families and support structures. It would allow them to work. I have heard the government say many times that the best social welfare program is a job. It would put that person in a community where they would have more access to required services such as mental health assistance and therapy, addictions treatments and help for any number of different physical or mental ailments they may have.

What are we saying? We are saying that transferring someone into that kind of facility is better for them and makes it more likely they will not reoffend, which is better for community safety.

Have we considered that? No, because the Bloc and the government have combined to ram this bill through in Parliament within a matter of days of debate.

One thing I have noticed about this chamber is that it is never good public policy to make legislation on the fly, under pressure and without study. I do not care what the bill is: no bill, no federal legislation that will affect thousands of Canadians, should ever be passed by this House without our thoroughly vetting that bill and understanding all of its implications and consequences.

What is the impact on community safety? What is the impact on prison overcrowding? What is the impact and how many more prison cells will we have to build if we have to keep more people in prison for longer? What will it cost? Which crimes should we be targeting? All of these questions are valid questions that any responsible parliamentarian would want the answers to before voting on a bill. However, the Conservatives and the Bloc, the separatists and the Conservatives, have joined together to say, no, we cannot have that debate.

The New Democrats have a number of positive suggestions in this regard. Again, we understand there are some crimes that should not get accelerated parole, particularly by white collar criminals who bilk people out of their savings. However, why do we not look at making surgical amendments to the legislation to add crimes to the list that do not qualify for accelerated parole? A second alternative is to allow a judge to have discretion at the time of sentencing to determine whether a person should or should not qualify for accelerated parole.

●(1200)

Those are amendments the New Democrats will be bringing to the committee tonight, in the four hours the government and the separatists have allotted for debate, after which they are going to invoke closure.

In those four hours, we will be exploring answers to these questions for Canadians. We are going to try to understand the impact of this bill on our penal system and on our treasury. We are

going to propose amendments to fix the problems that Canadians want fixed, but do not damage the rehabilitation and community safety. That is what the New Democrats are about: responsible parliamentarianism. That is not what we see in this bill.

I want to focus on the way our parole system works.

Our parole system is a carefully crafted system that has developed over decades. One cannot tinker with just one part and not expect it to have an impact on other parts. There are theories of punishment as to how we can best alter behaviour.

The purpose of our prison system is corrections. It is to try to correct the behaviour of people so that when they re-enter society they do not reoffend. That is the best public safety policy we could have. That is why we have sophisticated notions of punishment and reward where people get a short, sharp experience with prison and then reintegrate into society. As parliamentarians, we should be encouraging that process.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has raised some very good points. Clearly, without having the normal debate on such a bill, it interferes with parliamentarians' rights to have an informed discussion so that they can make good laws and wise decisions.

Having said that, the debate that has gone on so far seems to have focused on certain extreme cases to make the general case. My concern is there are some offences to which this bill would apply where to not have the option of early parole would not be in the public interest. Studies have clearly shown that recidivism rates increase when the amount of prison time increases relative to those who get early parole.

I would ask the member whether or not he is aware of any studies that show that more incarceration actually results in less recidivism in the community.

●(1205)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his astute comments.

We are not the only society grappling with crime in the world. Every society is grappling with crime. There are many different approaches to deal with it. There are very harsh, firm approaches that are characterized in countries in Asia. We see more liberal approaches in northern Europe. There are different approaches all over the world.

I have asked the government with the full resources of the public safety department and the justice department, to name one jurisdiction in the world for which they have data to show that these policies work to reduce the crime rate and make communities safer. It has never given me one example, not one.

We on this side have come up with many examples of states that have tried these kinds of policies and are reversing them. They know that in the real laboratory of life, after spending billions of dollars on building more prisons and putting people in prison for longer, there is no measurable impact on reducing crime. It is quite the opposite.

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In Texas, after cracking down on crime for over 30 years, the rate of recidivism was 50%. That means one out of every two people would be going right back into prison. That does not tell me it is a successful corrections program.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for all the work he does on the public safety committee.

The member closed his comments by talking about the corrections system and a series of rewards and punishments, rewards for good behaviour and punishments for bad behaviour to help correct the individual.

I am curious as to why he supports automatic accelerated parole. Would he not favour a system of earned parole if he actually sees merit in a system of benefits for those who behave well in the corrections system?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I also would like to congratulate the member on the good work he does in the public safety committee.

The first thing I would correct is the misnomer of referring to accelerated parole as automatic. It is not automatic. There is a reverse onus. Someone will get parole after serving one-sixth of the sentence, unless it can be shown by the national parole board that the person is likely to commit a violent offence in the community.

Once again, this policy came out of a different time when it was recognized that we wanted an effective targeted use of prison time and to focus on the people who really need to be in prison, people who are violent, people who cannot function in society, people who need to be supervised. It was recognized that it was desirable to have a different stream after exposing non-violent first offenders to that very harsh environment. And make no mistake, it is harsh. Of the 25 prisons I have visited, I would not want to spend five minutes in any one of them as a prisoner. After exposing people to that harsh environment for a period of time, to deliver that message to them, it is desirable to transition them to a halfway house, as long as we can be sure they are not going to be violent. They are still under their prison sentence. They are still in prison. They are still serving their sentence. They are still subject to conditions, but it gives them access to other programs and resources that are not available in prison.

In that respect, the recidivism rate of people in halfway houses is lower. It is cheaper. It costs about \$25,000 a year to keep someone in a halfway house, whereas it costs \$140,000 to keep someone in prison. That is the kind of economic theory the government is advancing here today.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway if I understand this correctly. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has projected that it will cost \$10 billion roughly over five years to implement the kind of so-called crime control the Conservatives would like to do, although they will not give us any numbers to confirm or deny that. Given that we have seen a lot of evidence all over the place that these kinds of draconian measures just harden beginner criminals and make them into really bad people who get put back into prison, and given that it does not work and it is expensive, what would the member and his New Democrat colleagues do for a better system on preventing crime?

●(1210)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North has asked an intelligent question. He works hard on behalf of his constituents across the board.

We do know what does work in terms of making our communities safer is to have more community police in our neighbourhoods walking the beat. We need to have a well-functioning judiciary and prosecution system that has enough resources so that it can prosecute crimes in an efficient and timely manner. If we invest in crime prevention, according to the statistics I have seen, every \$1 invested in crime prevention saves \$4 in terms of later court costs and costs to society. We need to focus on mental illness and addictions treatment. I was at the regional psychiatric centre in Saskatoon sitting inside a federal penitentiary talking to addictions counsellors. I asked them what percentage of the people in that institution who committed crimes did they think would not have committed them if they were not addicts or alcoholics. The answer was 70%. That was not said by me or any other New Democrat. That was said by the correctional officers inside a prison.

It stands to reason that we would be better advised to invest money in addictions treatment and in mental health facilities. Another benefit is it would work to prevent crime.

The best help we can give a victim in this country, in my opinion, in the opinion of New Democrats, is to prevent them from being victimized at all. Victims do not want us to crack down after they have been hurt. They want justice, but what they really want is for us to adopt policies that would make it less likely that they, their children, their families and their loved ones were ever hurt to begin with.

That is what is so wrong about the Conservative policy. It is focused on punishing after the harm has been created instead of focusing on preventing the harm in the first place, which is to be smart on crime.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member comment on how the government is being tough on victims, creating more victims, making Canada more dangerous by spending so much money on jails that could be spent on more police? Would he also comment on what the government has done to reduce the absurdly high proportion of aboriginal people in the federal system?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, dealing with the latter question first, the answer is nothing. We all know that aboriginal offenders are vastly overrepresented in our prisons. Approximately 30% of the female population in federal prisons is aboriginal. It is approaching that, actually, in our male population as well when they make up about 1% of Canada's population.

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That is the other thing the bill may very well harm. If people who are in prison for the first time are disproportionately aboriginal, the bill will quite logically have a disproportionately negative impact on aboriginal people.

In terms of the first question, absolutely, we need to be focusing on putting more resources into policing. That would be far wiser. A neighbourhood police officer on bike patrol embedded in the community or embedded in schools does more to prevent crime than any other factor.

The government claimed it would create 2,500 police officer positions in this country. However, it would not commit to funding beyond five years and it sent the money to provinces without any ties to it. Some provinces have not spent the money and have put it into general revenue.

I have talked to police departments and police chiefs who told me they cannot create the police positions because they do not have stable funding beyond five years. They will not create a police position, which usually requires two civilian staff on top, and go to all that trouble and expense when 48 or 60 months from now they will have to get rid of that.

The government has not created 2,500 police officer positions as the New Democrats have suggested. That would be a far wiser expenditure of funds than building more prisons to lock up people for longer and end up having those people come out more likely to offend than when they went in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill C-59, which, when passed, will abolish accelerated parole review.

Before giving my speech, I would like to say that I hope that the victims of white collar fraudsters are watching the debate being held in the House today.

The presentations we have just heard by our colleagues opposite—the NDP—were rather odd, to say the least. I do not understand from their remarks how they are helping the victims. I personally heard nothing about that.

I would first like to thank the hon. members for their collective efforts that have enabled us to properly debate this bill and to give priority to the safety of Canadians. I am pleased to speak in the House to tell Canadians that our government is determined to ensure that this bill is passed quickly.

We are here to debate a bill that will amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act in order to abolish the procedure known as “accelerated parole review”. These changes will ensure that white collar criminals will no longer have access to accelerated parole review. With Bill C-59, these offenders will have to assume responsibility for the crimes they have committed.

I appreciate the efforts made by my hon. colleagues to explain how accelerated parole review works, how it has created a two-tier parole system that allows white collar criminals to apply for parole earlier than offenders who have committed violent crimes, and how

white collar criminals need only prove to the National Parole Board that they will not commit violent crimes to be eligible for day parole.

We also heard hon. members on the other side of the House state that they agree that we should ensure that white collar criminals who defraud Canadians serve appropriate sentences for their crimes. We appreciate the important work that has been done and we ask all hon. members to continue to co-operate with us to ensure that this bill is as strong and effective as possible.

My hon. colleagues pointed out the differences between the procedure for accelerated parole review and the procedure for regular day parole review so that we can be sure that all members of the House and all Canadians are aware of the objectives of this bill.

I would like to give you a brief summary of the bill. These amendments will make it possible to repeal sections of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which governs the procedures for accelerated parole review, so that offenders are no longer eligible for day parole at one-sixth of their sentence and full parole at only one-third of their sentence. When you really stop and think about it, it is fairly ridiculous that, with the existing system, offenders who commit crimes and steal from people who trusted them with their money are put in prison but serve only one-sixth of their sentences. It is completely unacceptable.

The violent recidivism test will no longer apply to accelerated parole review. All offenders will be subject to the same general recidivism criteria. The cases of all offenders will be assessed at a hearing rather than by means of a paper review.

This is the main purpose of the bill. It is actually a simple change. It does not create a new system for white collar criminals by applying a different set of rules to them than to other offenders.

We are simply eliminating a system that has allowed people who commit white collar or non-violent crime to apply for parole earlier than those who commit violent crimes. In our opinion, it is important that those who commit crimes, whether they be moral or violent, serve appropriate sentences.

As any responsible government should, we must ensure that the laws that govern our country are not only fair and reasonable but also adapted to the times in which we live. We live in a time where the ease of transmitting data—particularly financial data since that is what we are discussing today—makes it possible for crime to be committed at an incredible rate. That is why it is important that this bill be passed quickly.

Government Orders

•(1225)

This is certainly not the first time a government has amended legislation to adapt to changing times, which is the case today. Ten years ago, September 11 changed the world. Following those tragic terrorist attacks against the United States, that country, Canada and its allies made significant and often permanent changes to methods for managing safety and security at the border and on their territory.

Of course, the bill before us today is not motivated by such a radical cultural change, but it contains changes made necessary by the rapid rise in crimes like fraud over the past two decades. I believe that in Quebec in particular we have seen some completely unacceptable cases of fraud. Obviously it is never acceptable to commit fraud, but you know what I mean, in that it is important for people who commit this type of crime to be punished accordingly.

We have all read articles in the newspaper about so-called smart and helpful people who have convinced Canadian workers to entrust their entire savings to their so-called solid name. That is the sector where we have seen a rise in white collar crime. These people no longer just go after corporations. Now they are attacking Canadians who worked hard their entire lives and saved money for a bit of financial security when they retire. Those are the people we want to protect with this bill. We want to protect Canadians who work hard to save money their whole lives only to see that money go up in smoke in the hands of a fraudster. This is totally unacceptable.

In the difficult economic times we have seen in the past few years, we cannot blame Canadians for looking for ways to build up their savings. These law-abiding Canadian workers suddenly discover that their savings have disappeared. Everyone here in this House has heard about families who have lost everything and ended up isolated after such a loss. We have seen many examples of this in the past two or three years in particular, and it is important that we do something about it immediately.

It is difficult to imagine the humiliation and embarrassment these people must feel after having put their entire savings in the hands of an expert fraudster. Imagine handing over all your financial assets to someone you trust, only to have them abuse that trust and steal all your assets. It must be absolutely terrible, and it was for many families.

Some victims find the courage to testify at the trial of the person who stole from them, but many victims remain silent because they are afraid to tell anyone what happened. Goodness knows that each of us has had moments where it seemed completely natural to trust friends, who eventually turned against us. And it is not always easy to admit that.

We must understand that the victims who choose to speak and play an important role in the legal proceedings must feel relieved once the criminal is convicted. It takes a long time and a long process before that happens. They must feel a certain sense of victory when the criminal is finally put behind bars for many years.

And it is at this stage that the system breaks down and we turn our backs on victims by saying that fraud is not a very serious crime. This is when accelerated parole review comes into play. As it currently stands, accelerated parole review allows white collar

criminals to apply for day parole earlier than a violent offender who receives the same length of sentence.

In Canada, financial fraud is not considered to be the same as a physically violent crime. But emotional and psychological abuse are just as serious as physical violence.

It must be a terrible shock and disappointment for the victims of these crimes to learn that the offender has received day parole so soon after being incarcerated. While the victims are still trying to pick up the pieces, the fraudster can apply for day parole and begin to rebuild his life after having served only one-sixth of his sentence.

It is rather unbelievable, when you think about it. Imagine that a fraudster caused you to lose everything you own, and after a year, a year and a half or two years, he is completely free and goes back to his life as though nothing happened. That is completely unacceptable. I am sure that hon. members will agree that that is completely unfair. Our government believes that this system is outdated and that it must be changed quickly.

I would like to stress a very important point. This amendment was not put forward by our government just for the sake of introducing a bill. Canadians told us that they wanted us to defend victims and their families. That is the purpose of Bill C-59.

Furthermore, Bill C-59 is a direct response to the recommendations in the 2007 report of the Correctional Service Canada Review Panel. The report, which made 109 recommendations, expressly stated that the accelerated parole review process should be abolished. Our government studied these recommendations and committed to following through on this recommendation so that all offenders are treated equally when it comes to eligibility for parole.

This amendment will ensure that white collar criminals, such as people who have been convicted of fraud, are no longer able to apply for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence. They will have to wait until they have served at least six months before being eligible for full parole, like any other offender. It will also ensure that white collar criminals participate in their parole hearings and plead their case in person before the NPB.

With this amendment, the rules will change so that the NPB will be able to refuse day parole if it has reasonable grounds to suspect that the offender will commit another crime, no matter what type. Under the current system, the NPB must only determine whether the offender could commit another non-violent crime. With this amendment, the same criterion applies to all offenders when they appear before the board.

Government Orders

I urge all hon. members to support Bill C-59 and to show our total commitment to the many Canadians who have been victims of these crimes. Changing times call for new measures. The sooner we pass Bill C-59, the sooner we can put an end to the two-tier system that makes white collar criminals eligible for early parole. We must work together to provide justice for all victims.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our biggest objection to the bill is the fact that the government is using closure on it. The government should understand why we are complaining about that move because when it was in opposition and the Liberals were using closure on a consistent basis, it too objected to the idea that the government could ram through legislation. There is no need for this.

We could simply proceed through the normal processes here and deal with the bill in the regular fashion, but the government is getting together with the Bloc to use closure to ram the legislation through. It is not something which should be used on a consistent basis.

Also, we have asked consistently for a costing of these bills. The fact is that no government introduces legislation without having some idea of the cost of the implementation of the bill. We have asked for that information. We are not able to get it.

In 2007, the state of Texas in the United States decided against building more prisons and opted to enhance proven community corrections approaches such as drug courts. It was able to reduce the cost of prisons and get a reduction in the crime rates since 2004 by, I believe, 10% by doing things that actually worked. Republicans and Democrats in the state were working together.

When will the government reconsider its approach on crime and start working with an all-party group in this House to get good crime legislation on the books?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear my colleague talk about co-operation and solidarity in the House.

I am trying to put myself in the position of a victim who has just lost all her savings, who sees us working here in the House of Commons and wonders if we can pick up the pace, if we can do something to ensure that this cannot happen again to her or anyone else.

That is basically what we are thinking: the faster we can pass this bill, the sooner people will feel more secure and ready to trust other people again when it comes to investing their money.

I almost feeling like turning the hon. member's question right back to him. If he were a victim right now, would he not want all members of the House of Commons of Canada to do everything they could to pass some sort of legislation? We have before us an excellent bill to ensure that these things never happen again and, if they do, to punish the criminals for their crimes.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to demonstrate our commitment to safety and security for families. I

want to know how important the member thinks it is to ensure the changes in the legislation are applied retroactively.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. Clearly the bill aims to speed up procedures so that they may begin as soon as possible. I think the Bloc Québécois members have understood how important it is to push this bill through quickly. It needs to be done as soon as possible. It is extremely important that this bill pass today, if possible, and if not, then in a few days or weeks so that it may become law as soon as possible. Thus, we will be able to punish people in a way that corresponds to their crimes.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member has probably heard today, there are all sorts of ways victims can be helped, which everyone would like to do, but only so much can be done with the resources available, so it depends on the costs of programs.

I wonder if he could speculate as to why not one Conservative member has been able to say, after requests from members in the House from various parties, what the cost of this initiative would be. How much would it cost and how much would be left for other ways to help victims?

The public service is a very professional, well-educated body that is used to providing the costs of things it proposes. It is very strange to the public watching on TV why, after a long debate, the Conservatives have either not come up with the numbers or, if they have the numbers, members are not allowed to provide them.

What exactly would be the effect of this bill, what are the estimates by the professionals of how many people would remain in prison longer and what would be the cost of that? Why does the member think that no Conservative member has been able to answer that question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, the cost I think that it is important to acknowledge today is the cost that victims have to pay. It is not simply a monetary cost; it is an extremely high psychological and emotional cost.

The members here today and all members must understand that the cost we may or will have to pay as a result of this particular bill, whether we take two weeks or two years to pass it, will not change inevitably, but it will change for the victims. Thus, it is extremely important to ensure that there are not further costs for victims in the future.

Government Orders

We must ensure that these offenders are kept in prison for the maximum amount of time they deserve for the crimes they have committed. We must ensure that we put pressure on society to prevent these crimes from happening again. For our government, that is the cost that it is most important to understand today.

• (1235)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, does the member think it is fair to have a process that would allow a committee to meet from 10 o'clock tonight until 3 o'clock in the morning, which is the period of time that we will have witnesses appearing on the bill? Does he think that is fair to the process to have witnesses appearing in the middle of the night? Why could we not simply go through the normal process and add an extra few days of debate and resolve the bill in the way that it is likely to be resolved anyway?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has been here much longer than I have. I feel I should to welcome him to the club. This is what it is to be a parliamentarian. There are no set hours and we work 365 days a year. This is the nature of the work we have to do. We must do our work regardless of the place or time. It is important and we have to do it now.

This bill is extremely important for victims and for all Canadians who may be victims of fraud or who could potentially become victims of fraud. We want to put an end to this current lack of action. It is appalling. An incredible number of people in Quebec have fallen victim to fraud over the past few years. Again, yesterday, we heard on the radio and on television that some people had been defrauded by their best friend.

Can the members of the House understand the need to act quickly? That is what we are in the process of doing. Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois has understood this message.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member suggests that we need to pass the bill quickly to protect Canadians from fraud. The bill is not just about fraud. This is about a range of non-violent offences, and many of them are very nominal. There is no evidence whatsoever that this will reduce the recidivism rate.

Is the member aware of any evidence whatsoever that longer incarceration will reduce the recidivism rate?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that matters is minimizing the impact on victims.

The simple-mindedness of my fellow members' questions is absolutely unbelievable. We are in this House before you, Mr. Speaker, to try to make all Canadians understand that we are working for them and for their security, and they tell us that it does not matter. I believe that it is important for citizens and all members to understand that we must act quickly.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand today to add my comments on Bill C-59.

I cannot help but at times draw comparisons with the Manitoba legislature and here. When I look at what the government is trying to do through a form of closure to limit debate, I reflect on the Manitoba legislature.

I have heard comments from my New Democratic colleagues that the Liberals did something of a similar nature. I can assure my New Democratic friends that my last experience with closure was actually within the New Democratic government in Manitoba. The NDP use closure in many different ways in the province of Manitoba.

What is important to recognize is what is taking place here and why this is a little more unique than most motions of different forms of closure that might take place.

It is interesting that time and time again we hear the government say how important this is for the victims. Even the previous speaker made reference to the victims. It is all about the victims. I, too, sympathize with the victims. I think every member of the House knows individuals who have been victimized through white-collar crime and other forms of crime. We all sympathize with the victims and we want to do what we can to minimize the impact that crime has on victims.

The big difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals is that we believe that we can do more to prevent victims from having to go through the hardships and emotional circumstances in which they find themselves if we can have a good, sound policy dealing with crime and safety.

At the end of the day, when we look at the differences between the Conservatives and the Liberals, we see that the Liberal Party has addressed this particular issue. My Liberal colleague has raised the issue of legislation or the idea of large-scale fraud and how we attempted to deal with that just over a year and a half ago.

After listening to the comments, in particular from the Bloc and from the Conservatives, I wonder why they did not embrace this enthusiasm that they have today back then. Had they done that, I suspect we would have had fewer victims. It is surprising to hear the government and member after member stand and talk about large-scale fraud when the issue of large-scale fraud was before the House on previous occasions. One has to question why it is they did not support dealing with the issue when the issue was first brought to their attention.

The way in which the government is now trying to say that the sky is falling and the bill must pass in the next 24 or 48 hours is somewhat unique. The Conservatives had the opportunity to do the right thing almost two years ago but they chose not to. They decided, in whatever collective wisdom they have among their benches, not to act on a good initiative that was before the House. We can just imagine the number of individuals who would not have been victims had the government done the right thing back then.

Government Orders

I would suggest that there are two issues here. We have the issue of large-scale fraud, which is very serious and which affects thousands of Canadians across this land, but it is also an issue that was before the House well before the government brought in Bill C-59. It is a real issue and it is causing a great deal of hardship in our society.

●(1240)

I understand there is virtually unanimous support from all members of Parliament. I suspect that had the government taken that issue, put it in this legislation and left it at that, the sense of co-operation would have been binding. We would have had wonderful co-operation. That bill would have passed quite quickly.

The Liberal Party has been advocating for that type of legislation for well over a year. Imagine the number of crimes that could have been prevented. Imagine if the government really was passionate about getting at large-scale fraudsters, the ones who victimized so many Canadians. Imagine for a moment that the government really was sincere in its comments and brought in legislation that dealt specifically with that issue. This would have been a wonderful thing to see. The government would not have needed to bring in closure. It would have had the support of Liberals and I suspect New Democrats. The Bloc would have supported the government for sure. The point is the legislation would have passed. It would have dealt with those large-scale fraudsters who caused so much hardship and concern for Canadians, and for good reason.

I have witnessed first-hand over the years individuals who have had their life savings taken away from them, or stolen from them, and the impact that has had on them, especially on someone on a fixed income. An individual on a fixed income does not have much of a choice. It is not like someone 75 years old can re-enter the workforce. Someone who cons a 75 year old out of thousands of dollars so he or she can vacation on some luxury yacht goes against what we believe is right. That is why we have laws of this nature. That is why we need laws to protect our seniors and others, because not only seniors are exploited. I sympathize as to why the need is there and I understand it.

At the airport just the other day I heard a newscast about someone selling vacation packages. It was a fraud. Imagine paying thousands of dollars for a vacation with the family and arriving at the airport find out that no such thing is taking place. People arranged to take time off from work. Commitments had to be changed. Money was allocated for the trip. All of this for naught because of possible loopholes in the law. Individuals took advantage of good, hard-working citizens.

These types of things happen far too often. We could do things in the House of Commons that would make a difference. I appeal to members to look at those things and act upon them.

I said previously that there were really two issues. The other issue is maybe not as pretty, and that is the political agenda of the government. The government's agenda is quite different from what is in the best interests of the average Canadian. The government gives the impression that it is tough on crime. This is one of those bills that it wants to use to demonstrate that.

●(1245)

This is why we have legislation before us that deals with more than just large-scale fraud. This is the reason the Conservatives expanded the legislation. They know it will be more difficult to get it through the House of Commons. They hoodwinked the Bloc, and I will give them that much. However, I do not quite understand why the Bloc would be onside with the legislation. I always thought there was more of a social conscience or more of a responsibility to look at the bigger picture within the Bloc.

I do not think the Liberal Party would do service, as the official opposition and as a party that has done so much in terms of justice, crime and safety in our country, if we closed our eyes and let the government get away with this. We have to recognize what the government is trying to do.

There are two different philosophies. The government genuinely believes the best way to protect society is to build as many prisons as possible and throw everyone and anyone into that prison if they violate a law.

The other day I had said that I was health care critic for the Manitoba Liberal Party. Also, for a short period of time, I was justice critic. In dealing with crime and safety, there is a lot more to that file than building a jail, keeping someone in jail for as long as we can and then letting them out the door.

Given the opportunity to hear the different sides, I believe people will buy-in to what the Liberal Party has to say on this bill. At the end of the day, I want to see less crime in the streets and communities of Winnipeg North. The best way to do that is to come in with an all-encompassing approach that deals with crime and safety. The government is failing in doing that. It is not delivering where it should be delivering because it is more interested in its political agenda of trying to give the impression it is tough on crime.

I will concede one point. The Conservatives are tougher than me in wanting to keep everyone and anyone in jail for a longer period of time, whether it is better or worse for society. I question virtually any policy they have related to justice.

I believe there has to be a consequence to every crime that is committed. I have seen crimes take place where there has been absolutely zero consequence under that administration. Maybe there will be another opportunity at another time in which I will be able to expand on that point.

I care just as much about the victims of crime as the government does. I believe all members care about the victims of crime. The difference is I want to do what I can to prevent some of those crimes from taking place. The way in which to do that is to develop programs that are sound, that make a difference and that get individuals off the wrong road and back on track. By doing that, we reduce the amount of crime in our communities in which we live.

Government Orders

●(1250)

As members know, we recently had a byelection in Winnipeg North. Crime and safety was the number one issue. I take it very seriously. There are areas in Winnipeg North where seniors will not go out of their homes because they do not feel safe in their communities when the sun goes down. Is putting everyone in jail until they hit 45 or 50 years of age the answer to that? Would that allow individuals to be safe? I would argue that is not the case.

Whether it is white-collar crime or other forms of crime, if we want to prevent some of these crimes from happening, we need education and programming. There also needs to be a punishment element, and I do not question that. I do not want the Conservatives to say that I am soft on crime or that I do not believe in punishment.

I do believe in punishment. I do not consider myself soft on crime. I consider myself an advocate in trying to minimize the amount of crime taking place in our communities, and I will talk about those types of government policies.

We could do so much more. We could take it down to the community level. For example, in dealing with white-collar crime, what can we do to better assist, better inform and educate 14 year old to 24 year old single parents? There are many 14 year old single parents. We could teach them to balance a cheque book. We could let them know how wrong it is to allow a cheque to bounce. We could teach them their responsibilities to the community as a whole, one of which is not allowing cheques to bounce.

That is one issue where if it is not dealt with at one level, it has a higher risk of continuing into the future. It potentially could become worse.

Are there things we could do to have an impact on that? I would argue, profoundly, yes. There are many things we could do to make a difference and to prevent people from becoming future victims or becoming victims in the first place.

That is the real challenge the government has to face. I have had an opportunity on one occasion to challenge the government on that. A number of days ago we raised the issue of some funding for gang prevention activities. The government made the decision not to reaffirm any sort of commitment to that. Preventing individuals from getting involved in gangs has an impact on preventing crimes. Why would the government not have the motivation to move in that direction?

When we look at the types of issues in white-collar crime, there are things the government could do. I question why the government has made the decision to expand what would have been legislation that could have very easily passed had it been focused on that large-scale fraud. It had the support of the opposition a year and a half ago. Had the government done that, it would not have had to bring in closure and this legislation could have possibly been passed by now.

With it being as all encompassing as it is, there needs to be more consultation. We need to hear what people have to say. There has to be more work done on the bill. That is the responsible thing to do, and the Liberal Party of Canada is doing the responsible thing.

●(1255)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been paying attention to the debate today and heard the tone of my colleague's speech, which I heard earlier from the NDP.

The opposition is accusing members of the government of oversimplifying the issue of crime by themselves oversimplifying things. We can all have agreements or disagreements on a certain amount of legislation, but the opposition is saying that our government and, therefore, I have no understanding of the responsibility to have a balanced government approach to dealing with crime. Yes for punishment, yes for incarceration, yes for support for law enforcement, but yes for support for programs as well.

To suggest, as the opposition and my colleague have time and again, that the Conservatives are in favour of locking people up and throwing away the key is nonsensical. Every year, I attend a graduation ceremony for a program called a chance to choose. It is run by SUCCESS which, as many colleagues know, is an organization that helps new Canadians who come to this country with the often difficult challenges of becoming a new citizen.

These are kids who are absolutely desperate to have some kind of structure in their lives and some hope. Most of them have been put into a program. Our government has increased funding for these programs. They exist across the country. These are kids who are absolutely at their most desperate point in life, often struggling with substance abuse and broken families who are not there to help them when they need it the most.

Our government is supporting these kinds of programs and organizations all across the country with great success. To oversimplify the debate and say that we do not support these kinds of programs is nonsensical. We support these programs when they work. We do it in my community all the time. To oversimplify the debate and say the Conservatives do not support programs that help kids is ridiculous. I hope he recognizes that and maybe re-calibrates his remarks appropriately.

●(1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments, but I must advise the minister that he is thinking outside the glass bubble that the Prime Minister has put him in.

The Prime Minister's line is very simple, that the government is tough on crime. Conservatives cannot have it both ways. They cannot tell the public and advertise in their brochures that the Prime Minister and the public safety minister are tough on crime and then in the backrooms say they are a little sympathetic to what is being said and they do support some of the programs. That is not what is being conveyed to the public on the front lines. Either Conservatives believe in them, are prepared to talk about them and use them as examples, or they are not.

Government Orders

In the future, if I get the opportunity, I should ask the member the question with regard to the gang fund and talk about the benefits of it. If we spend billions of dollars every year, some of that money is bound to be spent on good things. However, in the government's press releases, statements and advertising it does not necessarily focus on the issues that the member put forward.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a number of the comments my colleague raised. He is a representative of an area in my home province that many of my constituents end up going to, constituents who face some of the harshest realities, such as abject poverty and fleeing reserves in northern Manitoba, areas that lack some of the most basic services.

One service the government has claimed to hold great commitment on is recreation and prevention. I can safely say that on reserve, certainly in the communities I represent, there is no money for recreation or prevention. If anything, people have to go to the urban centres where provincial programs exist in order to support some of the young people who live on the margins and are at greatest risk of finding themselves in a life of crime.

I would like to hear the member's views on the importance of such programs in his community and the great shame in losing the funding for gang prevention programs in Winnipeg, a city that offers fantastic services to a lot of youth coming out of northern Manitoba and the young people I represent.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would concur in most part with the member's remarks.

In fact, recreation or alternative activities are of critical importance to me personally. One of the commitments I made to my constituents was that I would not collect my MLA pension. The proceeds from my MLA pension are going to go toward programs and activities for children who do not necessarily have the opportunity to participate. I am thinking of basketball, soccer and activities such as that.

If we take a look at the riding of Winnipeg North and others, trying to better engage our young people or provide opportunities for them to take part in activities such as basketball, soccer and different forms of social and recreational activities is a positive thing. Governments at all levels need to recognize it and adequately resource it.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning at the Standing Committee on Finance, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed to us that the traditional practice of governments in Canada has been that once a bill is tabled and under consideration, the assumptions on the costing of such legislation no longer constitute a cabinet confidence.

The finance committee has not been able to get that information, but we as parliamentarians are here now debating a bill, the cost of which is not insignificant. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said, with regard to one bill, that he does have some information the annual cost would be about \$1 billion.

Even more than that, there is an impact on the provincial side. The member is a former provincial member. He would know that when we make laws at the federal level, there are consequences at the provincial level which involve not only the incarceration, but also

the rehabilitation side. These are important aspects the House will not have the benefit of debating because of the closure provisions.

● (1305)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is an excellent question. Undoubtedly there is an impact. When we pass a law of this nature there will be costs for each and every provincial government across Canada. It is hard to estimate the actual cost.

Prior to the introduction of the bill, the government should have done its homework. There should have been some dialogue, not only among the federal bureaucrats, but also consultations with the different levels of government, particularly the provincial government, to try to get a sense of the impact on their budgets.

I can assure the member that in future justice minister meetings no doubt it will be a hot topic for discussion, because it will have a profound increase even on the provincial budgets, as they have to compensate for some of the legislation we are actually passing.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the conversation between the two Liberal members of Parliament. It is interesting that they are concerned about the costing of our justice legislation, but not the cost of anything else.

The leader of the Liberal Party refers to himself as a tax and spend Liberal, not concerned with all these huge programs and their cost, but are all of a sudden very concerned about the cost of the justice program. Liberals have to look at the cost of not passing legislation like this as well.

The member said that we need to hear from the people on this issue, hear what the people had to say. I am shocked if the members opposite have not been hearing what the people have to say on justice issues all along. I have been hearing that every week in and around my constituency. I am very concerned that the member has not heard the people on this. Why is he not listening to the victims of Earl Jones and people like that, people who have committed white-collar crime, which has deprived people of the retirement they worked for long and hard?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one could ask the question, why was the member not listening to the Liberal critic a year and a half ago when we wanted to deal with this very specific issue dealing with large scale fraud? Why was the member not listening then?

In terms of the cost factor, we cannot blame the opposition when member after member asks members of the Conservative Party, what is the cost of implementing the bill, and the only response is that we should think of the cost to the victims.

Yes, we will think of the cost to the victims, but what is the cost of the bill? It is a pretty straightforward question. We still do not have an answer. One would think there should be an answer to a very simple basic question of the cost of the legislation the government is trying to get through.

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Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this chance to speak to Bill C-59, the Abolition of Early Parole Act. The amendments our government is proposing are important for a number of reasons. They build on our government's already impressive record of cracking down on crime. That includes any kind of crime, from those involving handguns, to those involving stolen property, identity theft and fraud.

Our government is committed to building safer streets and communities for everyone. We have delivered on that commitment in countless numbers of ways. The changes our government is proposing in Bill C-59 will also help to ensure that the corrections system works the way it should so that all offenders are held accountable for their actions. That is something our government has been committed to achieving since we were first elected in 2006.

Perhaps most importantly, the changes our government is proposing with Bill C-59 will mean that offenders convicted of fraud will not be eligible for accelerated early parole after serving just a small fraction of their sentences. Therefore, I want to urge all hon. members to support the legislation before us today, which again demonstrates a commitment I believe all of us share, which is to stand up for victims and to crack down on crime and make our communities safer and better places for everyone.

Bill C-59 will essentially do away with what appears to be a two-tier system of parole in this country, which at times appears to treat offenders convicted of fraud as if swindling people of their life savings is somewhat less of a crime than other offences.

Our government believes, and indeed I feel most Canadians would agree, that offenders who commit such crimes should not just receive a slap on the wrist once they are convicted. They should not be out on parole earlier than other offenders simply because their crime was not violent. Their actions can wreak havoc and have wreaked havoc in the lives of countless numbers of Canadians. The devastation that their actions can and have caused can often be irreparable. In many cases, victims have been left wondering where the justice is in this world. Where is justice when such perpetrators can apparently be handed lengthy prison sentences but only serve one or two years in prison? They are left to wonder why the justice system does not seem to be standing up for them. Most of all, they have been left wondering when their interests will be put ahead of the offenders. That day is here. Again, our government is taking action to stand up for victims of crime.

Under the current system of accelerated parole review, so-called white-collar offenders convicted of a first-time non-violent offence are eligible for day parole after serving just one-sixth of their prison sentence. Indeed, not only can they qualify, they are almost certain to receive it. Unlike other offenders, white-collar offenders are in fact almost automatically put into the queue, so to speak, to receive early parole. That is because under the existing rules Correctional Service Canada must refer the cases of offenders entitled to APR to the parole board before their day parole eligibility date so that they may be released under supervision into the community as soon as possible.

Let us think about that. Offenders do not have to apply for parole. Under the current system, that is already taken care of. In fact, Correctional Service Canada in effect does it for them. However, for

other offenders the parole board will only receive applications for parole if the offender has informed them that they wish to be granted day parole. That is generally six months before their full parole eligibility date.

Why the double standard? Why are non-violent offenders treated differently? Our government, and I believe the majority of Canadians, would agree that should not occur.

● (1310)

Today, a white-collar offender might receive a sentence of 12 years, perhaps more in some cases. The reality is that many are released on parole before other offenders who might receive a similar sentence. Unlike other offenders who are generally eligible for day parole six months before full parole, white-collar or non-violent criminals can be free after just a few months in some cases. The general rule of thumb is that they can access a process called accelerated parole review after serving one-sixth of their sentence and full day parole after serving one-third of their sentence.

If we look back on some of the cases where we have seen convictions for very serious multi-million dollar fraud, sometimes in the hundreds of millions of dollars, a 12-year sentence is significant. However, when we find that the person has only spent two years in jail, we wonder if the system is being fair. The human cost is much more severe. We have heard of people who have committed suicide. We have heard of people who have lost all of their life savings. They serve what I refer to as a life sentence.

What makes the current parole system even more expedited for white-collar criminals is the accelerated parole reviews are done through a paper review by the Parole Board of Canada, whereas a regular parolee receives one by way of a hearing rather than just a shuffling of papers, as it were, in a paper process. There is no need to meet with the parole board to explain their actions, no need to face their victims. Why should a person be released on day parole if he or she is a white-collar criminal when there are still many people suffering under the weight of poverty because of his or her actions?

The test for accelerated parole review is also lower for white-collar offenders than it is for other offenders. The parole board only has to have reasonable grounds to believe that the offender will not commit a violent crime, whereas with other offenders, the test is whether that person poses an undue risk to commit any type of crime if released.

Government Orders

The bottom line is that the parole board, when dealing with these cases, has limited discretion. The test is whether someone is going to commit a violent offence. Even if the parole board believes someone will commit another fraud, the board is still compelled to release him or her under supervision after serving just one-sixth of his or her sentence. That means, in many cases, that people who are convicted of crimes that have devastating effects on the lives and livelihoods of Canadians may spend very little time in prison.

The end result is that offenders convicted of white-collar crimes can be released under supervision after just a few months. Offenders convicted of fraud are given lengthy sentences which do not result in much time spent in prison at all. This can be difficult to reconcile with Canadians' faith in their justice system and in the corrections system.

Bill C-59 would abolish accelerated parole review and repeal sections of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that govern the accelerated parole review regime. It would mean that offenders who commit non-violent or white-collar crimes would be put on the same footing as other offenders. They would be eligible for regular day parole review six months prior to full parole eligibility, and full parole review after serving one-third of their sentence. Rather than being subject to a paper review, they would be subject to an in-person hearing. The test as to whether they should be released would be whether they present an unmanageable risk of committing another crime.

All of us here have heard of the devastating consequences of white-collar crimes such as fraud. Victims, and I believe the majority of Canadians, are outraged that offenders who have destroyed so many lives should receive preferential treatment. They are outraged that the justice system does not appear to work for them. That needs to change, which is why Bill C-59 is so important.

• (1315)

Our government is committed to standing up for victims, regardless of whether they are victims of gun crime or white-collar crime. Our government is committed to cracking down on crime regardless of who commits it or how it is committed. That is why we have done it in the past and it is why we are going to continue to do it in the future.

I therefore urge all hon. members to work with us, with the government, with most, and I believe all, Canadians. We need to stand up for victims and ensure that Bill C-59 is passed quickly.

May I reiterate that we have seen on the news how white-collar crime not only devastates the lives of people who are the victims of it, but also does something insidious or more so in that it colours people's view of the very system in which we live. People are fearful to invest money in the economy. That means there is a reluctance to invest in job creators. What does that do? In my view, that creates a continuing lack of faith in the system that was designed to keep growing our economy, to invest in jobs and futures for Canadians.

We need to assure Canadians that people who misuse the system and commit the criminal offence of fraud will not receive just a slap on the wrist.

• (1320)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is very familiar with the criminal justice system and the judicial system.

Many people have talked about some of the big white-collar fraud cases. We also talked about Clifford Olson and Karla Homolka and all the hot-button cases. The member knows and he might agree that within the subset of non-violent crimes, there are some offences which are not of big concern to Canadians or victims. In fact, many of them are victimless crimes, but they would be subject to the same penalties and the same changes in the legislation with regard to early parole.

With regard to this subset of non-violent crimes that are being touched by the bill, would the member consider providing some sort of a benchmark for serious non-violent crimes, such as the defrauding of seniors, et cetera, which would not be eligible for this parole, and the small crimes, such as the person who had Tylenol 3 for a medical purpose and gave it to somebody else and could be convicted for trafficking in drugs. This is not a serious criminal matter relative to the rest of rest of discussion.

Would the member consider that there are certain crimes that should not be subject to the changes proposed in Bill C-59?

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I know from whence the member comes, as the saying goes.

We are dealing with people who have been convicted of serious white-collar crimes. We are dealing with people who would be in the federal corrections system, which means people who receive a conviction that carries with it time in federal custody. That means in excess of two years or more.

I would suggest to the hon. member that judges have discretion in their sentencing regime in cases such as the member is suggesting. For something like mistakenly giving someone a Tylenol 3, which has codeine or whatever in it, that was thought to be a Tylenol 2, the judge has discretion, if the case even got to court. There is discretion on the part of the police on whether to lay a charge. Once that discretion is exercised and a charge is laid, it goes to a crown attorney, who decides whether or not to prosecute. If the decision is made to prosecute, the case goes before a judge, who listens to all the circumstances surrounding the case. If it is indeed a very minor offence, that person would never serve time in a federal institution, let alone receive any kind of jail time whatsoever.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague who spoke before me and who I greatly respect. We sat for quite some time on the Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and we saw which points we agreed on and those on which we had a difference of opinion.

The fact that we are allied with the Conservatives against the Liberals and the NDP is surprising for many of members. It is true that we started from two different viewpoints and arrived at the same result. We believe that almost automatically reducing the sentence of any offender who has served one-sixth of their sentence shows disrespect for judges.

Government Orders

The Conservatives, with their tough on crime stance, or who are trying to look tougher by imposing minimum sentences, have shown how little respect they have for judges. The opposite is true for us. It is because we respect the judgment of judges that we want a significant portion of the sentence to be served.

Now that the Conservatives have changed their minds, I would like to know why, on September 14, 2009, when we introduced a bill on this subject, they objected? Why, on March 4, 2010, when I tried again to introduce the same provisions, did the Conservatives again object?

Why are they now working with us to abolish the one-sixth provision?

• (1325)

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I, too, have great respect for my hon. colleague who just spoke.

I think every single member of this House has the same objective, and that is to make Canada a better place in which to live. I also believe that every member of this House believes in justice. I think every member of this House has honour and respect for our judges. However, even when we respect each other, it does not mean we cannot have a respectful disagreement on policies and principles, and with that in mind, with a great deal of respect, disagree with each other.

I do not think mandatory minimum sentences are a slight on judges whatsoever. It is simply that this august institution called Parliament is sending a signal that we believe in certain circumstances there needs to be a minimum time that one convicted of an offence should spend in jail. There is no disrespect.

I think most of my constituents believe that is appropriate. We all have respect for judges and respect for each other.

When it comes to who brought in which act and who wanted what to happen or not happen, it is a question of timing, a question of what else is going on at the time. It is a question of whether the bill exactly fits in with the agenda of the government. If this is the right time and the right place and if we agree on it, we will vote on it together. If we disagree on it, we will not vote on it together. We will see what happens.

I do not think it is disrespect at all.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that in the case of Earl Jones, he was not a registered investment dealer. Members will know that people who have lost money through registered investment dealers are able to get compensated by the financial institutions, the banks and the organizations that represent these financial dealers.

The problem here is proper regulation, perhaps some trust fund and bonding regulations for people like Earl Jones, so that people do not get taken by these fraudsters in the first place.

That is really what the point is here. Just to show how lax our regulations are, the United States has had 1,200 white-collar criminals behind bars over a five-year period. In Canada, we have had five. Clearly the government has to start looking at how to

prevent the problem in the first place so that people like Earl Jones do not get to defraud people.

I also want to point to some success stories on crime in the United States. As I indicated, the state of Texas, since 2007, has stopped building prisons and has enhanced community corrections approaches, such as drug courts, and has saved \$2 billion over five years. Through that whole process, Texas ended up with a 10% reduction in crime from 2004 to 2009.

That is one example, and I could give many more, of being smart on crime. Republicans, right-wingers in the United States, worked with Democrats to achieve these results.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I guess the short answer is that the only people delaying this legislation in this chamber are the hon. member and his party and the official opposition. I think it is worthwhile to remind ourselves why we are having this discussion.

I will quote from a victim of the Earl Jones fraud who is from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Quebec.

He said, “Obviously you and your loved ones have not been the victims of white-collar crime. As a victim of Earl Jones, I can tell you that the way the law stands now, Jones will be free long before any of us regain any semblance of normalcy and closure. It makes no sense that a man sentenced to 11 years in jail for ruining the lives of 158-plus people will serve only 22 months in jail.

“I can tell you that my father died and the whole estate was stolen all within three months, leaving us completely devastated. Two years later we are still scrambling to pay dad’s 2008 taxes.

“This is a very serious crime with serious long-term repercussions. The penalty should be proportionate to the crime.”

I say to the hon. member that these victims deserve our support. This bill gives it. You are not providing that support by holding up this legislation. I think if you really cared, you would not be obfuscating and not pushing it—

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the chair and not to their colleagues.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak during debate on Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review).

As you know, this bill is the result of an initiative by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who went to see the Prime Minister. My friend the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin had introduced Bill C-434, if memory serves me. As a result of the Conservatives’ repeated refusal to agree to unanimous consent for the passage of that bill, the leader of the Bloc Québécois took the initiative of going to see the Prime Minister. They looked at whether there was a way of finding a simple bill that would meet the objective of abolishing parole after one-sixth of the sentence and on which the House might reach consensus.

Government Orders

I had the opportunity to meet with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to examine the principles on which a bill of this type might be introduced in this House, with, we hoped at that time, the support of all four parties.

Very quickly, in just over two weeks, we agreed on two principles. In fact, the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who is also our justice critic, was with me at the time. The first principle was the abolition of parole after one-sixth of the sentence. In our bill, we were abolishing section 119.1 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which is the only section that refers directly to one-sixth of the sentence. So by abolishing that article, we ultimately abolished the possibility of parole being granted after one-sixth of the sentence.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons told us that sections 125 and 126 had to be abolished at the same time, and we had no problem with that. Once section 119.1 was abolished, sections 125, 126 and 126.1 served no purpose. We quickly agreed that we had the same objectives.

The first principle we agreed on and which is found in Bill C-59, is, as I mentioned, the abolition of the possibility of parole after one-sixth of the sentence, and thus of the accelerated review procedure.

The second principle we felt strongly about was not included in any of the Conservative government's bills on this subject. In fact, we know that Bill C-39, which includes a section on the elimination of the possibility of parole after one-sixth of the sentence, is currently being studied in committee. However, it does not immediately apply to those who have not yet been able to benefit from the one-sixth of sentence rule. So, the second principle that we were calling for and reached agreement on is that everyone who has been sentenced but has not yet been able to benefit from the current provision for parole after one-sixth of the sentence will now be subject to Bill C-59.

After talks with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and officials from the departments of justice and public safety, we agreed that this was acceptable and represented the will of both parties. In addition, and I will come back to this later, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is being respected in all of this. Those were the two principles.

Next, there were meetings to ensure that the text reflected all of this. At the beginning, we thought about using part of a split version of Bill C-39 as the starting point, as happened with the issue of granting pardons last spring, if I remember correctly. In that case, Bill C-23 was split in two. Bill C-23A was fast-tracked here in the House and was passed by the parties. The other part, Bill C-23B, was sent to committee and followed the usual process. This was the first possibility we looked at.

We also looked at the possibility of using Bill C-434, which had been introduced by my colleague for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. We quickly came to the conclusion that it would be better to have a new bill. That resulted in Bill C-59, which is before us now. Again, it contains the two principles that were agreed upon, namely the elimination of parole after one-sixth of the sentence and the fact that people like Earl Jones, who have been sentenced but have not been able to take advantage of parole after the one-sixth of sentence rule,

would be subject to the new law set out in Bill C-59, once it receives royal assent, obviously.

• (1335)

The rest of the bill simply repeals sections that will no longer be necessary in the Criminal Code if sections 119.1, 125, 126 and 126.1 are repealed. The bill is about 10 pages long, but really, only three clauses are important: clauses 3, 5 and 10. No one should be using the bill's complexity as an excuse for any delay in studying it, as the Liberals and NDP have done.

As I was saying, it is a very simple bill that directly targets the objectives we intended. My initial contact with the Liberals and NDP led me to believe that we would have the support of those parties. Why did they change their minds in the middle of the process? I do not know, but it certainly cannot be because of the supposed complexity of the bill, especially since we have been debating this notion in the House for some time now.

I would remind the House that the Bloc Québécois has been proposing this since 2007. Thus, it was not the whole saga surrounding Vincent Lacroix's release after serving just one-sixth of his sentence that led us to promote the abolition of the one-sixth rule.

I will remind the House of certain things that have happened since 2006 that make a good argument for repealing the provisions that allow parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served for a very simple issue, and that argument is, simply, the credibility of the judicial system and the credibility of the sentences handed down by judges. I concur with my hon. colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin: our primary concern is to ensure that the entire judicial system—the judiciary and the sentences handed down by the courts—is considered credible in the eyes of the public, has public support and has the public's trust. Certain criteria must be met in order to benefit from parole at one-sixth of the sentence. We must acknowledge that for the past few years, parole at one-sixth of a sentence has been almost automatic and the conditions have been extremely relaxed and lenient, which has undermined the public's trust a great deal. This is true in both Quebec and Canada, and has affected the entire judicial system and how easy it has been for some criminals, particularly white collar criminals, to take advantage of the parole at one-sixth rule.

I will only talk about a few cases. In July 2006, Paul Coffin, who was involved in the sponsorship scandal, was released after serving one-sixth of his 18-month sentence. Members who have been around for a few years, like me, will remember. In 2006, that shocked a lot of people. In fact, the sponsorship scandal represented a turning point regarding trust in the Liberal Party of Canada.

On November 3, 2006, Jean Brault, another person involved in the sponsorship scandal, was released on parole after having served six months of his 42-month sentence. I can say that that was also a shock for many of us and for many Quebeckers, in particular, but I am sure that English Canada was just as shocked. I remind members that Jean Brault played a very key role in the sponsorship scandal. He practically bragged about it throughout the Gomery inquiry.

Government Orders

In June 2007, as a reaction to these two paroles after one-sixth of the sentence was served, we proposed that this procedure that enabled to fraudsters to serve a tiny fraction of their sentence be abolished, and that was made public. Our critic at the time was Réal Ménard. This goes back some time, since he is no longer here and is no longer the member for Hochelaga. As we know, he was replaced by my colleague, who is the current finance critic. This idea was presented in our justice plan. It was even included in a bill that Mr. Ménard was prepared to introduce before he decided to leave federal politics for municipal politics.

● (1340)

That is when we started promoting this idea of eliminating parole after one-sixth of the sentence. In December 2007, Vincent Lacroix was released for his first federal offence after one-sixth of his sentence.

On August 26, 2008, Jean Lafleur, another figure in the sponsorship scandal, was released after serving seven months of a 42-month sentence. We are talking about three cases, apart from the issues around Vincent Lacroix or Earl Jones, that are related to fraud and attempts to break the rules.

September 2009 was the first time we asked to fast-track Bill C-434, introduced by our justice critic, the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. The only people who opposed the idea at the time were the Conservatives. I remember it quite well: we did not hear a single no from the Liberals or the NDP.

On October 26, 2009, the government introduced Bill C-53 to eliminate the one-sixth sentence, which reached first reading stage only. It was clearly a reaction to the introduction of Bill C-434 by the Bloc Québécois. I must point out that during all that time, every time we sought consent or we asked questions as to why they were opposed to fast-tracking our Bill C-434 to eliminate the chance for parole after one-sixth of the sentence, those sitting on the Conservative benches told us it was very complicated, that they needed to take a thorough look at it and that we could not move forward in this manner.

I am glad the Conservatives have realized that it was not so complicated and that it was just a matter of two small, very simple principles and three key clauses. For the rest, it was just a matter of repealing clauses in order to be consistent with abolishing the clauses I mentioned earlier in my speech.

We introduced our own bill and prompted the government to follow suit. The Conservative government recognized the importance of eliminating the chance for parole after one-sixth of the sentence, but for partisan reasons, it would prefer to pass a government bill instead of a Bloc bill.

Two years ago, on February 15, 2009, Joseph Charles Guité was released on parole after serving six months of a 42-month sentence. This is yet another example. Had the government co-operated with us from the beginning and had the opposition parties, the Liberals and the New Democrats, been willing to be more objective and less partisan, we could have ensured that Guité was not released from prison in 2009 after serving only one-sixth of his sentence.

We brought this issue forward again on March 4, 2010, seeking unanimous consent to quickly pass the Bloc Québécois bill. Once

again, only the Conservatives opposed the bill. For the second time, the Liberals and the NDP did not oppose passing this bill quickly. Once again, we were unable to prevent the release of Vincent Lacroix after he served only one-sixth of his sentence. As the hon. members surely know, this happened on January 27. This time it was for sentences for criminal wrongdoing.

During this time, the Prime Minister called an election and Parliament was prorogued for partisan reasons. All of this caused undue delays in the passing of a bill that would have abolished the practice of parole after one-sixth of the sentence. The government revisited this issue on June 15, 2010, and introduced Bill C-39 to abolish the practice of parole after one-sixth of the sentence, among other things. This bill was passed at second reading and will go to committee. Clearly, the government will have to propose amendments so that Bill C-39 does not duplicate the provisions of Bill C-59, but that is the government's problem. There are other provisions of Bill C-39 that warrant closer examination.

● (1345)

If Bill C-59 is passed, it must apply to Earl Jones, who could be released next fall after serving one-sixth of his sentence. It is therefore urgent in this case, and in others, to ensure that Earl Jones will not take advantage of current provisions.

Once again, we are reaching out to the members of the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party to ensure that the bill to abolish parole after serving one-sixth of a sentence is passed quickly this week. I know that the committee will study the matter this evening. It will be an opportunity for further consideration of the issue. Once again, this bill contains three main clauses, and the remaining provisions are just consequential amendments.

In the time remaining, I would like to discuss the importance of passing this bill. As I have said from the beginning, it is a question of the credibility of the judicial system and the credibility of sentences handed down by judges. And it is compatible with the desire to have a system of rehabilitation. After one-sixth of a sentence, there will still be one-third. There are other opportunities for parole before the end of the sentence. However, we believe one-sixth is definitely not enough.

As I mentioned, such parole is almost automatic. We know that to take advantage of current provisions, and to be released on day parole, the offender must be serving a sentence in a federal institution—thus, a sentence of two or more years. And the crime committed must not have been a violent crime, related to a criminal organization, terrorism or a crime of a sexual nature. Furthermore, the offender cannot have been an accomplice in such an offence and, if he applies for this parole, he must not be subject to an order requiring him to serve at least of half of the sentence for a drug-related offence; it must be a first federal offence committed prior to the first stay in prison. Vincent Lacroix—and this is what is absurd about the law—was able to benefit twice from the one-sixth clause because, with respect to the federal offence committed, he had already been paroled when he was found guilty of his criminal offence. As a last condition, the offender must not be likely to commit a violent crime.

Government Orders

As you can see, there are many criminals who meet these criteria, including the big embezzlers who, for the past few years, have plagued the financial sector.

We believe that, because of issues related to the system's credibility, the practice of granting parole after one-sixth of a sentence must be abolished. I also mentioned that we are calling on the government, which has agreed to our arguments, to make the new provisions of Bill C-59 immediately applicable to all criminals, even those who have already been sentenced, as soon as the bill receives royal assent. It is important to note this, since some people suggest that there may be problems from a constitutional perspective.

Section 11(i) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms reads:

Any person charged with an offence has the right

(i) if found guilty of the offence and if the punishment for the offence has been varied between the time of commission and the time of sentencing, to the benefit of the lesser punishment.

This clearly pertains to the sentence. That is what this section is referring to. It is not referring to the application of the sentence.

Earl Jones' sentence is known. Parole after one-sixth of a sentence is an application of the sentence. Bill C-59 does not alter Earl Jones' sentence and the provision of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms simply does not apply. Some are using this argument; however, it is a false argument designed to put off a decision that must be made.

Once again, I call on the New Democratic Party and the official opposition to show their generosity and intelligence by joining us in quickly passing Bill C-59 at all stages.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little curious as to why the Bloc Québécois is now in a coalition with the Conservative government on issues of crime.

Heretofore, as a member of the Standing Committee on Justice for the last five years, I have not seen the robust presence of the Bloc Québécois with respect to issues surrounding the Criminal Code of Canada. Perhaps it is the third word of that aspect that has bothered the Bloc because it has not supported or discussed in earnest, in any positive way, making changes toward criminology in Canada.

The Liberals have stood for mandatory minimum sentences before. We think the crime agenda of the Conservatives is not evidence-based and is out of whack most of the time, but we offer advice to them on making the laws of Canada harder on criminals and better for society, although they do not always take it.

Where is this new-found Bloc Québécois passion for criminology matters coming from and will we see more of it in the future?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals certainly have nothing to teach us on this. For example, in many cases they have agreed with the Conservative philosophy of minimum sentences for no reason other than political opportunism. But we have had a public justice plan since 2007—I can send it to the member—and we have

always been consistent with that plan, particularly in terms of minimum sentencing and a number of other principles.

The idea of repealing the sections that allow for parole after one-sixth of the sentence has been part of Bloc Québécois election platforms in the various elections since 2007. There was an election in 2008. This is not new and it is not related solely to the fact that there have been a number of white collar criminals who have been able to benefit from these provisions. It is a real part of the Bloc justice philosophy. There is no Bloc-Conservative coalition on justice. In our opinion, this is a specific issue that has to do with the credibility of the justice system.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague across the aisle for his support of our legislation. He mentioned fraudsters like Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones. I think he shares with me the shock that the Liberals and the NDP in the House appear to be opposing the bill. It just blew me away when I heard that.

Perhaps my colleague across the way could comment on why it is so critically important that the bill get passed in a timely and speedy manner, and perhaps he could also speculate on what the motives are of the NDP and the Liberals in opposing the legislation at this point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. I believe that all of us in the House want the public to have trust in the legal system and the entire criminal justice system. For four years now, we have thought that parole after one-sixth of the sentence makes the public uneasy and discredits the entire system. That is one of the reasons we support this idea. I am quite pleased that we managed to agree with the Conservatives on certain principles and to draft Bill C-59. However, I do not understand why the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, who gave us their consent when we sought unanimous consent for Bill C-434 introduced by the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, are withdrawing that consent now. There must be something in their analysis, but this seems to be inconsistent with an approach based on principle. Again, I reiterate my invitation to the Liberal Party and the NDP to support Bill C-59 so that we may pass it unanimously.

• (1355)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend our House leader, who has practically become a legal expert from debating all these cases.

I would like to share some thoughts with him. I am of the opinion that abolishing the practice of parole after one-sixth of a sentence will serve to dissuade potential white collar criminals from committing fraud because of the negative consequences involved. In fact, it seems to me that serving many years in prison would be a significant deterrent. That is why I am urging all members to reconsider their decision and vote in favour of this bill.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières. We do learn a lot here in the House of Commons. My father was a lawyer and a municipal judge, but the comparison ends there.

I think that Bill C-59 is necessary not only to renew the public's confidence in the legal system but also to send a message to criminals, particularly those who commit major fraud. I am thinking of Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix and others who made the news. Even though they did not commit violent crimes, their crimes involved violence. A person who loses most of his or her savings at age 65 or 70 experiences a level of stress that equates to a form of violence. It is not physical violence but psychological violence or a lack of security causing stress. This must be taken into account.

Let us hope that abolishing this provision will make people think twice. But, once again, this is just one component. As we know, the Bloc Québécois submitted a proposal regarding economic crime that includes not only the abolition of the practice of parole after one-sixth of a sentence but also a co-operative effort between police and public accountants to track down these fraudsters.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made some comments about who supported what. The House has not yet had a vote on the bill. The Liberals certainly did oppose the closure motion because it stole from parliamentarians the right to do their job.

The member also referred to the case of Paul Coffin who, in 2005, pled guilty to some 15 charges of defrauding the federal government of \$1.5 million. There was restitution of \$1 million.

Why did the Crown at the time only press for three of the charges and settled on two years less a day? Maybe the problem will not be solved by Bill C-59. Maybe the problem would be solved if we asked why the Crown did not proceed with the serious charges that were originally raised. Does the member have an answer for that?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I understood the Liberal member. Although the Liberals opposed the quick passage of this bill, I hope that they will not oppose passing Bill C-59. I could not get a very clear answer on this from the Liberal Party House leader, but I hope that all members agree on this issue.

As I mentioned, abolishing parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served is just one change that needs to be made to our approach to economic crimes, because the traditional approach is not good enough. We have had some success, but too often, unfortunately, we discover the fraudsters only once the fraud has been carried out.

I believe that police forces need the assistance of accounting experts and that prosecutors need more solid evidence to be able to back up some charges. In the case of Mr. Coffin, the evidence that prosecutors had for some charges was perhaps not enough. As I was saying, I am not an expert in this area, but it is very clear that we need a different approach to economic crimes than the one we have now, which is based far too much on a world that did not have the information technologies we have today.

● (1400)

[English]

ROY MCGREGOR

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Red Deer said goodbye to our former mayor and councillor Roy McGregor, who passed away at the age of 87.

Mr. McGregor served as mayor of Red Deer from 1974 to 1977. He also served five terms as a city councillor until 1992. He played a significant role in Red Deer's development.

However, Roy will most likely be remembered more for what he did outside of council chambers as a volunteer.

In 1940, he joined the Royal Canadian Navy and served on a corvette between St. John's, Newfoundland and Londonderry, Ireland. After the war, he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway, where he lost his leg in a train accident.

In addition, to being a member and volunteer of the legion, Roy was president of the Rotary Club and president of the Kinsmen Club of Red Deer. He received the Alberta Centennial Medal in 2005 for his service and dedication to the community.

On behalf of the people of Red Deer, we thank him for his service, honour his memory and extend our condolences to the McGregor family.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are growing increasingly concerned about the Conservatives law and order agenda, which is tough on taxpayers and irresponsible on crime. A case in point is Bill C-5, which deals with the transfer of Canadians incarcerated in foreign prisons back into Canadian prisons.

There are good reasons to favour such transfers. Canadians incarcerated abroad, who are not transferred to a Canadian prison prior to the completion of their foreign sentence, will have the right to freely walk back into Canada without a Canadian criminal record or any constraints placed upon them by the Canadian parole system. This is most certainly not the way to protect Canadians.

Statements by Members

Yet the Conservatives are trying to give their minister absolute dictatorial powers to refuse such transfers. When asked in the House of Commons about such problems, the minister simply attacked the Liberal Party for allegedly not protecting Canadian victims. However, there are no Canadian victims involved, as we are talking about Canadians incarcerated abroad for crimes committed in foreign countries.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL PEDIATRIC CANCER AWARENESS DAY

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the diagnosis of childhood cancer is a significant source of stress for parents. As the organization Leucan has noted: “To deal with the requirements of the hospital environment and support their child, parents must take important decisions, including the decision to take an employment leave.” The length of treatment and an unclear prognosis can turn acute stress into chronic stress. It becomes nearly impossible to handle professional or financial difficulties.

As a modern, empathetic society, it is our responsibility to ensure that these parents have an environment in which they can concentrate solely on their child's recovery.

On International Pediatric Cancer Awareness Day, it is important to take action to help parents with a child suffering from a serious illness so that they benefit from better support, such as compassionate care leave, which the Bloc Québécois has been calling for.

* * *

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we know, February is Black History Month, the month when we officially recognize the rich and diverse history of Canadians of black heritage.

Throughout Windsor and Essex county, it is quite well known that we were a major terminus of the underground railway for those fleeing slavery in the United States. However, in many other communities across the country there is still little knowledge of black Canadian history.

In the areas of science, medicine, politics and the law, black Canadians have often, in the face of opposition and injustice, made vital contributions to our national mosaic. I take a measure of community and professional pride in the fact that the first Canadian-born black lawyer, Delos Rogest Davis, established a law office in Windsor and his great grandson, Lloyd Dean, a University of Windsor alumnus, is now a judge in the Ontario Court of Justice.

I would encourage my colleagues to take the rest of the month to familiarize themselves with black history, not only in their individual communities but throughout Canada. I would also encourage all Canadians to become more knowledgeable of the significant contributions of the black community.

MAPLE SYRUP

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout my riding of Prince Edward—Hastings, we are proud of the many dedicated and talented producers of maple syrup. This liquid gold is produced in a narrow time frame, when winter is growing weak and spring has not yet blossomed.

While production methods have been improved, the time-honoured process of collecting the sap and distilling it without any chemical agents or preservatives is truly a labour of love. This art form is governed by time, weather, years of experience and, of course, a talented set of taste buds.

One such producer, my friend and neighbour, Harry Dennis, and his family of Three Maples Farm overcame the adversity of having their sugar shack destroyed by fire. With support from many, perseverance and dedication, they rebuilt the sugar shack.

Their hard work and passion was rewarded when they won first place in the light category of the North American Maple Syrup Council. I offer my sincere congratulations.

With the sap now running, I would tell Harry and Joel to empty the lines, stoke that fire and taste that sweet nectar of the gods.

* * *

●(1405)

[Translation]

JEAN-MARC LÉGER

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the entire Francophonie is in mourning. Jean-Marc Léger, one of the architects of the strong bond that unites French-speaking countries, passed away on Sunday. Mr. Léger was a veteran journalist, first with *La Presse* and then as an editorial writer with *Le Devoir*, and he laid the cornerstone for what would become la Francophonie when he founded the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique des pays de langue française, for which he served as the first secretary following the conference in Niamey.

All of his hard work finally paid off at the first Francophonie summit in 1986. The French language was always at the heart of everything Mr. Léger did. He was also the first director of the Office de la langue française du Québec beginning in 1961 and received the Georges-Émile Lapalme award in 2005.

On behalf of all of my colleagues in this House, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones.

* * *

JEAN-MARC LÉGER

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, journalist and author Jean-Marc Léger died yesterday at age 84 following a lengthy illness.

Jean-Marc Léger was born in Montreal and began his career as a journalist at the age of 24, working at the news desk of *La Presse* from 1951 to 1956 and then at *Le Devoir* from 1957 to 1962.

Statements by Members

Mr. Léger was also involved in promoting the French language on the international stage, and he is considered one of the founding fathers of the International Organization of La Francophonie. In 1978, Mr. Léger became Quebec's delegate general in Brussels, and twice in the 1980s, he was an assistant deputy minister. He received a number of other distinctions, including the Ordre national du Québec and the Légion d'honneur de la France.

Today we honour the life of a journalist, a writer and the father of la Francophonie.

* * *

JEAN-MARC LÉGER

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with sadness that we learned of the death of Jean-Marc Léger.

With degrees in law, social science and history, he began his career as a journalist first at *La Presse* and then at *Le Devoir*. He went on to become the first director of Quebec's Office de la langue française and the founder and first secretary general of what is now known as the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie. He was also a pioneer in what is today known as the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. He worked for the Government of Quebec as the assistant deputy minister of education and of foreign relations, and as the commissioner general of La Francophonie.

Throughout his career, and particularly as a writer, Jean-Marc Léger was a strong advocate of the French language and culture. He did much to help Africa. He was also a staunch sovereignist.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer our sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of this great man who left his mark on Quebec.

* * *

[English]

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Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in the special legislative committee dedicated to Bill C-32, we heard from groups representing students from colleges and universities. We also heard from the Canadian Museums Association.

The message we heard very clearly was that Bill C-32 was indeed balanced. We also heard that the Bill C-32 opened up opportunities for the future for Canada's economy, for our students, for our places of higher learning and for industry.

My question for opposition members is very simple. Why are they obstructing and delaying Bill C-32 at committee? Why are we not getting the additional meetings we need for the consideration of the bill so we can return it to the House and open up opportunities for Canada? Why are they holding up protections for creators? Why are they holding back Canada's digital economy?

* * *

● (1410)

INDONESIA

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the horrendous events that took place on February 6 in Indonesia.

Members of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat were publicly killed in the streets and the police failed to protect them. The Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia was established in 1926 and was formally recognized by the government in 1953.

The Ahmadiyyas espouse the Islamic ethics of tolerance, brotherhood, generosity and assistance to the poor and the needy. Indonesia has long embodied the philosophy of allowing different interpretations of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad viewed differences of opinion as a blessing from God. Islam espouses the cosmopolitan ethic: respect among peoples of all faiths and no faith, respect for the dignity of the human person without any discrimination.

I therefore urge the Canadian government to seek assurance from the Indonesian government that it will not allow radicals to take over the country's agenda and that it will ensure protection of all minorities.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has a plan to raise taxes. He is openly and unambiguously calling for a \$6 billion tax increase, not a tax freeze but a tax hike.

The Liberal leader is demanding that his new tax hike be included in the next budget. If we do not support his plan to hike taxes, he will vote against the budget to force an election that Canadians do not want.

His reckless and dangerous tax hike proposal will stop our recovery in its tracks and it will hurt job creation. No wonder he is proud to call himself a "tax and spend" Liberal.

Canada's continued job growth shows our economic action plan and our low tax agenda are achieving positive results for Canadian families.

Our government believes in keeping taxes low. We need to continue with our low tax plan to create jobs, not the Liberal leader's high tax agenda, which will stall our job recovery, kill jobs and set hard-working families back.

* * *

WAWA ROTARY CLUB

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Wawa Rotary Club is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. I was fortunate enough to join its members last weekend as they hosted close to 100 youth as part of the Rotary International Youth Exchange.

The Wawa chapter is part of International District 6290, which also includes a club in Blind River and joins District 7010 with clubs in Elliot Lake, Chapleau, Kapuskasing, Gore Bay and Hearst, in serving the communities of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

Statements by Members

Rotarians are involved with programs that deliver on both the local and international levels, as exemplified by their campaign to eradicate polio. Their motto is “Service Above Self”, something I was able to witness first-hand.

The young people who came to Wawa from all over the world spent a day doing leadership training before taking part in a “Fun in the Snow” day, where many were able to experience things like snowshoeing and ice fishing for the first time.

Community service is important everywhere, but in small-town northern Ontario, it is the bedrock these places are built on. I salute the Wawa Rotary Club and all volunteer groups in the north for doing important work and bringing the communities closer in the process.

* * *

IRAN

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, Iranians in Tehran gathered in the thousands in support of pro-democracy protests in Egypt. Regrettably, approximately 10,000 Iranian security force members used tear gas, batons and pepper spray against those assembled.

What is hypocritical is the support the Iranian regime gave to the democratic movement in Egypt, yet the same regime uses violence to suppress the same demands in Iran.

Canada calls upon the Iranian authorities to allow for peaceful protests and to set free any protestors who may have been imprisoned.

We are also deeply disturbed by calls from Iranian officials for the execution of protestors.

Canada believes that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are universal rights. Iranian citizens should be free to express their political views and affiliations without fear of punishment or imprisonment.

* * *

[Translation]

MIDDLE EAST PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after the jasmine revolution in Tunisia and the popular democratic protest movement in Egypt, the movement is now expanding to other countries in the Middle East, such as Iran.

After the massive demonstrations that were held in the country in 2009 to protest the results of the presidential election won by Ahmadinejad, the green movement has mobilized yet again. A demonstration was held yesterday in Tehran, in support of the Egyptian and Tunisian people, at which the existing Iranian regime was also protested. This demonstration was harshly repressed: people were shot dead, tear gas was fired and opposition leaders were put under house arrest.

The Bloc Québécois supports these popular and democratic protest movements and denounces the conservative elected officials in the Iranian Parliament who now want the death penalty for the

opposition leaders accused of leading yesterday's demonstration. The Iranian people must be able to freely express themselves.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was 46 years ago today that Canada reached a defining moment in its identity, as the red and white maple leaf flag was first raised over Parliament Hill and communities across the country.

In 1964, the great flag debate took place between the government of former Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson and the Progressive Conservatives led by John Diefenbaker who wanted to keep the old red ensign.

This impasse ended in 1965, with the adoption of the maple leaf flag chosen by a parliamentary committee chaired by former Liberal MP John Matheson and designed by former New Brunswick Lieutenant Governor George Stanley.

[Translation]

Former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien created National Flag Day in 1996 to commemorate the day that our flag was raised for the first time, February 15, 1965, as well as to remember the great flag debate. I encourage all Canadians to make the most of National Flag Day by hoisting the maple leaf and reflecting on what it means to be a citizen of this absolutely extraordinary country.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was not the flag in days of yore; not Wolfe's flag, nor Sir John A.'s. It was not the flag of Vimy or Passchendaele. It was not even the flag of Mr. Diefenbaker.

Yet it is “our emblem dear”. When we welcomed the world at Expo in 1967, when we won the 1972 series against the Soviet Union, when we set a Winter Olympic record for gold medals last year in Vancouver, it was our flag.

We are proud to be here representing Canadians under our single red maple leaf raised 46 years ago. Well, most of us are proud. One MP, however, has said, and I quote:

In the case of the Canadian flag, I cannot entirely forget that it is both my flag and a passing imitation of a beer label.

The Liberal leader should be ashamed of himself. We should all be proud to celebrate Flag Day. As one company has said, “I am Canadian”.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation cut funding to a reputable church organization, then doctored a document from her officials to make it look as if they agreed with her judgment when they did not, and then she misled the House. This is conduct unworthy of a minister.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What consequence will the minister face for misleading the House and the Canadian people?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation has been very clear that she took this decision. These kinds of decisions are the responsibility of ministers. When we spend money on foreign aid, we expect it to be used effectively for foreign aid and that is the decision the minister took.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not receive an answer.

The minister cut funding to a religious, Christian organization that is doing a good job. She then altered a document to misrepresent her relationship with her bureaucrats. She also misled the House.

How can she still be a part of cabinet?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has clearly stated, in the House of Commons and in committee, that it was her decision. It is her responsibility to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent effectively for foreign aid. That is what she did.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is tied up in “nots”. She did not listen to her officials. She did not take responsibility. She did not tell the truth. She did not have the integrity to resign.

How can the Prime Minister not demand her resignation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the minister has been clear here and in committee repeatedly that this was her decision, as it is supposed to be. When the government spends money and gives out grants and contributions, those are decisions that ministers have to make, that they have to be responsible for.

It is not the decision of appointed officials, it is not the entitlement of outside organizations. It is a decision of the minister to make sure that taxpayers' dollars are used effectively for foreign aid, and that is what she has done.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the CIDA minister admitted that she ordered that the KAIROS document be doctored. She wanted KAIROS and Canadians to believe that it was the CIDA officials who rejected the application, knowing full well that it was not true.

Oral Questions

Regrettably, she did not use her statement yesterday to apologize to KAIROS and the millions of Canadians who have supported KAIROS over the last 35 years. Will she do so today?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what the president of CIDA said before a committee of the House. She said, referring to her minister:

This is quite normal, and I certainly was aware of her decision. The inclusion of the word “not” is just a simple reflection of what her decision was, and she has been clear. So that's quite normal.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian NGOs have every right to expect that the funding process be transparent and accountable. The treatment of KAIROS, the Canadian Teachers' Federation and CCIC has been characterized by manipulation, false accusations and untruths.

In order to restore Canadians' confidence in how the Conservative government treats these groups and the poorest of the poor, will she now follow her department's advice and restore the KAIROS funding?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister could not have been clearer. Ten times in committee and again yesterday in this place, she was very clear that the decision to grant a contribution to this organization was hers as the minister. That is the way it is supposed to be and she has taken full responsibility for that decision.

It was the right decision, it was the correct decision, it was a decision based on focusing priorities and focusing limited funds to help the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable in the developing world. It was the right decision she made.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when asked about the refusal to fund the humanitarian organization KAIROS, the Minister of International Cooperation answered many times that KAIROS had been subject to a rigorous review and that it did not meet the government's standards. Now we have learned that the department's officials had approved funding and that the minister blocked it.

Will the Prime Minister relieve the Minister of International Cooperation of her duties for having misled the House, a mistake just as serious as the one committed by the former foreign affairs minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been clear on a number of occasions, here and in committee: it was her decision. It is the responsibility of the minister to make decisions to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are used effectively to achieve the objectives of humanitarian aid.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is avoiding the question. No one is questioning that fact that it is her decision, that she made the decision. What we are saying is that she led us to believe that the officials agreed with her, which is not true. What she did was falsify a document.

Does the Prime Minister find such conduct acceptable? He has no choice. Why does he not act as swiftly as he did with the former minister of status of women? That did not take long. Is the Prime Minister motivated by ingrained ideological reasons?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here and in committee, on a number of occasions, the minister was clear: it was her decision and not that of her officials. It is the responsibility of the minister to ensure that the government uses public money to achieve the objectives of humanitarian aid. The minister made the right decision.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here we have another example of misinformation from this government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs led the House to believe that he had not received any requests from the Tunisian authorities for Canada to freeze the assets of former dictator Ben Ali or members of his family. That is not true.

How can the minister deny the many requests made to the Canadian government urging it to take the necessary steps to freeze the assets of Ben Ali?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have always answered my colleague's question clearly. The Tunisian authorities have taken steps. We have encouraged the Tunisian authorities to take steps to allow us to work with them on developing options to freeze the assets of those who are not welcome in Canada.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how could the minister, yesterday, still maintain his story that he did not receive any request, when a press release from the Tunisian embassy, dated January 26, confirmed that: "the Embassy has taken the necessary steps with the Canadian authorities...to freeze and protect assets...that might be held by ousted President Ben Ali, his wife, and members of their families"?

What more is the minister waiting for to freeze the assets of the Ben Ali family?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague reviews yesterday's transcript, he will see that he began his question by talking about Egypt. With regard to Egypt, I told him that we still had not received such a request. However, I continued by specifying once again that we are fully prepared to work with the Tunisian authorities on freezing the assets of those who are not welcome in Canada.

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was Vale, U.S. Steel, Potash and Alcan. Tomorrow it could be the TSX. Today, however, it is Xstrata and Xstrata is taking Canadian taxpayers and workers to the cleaners.

Nickel prices are up 50%, production is at a record in this country, and Xstrata's profit on nickel was half a billion dollars. What does it do? It turns the massive profit into a paper loss by selling off a property in Brazil so that it would not have to pay taxes here in Canada or contracted wages to the workers.

Why does the Prime Minister let Canadians down like this?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, there are certain laws in place that companies can avail themselves of. I do not know the particular details that the hon. member is dealing with. All I can tell him is that since Xstrata has invested in this country, it has created jobs. It has invested in our country, has invested in mines and has invested in other businesses, which means jobs for Canadians.

Why is the hon. member opposed to that?

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the decisions about the Investment Canada Act are made in secret, it is impossible to know what the net benefits for Canada are. For example is it years of lockout, the transfer of the takeover cost to taxpayers or the refusal to pay the Xstrata workers in Sudbury the bonuses to which they are entitled? Is this not the case?

Will the Prime Minister finally change the Investment Canada Act to protect taxpayers and workers?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister and I have both said, it is important to make changes to the Investment Canada Act. It is important to have greater transparency and more information for Canadians. We agree with the NDP.

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Xstrata made over \$500 million last year on nickel but then avoided its responsibilities to pay taxes here in Canada by turning a massive Canadian profit and then selling off a property in Brazil. The result was that no income tax was paid here and there was no bonus for the Canadian workers.

Will the Prime Minister direct the Canada Revenue Agency to launch an investigation into this practice by Xstrata and bring that report back to the House?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will take the hon. leader's accusations seriously and see whether there is any merit in them.

Oral Questions

I would mention to the House that the hon. member seems so concerned about Canadian jobs and yet whenever there was an opportunity in the House to vote for things that would help Canadian jobs, that would help employment, that would help investment and that would help the infrastructure of this country, that party voted against them.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation has lost all credibility. She tried to mislead the House by falsifying documents. It is shameful. The Criminal Code has sanctions for such acts.

Is it not true that the real reason the minister is still in cabinet is because she was doing exactly as the Prime Minister ordered?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to the member or to anyone in the House that I completely reject the premise of the hon. member's question.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good to reject it when you know it is true.

The minister tried to pin her shameful, unwarranted decision on the officials in her department. Blaming public servants seems to be a recurring theme with the Conservatives. That is what the Minister of Industry tried to do with Statistics Canada. That led to the chief statistician's resignation and completely altered the census process.

Is this not the Prime Minister's signature move?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister was clear. She said 10 times in committee and in the House yesterday that it was her decision not to give funding to this organization. It could not be any clearer.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the difficult part is that for a full year the minister's answer and the answer of her parliamentary secretary in the House was that the decision that was taken was taken by CIDA, as an organization, that it was taken according to its priorities and that it was its decision. For a full year she hid behind CIDA making that decision.

Suddenly, in December she said, "No, I made it myself", but she did not admit in December who it was that put the knot in the "not".

How does the minister justify this kind of subterfuge?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was certainly a lot of bluster.

The minister said some 10 times before the House of Commons foreign affairs and international development committee that she was the one who made the decision. She said that again yesterday.

I do not know how things operated when the member was in government in Ontario, but on this side of the House ministers make

those types of decisions and ministers take responsibility, which is exactly what the minister has done.

The minister has done an outstanding job on international development in every corner of the world. She has done a fantastic job. Canada is awfully lucky to have her.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister takes so much responsibility for her decisions that she is apparently incapable today of standing in her place and telling us why the story that is being told on her behalf, not by her, is a completely different story than the one she was perpetrating around the House of Commons for a full year.

The minister did not have the courage to tell the committee when she met with us in December that in fact she was the one who authorized the "not". Why did the minister not tell the truth to the committee in December when she appeared before it?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the horror of rightful indignation from the former leader of the NDP.

The minister is the one who made the decision and she has always been incredibly clear on that. The minister made the right decision and the correct decision to focus our foreign aid spending on helping the most vulnerable and not on Canadian NGOs.

* * *

● (1435)

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs replied earlier to my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher that the question he asked yesterday about freezing Ben Ali's assets was not clear. His question was "whether or not Canada has frozen the assets of members of the Ben Ali entourage". The minister cannot claim that he did not understand, because he replied, "...as I have told my colleague many times: the request has to come from the Tunisian government".

Since the minister knows that the request was sent, how does he explain his inaction in that regard?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague did not read the part before that, which was about Egypt. As I indicated, the country must first ask us to intervene. That applies to all countries. In that regard, as I have been repeating for a few weeks now, we are working closely with the Tunisian government to come up with options in order to freeze the assets of individuals who are not welcome in Canada.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my preamble with Egypt. The day after Mubarak's fall from power, Switzerland immediately froze his entire family's assets. I will now move on to Tunisia and I hope the minister can keep up. Tunisia has been asking for such assets to be frozen for some time now. Can the minister answer my question regarding Tunisia? Can he pull his head out of the Egyptian sand and answer me about Ben Ali?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep it simple for the Bloc Québécois leader. He just referred to the earlier discussion about Egypt, which he did not do a few minutes ago. As for pulling one's head out of the sand, perhaps he could pull his own head out of the sand.

* * *

QUEBEC CITY ARENA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): On March 5, 2001, Transport Canada issued a press release announcing “four projects for priority action in support of Toronto's bid for the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games”. The minister responsible for the Quebec City region stated yesterday in the House that “most of the investments made at that time were for the purpose of redeveloping the lakeshore”.

How can the minister deny that the federal government spent \$500 million backing Toronto's Olympic bid? One of these versions is true—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has the floor.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the same press release, in the second paragraph, it states that the projects announced are for waterfront revitalization. Four projects were announced: the preparation of the Port Lands district, a second platform at Union Station, an extension to Front Street, and an environmental assessment. That is what was announced, not an Olympic bid.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote another report.

In an Environment Canada report released in 2007–08, it states that “Each of the three orders of government announced a funding commitment of \$500 million...[for] Toronto's bid for the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games”.

Why are the reasons used to justify the funding of the Toronto bid no longer valid when it comes to funding an arena in Quebec City? *[English]*

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the previous federal government did was provide \$500 million to support the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront.

Some of the fund was to treat toxic chemical-laden lands and some of it was to beautify the city. It had nothing to do with respect to Toronto and the Olympics.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how costly will the Conservatives' bigger prison agenda be? How much will it cost Canadian taxpayers for a policy that failed everywhere to fight crime effectively?

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates the cost at \$5.1 billion annually for only one bill. This is an astounding cost. Imagine what the cost must be for the whole big jail agenda. The government

now admits that it has a number but it does not want to release it. It must. Parliamentarians are entitled to see this number. Canadians have the right to see this number. After all, it is their money. The government should table it. Why will it not table it?

● (1440)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians must come first. Part of keeping our communities safe is keeping dangerous criminals behind bars, not releasing them onto our streets early.

I have indicated from the very beginning that the cost of the expansion of the prisons, the building of new units, approximately 2,700 units, is \$2 billion over five years.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he began by saying that it was \$86 million over two years. He then went on to say that it was \$2 billion over five years. He is juggling the figures.

We need to know the truth about all the costs involved with the megaprison policy, which has failed everywhere there has been an attempt to implement it, including in Australia and Great Britain; even the Americans are no longer interested in it.

How much is it going to cost? The government admits that it knows what the figure is, but it will not tell Canadians. All of this money will not be available to effectively fight crime. Canadians have a right to know this information when it comes to their health, education and environment. After all, it is their money.

How much will the prison program cost them? How much?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are strange concerns coming from a man who was going to cripple our economy with a carbon tax.

Yesterday, for nearly eight hours, the House debated a motion to advance Bill C-59. The Liberal critic talked about keeping white-collar criminals out of prison. He quoted United States congressmen. He cited California. The number of times he stood up for the rights of victims was zero.

Does it cost money to keep prisoners in prison? Absolutely. Is it worth it? Do not ask the Liberals.

* * *

[Translation]

JUDICIARY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is insulting and denigrating the Canadian courts and attacking the integrity of judges, the Minister of Justice sits and does nothing.

He preaches about law and order but does not practise what he preaches. His oath of office is to preserve the integrity of our legal system. Has he forgotten his oath or does he share his colleague's opinion?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cited the Supreme Court on Friday when I spoke about how we have to respect the decisions made by quasi-judicial bodies, such as the IRB, and CIC decision-makers when we want to deport foreign criminals and terrorists. It is very simple: on this side of the House, we want to implement laws to deport foreign criminals.

Are the Liberals not concerned about the presence of foreign criminals here in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising the minister will not at least defend the 39 Conservative cronies the government has appointed since the last election.

One, Brian Abrams, was a Conservative candidate just weeks before he was appointed as a judge. Judicial advisory committees which vet these appointments usually take months. It is not believable that Mr. Abrams could have been properly vetted.

Is it not the only reasonable explanation that the Conservatives politically interfered to appoint their pal?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is slamming and slurring the judiciary of this country. We have made over 350 appointments and all of them have cleared an impartial committee made up of representatives of the provincial governments, the Law Society, the Bar Association and members of the law enforcement community. These are outstanding individuals and I am very disappointed that the member would cast aspersions on any of them. He should be ashamed of himself.

* * *

[Translation]

EARLY PAROLE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although the Liberal member for Lac-Saint-Louis and the NDP member for Outremont are trying to block our bill to abolish early parole for white collar criminals, the victims of Earl Jones in Quebec are calling on us to take action. Yesterday, these victims called on all the political parties in Ottawa to stand up for Earl Jones' victims, do the right thing, take action now and support the passage of Bill C-59.

Can the Minister of Public Safety tell us the status of this important bill?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote one of Earl Jones' victims in a letter to the NDP member for Outremont. The victim states:

We don't want to see this man out on parole as early as next December...Please work with the other parties to come to a good conclusion for all of us that have been victims—

Oral Questions

Criminals who prey on the most vulnerable members of our society should not be released just to save a buck. Is the cost to keep criminals behind bars worth it? Absolutely, but do not ask the member for Outremont or the Liberal public safety critic. Ask a victim.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like the Minister of Industry on Statistics Canada, or the Minister of National Defence on Richard Colvin, the Minister of International Cooperation has now joined the growing list of cabinet ministers caught trying to defend the indefensible. The minister responsible for CIDA has admitted she misled a parliamentary committee and doctored a document. In most places that is called forgery.

Will the Prime Minister finally show some leadership and remove her from cabinet?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, it will come as no surprise to my friend from Ottawa Centre or to the House that I do not accept the premise of the member's question. The minister made the right decision. She made the correct decision. She made the appropriate decision, the suitable position, the principled decision, the respectable position and the courageous decision not to give a grant to the organization. She did the right thing.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about when someone is telling the truth or not. Yesterday the minister said she directed someone to insert that word to kill a grant for KAIROS.

This is what she said on December 9 when asked, "Did you put that word in there?" She said, "No." When asked, "Do you know who did it?" She said, "I do not know".

Where I come from, that is misleading. That is not telling the truth. That is a premise for the Prime Minister to ask the minister to leave cabinet. Is he going to do it, yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly made the decision not to provide financial support to this organization. She could not be clearer. She said that 10 times in December when she was before committee. As to who was holding the pen, the minister made a tough and challenging decision. She did the right thing and all members of the House and all Canadians should be very glad to have this capable minister working for them.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry acknowledges that the AMF has considerable power in the planned transaction between the Toronto and London stock exchanges. The AMF is a major strategic asset for Quebec. By creating a single securities commission, the federal government would eliminate the AMF and stifle Quebec's voice for Toronto's benefit.

Will the government reconsider its decision to create its infamous securities commission, which would reduce the powers of Quebec? Who will do that?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have brought 10 willing partners from across the country and provinces to support this. We referred it to the Supreme Court and we await its decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as he did yesterday, the Minister of Finance is claiming that 10 provinces—the Minister of State just said it again—are working with him on this proposed commission. What planet is he living on? Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and British Columbia are all so opposed to the proposal that they are intervening against it in the Supreme Court.

Could the Minister of Finance, or the Minister of State, tell us which mysterious 10 provinces support the proposal? Even his own province of Alberta is against it. Does the Minister of Finance's province of Ontario count as 10?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what planet we live on. We live on a planet that wants to protect our investors. We live in a country where we welcome investments from outside this country.

We have heard it from many different companies that want to come to Canada, that want to invest, that want to be part of this great economy we have. They face the challenge of 13 separate regulations. They have to jump through 13 different sets of hoops. They pay for the applications.

That is not a welcome mat. We want to provide a welcome mat for investors coming to this country.

* * *

• (1450)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, secret immigration quotas obtained under the Access to Information Act show that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is planning on slashing reunification for parents and grandparents this year.

Even worse, Ukrainian Canadians should not expect to see their loved ones anytime soon, since Ukraine has been allotted only 25 of 11,200 spots.

Odds are against Ukrainian Canadians' parents and grandparents ever being reunited with their families in their lifetime. Why such a heartless quota?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year public servants at Citizenship and Immigration Canada make allocations to particular missions typically based on the number of applications received the year before. It is done in a completely independent fashion by our public servants.

What is really interesting is that we are now benefiting from more immigration of Ukrainians to Canada than was the case under the previous government. We are benefiting from more immigration overall, immigration that is helping to grow our economy and our future prosperity.

Instead of playing political games with immigration like the Liberals do, we believe it should be calibrated to grow our economy and create new jobs.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is the secret quota for Poland? How many parents and grandparents can Canada's one million Polonia expect to welcome in 2011? We can count it on one hand: five.

The government is leaving Canadians to fend for themselves when it comes to child care. Now it is clamping down on new Polish Canadians' ability to reunite with their loved ones.

How can the minister and his party claim to support family values while pursuing such an anti-family agenda?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that comes from the same member who accused me of going on a junket when I represented Canada at Auschwitz. The member is out of control.

The reality is very simply that last year we received the largest number of newcomers to Canada in 57 years and 80% of those newcomers were family members. They were husbands and wives, dependent children, parents and grandparents.

We have the most generous family reunification program in the world. Last year we received more family members from all around the world than was the case under the Liberal government. Canada is open for newcomers.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we heard that the government wants to close Service Canada offices all across the country, especially in rural areas.

News reports show that five offices in Cape Breton will be closed. Rural communities like St. Peter's and Port Hood will lose access to Service Canada.

How does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development explain that by closing Service Canada offices it is in the best interests of all Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our goal is to provide all Canadians with timely, co-operative service so that they can get access to the benefits to which they are entitled.

That is why we are changing how we deliver services. Instead of having people there who are only basically available to hand out brochures, we are putting in full-time Service Canada personnel on a regular basis so that we can actually provide Canadians with the service they need.

Canadians will be able to actually apply for their old age security or their guaranteed income supplement, even for a social insurance number, and they will get the professional help they need when they need it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to make her understand. In New Brunswick, 44% of employment insurance cases awaiting review take more than 29 days to process. In Canada, it is 45%; in Quebec, 55%.

In some cases, it can take up to 41 weeks to process Canada pension plan and old age security cases.

In Bathurst alone, Service Canada is laying off 60 call centre employees.

How can the minister justify these layoffs? They are providing more than just brochures in Bathurst. They are providing services.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have ensured that seniors have access to their benefits as quickly as possible.

Statistics show that 92% of those who apply for old age security receive their benefits for the first time as soon as they become eligible. That is very important. Last year, we began to automatically renew their applications, which helped 96% of seniors who applied for the guaranteed income supplement.

* * *

• (1455)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, we learned how immigrants from Sri Lanka, Mexico and Colombia are exploiting our immigration system by paying human smuggling rings.

By paying to commit illegal acts, these people are showing contempt for Quebec and its laws. Unlike the Conservatives from Quebec, the Bloc MPs are opposed to our measures against human smuggling and their complicit and willing clients.

Can the minister tell the House about the measures he has taken to protect the regions of Quebec from the threats posed by illegal immigration?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right to say that we have a problem with human smuggling at the border between the United States and Quebec. It is one of the reasons we have to pass Bill C-49, in order to deal with the human smugglers

who are taking Canada for granted and violating the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Unfortunately, the leftist urban elite in Quebec are against a strong approach to this matter.

* * *

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for thousands of people from the south shore, crossing the Champlain Bridge is a daily necessity. My constituents are worried. Everyone has known for some time now that the bridge is reaching the end of its lifespan, yet nothing is being done.

Transport officials are more concerned with how to restore the toll booths than how to replace the busiest bridge in Canada.

Does the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities understand that when the concrete blocks are falling down, his pious assurances that the bridge will last another 10 years ring hollow?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House and all Canadians, particularly those living in the Montreal area, that the Champlain Bridge is absolutely safe. There is a study taking place at the present time. We are looking forward to the results of that study by Quebec and the federal government. We will have better information once that report is in our hands.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LABOUR

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, several unions in Quebec and Canada will be demonstrating today in support of Mexican unions. There are still too many illegal and violent attacks against independent Mexican unions.

Canada should be helping to improve the plight of Mexican workers, but the Canadian government is refusing or cutting funding for co-operative programs with labour organizations in the south.

Will the minister admit that she is making these cuts because standing up for the rights of workers and labour organizations does not jive with her Conservative ideology?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to report that I work very closely with my counterparts both in the United States and in Mexico. Indeed, the opposition member may know that I recently returned from Mexico where I had a very meaningful dialogue with the secretary there. We discussed all these issues.

I also took the opportunity to meet with Mexican unions as well, to listen to the workers, because that is the best way to hear from the people what is going on in their own country.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should not have to wait for seven years to be united with their parents. In Beijing and New Delhi, 20,000 parents are stuck waiting in the queue. Some parents have died waiting to live with their children here, and some never got a chance to hug their grandchildren.

The minister slashed the immigration quota for parents by 40%. How can the minister claim to respect the elderly, to believe in family values?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. When we plan the immigration levels, we put priority number one on job creation. We need young immigrants who are going to pay taxes and contribute to our health care system. We need to prioritize spouses and dependent children. We need to discharge our humanitarian obligations, and we are receiving more refugees,

We cannot satisfy 100% of the demands 100% of the time without massive increases in the overall level of immigration, which we simply are not capable of absorbing even though we have the highest relative level of immigration in the world.

We are committed to family reunification and we are delivering on that.

* * *

• (1500)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is hard for struggling Canadian businesses to get ahead in today's global economy. Canadian businesses are concerned that the self-proclaimed tax-and-spend Liberal leader is planning to hike taxes by a shocking 6%. The Liberal leader said that if the government does not raise taxes in the budget, he will vote against the budget to force an election.

Can the Minister of International Trade tell the House what he is doing to help Canadian business owners get ahead?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal leader is plotting an election that nobody wants and nobody needs, our government is focused on the economy.

We have undertaken ambitious programs to open doors for Canadian businesses and workers abroad. We have concluded new free trade agreements with eight countries and are negotiating close to 50 others. Last week we had positive news of rising exports and the first trade surplus monthly in almost a year.

In fact, while this is good news, the economic recovery remains fragile, so we are focused on doing the work that Canadians want us to do on the economy. What Canadians absolutely do not want is the reckless Liberal tax hike the Liberals want to impose.

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the wear and tear on the Champlain Bridge causes more and more concern with each passing day. Yesterday, a motorist thankfully and miraculously avoided disaster when a block of concrete from an overpass at the bridge smashed into his windshield. The Conservatives do not seem to understand the urgent need to act.

Rather than giving \$6 billion in tax breaks to the most profitable companies, would not the minister be better advised to use this money to replace this infrastructure, which is vital to the Canadian economy?

[English]

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, there is a report coming which was commissioned by the Province of Quebec and ourselves on the future of the Champlain Bridge.

We have invested significantly, \$212 million, in the bridge to make certain that repairs are looked after and the bridge is safe.

I can report to the House that the bridge is absolutely safe.

* * *

[Translation]

SHIPPING NUCLEAR WASTE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite assurances from the Minister of Natural Resources about shipping nuclear waste up the St. Lawrence, the public continues to be against the idea, and the Government of Quebec has expressed its own reservations about all this.

How can the minister support the decision by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission without the prior approval of the Government of Quebec for this shipment through its territory?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, protecting the safety of Canadians is the number one priority. That is why we have an independent commission that studied this matter from a scientific perspective, and we have confidence in this regulator, which is made up of qualified experts.

I say again, the commission found this shipment to be safe after 77 groups and individuals intervened at public hearings that were open to everyone, including governments.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I have a number of persons in the gallery today to draw to the attention of hon. members.

I would start first by indicating to hon. members the presence in the gallery of the hon. Dr. Dipu Moni, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Government Orders

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. David Alward, Premier of New Brunswick. He is accompanied by three of his ministers: the Hon. Paul Robichaud, Minister for Economic Development; the Hon. Bruce Fitch, Minister for Local Government; and the Hon. Marie-Claude Blais, Attorney General and Minister for Justice and Consumer Affairs.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of four of the five finalists for the 2011 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing: Tim Cook, Shelagh Grant, Lawrence Martin, and Anna Porter.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

• (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Twice during question period I referenced a document that I received as a result of an ATIP request in which the secret quotas for family reunification are listed, for example, for Poland, 5, and Ukraine, 25.

Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for this document to be tabled in the House so that people can see the heartless numbers of those who have been targeted, the quotas not only for Warsaw and Kiev, but also for Nairobi, Ankara, and a list of other places.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I join in the debate on Bill C-59, the Abolition of Early Parole Act today.

Like many of my colleagues, the hon. members in this House, I have spent quite some time talking to Canadians about the need for this legislation. I am confident that all of us are hearing the same thing; that it is time to take action to crack down on white-collar offenders and we need to do it now.

I have heard from victims who have told me that they are tired of seeing and hearing about offenders who have perhaps wiped out

their life savings and are not serving appropriate times for their actions. I have spoken to ordinary Canadians and to the families of innocent victims and they told me that it was time for all of us to work together to crack down on the activities of white-collar offenders who might not use a gun but who, nonetheless, wreak havoc on the lives of hard-working and law-abiding Canadians. They told me that we need to get tough on those offenders whose illegal activities leave scores of victims in their wake.

I am therefore pleased to support the bill before us today, which would do all of that and would build on our government's already impressive record of standing up for victims and cracking down on all types of crime.

Over the last five years, our government has done a lot to make our streets safer through investments in crime prevention, law enforcement and in the tools for police officers to do their jobs. In fact, several of our justice bills last year alone received royal assent, including: Bill C-14, which targets gang violence and organized crime by addressing issues such as gang murders, drive-by shootings and additional protection for police and the police officers; Bill C-25, which fulfills our government's commitment to Canadians to help keep offenders from being given two-for-one credit and sometimes three-for-one credit in pre-sentencing custody; and Bill S-4, which will help combat the complex, serious and growing problem of identity theft and identity fraud.

I am also proud to say that our government recently passed legislation to help reform the pardon system. In particular, we have made sure that the National Parole Board of Canada has the discretion it needs to determine whether granting a pardon would bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

We have passed legislation targeting gang violence and organized crime by addressing issues such as gang murders, drive-by shootings and additional protection for police officers.

We recently passed legislation to strengthen the National Sex Offenders Registry and the national DNA data bank in order to better protect our children and other vulnerable members of society from sexual predators.

Of course our government has most recently introduced legislation to crack down on individuals involved in the despicable crime of human smuggling, which threatens our communities as well as Canada's immigration system.

In addition, our government has provided more money to the provinces and the territories so that they can hire additional police officers. I am very proud to note that Statistics Canada reported in December that the number of police officers across Canada is now at its highest point since 1981.

As well, the government has taken action to help young people make smart choices and avoid becoming involved in gang activity through programs funded through the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Our government has taken significant action that achieves results in tackling crime in our communities. We will continue to do more.

Government Orders

It is no secret that crimes and criminal activities can take on many forms. We often hear about violent gun crimes and communities which can and often do shatter lives. As I have mentioned, our government has done a lot to get tough with offenders who commit such terrible acts.

Of course, there are other types of crimes that can be just as devastating even though they do not involve the use of handguns. All of us have heard about the ruined lives left behind by white-collar offenders who prey on law-abiding citizens, often leaving them with nothing to show for a lifetime of hard work and savings for their retirement.

All of us have heard about the need to take action, to crack down on white-collar crime and stand up for the victims. That is what the legislation before us today would do.

• (1510)

As we have heard today, many offenders obtain parole early through a process called accelerated parole review. First-time offenders who have committed non-violent offences can access day parole at one-sixth of their sentence and full parole at one-third of their sentence. Unless the Parole Board of Canada has reasonable grounds to believe these offenders will commit a violent offence if released, it must release them into the community.

This means that, in some cases, a fraudster, a thief or even a drug dealer can be back on the streets early. Such an offender could be sentenced to 12 years but actually be released into the community on day parole in just 2 short years and fully paroled at just 4 years. The status quo gives the Parole Board little or no discretion in dealing with these cases. The test is whether an offender is likely to commit a violent offence. As a result, even if the Parole Board believes the offender is likely to commit another fraud, another theft or another drug offence, it is nonetheless compelled to release them.

What makes the review process even more expedited is that these accelerated parole reviews are accomplished through a paper review by the Parole Board of Canada, whereas regular parole reviews are normally done by way of a hearing.

The test for accelerated parole review is also lower. The Parole Board of Canada only has to have reasonable grounds to believe that the offender will not commit a violent offence, whereas, with other offenders, the test is whether the person is an undue risk to commit any type of crime if released. The test for accelerated parole review is whether someone is going to commit a violent offence. Even if the Parole Board believes that someone will commit another fraud, the board is still compelled to release the person under supervision at one-sixth of his or her sentence. In many cases that means that people who are convicted of crimes that have had devastating effects on the lives and livelihood of Canadians often spend very little time in prison. The end result is that offenders convicted of white-collar crimes are often released under supervision after only a very few short months. Offenders are given lengthy sentences which do not result in much time actually spent in prison.

This offends Canadians' sense of justice and it undermines their faith in our justice and in our corrections system. It should offend all of our senses of justice, and we need to change this. Canadians want change and that is what our government is delivering.

Bill C-59 would abolish accelerated parole review and repeal sections of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that govern the accelerated parole review regime. It would mean that offenders who commit non-violent or white-collar crimes are put on the same footing as other offenders. They would be eligible for regular day parole review six months prior to full parole eligibility and full parole review after serving one-third of their sentence. Rather than being subject to a paper review, they would be subject to an in-person hearing. The test as to whether they should be released would be whether they present an unmanageable risk of committing another crime. It is a very key point and something that all members should highlight.

The changes that our government is proposing would mean that Canadians can have faith that offenders convicted of white-collar crimes will not escape full accountability for their actions.

Our government has listened to the concerns of victims of fraud and other crimes and we are taking action on their concerns. By fixing the problem of early parole for offenders, we are following through on our tackling crime agenda. Our government believes that Canadians deserve a justice system that balances the rights of offenders with the rights of law-abiding citizens.

The commitment we are announcing today brings us another step closer to this important goal. Once again I urge all hon. members to work with the government to ensure that Bill C-59 is passed into law in the most timely way possible.

• (1515)

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-59 even if the other parties have had no real interest in seriously debating or discussing it. Today we are here so the Bloc and Conservatives can pay lip service to getting tough on crime.

Bill C-59 is hastily prepared legislation that introduces sweeping changes to the Criminal Code that would alter the parole rules for every non-violent first-time offender, regardless of the severity of the crime. The Bloc struck a backroom deal with the Conservatives, which we know, to fast-track the bill without any serious committee study or consultation with victims. Interestingly enough, the Quebec bar has said that it does not agree with the position that has been taken by the Bloc. In fact, it said:

The Québec Bar would like to state its opposition to Bill C-59 concerning accelerated parole and conditional release, which you introduced in the House of Commons on February 9.

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Firstly, the Bar is opposed to the retroactive effect of the proposed legislation. ... we would like to point out that some people chose to plead guilty after considering the advantages of accelerated parole. Changing the sentencing rules after these people have made their decisions and their choices is unfair and opens the door to constitutional challenges.

Secondly, the Québec Bar believes that before this bill is passed, it should go through the same process as all legislation, including a thorough study of the advantages and disadvantages of the current legislation and an impact study of the proposed changes. The findings of these studies should be made public so that there can be informed debate on this issue.

We can all agree that serious cases of white-collar fraud have been terribly damaging to families across Canada and particularly in Quebec. We share the anger and frustration that is felt when serious criminals have their sentences reduced.

Over a year and a half ago, the Liberal Party called for legislation to put an end to parole for white-collar criminals who have only served one-sixth of their sentences. The Liberal Party was the first party to put forward a comprehensive proposal to deal with white-collar crime.

The Conservatives could have supported the proposals made by us concerning parole but they chose to play politics instead and fraudster Vincent Lacroix was given conditional release. Now they are simply trying to do damage control and win some votes in Quebec. They had the chance but they were not concerned with protecting victims at that time.

The Liberal caucus wants to see the current flawed proposal amended so that it better reflects the high standard Liberal position that we had previously put forward that better targets the real problem: the serious white-collar fraudsters who should not be eligible for early parole. The other parties seem intent on making it look as though we are not supportive of ensuring that white-collar fraudsters are not eligible for early parole. Again, this is not the case at all and their position is deceitful.

Two years ago, several of my colleagues participated in a press conference with the victims of Earl Jones' Ponzi scheme. We were calling for increased measures to protect victims of white-collar crimes then. We were asking the government to move quickly on this matter and to introduce legislation that would eliminate one-sixth accelerated parole for white-collar criminals. We were especially concerned with eliminating early parole for fraudsters who have multiple victims and have inflicted serious financial damage to individuals and families.

I am wondering why the Conservatives have taken so long to get down to doing anything about this problem and, when they do it, it is ill thought out and flawed to the core. Instead of trying to rush this legislation through Parliament, we are asking for serious debate and discussion on a very serious matter. Making legislation as a belated knee-jerk reaction to an issue is highly emotional and is no way to conduct the business of Parliament.

What needs to be done is that experts in the judicial field need to be consulted and the committee must carefully consider all the options that are available, as is now being proposed by the Québec Bar. This is too important a matter not to be looked at thoroughly.

We are all aware of the devastating consequences that white-collar crimes have on the lives of people. We are all becoming more aware

of the need to be vigilant in protecting our investments and who we trust with our money.

● (1520)

We are all in agreement that action needs to be taken to ensure white-collar criminals are held accountable for their crimes, which can be just as devastating to the well-being of people as violent crimes. We have been asking the government to take action for some time now. It is only now getting around to it.

The spectre of white-collar crime is increasing. In the past, white-collar crimes tended to be considered victimless crimes. When people thought of white-collar crimes, they typically thought of crimes being committed against large corporations and governments.

However, with the advent of the likes of Bernie Madoff in the United States and Earl Jones in Canada, we have seen the human face of fraud and devastating consequences it has for hundreds, if not thousands, of people. People have reacted with anger and frustration at these crimes and the men who willingly carried them out over the years.

The entire life savings of people have been wiped out and investments completely disappeared, leaving them with nothing and no chance to ever recover.

As we know, under the current system, white-collar offenders can be released after as little as one-sixth of their sentence in prison for their crimes. Bill C-59 could give us all a chance to change this and to support Canadians who have become the victims of crime, if the government would take the time to get this legislation right.

The Liberal Party has always considered helping victims of crimes to be at the core of our justice policies and we have always supported victims to ensure their voices are heard.

The Liberals have repeatedly said, since the revelation of the criminal activities of Earl Jones, that the current government needs to focus its criminal legislation amendments on protecting victims and preventing crimes.

Back in 2009, we suggested that the country needed tougher sentences for white-collar criminals. The laxity of the current legislation has made Canada an attractive place for those who wish to rip off their fellow citizens. As a country, we need to ensure that the consequences of such actions are stringent enough to truly deter this type of criminal activity.

Keeping our laws focused on protecting Canadians means that we need to go further than simply addressing the penalties in place for those who would seek to defraud hard-working Canadians. The government needs to help victims by negotiating international treaties that would allow stolen money being held overseas to be tracked and returned to the rightful owners.

Furthermore, the Conservative government needs to revamp Canada Revenue Agency procedures regarding tax moneys paid by victims on fictitious interest payments. Law-abiding Canadians who have diligently filed their tax returns and paid the calculated income tax based on documents with false amounts, provided to them by people engaged in criminal activity, should be entitled to a refund of any tax moneys paid on non-existent interest payments.

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If it wants to understand the Liberal position, I ask the government to read the transcripts of the hearings that the justice committee held on Bill C-21, the white-collar bill. There it will find that the Liberals supported that bill. The government might want to also check the media coverage of a press conference held over two years ago, in which Liberals called on the government then to remove the one-sixth accelerated parole release for white-collar criminals.

In the justice committee this past fall, when the white-collar crime bill was being examined, it was a Liberal member who brought in an amendment that would have eliminated the one-sixth accelerated release or early parole release, as it is commonly called, for white-collar criminals and major fraudsters.

The amendment was subsequently ruled out of order by the Conservative chair. A Liberal MP challenged the chair and the Conservatives and the Bloc formed an alliance and voted to uphold the chair's ruling. They were the ones who voted against eliminating the one-sixth early parole option.

The government may want to check its facts before making such ridiculous claims that the Liberals do not support victims.

We are calling on the government to make the proper amendments to this legislation. As with all other Conservative tough on crime bills, this one would introduce sweeping changes to the Criminal Code that would unfairly target all people who have been guilty of a criminal offence. This is contrary to our justice system, which also aims at rehabilitating and reforming those who have committed offences. Parole does exist for a tried and tested reason and it does offer a second chance to those who have demonstrated their willingness to change to come back into the fold of society as co-operative, productive and contributing members.

The government has made a pact with the separatists to fast-track the bill without any serious committee study. There has been no consultation with victims or legal experts. There has been no discussion of this matter until Friday.

The impact of white-collar crime costs taxpayers and the treasury a lot of money because of the complex investigations that have to be conducted. The fraudsters are committing fraud against those vulnerable people. Fraud is not victimless. Fraud preys on the weak and the vulnerable in society. The Liberals support sending the bill to committee because we believe it is the right thing to do.

The principles behind the stricter sentencing rules are very important. However, we also know that they are not enough to prevent these frauds from happening. Sentencing is important, but prevention is equally important in white-collar crime.

The question is why the government will not use this opportunity to do more and do it properly. The opposition and the public have been calling on the government to end the one-sixth accelerated parole provision for these types of offenders and the government has not acted yet. We hope that by sending it to committee, we can have some thoughtful discussion and develop solid legislation.

Let me be clear. The Liberal Party is more than supportive of eliminating the one-sixth accelerated parole provision. We support this in principle. What we do not support is the railroading of legislation through Parliament based on shady backroom deals made

between the government and the Bloc. This is simply unacceptable. This is not the way Parliament should work. It is not what Canadians expect of those who represent them in the House.

The government, with the support of the NDP, has already given white-collar criminals a free pass by voting down a Liberal amendment that would have ensured a two-year mandatory minimum prison sentence for criminals who defrauded the public through things like Ponzi schemes.

I guess it is not enough that the Conservative government so passively watches as seniors living in poverty rise by an alarming 25%. Now, with the help of the NDP, the Conservatives have made sure that those same seniors get no justice when they have been bilked of their life savings by white-collar criminals like Earl Jones.

The Liberal Party tried to get the Conservatives' white-collar crime Bill C-21 amended so it would cover stock manipulation and Ponzi schemes, like the \$50 million scheme perpetrated by Earl Jones that ended up wiping out the personal savings of nearly 150 investors.

Victims groups came to Ottawa last year to appear before the parliamentary justice and human rights committee to not only request stiffer sentences for white-collar crime, but also for a longer period before which a white-collar criminal could make an application for parole, up from the one-sixth of sentence that exists today.

If the truth be known, the current government has been soft on white-collar crime in general.

Consistent with his neo-conservative ideology of privatization and deregulation, the Prime Minister wants greater self-regulation of Canada's financial industry. The Conservatives already put forth a plan in the 2007 budget to adopt principles-based regulation of the securities and financial industry. The problem is business principles are, by nature, about making money, not about looking out for the welfare of the public.

Now the government is gung-ho to make sure it looks tough on white-collar criminals. This is typical Conservative too little, too late scheme of preying on the emotions of victims of white-collar crime. If the government had been listening to Canadians all along, and to the Liberal Party, it would have known this was an issue years ago and that it should have been dealt with when the Liberal Party first brought it forward.

The government has never handled white-collar crime effectively. We can think of examples from the corporate world, such as Bre-X Minerals and Nortel. It has taken years for the government to proceed with cases against these corporate offenders. As far as it goes for individual investors, such as the victims of Earl Jones, the system has long been handing out slap on the wrist punishments to those who deliberately steal from others.

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The government has only recently taken a serious look at white-collar crime, and that has been at the insistence of the Liberal Party. It has taken the government too long to realize that an aging and vulnerable population has been targeted by sophisticated financial criminals for years.

Denial always comes with compound interest. This means that being too soft for too long on white-collar criminals has a steep price attached. It has undermined confidence in our financial markets, especially in the international community, and it has created a political problem.

The government has failed to protect seniors who have been duped out of their life savings. It is seniors who have been most victimized precisely because they do have savings and they do make investments to help cover the costs of retirement. These costs of retirement are very high. In fact, today, rising costs impact seniors whether it is the cost of home heating, or it is the cost of food and medicines. All these costs have to be considered by seniors in their retirement. The little they have in the way of savings, they try to invest time and time again to ensure that they have some additional money. Look what happens when they are taken for a ride.

We support the government as it now tries to toughen up the laws that deal with white-collar crime. However, there is always the risk that the fundamental flaws in this system will be glossed over because such action is taken hastily and without thought.

Financial crimes are generally very complicated to unwind. That is only one reason why law enforcement agencies, many of which have suffered budget and staff cuts, take so long to assemble the cases against fraudsters. The advent of the Internet and other sophisticated technology has only made it harder to keep up with these criminals, but the government has failed to adequately fund law enforcement agencies that would investigate and bring white-collar criminals to justice.

Different jurisdictions and regulations from province to province also complicate matters, as does the international component of investigations. The fact that there is no single national securities regulator to enforce one set of standardized rules does not help matters either.

These are some of the reasons why we insist the government take the time to get the legislation right once and for all. It needs to work with the legislators in Parliament and recognize how important it is to deal with white-collar crime. It needs to find away to work together and acknowledge the fact that the right thing to do is to send this to committee to see if we can get it right.

We do not need to rush this legislation through Parliament. We need to take our time to consider the legislation and to consult with the experts and victims. The victims are the ones who have been unfairly targeted by white-collar criminals. We need to listen to them. We need to hear what they have to say. We need to learn from their experience. We also need to talk to legal experts. We need to send this to committee so the House can get the legislation right.

● (1535)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was somewhat confused by the comments of my hon. colleague. Maybe she can clarify this for me. In one sense I hear the

member speak about victims and that we need to stand up for victims of white-collar crimes. At the same time, she says that the bill should not be retroactive. Unfortunately for the victims of Earl Jones, if this bill is not retroactive, these victims will never have any kind of justice served.

This is what one of the victims of Earl Jones has to say:

Do you know what it feels like to be ready to retire, knowing you have enough money to enjoy your home and to do some travelling, but suddenly to have the carpet pulled from under your feet? We have gone through this because of Earl Jones and the fraud he perpetuated for so long. We have lost our nest egg, as well as the money we wanted to leave to our children. We have had to go back to work. We don't want to see this man out on parole as early as next December. This is not a good system. Please work with the other parties to come to a good conclusion for all of us that have been victims of "white collar crime".

What would my hon. colleague have to say to the victim of Earl Jones who wants him to receive justice for this crime?

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, that is precisely why we need to take our time with the legislation. We need to listen to the victims. We need to listen to the legal experts. We do not need to rush this legislation through. Let us send it to committee. Let us listen to the very people from whom she has quoted. Let us ensure that we cover all of our bases. Instead of rushing this through, we need to listen to those who have been impacted. We have to recognize how serious this issue is and we need to take our time to get it right.

We can rush this through and miss some important components, but at the end of the day, we know there are serious issues. People are being impacted negatively. People are being hurt by this.

We must do whatever we can to get it right. That means listening to the victims and the legal experts. Let us do that. Let us send it to committee and let us get it right.

● (1540)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with many of the member's points. She talked about the problem in large part being the lack of regulation in this country, and I think she is right about that.

However, the fact is the white-collar criminals were running amok before the Conservatives even formed government. It was so serious that Jean Chrétien's government set up IMETs within the police forces. I believe six of them were in place, but they had a very poor track record. Only five people were convicted in five years, whereas the United States managed to convict 1,200 white-collar criminals. Clearly, the system of regulation in Canada has to be changed.

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The Conservatives are in government right now and they are not really doing anything that would change those regulations. They have to stop appointing to the regulatory boards people who recently left the jobs they are supposed to be regulating. We cannot expect to have a proper regulating environment when the regulators are golfing with the people they are regulating. That is the system the Liberals set up and the Conservatives have done absolutely nothing to change it. That is what they should be looking at.

Passing bills like this one is fine, but the Conservatives should be looking at re-regulating so that Earl Jones could not have taken advantage of people in the first place.

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, I did not hear a question, but I acknowledge the input from my colleague on how important it is that we get regulation right. As he said, this issue is as much about trying to deal with white-collar crime from a regulation perspective as it is about dealing with the situation where people like Earl Jones are taking advantage of others who want to invest.

I acknowledge what he is saying in terms of getting it right. That is why I keep going back to the point that we need not be rushing this bill through. We need to take our time with it. We need to send the bill to committee. We need to look at the flaws in the system now, whether it is regulation or whatever it is. We need to get it right. We need to send the bill to committee and work together, as my hon. colleague said, to get it right once and for all.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is with regard to the expediency behind moving the bill to committee.

I would like to point out the lack of speed with which the Liberal Party coalition on the other side deals with bills. Bill C-5 has been in committee since the fall. Bill C-17, the terrorism bill, has been lingering in committee, as has Bill C-23B, concerning pardons for offenders. All of these bills have been in committee for months and months and yet there has been no action from the opposition to help us move them along. Instead, in the fall those members spent time going on a witch hunt against the RCMP, the Toronto police department and other good men and women who do a job every day.

I wonder if the member could say why she has not been able to push the law and order mandate to get these things through. That is what we are trying to do and every day we fight roadblocks from her party and the critic for public safety.

● (1545)

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, interestingly enough, when the Conservatives stand to speak to an issue, it is always to point the finger in the other direction. They always blame someone else for a backlog and suggest that it is someone other than themselves who is holding up the process.

If the Conservatives were willing to work with all of the parties on the legislation, if they realized that they do not have all the answers, that other parties have some good ideas as well and if they acknowledged that, then I am sure things would move much more quickly. The problem is, whenever we try to bring forward suggestions in committee, the government always finds a way to say that either the Liberals or another party in the House of Commons is not working with the government to make it happen.

The reality is that it takes everybody to make it happen. We need to work together. We need to acknowledge that no one group has all the answers. The ideas, proposals and amendments that members from other parties put forward need to be considered. That is what we are proposing in terms of this piece of legislation. Let us send it to committee and have that discussion.

The Conservatives have to take the other parties seriously. They cannot sit around the table in committee and just pooh-pooh the input other parties have on legislation.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I picked up on what I think is a little weasel phrase. The member said that she wants to return the bill to committee because she wants to get it right. Really, those are code words for removing the retroactivity provisions of this bill.

She talks about wanting to protect Canadians against the Earl Joneses of this country, but she wants to ensure that this bill before us, which would remove accelerated parole, would not be retroactive so that Mr. Earl Jones would actually get out of jail after serving only one-sixth of his sentence.

I want the member to state for the record right here in this House what the Liberal position is. Are the Liberals prepared to accept removing retroactivity which would allow Earl Jones to leave jail after serving only one-sixth of his sentence? That is what the victims are asking her as well.

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, the Conservatives will stand in this House and put questions across the floor, but they will not agree to the idea of getting this right by having a discussion in committee about what we need to do with this legislation to respond to the needs of victims of crime. White-collar criminals need to be taken to task. We need to deal with them in a responsible manner. We need to ensure that this does not continue.

Yes, let us get it right. Let us work together in this House and in committee to get this legislation right.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-59, Abolition of Early Parole Act. This is an important piece of legislation and I am happy to contribute to the proceedings in an effort to have it passed as swiftly as possible.

It is always great to have the opportunity to talk about how our government is delivering on its commitment to Canadians to keep their country, their communities and their streets safe and secure.

I would like to thank hon. members for engaging in the process of helping us create a strong piece of legislation that will level the playing field for all offenders who seek parole.

Our government has told Canadians many times since coming to power in 2006 that our priority is to keep them safe and secure. We have done more than just talk about keeping Canadians safe and secure. We have taken decisive action to deliver on that commitment, because our government is a government of action, not words.

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We have taken action by introducing a host of legislation to tackle crime while strengthening the rights of victims and their families. We have worked very hard to make our streets and communities safer for everyone by giving law enforcement officials the tools they need to do their jobs.

We have also taken action to crack down on organized crime and on violent gun crimes in particular. We have passed legislation to increase sentences handed out to people convicted of drive-by shootings and murders connected to organized crime.

I am proud to say that our government passed legislation last year to strengthen the national sex offender registry and the national DNA data bank. We have also introduced legislation to strengthen the International Transfer of Offenders Act.

We have introduced bills to fix the pardon system and keep serious offenders from having their criminal record suspended, and to end the use of house arrest for serious and violent crimes.

In our ongoing efforts to make sure that people convicted of a crime do the appropriate time behind bars, our government has also passed bills that limit the amount of credit given for time spent in pre-sentence custody.

Our government has taken action to tackle property crime, including the serious crimes of auto theft and trafficking in property that is obtained by crime.

We have also taken action to provide additional police resources in our communities. As an example, we have hired 1,000 additional RCMP personnel to help combat crime and keep our communities safe from coast to coast to coast.

Our government has pledged to keep Canadians safe, and as hon. members can see from this impressive track record, this is exactly what we are doing.

Our government has also pledged to Canadians that we will make changes to the corrections and conditional release system that strengthen the rights of victims and give them a voice.

We have heard much talk by hon. members on the other side of the House who question the costs involved in improving and strengthening our correctional system. What hon. members do not talk about is the heavy toll that crime takes on individual victims, their families, communities and society at large. That is why we have taken action to ensure that the scales of justice are balanced to include victims.

Since the day we took office, we have been doing a lot of things to help victims of crime and make sure that victims' needs are taken into consideration in all aspects of our public safety and justice agenda.

There are many programs already in place, and we are moving ahead on several initiatives to ensure that victims' voices are heard, and to ensure that victims' concerns are addressed.

As an example of the importance our government has placed on helping victims, we committed over \$50 million over four years to improve the federal victims strategy, which exists to help victims navigate and deal with the criminal justice system.

As another example, we created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime to be an independent resource for victims.

The National Office for Victims at Public Safety Canada is also working hard to give victims a greater voice in the corrections and conditional release process and to assist victims in getting access to the information and services that they might need.

Our government is proud of the work the National Office for Victims has done to reach out to more victims of crime through consultation and outreach. The office also works with aboriginal communities to help victims get better access to information and services.

I could talk about many more initiatives and actions that our government is taking to put victims' rights at the forefront of the justice system. I would like to turn, however, to the matter at hand, that of Bill C-59.

Hand in hand with our efforts to help victims, we must ensure that we keep dangerous offenders off our streets and out of our communities. We must ensure that anyone who is sentenced to prison for a crime remains in prison for the proper length of time before being eligible for parole. This is what Bill C-59 aims to do.

Bill C-59 would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act by abolishing accelerated parole review. Accelerated parole review was incorporated into the CCRA in 1992 to do exactly what it sounds like, accelerate the parole review process for those first-time offenders who have not been convicted of a crime involving violence, organized crime, or a serious drug offence.

When it was first introduced and up until 1997, accelerated parole review only applied to full parole eligibility. In 1997, however, accelerated parole review was amended to include day parole, making it possible for white-collar offenders to apply for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence or six months, whichever is longer.

As we stand here in this House in 2011, we understand that the situation in 1997 was not the same as what we now face in 2011. We believe that accelerated parole review is an unfair practice and it should be abolished.

One of the key crimes that accelerated parole review applies to is that of fraud. Under accelerated parole review, first-time offenders charged with a white-collar crime such as fraud need only serve one-sixth of their sentence before they are eligible to apply for day parole.

● (1550)

Under accelerated parole review as well, these offenders do not have to attend a parole board hearing in person. The application is submitted and approved on paper alone. The offender is not required to appear before the Parole Board of Canada officials to make a case for his or her day parole application.

Finally, under accelerated parole review, the Parole Board of Canada has little choice but to release the offender on day parole if there are no reasonable grounds to believe that the offender will commit a new violent crime.

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It is difficult for me and for many Canadians to understand why an offender who commits a crime like fraud should be given a fast track to apply for day parole. We do not agree that someone who steals hundreds of thousands of dollars, and often millions, from hard-working Canadians through a fraudulent investment scheme should be allowed to apply for day parole without any need to appear in person before the parole board. Nor do we agree with the criterion that the parole board must release the offender back in the community if there is no evidence that he or she will commit a new violent crime.

That is why we have introduced Bill C-59. I would like to address in turn the three key elements of the parole system that will change under Bill C-59.

First and foremost, Bill C-59 will change the rules so that white collar offenders must wait the same amount of time as any other offender before applying for day parole. That is, they are not eligible to apply for day parole until six months before they are eligible for full parole. This makes sense. Why should these offenders be allowed to apply for day parole sooner than any other offender? They committed a serious crime and, therefore, they must serve the time.

Second, by abolishing accelerated parole review, we will ensure that white collar offenders must stand in front of a Parole Board of Canada hearing in person, just like every other offender. Again, it only makes sense that all offenders must go through the same process to apply for parole. Parole should not be seen as a given or a sure thing. All offenders should be expected to stand in front of a parole board hearing and convince board officials they are not going to commit another crime.

Finally, this legislation will ensure that white collar offenders must pass the same test of eligibility for parole as all other offenders. In other words, the parole board must be convinced that this offender will not commit any new crime, never mind the current criterion of a vicious crime or criminal offence, but any new crime. It is only fair and just that all offenders must face the same test to determine if they can be trusted to return to the streets of our communities.

As hon. members can see, Bill C-59 is all about levelling the playing field for all offenders. No longer will people who are charged with fraud have an expedited process when it comes to applying for parole. No longer will victims of fraud have to watch in disappointment when the offender is allowed to apply for day parole after serving only a small fraction of their sentence.

By passing this legislation we will send a message to these offenders and to Canadians that we will no longer support a system that favours offenders who steal hundreds of thousands of dollars, and sometimes millions, from hard-working Canadians.

I urge all hon. members to join us in taking a stand today to end this unfair, two-tiered parole system. I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of Bill C-59.

• (1555)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member knows full well that when the Conservatives were in opposition five years ago and the Liberal government of the day brought in closure, they rebelled at the idea. They did not

approve of it. They did not like it one bit. Now they see nothing wrong with jumping in bed with the Bloc and forcing closure when there is absolutely no need for it in this situation. It would take maybe two or three extra days, but we could have proper committee hearings.

We will have the spectacle tonight of a committee meeting starting at 10 o'clock and ending at 3 in the morning. Is this allowing for public input?

In my province of Manitoba, we have committee meetings at normal hours when bills are dealt with. The public is invited. The member knows that, as he is from Manitoba. Any member of the public is invited to show up and make a 10-minute presentation to that committee. We do not set up our meetings to start at 10 a.m. and run until 3 a.m. Whom are we going to invite? What experts are we going to invite at that hour to get proper input on this bill? This is a bad way to conduct business, and the member knows it.

We have asked the member about the cost of this bill. The member must have some sort of costing because governments do not introduce legislation without having information at their fingertips.

Could the member tell me the projected financial cost of the implementation of this bill?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I find it a little rich that the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who was in the Manitoba legislature, would talk about having committee meetings at all hours of the night. A few years ago, the agriculture committee was holding hearings on a moratorium on the hog industry. Those hearings went through the night. Over 300 farmers and people in the community wanted to appear before that committee, but the meeting dragged on and on. People were not able to stay in the middle of the night to make their presentations. It was really unfortunate that people were not provided with a true opportunity.

Different procedural moves and antics are often used by all parties of the House to make sure that debate is not turned into a filibuster. That is essentially what the NDP wanted to do here.

I am chair of environment committee and we just went through this process while studying a private member's bill. The opposition parties worked as a coalition and limited the amount of time that any party could speak on any clause within the bill. If Conservative members were to share their time equally, they were limited to speaking not more than one and a half minutes on a particular clause.

If the member wants to talk about stifling debate, that stifled debate. That prohibited other members from being able to get up and voice their concerns about particular clauses in a troublesome bill, namely Bill C-469.

Government Orders

I am surprised that the member never rose and asked me a question about the importance of bringing this bill to fruition and that we actually get rid of the accelerated parole review.

I want to turn his attention to what some of the victims are saying.

The Earl Jones Victims Organizing Committee actually put out a press release saying:

The elimination of the so-called 1/6th access to early day parole for crimes committed by non-violent offenders not only better protects these victims, but also serves to provide the strongest deterrent in our society against any acts of serious fraud, and theft resulting from such fraud, from white-collar criminals.

One of the victims from Lac-Saint-Louis, Quebec, is quoted as saying:

As a victim of the Earl Jones Ponzi Scheme I know first hand how devastating the effects that white collar crime has had on the lives of the victims, their families and their descendants. Almost every week there is a new Ponzi Scheme discovered in Canada and to date there is little incentive in our current criminal code to discourage criminals from taking this lucrative path. White collar crime is fast becoming the most debilitating crime for Seniors in the country. We have been left without our savings and have been shamed and ridiculed in the press. Time is of the essence in this matter.

Thus we are hearing directly from victims that we must do this, that we must make sure that these fraudsters play by the same rules as violent offenders and every other criminal in our federal penitentiaries. Stony Mountain Institution is in my riding and I have attended parole board hearings. It is a thorough and just process and there is no reason why fraudsters, the people out there stealing money from Canadians and seniors, should not have to go through the same process as every other convict.

• (1600)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, that was certainly a thorough answer, if I have ever heard one.

The member for Selkirk—Interlake is obviously very passionate about this bill and the possible benefits it will have for victims and victims' rights. The member for Elmwood—Transcona, though, is dead wrong.

It is a minor point, but the meeting does not start at 10 o'clock. It starts at 6:30 p.m. just down the hallway. He is welcome to sit in and watch, if he would like to.

What is interesting is that we never hear about the victims from NDP members. Nothing in his question was about victims. We never once hear about the victims from them. Then they talk about sending the bill to committee or something else, but the fact is that they drag their feet. I am on the public safety committee and at least three bills have been dragged along by the coalition since the fall, and we cannot move them along.

I would like the member for Selkirk—Interlake to tell the House and viewers at home a bit more about how this bill will help the victims and victims' rights, and also about the antics of the coalition in dragging its feet on these bills in committee. It is outrageous.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, that is a great question. It is rather disturbing that there is so much legislation before the House that gets shuffled off to committee, and so often what we are seeing are the antics of opposition parties to slow down and stall legislation. The justice committee is completely overwhelmed with bills and cannot deal with them, because the opposition either continues to

call witnesses and does not put closure on hearing from them or essentially shuffles it off the agenda completely.

It is important that we take our jobs seriously and deal with legislation in a timely manner and address all the concerns people have. However, we need to ensure that we get bills moving through the process and not stall them deliberately.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, while the hon. member may have given a good speech, he really has not described how this bill helps victims.

As I read the bill, it would alter parole eligibility date for federal convictions from one-sixth of a sentence to two-sixths. I am trying to figure out how that helps victims, particularly in light of the fact that when we are dealing with white collar crime, when the money is gone the money is gone.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, the member knows full well that by changing the parole review system in determining eligibility, we are giving victims the opportunity to actually attend the Parole Board hearings and have their input and their victim's statement read into the record on whether those individuals will ever be released. Therefore, we are empowering those victims.

Earlier I quoted from the press release from the Earl Jones victims support organizing committee. It says that if we want to put in place strong deterrents, we need to ensure that these fraudsters are not eligible to get out there and do it again. By changing the system, we are also providing an opportunity to close the window for those individuals to go out and commit another crime that involves fraud.

We are not just talking about eligibility based upon people committing a violent crime, because these criminals are only fraudsters and not likely to commit violent offences, but now it would be all offences. Will these individuals go out and commit fraud again? Will they go out and set up another Ponzi scheme that will take money away from even more Canadians and more seniors and people's savings? That is what the bill is all about.

• (1605)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona.

Bill C-59 deals with an issue that we have needed to address for at least the five years that the government has been in power. However, it sat on its hands and passed all sorts of other silly laws, including in the area of criminal law, which in its mind took precedence over this particular bill.

Government Orders

I find it surprising that the Bloc members never acknowledged the fact that these amendments were initially introduced under the Mulroney Conservative government in 1992 and then introduced in 1997 by the Liberal government. During that time in 1992, the Bloc members, who were Conservative members at the time, voted for those amendments. In 1997, the whole Bloc caucus voted for the amendments that affected the types of victims that we are hearing so much about today. Of course that was done after they had been victimized. However, any number of steps could have been taken, both at the federal and provincial levels of government, to prevent these types of crimes. I will address that a bit more toward the end of my speech today.

The issue that we have before us today with regard to changing these provisions for early release is that we are doing it almost totally in reaction to one case, the Earl Jones case out of Montreal, Quebec. Earl Jones will be eligible for early release somewhere between December 2011 and the spring of 2012. It is not as though it is tomorrow or next month. We have at least nine months, if not a full year, before we attempt to stop him from being able to use it.

As an aside, whether in debate or in private conversations, I have not heard of one member of the House, including my entire caucus, who is opposed to ensuring that Earl Jones does not serve only one-sixth of his sentence. We all agree that we should be doing something about this. However, as is so typical of the government, especially in the criminal justice area, there is much overreaction and overkill. I castigate the Bloc members for agreeing to this on the basis of the few facts that we have.

We do not have answers to a series of questions that we have posed. We have some partial figures and partial facts but we have nowhere near a clear picture, nor will we get it this evening at committee. For instance, we do not know how many people are released on an annual basis under this one-sixth provision. We do not know how many of those released are in full parole, how many are in day parole or how many are spending their time in halfway houses, which is another form of detention. We also do not know what crimes they have committed before being released.

Every Conservative member who I have heard speak to this, and I think the Bloc is making the same mistake, assumes that the offenders who are eligible are white-collar criminals. I can say that is absolutely not true but I must admit that I do not know how many of the offenders committed the stereotypical white-collar crime and how many were incarcerated for other reasons. We know they are crimes of a non-violent nature, because that is the criteria for eligibility, and that it has to be a first offence. We also know that the offenders must show that they are not at risk of committing a violent crime. All of those criteria are written in the statute of the corrections act now.

However, we do not know what crimes those offenders have committed or what their individual factual situations are. We have some indication that a good number of those who are eligible for this had originally committed the crime because of addictions, whether it be gambling, alcohol, drugs, et cetera. However, they are eligible because they have since dealt with those issues while in custody or, in some cases, even before sentencing. However, all of those are unknowns in terms of absolute numbers.

● (1610)

We have a figure of approximately 800 people who get this benefit each year. We do not know how many weeks, months or years it takes off their sentences, so we do not have a sense of how much it will cost if they stay in the full-blown prison for an extra few weeks, a few months or a few years. It costs, on average, \$93,000 per inmate per year. If we do the math, that is \$93 million. The number may be higher than that or a bit lower but we never hear the Conservatives, when they are talking about victims, say how much it will cost the Canadian taxpayers. The only answer we ever get is that they are prepared to pay the price. That is false. All we have to do is look to the United States where we are seeing state after state changing their laws to reduce their prison population because they are bankrupting themselves by putting many more prisoners in prison for lengthier periods of time.

We need answers to those questions. We do not know, for instance, the effect it has on the rate of recidivism, which is a straight public safety issue. The individuals who benefit from this commit fewer crimes. The figures we do have on that indicate that their rate of recidivism is lower than if they serve their full one-third or up to two-thirds sentence. By extending this, by passing the bill, we may be creating greater risk to the Canadian citizenry.

There is a number of questions as to how should we deal with this. We have certainly put forward suggestions. Are there specific crimes that should be excluded from the use of this section? We passed a few months ago in the House the Conservative answer to white-collar crime, which was not that to any significant degree, but in that we put in that if people steal a million dollars or more they will spend at least a minimum of one year in jail. We could be putting that type of provision in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to say that the one-sixth does not apply if a person has committed this crime. That is what is in there now with regard to other crimes, but with regard to white-collar crime, we could put a very specific section in that would say that a person is not entitled to it if the person has done this. That is a very simple amendment and it would address the current crises that we have, in the minds of the Bloc Québécois and in the minds of the Conservatives, with regard to Earl Jones. It would solve that problem right there. It is simple enough.

For the long term, what we should be doing with the one-sixth is that at the time of sentencing the judge should be allowed the discretion, which we will have to write into the Criminal Code, to say that the crime is so serious, even though it is non-violent, and with so many victims, or whatever other criteria we want to build in, that the individual will not be entitled to a one-sixth reduction. It is gone for those people. That would be step number one.

Government Orders

Step number two would be to give a very similar discretion to the Parole Board, which it does not have now. The Parole Board, as it stands now, is required to establish the three criteria of an offender: first offender, non-violent offender and not likely to commit a violent crime before he or she is allowed out. The board has to prove why a person should be held back. We should be taking away the reverse onus on the Parole Board and giving it a general discretion. If the person is not likely to be a risk to society and he or she meet certain criteria, then the board has the right to release the person. However, if it is felt for any reason, it would be that broad of a discretion, it would not release the individual. There are things like that which can be done.

There are other specific crimes. We are hearing anecdotally that some members of organized crime, organized syndicates, biker gangs are able to take advantage of this because of what they were convicted of. That should not be allowed. I can envision quite easily amendments that would prevent them from accessing it.

• (1615)

There are ways of fine-tuning this, tailoring it for those people who, I think Canadians would generally agree, should be entitled to this. We can let them out, but restrict the others.

I see my time is up. Hopefully my friend from Elmwood—Transcona will be able to cover the issue around the prevention of these crimes.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh serves a useful role on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that I chair. We have had a chance to work through many different bills.

The bill before us is intended to eliminate accelerated release so that white-collar criminals cannot get out of jail early. In other words, they cannot get out on day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence.

My colleague mentioned that there are a number of cases that have focused our attention on this bill. However, it was actually a case in British Columbia that dealt with a drug dealer convicted of a non-violent crime.

Perhaps my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh could comment on whether these kinds of individuals deserve day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, the member obviously was not paying attention to the latter part of my speech when I specifically addressed the issue of drugs and organized crime members.

I want to make the point that we in the NDP are very clear that there are provisions within the existing corrections act around the one-sixth provision that need to be changed. I made that very clear. I spoke of it yesterday. My colleague from Vancouver spoke on it today.

That is why we are quite prepared today to vote as a caucus to send the bill to committee this evening, but we want to be very clear, and this is what the member who just asked the question is missing. This bill excludes everybody. It is not just the drug dealer in his area

of the country, but everybody else. There are certain people who should in fact qualify for this.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am always compelled by the international examples and I have always liked the expression that there is nothing new under the sun.

The member gave a few examples that were primarily American, but he could refer back to the example where this has been done before. In the case of Bill C-59, there is nothing new under the sun.

I was wondering if he could again give some examples of how other states within the United States went about doing this and are now, in many cases I suspect, scaling back from that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, what is happening in the United States is interesting. We had a witness, a private consultant who works closely with the Mennonite Central Committee, in front of our justice committee last week. He was going to California, which is one of the more notorious states in terms of an increase in their prison population over the last 20 to 30 years with about a 300% increase in the prison population. He was going there to describe some of the provisions that we have here.

The United States generally does not have this kind of provision that I am aware of in any of its states. However, California was forced last spring to release something like 40,000 to 45,000 prisoners, including drug dealers and other people who had committed violent crimes. They are having to do that, but mostly they are closing prisons and releasing people. They are changing their drug laws, doing away with mandatory minimums in most cases and shortening the length of time that people can be sentenced, particularly for drug crimes. That is what is happening in the United States.

In other parts of the world, western Europe, the democracies of Australia and New Zealand, no one has gone down this route to any significant degree with the kind of mandatory minimums that the Conservative government is using. They just do not do it. If they do, they always leave residual discretion in the hands of the judiciary to deal with individual cases, which is really what this section is about. It allows that discretionary role to be played if the person has cleaned up his or her act, is not a risk to society, is able to contribute when he or she gets back into society, is rehabilitated and does not commit more crimes. That is what we need to be doing.

This section is such an over-reach that it is throwing the baby out with the bath water.

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to follow the member for Windsor—Tecumseh in speaking to Bill C-59. Our party supports sending this bill to committee.

Government Orders

We as a group passed Bill C-21 recently. That bill dealt with providing a mandatory minimum two year sentence for white-collar criminals involved in schemes and thefts over \$1 million.

Today government members have continually asked what the victims want. The victims want their money back. They did not want their money stolen in the first place.

This bill deals with the issue after the fact, after the money is gone. We need proper regulation of financial institutions, banks and investment salespeople in this country to prevent this type of thing from happening in the future.

Twenty-five per cent of the members in the House, excluding myself, are lawyers. We all know how lawyers' trust funds are dealt with. We all know how real estate brokers' trust funds are dealt with. They are dealt in trust because of past abuses. The provinces have brought in laws to define how trust funds have to be dealt with.

My understanding of the Earl Jones case is that he was not registered. How can a person invest money on behalf of clients for many years and not be registered under any authority within the jurisdiction in which he is living? Mr. Jones was dealing with financial institutions and those financial institutions should be responsible for policing their salespeople.

What was the bank's responsibility? What was the financial institutions' and the insurance companies' responsibility? What was the responsibility of the people that he was buying these investments from on behalf of his clients?

Most investors in this country are protected in case a financial adviser makes off with an investment. Most people would be compensated by the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization. That organization has a plan to compensate individuals when dealers run off with money. Banks and institutions have a corporate responsibility. We need to tighten up on the front end before the money disappears. In a five year period in the United States, 1,200 people, including Conrad Black, were sent to prison. In Canada, there were five.

This problem did not just start with the Conservative government five years ago. The Liberals faced the same problem for many years. They recognized the problem because in 2003 they set up the IMET program. Six groups operate under this particular unit within the police force. After a five year period it had only five successful convictions and imprisonments to show for its time in office. I am not saying it was a bad idea. It just did not achieve great results during that period. It should be studied and improved upon.

We also have to look at our regulatory environment. We have to start appointing to the regulatory bodies people who are not playing golf with the very people they are regulating. An incestuous relationship can develop anywhere one looks in society if we do not have the proper balance.

• (1625)

When we get a regulatory body, be it the Ontario Securities Commission or the national securities agency that we are debating in the House on an ongoing basis, if those regulators are not on the ball and if they are not actively trying to pursue abuses, if they are not fearful of arresting some of their friends, then we will have results.

We will have activity and the arrest rate will go up and people will be put in prison in this country. Once people like Earl Jones recognize that it is going to be a one-way trip to a prison sentence, then we will see better protection.

The point is we have all these protections. We have protections in insurance. We have protections in real estate. We have protections for the law society. How difficult can it be for us to examine this area a little more and put in these protections to stop people like Earl Jones? That is how we should consider approaching this problem at the front end as opposed to the back end.

We have a lot of issues and very limited time to deal with them. I definitely want to deal with the issue of what works in crime prevention and enforcement and what does not.

A situation has developed in the United States where Newt Gingrich, who helped to create the problem, is now providing an answer from the right. The fact is it goes back further to Ronald Reagan's days and the "three strikes and you are out" that he brought in as Governor of California, and how their system developed into a warehousing system for criminals in the state. At the end of day it resulted in a higher crime rate and almost bankrupted the state in the process.

Newt Gingrich has recently changed his position on this. Not only him, but Ed Meese and other right-wing Republicans in the United States have actually come around to the NDP's approach on crime, as surprising as that might be.

We only have to look at Texas as an example. In Texas in 2007 the Republicans started to work with the Democrats. What a novel idea that is. It is like a minority government here. Why cannot all parties get together? The Gary Filmon government did it in Manitoba a number of years ago. It was a Conservative government. It worked successfully.

By the way, I ran into Gary Filmon over the Christmas holidays. I asked him if he ever contacted the federal government. He said he had sent a long email when the Conservatives came to power, but he said he had never heard back at all.

In 2007, the Democrats and Republicans in Texas decided against building more prisons. Instead they opted to enhance proven community correction approaches such as drug courts. We have those here in Canada, but I guess they did not have them in Texas. The reforms were forecast to save \$2 billion in prison costs over five years. Also Texas redirected much of the money saved into community treatment for the mentally ill and low-level drug addicts. We are doing that here in this country.

Government Orders

These reforms reduced the Texas prison population. Now there is no waiting list for drug treatment in the state. Crime dropped 10% in the period from 2004, the year before the reforms, through to 2009. The crime rate is now at its lowest level since 1973.

In South Carolina, Newt Gingrich is talking about taking prison beds for dangerous criminals and punishing low-risk offenders through lower-cost community supervision. This is not a left-wing person talking. It is Newt Gingrich. It is the people that Conservatives like to follow. That is where they take their direction from, and I have an even better example. I hope I have time to provide it. I may have to wait until my questions and answers.

That is the issue of the crime rate in Florida versus in New York. Over the past seven years Florida's incarceration rate has increased 16% while that of New York's has decreased 16%.

● (1630)

The crime rate in New York has fallen twice as much as the rate in Florida has, but New York spent less on its prisons and delivered better public policy. In other words, the crime rate was higher in Florida and the cost was higher. New York had a lower crime rate and a lower cost.

Those are great examples. The members opposite should brush up on them.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague was unable to get through all of it.

I just want to ask the member about a preventive approach to white-collar crime, so that people like Earl Jones would not be allowed to operate. There could be a system that would require them to register. They would have to show their registration. They would be monitored. They could not receive any money unless they were registered and met certain qualifications to be able to advise and direct investment.

Added to that kind of a structure, beyond the initial registration, would be a monitoring structure, much as lawyers have their trust funds monitored and the funeral industry has its trust funds monitored. It could be that kind of an approach and strict enforcement if there was a breach.

Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. That is essentially what I have been talking about.

After 9/11, we saw almost immediate changes to the way people set up bank accounts. If people in business went to the bank to try to change their bank account, they would have to dig up their articles of incorporation, et cetera. That is how strict we are.

How could a guy like Earl Jones set up and operate for many years, and deal with all of these banks and financial institutions, and move around big amounts of money? He did not hide the money in a sock somewhere and move it around that way. He had it in a financial institution.

An hon. member: The Royal Bank of Canada

Mr. Jim Maloway: The Royal Bank of Canada. There is a responsibility for the financial institutions to keep track of their deposit holders. They knew he was in the investment business.

There is a responsibility there. The Royal Bank should have been chased for its role and complicity in the loss of this money. I hope that the victims followed up on this.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think anyone in this House will ever accuse that member of not being entertaining.

He has taken us from Manitoba to California to New York. What stuck out was the fact that apparently the NDP members are taking their marching orders from the experience in the United States, from Newt Gingrich, from Edwin Meese, and that is wonderful. It is almost a Republican-NDP coalition. A new coalition is taking root right here in the House.

I want to ask the member a more serious question. Earlier today it appeared that the Liberals dropped a bombshell on this House by, at least by implication, suggesting they do not believe this legislation should be retroactive. In other words, it should not apply to the Earl Joneses of this world.

I am wondering if the member could clarify for Canadians, right here in this House, whether his party is opposed to the retroactivity provisions, or will it make this provision retroactive to ensure Earl Jones does not get out after serving one-sixth of his sentence?

● (1635)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I just want to complete my last thought on the previous question. Evidently the victims of Earl Jones have actually sued the Royal Bank. I wish them all success. I understand the case is still pending. I have good news for them and that is that in the United States there have been a number of Ponzi schemes where the victims have actually recovered a lot of their money.

In terms of what the member asked me, unlike our questions about providing cost estimates for this crime bill and other crime bills and getting absolutely no answers, the member is demanding an answer from me and I am actually going to give him the answer.

The answer is that at the end of the day it will be resolved by the courts. That is how this issue is going to be resolved.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. Since I spoke to the motion regarding the disposition of the bill yesterday, there have been some developments. However, I do want to take this opportunity to add some points which I did not have time to do yesterday, given the 10-minute limit.

I would like to focus on the democracy argument.

Government Orders

In terms of the Canadian democracy, we have an executive branch, which is the Prime Minister and the cabinet, which essentially, on a day-to-day basis, runs the government. The job of the Parliament of Canada and the members of Parliament who are not sworn into cabinet is to keep the executive branch in check. The executive is supposed to report to somebody. It is not a dictatorship. Yet, what we have here is a circumstance where the executive branch of government is attempting to circumvent the democratic process by invoking closure on a bill that is not urgent by anybody's definition of urgency.

The Conservatives had the opportunity last fall, with respect to Bill C-21, to approve Liberal amendments in the justice committee which would have eliminated the one-sixth accelerated parole review. This would have prevented Mr. Lacroix from being released, which is the reason we are here today, because of the public outcry about it. It would have prevented Mr. Lacroix, if they had voted for it, from being released. However, the Bloc and the Conservatives voted to defeat those amendments in the fall of 2010. Now, because of the public outcry over the release of Mr. Lacroix, we are here in an undemocratic environment with the executive branch of Canada's government attempting to stop Parliament from asking questions and from getting the information that is required. Those pieces of information that would be eliminated are important.

I am on the public safety committee and I have the notice for tonight's meeting. Because of the closure motion, the bill will be voted on this afternoon. Everybody knows that the bill will pass, because the Conservatives and the Bloc have teamed up. The Conservatives like to use the word "coalition", so I will use it. They have teamed up to form a coalition on this piece of legislation to stop the democratic process.

It is not the first time either. In the past, the Conservatives attempted to reach a coalition deal with the Bloc to defeat the Martin government. They run their ads about coalitions. It is hypocritical for them to do that. Canadians should know this is something they have attempted to do before and they are doing it now with the Bloc. They are circumventing the democratic process.

In terms of the information that we must have, we need to know the costs that are involved. We will be asking for the costs.

An hon. member: Who is hiding what?

Mr. Andrew Kania: A minister just asked off mic, "Who is hiding what?" What is the government hiding in terms of the cost?

We will go to the public safety committee tonight after we have the vote on the bill, which will be successful, based on the coalition between the Conservatives and the Bloc. We will be sitting for four hours, until 11 p.m. or later. The way the motion is worded, if the amendments and study are not done within that period of time, the bill will be reported back to the House without any amendments.

They have already told the committee, "It does not matter what you do. It does not matter what you say. You have a certain amount of time and if we do not like what you are doing, the bill will come back to the House and will become law. So you are wasting your time anyway".

We can go to the committee. The Conservatives can filibuster or there could be amendments, or no amendments, or whatever. We all know the bill will come back to the House. We all know that the coalition between the Conservatives and the Bloc will rush this bill through the House of Commons without proper consideration.

What are the costs? How much will this cost? They will not say. Tonight, in the public safety committee, I will be asking those questions. I will be asking: What will this cost? Why are we doing this? Why are we doing this now? What are the social implications of changing this law at this stage?

• (1640)

Maybe this is a good thing to do. Maybe the legislation as it is currently written should not be changed. Maybe the legislation should be changed slightly. The point is, Canadians will not have the opportunity to have their elected representatives provide that sober second thought in committee and in Parliament through proper debate, because the executive branch of government, supported by the Bloc, has invoked closure. In essence they are stopping the elected representatives of the Canadian people from properly considering this legislation in circumstances where there is no urgency.

I challenge the government. Why did it not do this for other measures? Where was closure invoked when it came to the economic crisis in Canada? We have had the worst economic situation in Canadian history since the depression. Where was closure invoked to help the Canadian people? Where was closure invoked for EI changes?

In March 2009 a motion was passed by the Parliament of Canada calling for EI changes to help Canadians weather the storm. The government ignored the motion, of course, which also is anti-democratic. There have been a number of instances. Paul Kennedy, Ms. Keen and a whole bunch of people who do not agree with the government are fired or their terms are not renewed, which is all anti-democratic. It is a pattern with the government.

We are in a situation where we will examine a piece of legislation under a gun tonight. We already know it will pass. We already know that amendments will not be passed. We will be faced with this without even knowing what we are doing.

If a closure motion is supposed to be for urgent matters, why have the Conservatives used it for this and only this and only after they refused to pass the amendments the Liberals suggested last fall? Those amendments would have prevented Mr. Lacroix from getting early parole. They could have done that then, but they did not.

After people found out they did not do that and Mr. Lacroix was released, now it is urgent to deal with the situation and invoke closure and anti-democratic processes. Once again, if the Conservatives like doing this and they say it is urgent, why do they never do it on economic issues? If they like to use an anti-democratic process to help Canadians, to protect Canadians, to take care of Canadians, why have they never used this when people are suffering, are unemployed, lack health care and pensions?

Government Orders

How about the Nortel pensioners? Let us talk about them for a moment. When they lost their pensions and medical coverage and did not get help in terms of bankruptcy proceedings, why did the Conservatives not invoke closure to help them? The Conservatives in the Senate were defeating that legislation because they did not care.

Where is the closure on other issues? It is not used on anything else. There are urgent matters that Canadians need to deal with. Rather than spending yesterday and today debating closure on a non-urgent piece of criminal justice legislation, why are the Conservatives not dealing with economic issues? We have the largest deficit in Canadian history. Why were we not discussing that yesterday and today? The cost of living is going up exponentially. Why are we not discussing that and how to help productivity?

We have the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs which have been replaced with temporary, part-time jobs, or as I referred to yesterday, McJobs. Why are we not discussing job creation plans?

We experience embarrassment on the international stage. There is the situation with the UAE and the environmental conferences where we have received Fossil of the Year awards two years in a row. Why are we not discussing environmental issues on an urgent basis?

If the Conservatives love this anti-democratic procedure, there are many issues on which closure could have been invoked. However, they are invoking closure as a form of damage control. They are trying to tell Quebeckers and other Canadians that they are upset that Mr. Lacroix was released early, but they are not, because they had a chance last fall to stop that. They could have accepted the Liberals' amendments in justice committee, as I mentioned, but they refused to do that. So, what is the urgency of this situation?

In terms of what has occurred since the comments I made yesterday, I now have a letter from the Quebec bar. I will read this letter into the record. It is addressed to the Minister of Public Safety, and as a member of the public safety committee, it was forwarded to me. It is with respect to the bill and it reads as follows:

The Quebec Bar would like to state its opposition to Bill C-59 concerning accelerated parole and conditional release, which you introduced in the House of Commons on February 9.

I will pick up on that point. February 9, 2011 is when the bill was introduced. This is not something that has been languishing for two years.

• (1645)

The earlier bill, Bill C-39, died with the prorogation. We had two prorogations that wiped the slate clean of all legislation that could have been invoked and in law earlier. Without those two prorogations, this would have been addressed and that law would have been amended a long time ago, rather than continually reintroducing the same bills in the House of Commons. It is an anti-democratic part of the pattern of the government.

Going back to the letter, it states:

Firstly, the Bar is opposed to the retroactive effect of the proposed legislation. Like the Association des avocats en droit carcéral du Québec, we would like to point out that some people chose to plead guilty after considering the advantages of accelerated parole. Changing the sentencing rules after these people have made their decisions and their choices is unfair and opens the door to constitutional challenges.

Forget for the moment whether one agrees with that paragraph or not. That is not even the point of today's closure vote and the debate that took place yesterday. The point is there is an issue that needs to be discussed. We need experts to speak about whether the retroactive provisions are constitutional according to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution of Canada.

Yes, they do constrain the government. Conservatives may not like to think that, but they do. Experts should be testifying before the committee as to whether they are constitutional. If there is any reasonable doubt as to whether the provisions are constitutional, they should be either left out or there should be a reference made to the Supreme Court of Canada to let us know if they are.

It is absolutely unfair for the government to force people who have agreed to plea bargains to hire lawyers, spend money on legal fees, go to court and eventually seek a final ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada, if they can afford it, just to find out whether these provisions are constitutional. The minister has an obligation to provide an opinion and consider whether these provisions are constitutional, but how can that be done in a responsible manner when the government has invoked closure, there has been no debate and no witnesses have testified.

Based on the individuals on the witness list for tonight, which we have not heard from yet, I would be very surprised if testimony will be provided during the four hours allowed for the debate. I would be very surprised if anybody will have the expertise to comment about the constitutionality of these provisions.

In essence, the government is saying that it does not care and that it is going to invoke closure. It knows it made a mistake. It should have passed the Liberal amendments last fall that would have prevented Mr. Lacroix from being released. However, it did not do that, neither did the Bloc. They both voted against the amendments. Now it is trying to do something about it.

We are in a situation now where we will have a very short debate with no sober second thought and no proper consideration. Even if there is and even if the committee does not agree, it will come back within four hours anyway. It will be reported back to the House and then further amendments can be filed until 3 a.m. It sounds very urgent, but there is no urgency. The urgency was last fall when it was ignored and the Liberal amendments were defeated.

If this were urgent in those circumstances, why has the government not done the same for economic matters? The people listening at home, those who have lost their jobs, or their houses or cannot afford their mortgages or pay for their kids' various extracurricular activities, might ask why the government has not invoked closure on some type of economic legislation to help them.

Why is one-third or more of the government's entire agenda "law and order" when all empirical objective experts have said, for a repeated number of years, that crime rates have gone down? Why is the government trying to make people think that crime rates are going up and that it is taking steps to protect them when that is not what is occurring?

Government Orders

● (1650)

Today I had the honour of reading a statement into the House. Another example is Bill C-5, the international transfer of offenders act. Last week the Minister of Public Safety stood in the House of Commons during question period and criticized the Liberal Party for opposing provisions of that legislation, which deals with the transfer of Canadians incarcerated abroad who seek to apply to be transferred back directly to a Canadian prison. It is from prison in a foreign country for a crime committed in a foreign country against a foreign citizen to a Canadian prison. The transfer, in most cases, makes sense if people are in a foreign country that does not have proper rehabilitation. In some jurisdictions, I believe even in the United States, foreign citizens cannot get rehabilitation, so they will get nothing.

Since most of these people will be released back into Canadian society anyway, by definition it would be good for them to receive rehabilitation. However, a lot of them will not get it unless they are transferred back to Canada.

A key point is this. If they have committed a crime in a foreign country to a foreign citizen but they are not transferred back to a Canadian prison before their sentence has been completed, then when their sentence is over and completed in the foreign jurisdiction, because they have a Canadian passport, they can come back into Canada, free and clear. They will have no criminal record. There will be no ties upon them in terms of our parole system. It will be like they never committed a crime.

Imagine some of the serious crimes that could have happened abroad and they were incarcerated for them. There will be no record of it in Canada and there will be no ties on them in Canada if we do not bring them back and put them in a Canadian prison before their sentence expires.

Is that not logical to do? Is that not the best thing to do to protect Canadian safety? However, when that question was posed to the Minister of Public Safety last week, rather than answer it, he attacked. That is what the government does.

My colleague from Ajax—Pickering is the recipient of almost daily personal attacks. He asks questions in the House of Commons in a logical and lucid manner, seeking to get intelligent responses, facts and figures, but the government attacks him personally, trying to turn the channel and not responding to its shortcomings in this legislation.

When the Minister of Public Safety was asked the question last week on the international transfer of offenders act, which once again makes perfect sense for the protection of Canadians, his response was to say “You are not thinking about Canadian victims.”

Let us think about that for a moment. He says that we are not thinking about a Canadian victims. This is about Canadians incarcerated in a foreign country for a crime committed in a foreign country to a foreign citizen. In these circumstances, we have asked the government why those people would not be brought back to ensure they have rehabilitation. If they are brought back early, they will then have a Canadian criminal record, they will go through the Canadian parole system and we will have some controls. With that

stem, we can ensure we minimize the risk they will commit the same harm to Canadians living here.

Members can check the record, but his response was that we were not thinking about Canadian victims. What is this? It is rhetoric. There is no logic to it. Why can we not get honest responses that deal with the issues? Why can we not have a reasoned debate rather than mudslinging and personal attacks on our Liberal critic for public safety?

I will finish this letter from the Quebec Bar Association. It states:

Secondly, the Quebec Bar believes that before this bill is passed, it should go through the same process as all legislation, including a thorough study of the advantages and disadvantages of the current legislation and an impact study of the proposed changes. The findings of these studies should be made public so that there can be an informed debate on this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

● (1655)

Once again, that was a February 15 letter from the Quebec Bar addressed to the Minister of Public Safety, asking for sober second thought, to follow democracy, to consider this and make a responsible decision. Conservatives should not try simply to do something because they failed to pass the Liberal amendments last fall, with the help of the Bloc, which would have stopped Mr. Lacroix from being released.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we help the victims by not having victims in the first place.

The member for Random—Burin—St. George's spoke about the need for revamping the financial services rules in our country. I and others have dealt with that issue in a number of different ways over the last several months.

Does the member agree that the real exposure is to not have people take advantage of other people in the first place? People are able to do that because they are able to get around what few rules there are. In fact, we should have tougher rules so when people are holding themselves out as investment dealers, they actually have to be registered as investment dealers and under the supervision and responsibility of the banks with which they do the transactions.

I understand there is an outstanding law suit. The victims are hoping to recover some of their money from the Royal Bank.

In the United States a lot of the victims have recovered money and at the end of the day perhaps the losses are as little as 50¢ or 60¢ on the dollar. That is the proper way to look at the problem as opposed to dealing with it after the horse is already out of the barn.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, it makes sense to consider the entire justice bill and legislation with regard to protecting victims in these circumstances. Rather than dealing with early parole provision on an alleged emergency basis and invoking undemocratic closure, why are we not considering mandatory restitution orders, like in the United States or other jurisdictions, so these victims do not have to spend money on lawyers, or go to court and sue companies?

Government Orders

With regard to Earl Jones, where is the money? Why is there not a mandatory restitution order against him now so the victims know they can attach his assets? Why do they have to sue?

The maximum sentence for these types of crimes is 14 years. Why is the law not stronger? Where is the enforcement and investigation moneys that the government could put in? Why is the focus simply after the fact? I will tell the members why. Last fall the Conservatives and the Bloc voted in the justice committee to defeat the Liberal amendments that would have stopped this.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Brampton West made an excellent presentation of the facts. We will spend a lot of time this evening looking at this bill before we report it back to the House.

The hon. member mentioned Liberal efforts to fix this a couple of years ago, to ensure that those who committed large-scale fraud would not be eligible for these provisions. However, could he speak to some of the other things that we have been trying to advocate for with which we have been frustrated? As examples, there are the cuts that have been made to the RCMP task force on white-collar crime. Also, we have been sitting for literally four years in the House with bills killed through prorogation on lawful access, police officers saying that they need to have the tools to go after criminals through electronic media. Yet that bill is nowhere to be seen. This bill the Conservatives want to do in four seconds. That bill they were not interested in doing in four years.

As well, just this morning in committee we heard about cuts that had been made to the national police services that impact things like the sex offender registry and CPIC.

Could the hon. member talk about some of the things we feel need to be done on prevention and some of the other areas the Conservatives have cut that are important in preventing crime and making a difference?

• (1700)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party believes in protecting Canadians, but there are two ways to do that. The government is focusing simply on damage control after the fact, after defeating the amendments in the justice committee last week, and now trying to change the parole rules.

Where is the money for enforcement? Where is the money for investigation? Why have the Conservatives cut money from the RCMP? Why do they ignore all of this?

My friend is right. Today when we were questioning the RCMP, we heard about further cuts to the RCMP. If we want our national police service to investigate these white-collar criminals and prevent them in the first place, which I would suggest is the first goal, then why are there continual cuts to these police services? Is it because the Conservatives do not have enough money? Then how about the \$6 billion in tax cuts?

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): It is quite interesting to hear the members from across the aisle talk so self-righteously about pieces of legislation they would like to see introduced. If we look at the agenda of the public safety committee, of which the member speaking and the member who previously asked a question are members, we see an agenda that concentrates on trying to dig up dirt

on the G20 summit and other issues that bear no relation to the passing of legislation this House puts forward.

In his discussion and self-righteousness about passing legislation, I wonder why, as a member of the public safety committee, he would be supportive of all of this other activity besides dealing with legislation from the House on a timely basis.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Obviously, discussions on the setting of agendas are in camera. To be honourable, we are not supposed to speak about that in the House of Commons and I am not going to violate that honour.

I will say that when it comes to setting the committee's agenda, we have divided it up approximately 50% between what the government wants to do and what the opposition wants to do. The government does not seem to be happy with that, which I understand because the government is trying to invoke closure and does not have much respect for the democratic process. The government thinks that maybe it should have 75% or 100% of the agenda rather than the 50%, which is actually more than the government's weight in the House of Commons.

Why does my colleague not think that studying something like the G8 and G20 summits is relevant? Does he think Canadians do not want to know why \$1.2 billion was wasted in circumstances where London, England, spent \$50,000 for security? Why would Canadians not want to know what the witnesses have admitted in saying that the government spent an extra \$200 million because it divided the summit between Huntsville and Toronto, which was totally unnecessary?

Canadians have the right to know that the government chose to spend \$200 million more by dividing it for political reasons.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we hear the government claim that it has to run this through rapidly. It prorogued Parliament twice and called an unnecessary election in 2005-06 and introduced all sorts of other crime-related bills, giving no priority to this one.

There is other procedural stuff the government could have done. It could have had a Conservative private member's bill brought forward, or even the Bloc could have done that. Yet here we are at the last minute having to scamper about to try to deal with this.

I wonder if the member could comment on other tactics that could have been used that would have been much more democratic than what we are faced with today.

Government Orders

●(1705)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, we could have started with the Conservatives proposing that the public safety committee study this as a topic. They could have done that a long time ago. They could have done that before the first prorogation; they could have done that before the second prorogation. We had lots of time to do that, but they chose not to.

The Conservatives chose to wipe out the legislative slates twice and reintroduce legislation. There was lots of time this House had to consider criminal justice legislation. However, after they voted against the Liberal amendments in the fall of last year, which would have stopped Mr. Lacroix, the public outcry was so strong that they and the Bloc, who both voted against the amendments, think they have to do something by invoking undemocratic closure.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the last speech, I think we have heard it all now. Apparently England hosted the G20 summit and spent \$50,000 for security. That was an exceptional feat. Certainly, if they were able to hold a summit and spend \$50,000 on security, then yes we do have something to learn from them.

The victims of Earl Jones in Quebec are calling for action. Victims of white collar crime from coast to coast are calling for action. The victims said yesterday that they are petitioning all political parties in Ottawa to stand up for the victims of Earl Jones and to do the right thing and act now and support the passage of Bill C-59. Those parties even include the Liberal Party and the NDP.

Let me quote a letter that one of Earl Jones victims sent to the NDP member for Outremont:

We don't want to see this man out on parole as early as next December.... Please work with the other parties to come to a good conclusion for all of us that have been victims—

The letter continued that criminals who preyed on the most vulnerable members of our society should not be released just to save a buck. Was the cost of keeping criminals behind bars worth it? Absolutely.

That is an important comment, because we have heard a fair bit from members about costs, but that is a comment by a victim who says that in some cases perhaps the costs of reparation are suited to the victims.

I would not mind commenting on a speech from yesterday given by the member for Ajax—Pickering. In his speech he advocated 10 times for keeping white collar criminals out of prison. He quoted former U.S. congressman Newt Gingrich at least four times. He seems fixated on Newt Gingrich. The member made reference to the U.S. State of California six times. Not surprisingly, he mentioned victims zero times. As a member of the public safety committee, I have grown accustomed to members on the other side not referring to victims.

Another thing that I heard from the last speaker and from others is that we need to get this bill to committee, that we need to have a debate, that we prorogued this and we prorogued that. However, the fact of the matter is that all of these bills that would help victims, that would fight crime, that would get tough on criminals, just like the bill we are talking about today, could have been dealt with long ago.

Bill C-39 had its first reading back in June. It was referred to committee on October 20. We could have dealt with Bill C-39 before Christmas, but the coalition was more intent on a witch hunt against the RCMP, the Canadian Forces and the Toronto Police Service, the men and women who go to work every day to provide safety and security to our families, friends and neighbours. That was the coalition's priority. Last fall that was what it spent its time focusing on, when it could have focused on legislation that would have actually done something for victims. We could have got tough on crime.

We can go down the list of bills before the public safety committee right now. Bill C-5, the bill dealing with the international transfer of offenders, has been sitting in committee since the fall. It has been at committee for months. Bill C-17, the bill dealing with combatting terrorism, has been before committee for months as well. All of these bills could have been dealt with and been brought back to the House and been voted on and gone all the way to royal assent long ago. Bill C-23B, the bill to eliminate pardons for the most serious crimes, is still hanging around. No action has been taken. They are dragging their feet. Bill C-39 would have addressed the very issues we are dealing with today, but has evolved into Bill C-59.

When the opposition, specifically the Liberal Party, start talking about this and that and the other thing, these are the facts. They can be checked. They are all on the record.

The fact of the matter is that Bill C-39 could have been dealt with long ago. It was first read in the House in June. As I said, it was referred to committee in October, and because of the coalition's agenda and the witch hunt against the RCMP, the Canadian Forces and the Toronto Police Service, we have not heard much of these bills at all.

●(1710)

The government is trying to advocate on behalf of victims by pushing this agenda forward. However, it is being roadblocked at every turn and every step of the way .

Another point I would like to come back to is the costs. We have heard questions about the costs of this and the costs of that. I would also like to talk about victims. I have never heard anything from the coalition about costs when it comes to bills. This is the first time. It is great to hear. It is enlightening that it is starting to look at costs. It may want to consider the costs of the tax hikes it is proposing. However, that is a whole other topic for debate.

These schemers and fraudsters are not fools; they are highly intelligent individuals who are lacking moral fibre and who prey on their victims. They realize that if they are caught, they will get out. They know that. Therefore, when we look at costs, we have to complete the loop and follow the full circle and realize that once these fraudsters and schemers know that accelerated parole is no longer available for them any more, they will think twice before they go down the path of Earl Jones. There is no doubt about that.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, the coalition does not want to talk about that, as it does not suit its argument. As with everything else that I have mentioned in debate this afternoon, it does not suit its needs. However, the facts are right here; the facts can be checked. The fact is that when someone like Earl Jones or Lacroix knows that there will no longer be accelerated parole available, they will think twice. The next offender out there will take a long hard look and a second thought.

While we are talking about parole, let us take another look at what some of these changes will do.

Here is the current situation. Fraudsters who fleece hard-working Canadians of their savings are guaranteed to have their cases reviewed in advance by the Parole Board of Canada, so they can be paroled earlier than other offenders. That does not sound fair to a victim. White collar offenders, who might have destroyed the lives of hundreds of Canadians, are not in fact even required to apply for parole.

Can one imagine that? We have members here who are against this and are having an issue with it. We are just trying to say that we should have some fairness, that we should think about the victims before we send someone back out into the public.

The offenders do not need to lift a finger when they are trying to get back into society. Offenders who qualify for accelerated parole are not required to notify the Parole Board of Canada. In fact, the current Corrections and Conditional Release Act requires that the Correctional Service of Canada refer the cases of the offenders who are eligible for accelerated parole to the parole board before their day parole eligibility date so that they will be released as early as possible.

The other tragedy in all of this is that we do not hear one word from the victims. They are not allowed to make impact statements as to the effects of these offenders' actions on their lives, even the ruination or vaporization of their 30 or 40 years' of savings for their retirements with their families. That is shameful.

This bill needs to be passed today.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Monday, February 14, the time provided for debate has expired.

Therefore, the question is on the motion. 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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

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

• (1755)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 182*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Asselin
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Benoit
Bevington	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Block	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Boughen	Bourgeois
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Byrne	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Coderre
Comartin	Crombie
Cullen	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
DeBellefeuille	Dechert
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Devolin	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Donnelly
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dreeshen	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra
Easter	Faille
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Gameau	Gaudet
Généreux	Glover
Godin	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	Harris (St. John's East)
Harper	Harris
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn

Adjournment Proceedings

Hiebert	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Holland	Hughes
Hyer	Ignatieff
Jean	Jennings
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kania	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kennedy
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lemieux
Leslie	Lessard
Lévesque	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Malo	Maloway
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McLeod
McTeague	Ménard
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Oliphant	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Paradis	Patry
Payne	Pearson
Petit	Plamondon
Poillievre	Pomerleau
Preston	Proulx
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Ratansi	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Sgro
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Silva
Simms	Simson
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Cyr	Stanton
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriot
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Volpe
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilfert	Wong
Woodworth	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Young
Zarac — 283	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There being no amendment motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ) moved that Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), be concurred in at report stage.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour will please say ye.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 16, 2011, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to follow up on a question I asked before Christmas. The question concerned the enabling accessibility fund. This is a fund that was set up a number of years ago by the government ostensibly to provide support to the disabled community by helping to renovate buildings to become more accessible for people with disabilities.

There was a problem with the fund when it was announced that the stipulations for what was called the large or major segment of the fund were brought into disrepute by people in the disability community. They suggested that these large amounts of money were set up specifically to apply only to projects in ridings of government members, including the Minister of Finance. In fact, at the time, Traci Walters, who was the national director of the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, said:

Non-profit organizations are under-resourced and under-staffed—especially disability organizations...We do not have a team of experts who can pull something like this off within one month.

That was the timeline they were given. Of course, when the funding was announced it turned out that a total of \$30 million out of the \$45 million that was allocated for the entire fund, two-thirds of the money, went to two projects, one in the riding of the Minister of Finance, the other in the riding of a Conservative member from Calgary.

What made it even worse was when the other funding was announced there were 166 projects that were funded. To follow the math, 166 projects were funded totalling just under \$6 million. Of those projects that were funded, 21 were in Liberal ridings, 15 were in Bloc Québécois ridings, 23 were in NDP ridings, and 107 were in Conservative ridings. This meant that 35% of the funding went in the smaller funds, and it went in incredibly disproportionate numbers to Conservative ridings. In fact, two-thirds of the money went to Conservative ridings.

A couple of years later the government replenished the fund. With the attention that was brought to it and the outrage by disability groups, one would think the Conservatives might have thought a little more about it and decided there should be a more equitable distribution. In fact, the funding was even more skewed.

What does this mean?

This means that the Government of Canada has set up a fund and is politically using it as a slush fund for its own members. It is taking money meant for disabled Canadians across the country and picking to which ridings the funding will go.

Most amazing is that one rural riding in Ontario received more grants than all of the GTA ridings put together. Why is that? It is because the GTA ridings were held by Liberal members of Parliament.

As MPs we all do our jobs. We represent disabled people across the country. This should be done fairly.

Last week I had the chance to meet, as I am sure other parliamentarians did as well, with two leaders in the disability

community: Steve Estey, who happens to live in my area of Halifax and Dartmouth; and Vangelis Nikias. Steve is hearing impaired and Vangelis is visually impaired and they are leaders in the disability community. They have helped to negotiate and have worked on Canada's position going back to 2004, 2005 and 2006. They helped to negotiate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, a landmark achievement that countries across the world signed on to.

It took Canada almost four years to ratify that deal. Last spring the Government of Canada decided it would ratify the UN convention. Great celebrations were held across the country. I was at two of them. I was at the one in Halifax and the one in Ottawa. There was virtual jubilation in the disabled community that finally the government was recognizing that we could do more for the approximately four million disabled Canadians. Since then, we have had nothing.

My question for the parliamentary secretary tonight is: How could the government use funds like the enabling accessibility fund in such a political way?

• (1800)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, the facts are simply not as the member states. He is trying to make political hay out of a non-partisan issue like support for Canadians with disabilities and trying to score cheap political points. It is simply shameful.

No government has done more for persons with disabilities to become fully included in our society than our Conservative government. We have removed barriers to participation across the country, including rural and remote areas, as evidenced in part by the over 300 enabling accessibility fund projects supported so far. From building ramps to upgrades to washrooms, to the creation of comprehensive centres, the enabling accessibility fund is making a significant difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities all across our great country.

We support accessibility everywhere because people with disabilities live everywhere. We are not focused on just a few large cities where most of our opposition colleagues live.

We have launched other programs like the RDSP, the registered disability savings plan, that is helping over 40,000 Canadian families save for the future. We also introduced the Canada disability savings grant and the Canada disability savings bond. These are all pioneering initiatives that are important and that have been well received by the public.

We ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as the hon. member mentioned. We have increased funding for training to help Canadians with disabilities join the workforce. We have invested \$75 million for affordable housing specifically for persons with disabilities.

Adjournment Proceedings

Members should not just take it from me. They should listen to what others have said about our government's record. Al Etmanski from the PLAN Institute said, "I believe the...Government is hands down the most effective Federal champion people with disabilities and their families have ever had". He further stated, "The... Government's commitments are impressive". I guess that is why the organization presented the Prime Minister with a lifetime membership for making a positive difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities.

We have done a lot and we will continue to do a lot. I just wish the opposition would support our efforts because its record on this issue has not been stellar. In fact, the enabling accessibility fund, to which the member speaks, has helped Canadians with disabilities all across this country, including in the member's own riding and in the ridings of many of his Liberal colleagues.

I would also point out that the member is complaining about a program that, if it were up to him and his Liberal friends and colleagues, would not even exist. Why is that? It is because they voted against it. They voted against it when we first brought it in and invested \$45 million over three years, a program, as I said, that was very well received by Canadians with disabilities.

The Liberals voted against it again in budget 2010 when we invested another \$45 million to ensure even more communities and more Canadians were able to benefit. They have consistently voted against help for persons with disabilities. The member and the Liberals voted against the EAF twice, against the RDSP and against increased skills training money for persons with disabilities.

The record is clear. We have provided unprecedented support to Canadians with disabilities in budgets that have been voted against by that party time and time again. Our record is clear and it is one that is supported by persons with disabilities and Canadians across the country. These funds have been distributed and disbursed to various areas, including rural and remote areas. The member should get behind these initiatives and not complain about them.

•(1805)

Mr. Michael Savage: Just by way of comparison, Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary suggested that we should be grateful that some projects in our ridings have been funded. My riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour received one grant in the amount of \$50,000 for the Iona Presbyterian Church. The Minister of

Finance received \$15 million. That is \$50,000 versus \$15 million. This is an issue of fairness.

He talked about the enabling accessibility fund. When it was set up, it seemed to be a very noble cause. The fact that it has become a political football bandied around by the government is the shame of it. I will guarantee him and any Canadian that what a Liberal government would do for people with disabilities would dwarf anything that the Conservatives have done, any of the small bits of money.

When we look at the billions of dollars that they waste on things like G20 summits, planes, prisons and things like that, we can think about what that could do. Even the \$6 billion we are talking about now in corporate tax cuts, we can think about what that could do for people with disabilities. We can think of what that could do for the Dartmouth Adult Service Centre in my riding which is applying for this fund. That is the kind of organization that needs the support. It should not be done politically, it should be done based on need.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Madam Speaker, the member raises the issue of the \$50,000 contribution to the Iona Presbyterian centre in his own riding. The member and his party voted against the enabling accessibility fund. So, if the member had had his way, the centre would not have had that at all. There also would be no RDSPs, registered disability plans, which have been helpful to those who have family members with disabilities. They have been very well received. Job start, in his leader's own riding, is an example of something that also would not exist. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind in his deputy leader's riding would not have been helped.

Exactly which particular programs across the country is the member opposed to? If there was no support for these programs, none of these would be available. There would not be any programs like the registered disability fund that has been well received. Those are the kinds of things that need support, not opposition.

•(1810)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:10 p.m.)

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