



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the Hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February marks Black History Month in my riding of St. Catharines.

At the Parkway hotel, I had the opportunity to recognize the achievements of Fergie Jenkins and celebrate the launch of the official Fergie Jenkins stamp.

As we mark Black History Month and the launch of the Fergie Jenkins and Carrie Best commemorative stamps, I was not three kilometres from the Salem Chapel on Geneva Street, a stop on the Underground Railroad, where the legendary and courageous Harriet Tubman led American slaves to freedom here in Canada.

In honouring Fergie Jenkins and journalist Carrie Best, Canada Post is recognizing the valuable contributions they have made to our country. Whether we celebrate a black Canadian athlete in the Hall of Fame or a journalist who stood up on behalf of the black community and said what was right and what we needed to do, those are two people who made a difference in the lives of others and in our country.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Atlantic Canada, the economy is made up of a large number of seasonal industries and in the off season workers rely on employment insurance benefits until the next season. Workers who have

been laid off are having difficulty getting employment insurance claims processed in a timely manner.

In my area, the claims processing centre is reducing a number of CR-3 individuals. My constituency office gets daily calls from individuals in the riding who have to wait long periods of time to receive their benefits while their bills are piling up. This is unfair to the people who are out of work and unfair to the remaining staff who are left to deal with the growing demand of service. Cutting services on the backs of individuals is certainly not what the rural areas of this country deserve.

I ask the government to stop cutting services to rural Canadians and reinstate the much-needed CR-3 positions.

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● (1405)

[*Translation*]

HONORIUS THÉRIAULT

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to the commitment of an extraordinary volunteer: Honorius Thériault, from the famous little town of Saint-Élie-de-Caxton. Mr. Thériault, who will turn 80 on March 8, is and has been involved in fundraising for many charitable causes, including the Red Cross, childhood diseases, multiple sclerosis, the Canadian Cancer Society, Opération Enfant Soleil, Operation Red Nose and Noël du pauvre. This big-hearted man has put all of his energy into generously and willingly helping his neighbours.

This tireless volunteer was also the founder of the Saint-Élie-de-Caxton optimist club, the first rural optimist club in the movement. Mr. Thériault is also dedicated to the sovereigntist cause. He has been involved in the Quebec nation's quest for freedom since the founding of the RIN.

Mr. Thériault, you are a role model and an exceptional man, which is rare these days, and I admire that. You should be proud.

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[*English*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, search and rescue is an important role for our military. It is important in the Arctic, on the west coast, the Great Lakes, in the Maritimes, off the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador and on the great land mass of Canada. SAR service responds to over 6,000 incidents a year, saving thousands of lives, but why do we lag behind the rest of the world on response times?

Statements by Members

In Norway, its air force gets rescue choppers in the air in 15 minutes around the clock. In Australia and in the United States, the response time is 30 minutes around the clock, seven days a week. Canada has a response standard of 30 minutes but only from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays when less than 20% of incidents occur. Otherwise, it is two hours. Lives are lost.

The defence committee heard from a survivor of a sunken fishing vessel who watched two others drown 15 minutes before a Canadian Forces helicopter arrived, which had left one hour and twenty minutes after being tasked. This must change. We can do better. We deserve better.

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LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for some time, Canadians have wondered about the Liberal secret agenda on fighting crime. This week, the its real agenda was revealed.

The Liberal leader shocked Canadians by announcing that his MPs would not support our bill to impose tough new prison terms on serious drug traffickers and gangsters. He followed that up by obstructing our efforts to abolish a law that had allowed serious white-collar criminals to apply for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentences.

Earlier, the Liberal justice critic promised that a future Liberal government would overturn our decision to eliminate the faint hope clause under which murderers had been able to apply for parole after only 15 years in prison.

Time and time again the Liberal leader has promised to protect Canadians against crime, only to flip-flop and abandon victims and law-abiding citizens.

Now that the Liberal agenda on crime is out, we know that the Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians. He is just in it for himself.

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WE WELCOME THE WORLD CENTRES

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thousands of residents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale will be left to suffer due to the decision by the Conservative government to cut \$53 million in essential funding for programs and services to help new immigrants, this despite the fact that Brampton is home to some of the largest numbers of immigrants in Canada. The Conservative government has cut \$53 million in funding for language, counselling, training and mentorship programs to integrate new Canadians.

One organization in particular that has been impacted is the We Welcome the World Centres which operates in schools in conjunction with the Peel District School Board. This centre has helped over 4,400 families in its first 18 months of opening. Despite it helping new Canadians, it has lost almost half of its operating budget.

On behalf of all Bramptonians and my constituents in Brampton—Springdale, we urge the Conservative government to reverse these cuts because Brampton families want to have families as a priority, not prisons, planes and photo ops.

●(1410)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to rise today on behalf of the people of Ottawa—Orléans, people who are paying \$3,000 less tax in 2011 thanks to the work of this government over the past five years.

[English]

We cut the GST twice from 7% to 6% to 5%. We introduced pension income splitting. We established the tax free savings account and the first-time homebuyer's tax credit. The average tax burden is now lighter by \$3,000.

[Translation]

This government has consistently stood on the side of the people of Ottawa—Orléans and all Canadians. We remain committed to helping them keep more of their hard-earned money.

[English]

Recently I hosted seven tax seminars led by specialists from the Canada Revenue Agency. Hundreds of people came to find out how they could get all that they have earned when filling out their tax return.

I thank the CRA staff for its dedication and professionalism.

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[Translation]

MEDAL OF BRAVERY

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 8, at the Citadel in Quebec City, two people from my riding, Daisy Flamand of Manawan and Marjorie Jean-Baptiste of Saint-Charles-Borromée, received the Medal of Bravery, which is awarded every year by the Governor General to individuals who have risked their lives to save or protect another person.

Daisy Flamand did not hesitate to rush into a burning house to save her grandmother, niece and baby, even though thick smoke made it difficult to breathe. The police had to restrain her from re-entering the burning house to help two other family members, who unfortunately did not survive.

Marjorie Jean-Baptiste risked her life to save seven children from the fire that engulfed their house in Rivière-des-Prairies. Despite thick black smoke that was building up, Marjorie kept calm and gathered her children in her bedroom, then broke the window and dropped them one at a time into the snow.

I congratulate the two recipients on their courage and determination.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our Conservative government delivered jobs and economic recovery for Windsor, the NDP MPs for Windsor West and Windsor—Tecumseh vote against jobs and prosperity.

When our government helped save 500,000 auto jobs and Windsor's largest employer, Chrysler, the NDP MPs voted against it.

When our government invested the highest per capita infrastructure stimulus to create jobs and reposition Windsor's economy during the recession, the two NDP MPs voted against it.

When our government invested millions to start a new aerospace MRO industry and up to 700 jobs, the two NDP MPs voted against it.

When we budgeted for the new DRIC bridge and the Windsor-Essex Parkway in 2006 and 2007, and the 30,000 jobs that go with it, those NDP MPs voted no.

The NDP MPs for Windsor West and Windsor—Tecumseh have voted against thousands of jobs and economic recovery for Windsor.

It is time Windsorites vote Conservative not NDP.

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JUDICIARY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a basic principle of Canadian democracy and a foundational principle of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms that citizens have a right to petition government for redress of grievance, that they are allowed to criticize their government without fear of reprisal and that the independence and integrity of the courts warrant respect from us all.

Yet, these past few days we have witnessed a minister impugning the decision-making of the federal judiciary, and the member for Oak Ridges—Markham attacking a University of Ottawa law professor, Amir Attaran, for exercising his rights under law, for making representations to the court and for using the democratic process.

This conduct of targeting a person who has otherwise critiqued government policy, who exercises his free speech rights and due process rights, can have a chilling effect on free speech, let alone the undue interference in matters before the courts.

This is not the way a democracy should work. This is not the way to respect the independence of the judiciary and to respect the integrity of processes before the courts.

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ARTHUR MEIGHEN

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to pay tribute to Canada's ninth prime minister, the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen.

Born after Confederation in the village of Anderson, near St. Marys, Ontario, Arthur Meighen would go on to serve our country on two separate occasions as prime minister.

Statements by Members

During his political career, Meighen served as solicitor general, minister of the interior and secretary of state of Canada. While he spent 10 years in the Senate, it was in this very chamber that Mr. Meighen, representing a riding in Manitoba, distinguished himself as the greatest orator of his generation.

Today, 51 years after his death, Prime Minister Meighen's portrait will be officially unveiled.

Perth—Wellington is proud to have Arthur Meighen as its son. I know all hon. members will join me in paying tribute to this great Canadian.

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● (1415)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this Monday, Valentine's Day, men and women took to the streets of Edmonton for the sixth annual Memorial March for all the Missing and Murdered Women. The march was led by aboriginal drummers. Families carried pictures of the loved ones they had lost.

Danielle Boudreau organized the Edmonton march following the murder of two friends, Rachel Quinney and Ellie May Meyer, whose bodies were found on the outskirts of our city.

Project KARE, a joint task force of the RCMP and Edmonton Police Service, continues to investigate more than 20 cases of Edmonton women killed or missing since 1983. As in other Canadian cities, a disproportionate number of the missing and murdered women are from our aboriginal community.

As National Chief Shawn Atleo has said, "It is time to raise a national action plan that will address the seriousness and scope of violence and discrimination facing indigenous women in a coordinated, effective fashion".

If we make communities safe for our most vulnerable, they are made safe for all of us.

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[Translation]

TAXES

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party leader's plan is clear: he wants to raise taxes. He has clearly and concisely said that he wants to increase taxes by \$6 billion. He is not talking about freezing taxes, but increasing them.

The Liberal Party leader wants higher taxes to be included in the next budget. If we do not increase taxes, he will vote against the budget and force an election. This is an irresponsible demand that will slow down the economic recovery, which is currently on the right track, and it will also hurt job creation in all regions of Quebec. No one is surprised that he calls himself a tax and spend Liberal.

*Oral Questions***BORDER CROSSINGS**

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec municipal officials and local stakeholders are here on the Hill today. They are joining with the Bloc Québécois to denounce the Conservative government's announcement that services will be reduced at certain border crossings and customs offices, and they are calling on the government to reverse its decision.

I met with the president of the Canada Border Services Agency about this on February 8. He seemed very interested in our proposed solutions, but his hands are tied.

Bill Owens, a congressman for the state of New York, supports our position and is proposing effective solutions such as sharing infrastructure at the Churubusco crossing. That proposal is being backed by Canada's Customs and Immigration Union.

There is no reason for the Conservative government not to listen to us and consider our proposed solutions, particularly since it is secretly negotiating a common security perimeter with the United States. Our solutions are reasonable and are widely supported.

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CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, elected officials south of the border are becoming increasingly concerned about what was once a source of pride for Canadians.

It used to be said that Canada and the United States shared the longest undefended border in the world. It seemed like the friendship and trust that characterized our border relations with the United States were permanent and unchangeable. However, today, our neighbours seem to sometimes confuse their northern and southern borders.

Rather than devoting their energy to correcting perceptions and setting the record straight, the Conservatives are grovelling in Washington. They are negotiating a secret perimeter security deal that will put Canadian sovereignty at risk in areas such as privacy, immigration, and commercial and environmental standards, just to name a few.

At the same time, these same Conservatives are preparing, in secret, to close border crossings that serve small border communities. These closures will mean lost commercial development opportunities and longer wait times at other border crossings, and they will certainly not help to improve border surveillance.

Canada first!

* * *

[English]

OPPOSITION COALITION

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the coalition continues its scheming. On Saturday, at its general council meeting, the Bloc added a phrase to its election platform stating, "The Bloc Québécois reserves the possibility to enter a coalition of parties" in the event of another minority government.

While our Conservative government is focused on jobs and the economy at this time of global economic uncertainty, the separatist Bloc is plotting to create a coalition with the Liberals and the NDP.

In 2008 the NDP was willing to make the Bloc the driving force in the coalition. The NDP did this in spite of the Bloc leader calling Canada "ruinous".

The Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition plan is back out in the open.

In 2008 Canadians were overwhelmingly opposed to a reckless Liberal-led coalition. They still are, and we agree with them. Canadians do not want to hand a veto to the party that wants to break up the country.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the Prime Minister basically said, "I don't care whether my minister doctored documents. I don't care whether she misled the House. I don't care whether she told the truth. I just don't care". This kind of disrespect for democracy just has to stop.

When will the Prime Minister start showing respect for the House, respect for the people who put us here and fire that minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise of that question. The minister took a decision. The minister made clear that the decision was contrary to recommendations she received from unelected officials. In a democracy it is the elected officials who make decisions on how to spend taxpayer money.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question has to do with respect for democracy. What part does the Prime Minister not understand? I will say it again. The Prime Minister's disrespect regarding this issue illustrates his values, his disrespect for democracy, his disrespect for this House and his disrespect for Canadians.

When will he call for the minister's resignation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the reality is that the minister took a decision that was contrary to the recommendations of her officials. In a democracy, the elected ministers are the ones who make decisions. That is what democracy means.

[English]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they say a fish rots from the head and the rot has stopped at the top. We have a Prime Minister who lets a minister deceive the House of Commons, falsify a document and instead of reprimanding or dismissing her, gets up in the House and actually applauds her.

This is bad for Canadian democracy. When will he stand up, take his responsibilities and fire that minister?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so much for raising the tone of debate around here.

The fact is the minister took a decision. She has been clear about that. It has been clear in the House. It was clear before committee.

In terms of the use of taxpayer money, we want to ensure that foreign aid dollars are used for foreign aid. They are not entitlements to Canadian organizations. They are not decisions made by officials. They are decisions made by elected ministers, and the minister has made the correct decision.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. What is worse: a minister who leaves some cabinet documents at his flavour-of-the-month girlfriend's house, or a minister who doctors and falsifies ministerial documents and who knowingly misleads the House? The Prime Minister did not hesitate to destroy the political career of the member for Simcoe—Grey based on false allegations. Now we are talking about facts.

Why is that minister still in cabinet? Is it because he asked her to do it?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about facts. The minister in question has always been very clear that she alone had made the decision not to fund the grant to this organization. She said that all along. She said it 10 times in committee and she said it in the House of Commons.

The minister made a courageous decision, she made the correct decision and should be applauded.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even worse, it was this same Prime Minister who wrote a guide that gives specific instructions to his ministers. They are obligated to stand up—yet that minister will not stand up—not only to set the record straight but also to speak the truth when answering parliamentarians' questions. Yet he continues to defend the minister. As if that were not enough, now it is no longer her fault; it was done by a mechanical arm. We are not puppets here. The great filmmaker Claude Lelouch said “Lying is an option that anyone can choose, but we always pay for it one day.” That day has arrived.

When will he fire the minister?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was certainly a very colourful question from my colleague opposite.

The minister has been very clear that she made the decision not to provide a grant to this particular organization. The minister has been very clear that she is the one who is trying to put foreign aid to help the vulnerable in the developing world. She has done an amazing job of doing that.

Perhaps in some of the Liberal days Canadian NGOs felt that they were entitled to grants every year.

The minister has done an outstanding job as the Minister of International Cooperation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government likes to hide behind half-truths. With regard to funding for the humanitarian agency, KAIROS, the Prime Minister told us the decision was made by the Minister of International Cooperation. The problem is that the minister told us that her decision was based on the advice of her officials and that is not true. CIDA officials recommended the grant to KAIROS and the minister reversed the decision.

How can the Prime Minister continue to stand behind a minister who does not tell the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister indicated here in the House and in committee that she was the one who made the decision. It was the right decision.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is also telling us the opposite of the truth. For a year, this minister told us that officials recommended that she take this decision. That is what she said in committee, that is what she said here, and that is what she said to journalists. What is more, this minister falsified documents and the Prime Minister condones that.

Is it worthy of a Prime Minister to act that way?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister was clear several times in her testimony before committee when she said that she was the one who made the decision. I think the minister made the right decision. It is essential for taxpayers' money to be used effectively for humanitarian aid and for the health and well-being of the poorest, most vulnerable people in the world.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs says that he has not received any requests from Tunisian officials to freeze Ben Ali's assets. But we received a verbal note from the Tunisian ambassador dated January 24, 2011, asking Canadian authorities to take the necessary steps to freeze the financial assets of Ben Ali's family. We will table this note.

In light of this, how could the minister have told us that he did not receive any requests from the Tunisian government to freeze the assets of Ben Ali's family?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is prepared to assist the government of Tunisia in any way we can in accordance with our law. We are going to continue to work with Tunisian officials on this issue. Obviously, we all have an interest in making sure that justice is done for the people of Tunisia.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the ambassador is worried that by not freezing the assets of Ben Ali's family immediately, the government is playing into the hands of these tax evasion experts, who can transfer their money into tax havens with complete peace of mind.

Is the minister aware that without immediate interim measures to freeze these assets, he is an accomplice to the misappropriation and theft of these assets, which belong to the Tunisian people? Canada should be supporting Tunisians, not criminals.

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly not on the side of the Bloc.

That being said, we will continue to work with Tunisian officials. We all have an interest in making sure that justice is done for the people of Tunisia, and that is what we will continue to do.

* * *

● (1430)

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the KAIROS affair, the question is no longer about a discredited minister. The question now has to do with the Prime Minister.

Yesterday in this House the Prime Minister condoned forging documents and condoned misleading this House. How can Canadians trust a Prime Minister who would have such contempt for this place? He tries to claim that the minister has the right to make decisions, but there is no right to forge documents. There is no right to mislead the House.

What kind of leadership is that?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the president of CIDA herself has said that the minister indicated she did not agree with her recommendation. Let me read quotations from the very testimony that the hon. members purport to represent.

The minister said on page 3 of her testimony, "Ultimately, it's the minister's responsibility and it's the minister's decision". Again on page 3, it "reflects the decision of the government" and the minister. Again on page 3, "I was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the government's policies are being followed".

I could go on. There are at least 10 different references to the minister saying it was clearly her decision.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation no longer deserves her position. Everyone is in agreement about that. She made the wrong decision by cutting funding to KAIROS. She did so against the advice of government experts. She did so by forging a document. And she did so by using the bureaucracy as a cover-up. She does not deserve to be a minister.

Where is the Prime Minister's leadership?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the agency gave advice that differed from the decision made by the minister. The minister said that. She said that it was her decision. That is the nature of our responsibility here. Officials do not make those types of decisions; elected ministers do. The minister took responsibility and the government supports her efforts.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the denial of funding has nothing to do with merit or effectiveness as evaluated by the bureaucracy. It has everything to do with politics, politics right out of the Prime Minister's playbook; politics that say it is fine to play partisan games with no accountability, to forge documents, to make things up, to come up with arbitrary political decisions, and then let them cover up afterwards and, even worse, let them mislead Parliament. That does not matter; that is fine according to the politics of the Prime Minister.

When will he take some responsibility and restore the funding for KAIROS? That is the bottom line.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is wrong is when governments slavishly follow advice that results in taxpayer money used, not for the purpose it was supposed to be used for, which is to help the people in the developing world, help the poorest and the most vulnerable, but instead for other purposes.

The government has been very clear that it expects taxpayer money to be used not to reward Canadian organizations, but to promote the foreign policy and the humanitarian objectives of the government. That is exactly what the minister has done.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we now know the Prime Minister supports his minister's contempt for Parliament. He supports her mistakes, and shamefully, he even says it was the right thing to do. Is it because, as he said, he makes the rules?

Why is the minister allowing herself to be manipulated by the Prime Minister? Is it because he will not let her resign? Is that why she will not defend herself?

Certainly she would prefer to defend her own integrity and answer for her own actions.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is quite rich.

Let me tell the House about the minister. The minister has done good work in helping millions of people around the world get the help and the assistance they require in very vulnerable situations. She is the minister who helped double Canadian aid to Africa, helping some of the most vulnerable people on the planet.

She is a minister who made a difficult and courageous decision when it came to not awarding a grant in this regard. It was the correct decision. It was the right decision, and the government stands behind that decision.

Oral Questions

● (1435)

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue of integrity. It is about dignity and honesty. It is about respect not only for the position the minister holds, but for the people she is supposed to represent.

If she really believes Canadians and her own constituents think she is in the right, why can she not just say so?

I quote, "Ministers must be present in Parliament to answer honestly and accurately about their areas of responsibility". Who said that? The Prime Minister.

Where is the accuracy? Where is the honesty? Where is the minister?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation attended at committee on Thursday, December 9. On more than 10 times she was incredibly clear that it was her decision not to give this particular non-governmental organization a grant. She was very clear about that. She was once again clear about it earlier this week in this place.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious by now that CIDA, and possibly the minister, approved the KAIROS grant. Then persons unknown inserted the "not" in the document and doctored it to make it look like CIDA turned down the application.

What specific Conservative government policy did the Christian churches offend after being approved for the CIDA grant?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member opposite to look at the committee transcript from December 9, where the deputy minister responsible said the inclusion of the word "not" is just a simple reflection of what her decision was. That is exactly what she said.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the right of every minister to make ministerial decisions. However, it is not the right of a minister to make a decision and then doctor a document and make it appear as if it is someone else's decision.

Mr. Speaker, until you blew the whistle, the minister was perfectly content to mislead the House.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to fire the minister, or will he have Parliament do it?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is certainly very clear is the member opposite did not agree with the decision the minister made. Those of us on the government side of the House agree that the minister made the right decision. She made the correct decision. We support that decision.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has spoken out against the government's

obscurantism before the Standing Committee on Finance. He was annoyed that the Conservatives too often use the cloak of cabinet confidence to withhold documents that he and we need to do our jobs. The expenditure reduction plan is one example.

Will they understand that it is a basic principle that Parliament authorizes expenditures? Will the government stop hiding things and give us its expenditure reduction plan?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question.

Just yesterday I met with the Parliamentary Budget Officer and told him that if he was having trouble obtaining any documents, all he had to do was call me and we would verify whether there are any documents.

Regulations have been established here, in the House, that make it possible to provide certain documents. He just needs to call me.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he may very well go out for a beer with Kevin Page, but the list has been known for a long time. Come on.

Kevin Page said that "Parliament needs more fiscal transparency". As they did in 2005 and 2006, they must make the cuts public, department by department. We need this information.

Why has it become a secret? What does the government have to hide? Its incompetence? Its intransigence? Its inability? Its ineptitude? All of the above?

● (1440)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was no beer yesterday because we have changed the former government's policy regarding alcohol at meetings.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer also said that our plan to reduce the deficit is ahead—by \$5 billion. That is not necessarily our opinion, but he said that he thought we were further ahead. He can say that because he has the plan, absolutely.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on December 10, 2009, the Minister of Industry instructed the CRTC to determine "whether the impact of these wholesale requirements unduly impairs the ability of incumbent telephone companies to offer new converged services".

How can the minister explain his flip-flop on usage-based billing when barely a year ago he was asking the CRTC to better protect the interests of Bell and Rogers, at consumers' expense?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue. Our government has expressed serious concerns about the CRTC decision and the wide-reaching implications it has for consumers, innovation and the competitiveness of small- and medium-size businesses. That is why the minister and the Prime Minister both expressed concern last week. That is why they decided to ask the CRTC to review that decision.

This government will always stand up for Canadian consumers, for innovation and for advancement in technology in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' stubbornness on the Globalive issue is disconcerting. Even though the Telecommunications Act, the CRTC and the Federal Court contradict the Conservative government, it is launching an appeal. The Conservatives must stop wasting public money and admit that Globalive is a corporation controlled by foreign interests.

When will the Conservatives comply with the Telecommunications Act rather than selling our airwaves to foreign corporations?

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat confused right now after listening to that question because the member has asked two questions and has taken a different position on each one.

Of course with the Globalive decision, consistent with the decision we have just talked about, the government has acted in the interests of Canadian consumers and in the interests of more competition in the Canadian marketplace. We will always do that.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, KAIROS is just the tip of the iceberg. Many hard-working organizations from across Canada have been left twisting in knots, their funding cut without reason and without explanation by the government.

With the minister's admission of fraud, can others be wondering, did we suffer the same fate? What other groups did CIDA recommend for funding but received a handwritten "not"?

Will the minister tell us or not?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister made no such admission because there was not one. The minister made a decision, as she is entitled to do. She was very clear that she was the one who made that decision. She believed that funding would better go to support vulnerable people in the developing world rather than to a Canadian NGO.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clear, I think not. The Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, MATCH, AIDS groups, women's groups, human rights groups, dozens have had their funding cut.

The Prime Minister makes the rules. The message is clear: ideology over reason, "cross him and you are finished." Will he do the right thing? Will he reverse these ideological cuts and will he fire that minister today?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member what the minister has done. She has done an outstanding job supporting the people of Haiti during a very difficult circumstance. She has led the way by providing millions of the world's most vulnerable mothers, children and infants with the medicine and care they so desperately need. She has also committed to ensuring that millions of girls and women in Afghanistan are getting an education today, an education that was denied to them for many years by the Taliban terrorists.

• (1445)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 16, 2009, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism gave a speech in Jerusalem in which he linked KAIROS to the Canadian Arab Federation and Canadian Islamic Congress as being part of an anti-Semitic approach to public policy. He said that KAIROS was taking a leadership role in the boycott movement and that was the reason for the de-funding.

My question is actually for the Minister of International Cooperation. I would like to ask the minister this simple question. What conversations did she have with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, or with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or with the Prime Minister's Office that would lead her to that false and unfair conclusion—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. government House leader.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly have not read the speech in question by the minister of immigration. I am pleased that the foreign affairs critic for the official opposition is reading the speeches by the minister. He could certainly learn a terrific amount. The minister of immigration has done an outstanding job.

I believe what we have seen is that, at the committee in December, the Minister of International Cooperation said more than 10 times that she was the one who made the decision.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 8, in response to a question from my colleague from London North Centre, the minister answered this way.

[Translation]

She responded in writing as follows: "The CIDA decision not to continue funding KAIROS was based on the overall assessment of the proposal, not on any single criterion."

My question for the minister, the same minister who is still refusing to answer questions today, is the same: why did she not say, on March 8, that it was her decision and not CIDA's decision?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Probably because, Mr. Speaker, she had said it 10 times on December 9 when she appeared before the parliamentary committee, when the member opposite was right there.

* * *

ROYAL VISIT

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians and our government were very happy to learn that His Royal Highness Prince William and Ms. Catherine Middleton are to be wed in April. I ask the Prime Minister, could he please update the House as to the government's plans with regard to the royal couple?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor. We will have some order.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Canadians and our government are pleased to inform the House that His Royal Highness Prince William and Ms. Catherine Middleton will make Canada their very first official tour as a couple following the royal wedding in April.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor. We will have some order, please.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, His Royal Highness and Ms. Middleton will visit all regions, meet Canadians from all walks of life and experience first-hand the beauty and vastness of this country.

I am sure Canadians will be as wildly enthusiastic in their reception of this visit as all members of the House appear to be.

* * *

AVIATION SECURITY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Dawood Hepplewhite of Sheffield, England cannot leave Canada because he is on the U.S. no-fly list. Why? Because he once went for a job interview in Yemen. The Conservatives' Bill C-42 would hand over passenger information to the United States and cases like this would dramatically increase.

Will the Conservatives wake up and realize this is a bad deal for Canadians? Will they finally scrap Bill C-42 and negotiate a new deal with the United States that better protects the rights of travellers?

• (1450)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is very interested in working with the Americans not only in respect of our trade relationship but in respect of a perimeter security. I was very pleased to hear that the Prime Minister and the President arrived at some agreement to move forward in that respect.

In respect of Bill C-42, that issue relates to the use of American airspace and the requirements that the American Congress has placed on people flying over that particular country.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are shutting down the border services office in Windsor. The new office is being set up not at Canada's busiest and biggest border gateway, but in the riding of a Conservative minister 400 kilometres away. Weakening the Windsor CBSA will mean more drugs and more guns crossing our border and getting onto our streets.

Why are the Conservatives putting political games ahead of public safety? Will the minister come clean about this decision and take responsibility for his partisan interference?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Border Services Agency announced that merging its administrative services in southern Ontario would be done to increase efficiency and save taxpayer money.

Fort Erie, Ontario has been chosen as the location for the new regional headquarters office. This was the decision that was made, and allow me to say I support the selection of Fort Erie.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at a time when our American neighbours need more than ever to be reassured about border security, the Conservative government is making cuts at border crossings in the Montérégie area and the Eastern Townships. Service at three border crossings will be reduced, and two crossings and four inland customs offices will simply be eliminated.

When will this government listen to reason and abandon its plan, which jeopardizes the economic development of our regions and threatens public safety?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc propaganda continues. Careful consideration was given to CBSA's ability to provide continued services as well as to the proximity of another port of entry.

Currently CBSA has 1,200 service points across the nation and processes over 91 million travellers annually. Jamieson's Line, for example, in Quebec sees an average of 12 travellers a day and no commercial vehicles. There is a port of entry 10 kilometres distant. Franklin Centre sees an average of 56 travellers a day and 3 commercial vehicles.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Brome—Missisquoi, the hours of operation of three border crossings will be reduced to just eight hours per day, effective April 1. This decision will have a negative impact on public safety and our economy.

Oral Questions

How can the government make such a decision without taking into consideration the views of local elected officials and the needs of the public? That is not propaganda.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a decision that was very carefully considered by local CBSA officials. For example, the Jamieson's Line in Quebec sees an average of 12 travellers a day and no commercial vehicles. There is a 24-7 port of entry 10 kilometres distant. The Franklin Centre in Quebec sees an average of 56 travellers a day and 3 commercial vehicles. There is a 24-7 port of entry 16 kilometres distant.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether forging documents or hiding them altogether from Canadians, the Conservatives are deceiving Canadians. They are operating an agenda of deception.

When the finance committee asked for the costs of the corporate tax cuts and the U.S.-style justice bills, the Conservatives said “no”. They refused to provide the documents to Parliament.

Why are the Conservatives stonewalling Parliament and why are they trying to hide the true costs of their right-wing agenda from Canadian taxpayers?

•(1455)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is why is the hon. member attempting to hide the true position of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business?

That is a member who stood in the House and claimed that the organization representing small businesses all across Canada supported his \$6 billion tax increase on job creators.

We found out only moments later from Catherine Swift that it was not the position of the CFIB. I suggest the hon. member rise and apologize because Catherine Swift has corrected the record.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Kings—Hants has the floor and the parliamentary secretary is dying to hear the question. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Parliamentary Budget Officer was absolutely clear when he said that Parliament is “losing control” of the public purse because of this government's secrecy. He said that in his 25 years of public service, the documents that we have asked for were never covered by cabinet confidence. The previous Liberal government even published these documents on the web.

Why are these big spending Conservatives breaking the rules to hide the true cost of their right-wing agenda from Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Catherine Swift of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was absolutely clear: she does

not support, as the Liberal member suggested, the Liberal plan to raise taxes on job creators by \$6 billion in the middle of an economic recovery.

We need a low tax plan to create jobs, not a high tax Liberal plan that will kill jobs. We need a stable government led by a solid prime minister, not a risky coalition that will risk the recovery and put Canadians out of work.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, shipbuilders on the west coast are nervous about talks with Britain to jointly discuss the building of Canadian naval ships. The government promised that these new vessels would be made in Canada, yet workers are worried that they may be sold out in these closed door negotiations.

Workers at the shipyards of Victoria, Esquimalt and Nanaimo are looking for answers. Will the Minister of Public Works come clean and recommit to an inclusive, fair and made-in-Canada shipbuilding strategy?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remember the day that we announced the national shipbuilding strategy. One of the member's colleagues from Halifax was there, and he said that it was a great day for Halifax.

I can tell her that our government is fully committed to the national shipbuilding strategy. It is a historic commitment. Our strategy will create more than 75 million person hours of work for the Canadian shipbuilding industry.

At the end of the day, this is great news for shipbuilders across the country. Our ships for our navy and our coast guard will be built by Canadians.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible that we have to go the House of Commons in Britain to find out that Britain and Canada are having closed discussions regarding the possibility of jointly building naval ships.

If the government is so committed to the NSPS, why is it having discussions with Britain regarding the building of our Canadian vessels?

We would like to know what those discussions are about. We would also like the government to recommit once and for all to building the entire ship for the navy and the coast guard, lock, stock and barrel, from stem to stern, with everything in it, in Canada by Canadian workers in Canadian shipyards.

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government is fully committed to the national shipbuilding strategy. The member knows that this is an historic commitment to our shipyards across the country. It is going to create 75 million person hours of work for the Canadian shipyards from coast to coast to coast.

He knows full well, being from Halifax, that this is a very competitive process, but it is good news. At the end of the day our ships for the navy and coast guard will be built in Canada by Canadians.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is reserving the possibility of entering a coalition with the Liberal leader and the NDP in the event of another minority Parliament. This scheming by the former reckless Liberal-led coalition is opposed by Canadians.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister please inform us why we should focus on jobs and the economy and not an election that Canadians do not want?

• (1500)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote *Le Devoir* from Monday. It says, “On Saturday at their general council meeting, the Bloc Québécois added a phrase to their election platform stipulating that: ‘The Bloc Québécois reserves the possibility to enter a coalition of parties’ in the event of another minority government.”

That risky coalition would drive up job-killing taxes and threaten our recovery. We need a low tax plan to create jobs. We need, and we have, a prime minister who is solid, steady and strong.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BORDER CROSSINGS

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while our American neighbours have been inviting the Prime Minister to discuss a secret perimeter security agreement that is causing Canadians concern, what are the Conservatives doing? They are preparing to close three other border crossings by April.

Can the minister clearly tell us whether or not he intends to close the border crossings at Morses Line, East Pinnacle and Glen Sutton in the Brome—Missisquoi region? The question is simple: yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, currently the CBSA has 1,200 service points across Canada and processes over 91 million travellers annually.

Jamieson's Line, Quebec, sees an average of 12 travellers a day and no commercial vehicles. There is a 24/7 port of entry 10 kilometres distant. Franklin Centre, Quebec, sees an average of 56

travellers a day and three commercial vehicles. There is a 24/7 port of entry 16 kilometres distant.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tonight, the Conservatives, who claim to support victims of crime, will have the opportunity to move from talk to action by voting in favour of Bill C-343, which is designed to provide better support to victims' families. The Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association supports this bill, which makes it possible to show a bit of compassion.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether his government has reconsidered its position and whether it intends to support our bill to provide tangible assistance to crime victims' families?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will never support a bill such as this one that rewards criminals. If a criminal gets injured while committing a crime, this bill would allow thousands of dollars to be paid out for his care. This is unfair and insulting to the victims, their families and Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the deadline for RRSPs just around the corner reminding Canadians, they are very worried about their retirement. After years of Liberal and Conservative neglect, the Canada pension plan will not be enough.

Many middle-class families cannot afford to buy RRSPs and those that can, cannot afford the high fees plus the HST. The Canada pension plan must be expanded. It is our most secure, reliable and least costly option.

When will this government expand the CPP so that all Canadians, regardless of income, can retire with dignity?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have cut taxes for seniors and pensioners by over \$2 billion annually since becoming the government, including the very important reform and saving for retired persons of pension splitting, which we brought in.

We are working on the new pooled registered pension plan proposal with the provinces. This is an area in which the provinces and the federal government are obliged to and do work together. We look forward to implementing that.

Routine Proceedings

There is no present consensus with the provinces with respect to proposed reforms to the Canada pension plan.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, street gangs and crime are major challenges for families in every region of Quebec. The Bloc Québécois prefers to listen to the leftist urban elite of Quebec and other leading thinkers who are disconnected from real life in the regions.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice tell this House what the Conservative government is doing to deal with street gangs and crime?

• (1505)

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is the only one listening to the regions of Quebec and their priorities. That is why we are continuing to deal with street gangs and to protect Quebec families. We recently passed a bill with minimum sentences for human trafficking, particularly involving minors. Unfortunately, the Bloc listened to its friends among the urban elite and not to the regions. The Bloc voted against the bill. Fortunately, the bill passed without the Bloc.

Our government continues to listen to the families and the regions of Quebec and we are going to continue to fight crime, regardless of what the Bloc and its urban friends might think.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

TAKE NOTE DEBATE ON IRAN

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In our ongoing efforts to make Parliament work, I believe you will find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion:

That a take-note debate take place today, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on the subject of the alarming deterioration of the Human Rights situation in Iran.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion adopted.
(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to request unanimous consent to table the document, "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State", which says:

Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the use of all powers vested in them. This demands constant attention to their parliamentary duties, including being present in Parliament to answer honestly and accurately about their areas of responsibility—

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.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent of the House to table the letters sent by the ambassador of Tunisia to the leader of the Bloc Québécois about Tunisia's requests to freeze and protect the real or personal property and financial assets belonging to the family of former President Ben Ali, currently on Canadian soil. We know that these assets belong to the people of Tunisia. We must take action before it is too late. Do I have the consent of the House?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

REPORTS OF THE COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 10.5 of the Lobbying Act, it is my duty to present to the House three investigation reports of the Commissioner of Lobbying.

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[*English*]

STATUS OF THE ARTIST

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 61 of the Status of the Artist Act, I have the honour to table the annual report of the Canadian Artists and Producers Professional Relations Tribunal for the period of April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010, in both official languages.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under standing order 32(2) of the House, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the following three treaties.

The first is an “Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of Jersey, Under the Entrustment from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for the Exchange of Information Relating to Tax Matters”, done at St. Helier on January 12, 2011.

The second is an “Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Isle of Man, Under the Entrustment from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for the Exchange of Information on Tax Matters”, done at Douglas on January 17, 2011.

And the third is an “Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the States of Guernsey, Under Entrustment From the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for the Exchange of Information on Tax Matters”, done at St. Peter Port on January 19, 2011.

* * *

●(1510)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the second report of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan in relation to the stoning of women and men in Afghanistan.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that pursuant to order made on Monday, February 14, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security deposited with the Clerk of the House the sixth report of the committee on Tuesday, February 15, at 10:08 p.m.

The committee considered Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts and reported it without amendment.

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PETITIONS

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from constituents of Western Arctic and citizens of Canada.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House of Commons to a promise made in 2008 to the public and our brave soldiers serving in Afghanistan by the Prime Minister that Canada's military mission would end in 2011.

The petitioners call upon members of the 40th Parliament of Canada to bring our troops home.

Routine Proceedings

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition in support of my private member's bill, Bill C-439, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (products made with dog or cat fur).

Members in the House may be surprised to know that there are currently no measures in place to ban the sale of products made with dog or cat fur in Canada, which makes Canada an international laggard.

In January 2009, the European Union passed an act prohibiting the trade of all dog and cat fur. More recently, U.S. President Obama signed into law the truth and fair labelling act which, along with the dog and cat protection act of 2000, ends the legal sale of dog and cat fur in the United States.

The over 2,200 Winnipeggers who signed this petition want Canada to take action to stop the sale of dog and cat fur in this country. It is time for us to update our animal welfare laws and pass Bill C-439.

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition signed by approximately 110 people. They are asking the federal government to amend the Veterans Charter to restore the lifetime monthly pension as a means of compensation for injured soldiers.

Although the minister introduced Bill C-55, which includes new assistance measures for our injured veterans, he is still refusing to give them the best solution for them, which is a lifetime monthly pension for all injured soldiers. We hope that this petition will open the federal government's eyes to this legitimate request from the people who have signed this petition. And we hope that the government will finally fix the mistake it made when it replaced the lifetime monthly pension with a lump sum payment for injured veterans.

●(1515)

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of people concerning the deportation order issued against Salvadorian refugee claimant Jose Figueroa.

The Immigration and Refugee Board has issued a deportation order against Mr. Figueroa, a Salvadorian refugee claimant and married father of three Canadian born children, who has lived in Canada for 13 years. The order is based on arguments by the Canada Border Services Agency and Department of Public Safety that Mr. Figueroa was once a member of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, which is now the government in El Salvador.

We know that Mr. Figueroa has never been involved in terrorist activities. The FMNL is not and has never been a terrorist organization. Mr. Figueroa has the support of his community and has an unblemished record of good citizenship in this country.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners ask that all members of the House contact the Minister of Public Safety to ensure this order against this very worthy claimant is lifted.

CANADA HEALTH ACT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by hundreds of individuals.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine the Canada Health Act and the five principles of medicare: universal coverage, accessibility, affordability, comprehensive coverage and federal funding, in the Canadian Constitution to guarantee national standards of quality and publicly funded health care to every Canadian citizen as a right.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition to urge hearings on the purchase of Joint Strike Fighters. This petition is with regard to the 65 F-35 JSF for a cost of roughly \$30 billion over 30 years.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to hold public hearings to enable a thorough, informed and frank national debate about the security threats to be met, the costs and benefits and the consequences of the acquisition of new generation fighter aircraft, and that a competitive selection process be held before any final commitment to the JSF project is made.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to table in the House today a petition from Calgarians who are urging public hearings on the proposed purchase of 65 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters at a cost of roughly \$30 billion over 30 years.

They state that the immense and unknown future costs of this proposed expenditure must be prioritized, along with the need for icebreakers to patrol the Arctic, transport aircraft for military and civilian personnel to respond to crises beyond our borders, a major boost to Canada's diplomatic core, a massive increase in foreign assistance and increased funds for environmental, health and education needs.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to hold public hearings to enable a thorough, informed and frank national debate on this purchase.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present two petitions.

The first petition is with regard to the long gun registry. It says that the long gun registry was originally budgeted to cost Canadians \$2 million but the price tag spiralled out of control to an estimated \$2 billion a decade later and that the registry has not save one single life since it was introduced.

The petitioners are calling upon the House of Commons and members in the House to support any legislation that will cancel the long gun registry, streamline the Firearms Act and keep the promise to cancel the long gun registry.

SKIN CANCER

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): My second petition, Mr. Speaker, is with regard to skin cancer. It says that one in seven Canadians will develop skin cancer in his or her lifetime. Melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer and one of the most rapidly-increasing cancers in Canada.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to support a national skin care and melanoma initiative to provide much-needed access to newer drug treatments and funding for research and educational programs.

[*Translation*]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition submitted by Louise Lamontagne of Kapuskasing. This petition has been signed by hundreds of people from Kapuskasing, Moonbeam, Fauquier and Timmins.

[*English*]

They are petitioning the Minister of Health to have chronic cerebrospinal venous Insufficiency surgery, also known as the Zamboni treatment or liberation therapy, made available in Canada to people who suffer from multiple sclerosis. The petitioners join residents from Rockland, Val Rita, Verner, Mattice, Wawa, Moosonee, Strickland and Ottawa in signing the petition.

It is obvious that there is a growing chorus of Canadians who have great hope in CCSVT's potential to improve the quality of life for people living with MS.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Clearly, an increasing number of people suffering from multiple sclerosis are demanding access to this procedure.

[*English*]

A good portion of those are only held back by the tremendous costs of receiving the treatment abroad. The petitioners feel that it is time for the minister to stem the tide of Canadians who are travelling abroad to receive liberation therapy and make this otherwise common procedure available to Canadians with MS.

CANADA HEALTH ACT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition in which the petitioners are calling upon the federal government to preserve and enforce the Canada Health Act and the foundation of medicare in every province and region of Canada. They want the government to maintain the five principles of medicare.

Government Orders

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine the Canada Health Act and the five principles of medicare in the Canadian Constitution. They are hoping that this will guarantee national standards of quality publicly-funded health care for every Canadian citizen as a right. The petitioners and I look forward to the answer from the minister.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition is signed by dozens of Canadians and calls for Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan to end this July 1.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with agreement 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 the 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 mission 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): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no 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.

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, February 14, the House will now proceed to the third reading of this bill.

Hon. Vic Toews moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of the legislation before us. As hon. members know, we are here to discuss Bill C-59, which would make important changes to our parole system.

As we have heard from my hon. colleagues, the legislation has one clear purpose. That purpose is to abolish the system known as accelerated parole review. This is not complex legislation, with many layers and detailed lists of amendments. That is why the name of the proposed act is also clear: Bill C-59 Abolition of Early Parole Act.

The legislation proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to put an end to the current practice of giving white-collar offenders early eligibility for day parole.

We are not creating new regulations. Nor are we looking for ways to complicate the parole system. Instead, we are standardizing a system that currently has two sets of rules for two different types of offenders. In essence, we have a two-tiered system.

Under this system, an offender who has committed a violent crime, like murder or assault, cannot apply for day parole until six months before he or she is eligible for full parole. On the other hand, individuals who are sentenced to jail for committing a white-collar crime, like fraud, can apply for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence. This puts non-violent offenders on a different playing field.

The individual who is sentenced to 12 years in jail for stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars from unsuspecting Canadians is well aware that he or she will only have to serve two years in jail before being eligible to apply for day parole. Also, under the current system, it states that the offender who committed a violent crime must appear in person before the Parole Board of Canada and stand in front of board officials to plead his or her case. This is not the case for non-violent white-collar offenders. In their case, the application for day parole is done on paper. They are not compelled in person at a Parole Board hearing.

Government Orders

Under the current system, a violent offender must clearly show the Parole Board of Canada that he or she will not commit another crime once released on parole. If the Parole Board cannot find reasonable grounds to believe the offender will commit another crime, any crime, it will then approve parole.

The system works differently for non-violent and white-collar offenders. The only test they must pass in order to be released on parole is that the Parole Board must not find a reason to believe the individual will commit a violent offence.

I would like to repeat that last part because it is certainly one of the most confounding parts of the current system. Under APR, the individual who has committed a non-violent crime must be released on parole if there is no evidence that he or she will commit a violent crime.

I would suggest that the number of people jailed for a non-violent act like fraud who then end up committing a violent crime once on parole must be a fairly low number. The reality is most of the people who are in jail for scamming people out of their investments are not likely to have a violent past.

● (1525)

It seems odd, then, that this would be the ruler with which their future freedom is measured. Instead, it would make more sense for the Parole Board to use the same test as it uses for all offenders, that they must show they will not commit any new crime in order to be released.

As hon. members can see, the current system of accelerated parole review is not working. In addition to giving white-collar offenders an easier and faster system in which to apply for parole, it also removes any incentive for these offenders to work toward rehabilitation. They know they need only serve one-sixth of their sentence before applying for day parole. They know they will not have to present themselves to the Parole Board of Canada in person to plead their case. They also know that if there is no evidence they will commit a violent crime once released, the Parole Board has no choice but to release them.

Again, where is the incentive for this individual to make progress toward rehabilitation? The simple answer is there is no incentive. Our government is determined to change the system so it puts all offenders on the same level. In essence, we are streamlining the parole system so all offenders are treated the same. This makes sense and this is what we intend to do.

We have heard from hon. members on the other side of the House who say that the actions we are taking to improve our law enforcement and corrections and justice system are just too costly. However, our government has said more than once that we will not count nickels and dimes when it comes to protecting victims of crime and their families.

We have told Canadians that we will not turn our backs on victims who feel they do not have a voice in our justice system.

This is why we are asking all hon. members to support Bill C-59. We are urging all hon. members to stand with us in support of victims.

I have listened with great interest to my hon. colleagues who have spoken eloquently about the devastating impact that this crime can have on the lives of hard-working Canadians and their families. Some of these victims have overcome their shame and humiliation to come forward and tell their stories and provide evidence in court that helps convict these fraud artists. This cannot be an easy decision for these victims, especially as they start the process of picking up the pieces of their lives. It then comes as a shock to these victims and, in fact, to all Canadians when this offender is allowed to apply for day parole after serving a small portion of his or her sentence.

As I mentioned earlier, we have heard the example of how someone who is sentenced to 12 years in prison can be eligible for day parole within just 2 years. In those same two years, the victims have struggled to find their normalcy and to repair the damage left in the wake of this white-collar crime. It is these victims who we must consider when we discuss Bill C-59. In fact, our government has always put victims of crime first in our efforts to improve the legal and corrections system.

We have introduced legislation to give victims a voice at the Parole Board hearings and to ensure that offenders cannot pull out of their hearing at the last minute.

We have also supported many programs and initiatives that ensure that the voices of victims are heard and that their concerns are addressed, including the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime and public safety, Canada's national office for victims.

● (1530)

Our government is proud of our track record to support the rights of victims. We have told Canadians we will do what is right and we will keep their communities safe and secure. Bill C-59 is an important step in this process and we ask all hon. members to support the legislation.

● (1535)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this issue has vexed me for an awful long time. When I was acting in a role as a crown attorney, criminals and their counsel would often come to me and ask what kind of a sentence I was looking for. If I said, for example, 10 years, they would agree to the sentence as long as they could determine what they would plead to. They would ask that all of the violent crimes, like robbery, a gun crime, or the like, be stayed by the Crown. The crown attorney would not care, generally speaking, if he or she got the 10-year sentence. The individual would plead guilty to a break and enter with intent, for example, which is not considered a violent offence.

The game being played was that by removing all of the reference to so-called "violent crime", people would then be eligible at one-sixth or one-third, at a much more rapid pace. That, quite frankly, was unacceptable.

How does this bill address that kind of gaming of the system?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague is proud of the stand our government is taking on sticking up for victims. That is what we are asking all members in the House to do.

Government Orders

I know not just Miramichiers but all Canadians want us to stick up and work for victims. The victims are suffering from whatever criminals have done to them.

I am proud to be part of this government and I know my hon. colleague is as well. It is a government that is tough on crime and we urge all opposition members to support the bill.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are approaching third reading and it would seem almost impossible to believe that the Conservative government would be asking Parliament to vote in mere hours with no cost whatsoever.

First, does the member have an expectation that Parliament would vote in the dark with a blindfold on? Does she find it acceptable that we should just vote for bills without any idea whatsoever what the cost implications would be, particularly when we have seen that these types of bills cost enormous amounts of money? The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that just one of the Conservative crime bills would cost between \$10 billion to \$13 billion. Where is the money?

Second, I would accept any evidence. I am begging for it and I have asked, but there has been nothing again and again. What evidence is this being based on? Could the member show a single jurisdiction in the world where first-time non-violent offenders are put in for long periods of incarceration where it does anything but increase violence, increase victimization and create more problems?

Last, why would Conservative members not support our efforts both in committee and two years ago to go after large-scale fraudsters, focus it there and keep the accelerated parole review for others?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I come from the community of Miramichi, which is one of the best communities in the world. Miramichiers as well as all Canadians have certainly witnessed crimes done to victims and there is no money that can pay for that.

Last night I went to the ballet and I saw a silhouette of a Miramichier. I know this family and I know of its suffering and hurt. Regardless of what the cost is, no money can ever repay that.

What Canadians worry about are the millions that are thrown into the air and never accounted for, like we saw in the previous government. Those are the kinds of dollars that Canadians are worried about us spending.

• (1540)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about meeting with victims. Would it not be best for government to instill regulations and rules that would prevent victims from being created in the first place?

My question is very specific. The member is obviously concerned about this issue. Could she outline what her government has done to tighten up the regulations for the investors who rip off pensioners? Could she give us a few examples of something specific her government has done that says oversight will become more strict in Canada, not as it is right now?

The white-collar crime my colleague talks about will continue on beyond implementation of this bill because the government has

regulators that are too close to those they are meant to be regulating. The OECD has harshly criticized Canada for this investment environment. The greatest reason others do not invest in Canada is that our regulatory environment is too weak. The reason Conrad Black was thrown in jail in the United States and not in Canada is that the Conservative government is too passive toward white-collar crime.

Could the member name one thing her government has done to clamp down on this so victims are not created in the first place by Earl Jones and others?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, that is another prime example of the opposition supporting criminals. I know that is not what Canadians want.

Just yesterday one of Earl Jones' victims said, "Jones will be free long before any one of us regain any semblance of normalcy and closure".

Yesterday in the House the Liberal leader voted for our bill at second reading to end accelerated parole, but today he is again proving he is soft on crime by opposing our measures that would put an end to early parole for notorious fraudsters like Earl Jones.

I would ask all members of the House to support our bill, to support the victims.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Here is the problem, Mr. Speaker. A member of Parliament asked a question about what the government has done for victims and the response is to say that the member supports criminals. What absolute nonsense.

I was at committee last night. I watched every single opposition member, except for the Bloc Québécois, vote to ensure people like Earl Jones are not eligible for this condition. Shame on that member for trying to portray that any member of the House, either the member who posed the question, or myself, or a member of the Bloc, or the member herself supports Earl Jones getting accelerated pardon review.

The member should have listened two years ago when at justice committee we moved provisions that would not have allowed Mr. Lacroix out.

If the member is interested in victims, why has nothing been done to implement restitution orders so that when victims are taken for this kind of money the individual who commits the crime has to pay the money back? Why has the government made cuts to the RCMP task force on white-collar crime that goes after these criminals? Why has the government sat for years on legislation that we have been waiting to pass on lawful access to give police the tools to go after these kinds of criminals? Why has the government made cuts to crime prevention? Why has it cut from victims' services? Why did the government fire its victims' ombudsman, the government's own hand-picked ombudsman, who said its plan for victims is broken and will not work?

If the member is concerned about victims, why is she not addressing those issues?

Government Orders

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I want to replace that word “if”. There is no “if”. Our government is concerned about victims and we have shown that over and over again. For 13 years we saw nothing being done for victims and we are now trying to take the ball and run with it.

I do not know what the member was dreaming about last night; none of us saw what he was dreaming about. I can assure him that our government is proud to stand in the House and stand up for victims. When I go back to the Miramichi, I will be proud to tell Miramichiers that I, along with our government, stood up for them, stood up for victims, stood up for all Canadians.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a couple of hours this House will vote at third reading on a bill that we have had about three days to work on. Parliament is yet again being asked to vote on a bill with absolutely no idea whatsoever what the costs will be. Effectively, Parliament has a blindfold on and has been wished good luck. It will find out after the bill has been passed and the money has been long since spent what the financial implications are. This is no way to conduct business.

As I watched last night, we had a couple of hours to listen to witnesses and listen to serious concerns regarding this bill. Yet again there was a closure motion so we could only deal with it until 10 o'clock.

Here are the facts. This sudden urgency, this sudden flurry of activity that came from the government could have been easily avoided if it had listened over the last number of years when Liberal members said that we should make sure we fix this, that we should shut down the provisions that allow someone like Earl Jones or Mr. Lacroix to get out early. We have been very clear on that. We have consistently pushed for it. We did so in press releases. We did so at the justice committee, moving it as amendments. The government refused to act. Then Mr. Lacroix got out because of the government's inaction. The government was caught with its pants down. It was embarrassed and suddenly, there was a flurry of activity. Suddenly it said that we should adopt this overnight or we do not care about victims; adopt this overnight or we are on the side of criminals. It is a defensive argument and it debases this House.

I have sat here and I have listened to members talk about rape victims. Just yesterday a Conservative member stood in the House and said that there are certain members of Parliament, of course they were not named, who support organizations that do not want jail time for people who rape children. What on earth is happening to debate when the Conservatives do this kind of thing? This is debate about first-time non-violent offenders and there is someone standing in the House talking about raping children and saying there are members in the House who do not support tough sentences for somebody who commits a crime like that. That is shameful. It shows us how desperate the Conservatives are to put politics ahead of an honest debate.

Here is the honest truth. Over the last two years not only did we advocate for these types of provisions that would stop someone like Earl Jones from getting released early, but in committee last night I, along with Liberal members and members of the NDP, proposed a series of amendments to make it targeted.

We voted yesterday at second reading to have the ability at committee to debate this matter, to focus it and get rid of the most offensive provisions that touch on things that frankly none of the Conservatives has been talking about and to determine what the Conservatives say the stated purpose of the bill is. What did they do? They voted against those amendments. In recorded vote after recorded vote, they blocked our efforts to amend the legislation.

Then they had the audacity, the intellectual dishonesty, to stand in the House and say that we do not care about victims, that we want to let Earl Jones out. It is despicable and it is dishonest.

To say that we have fair differences, to say that between us there are bridges we cannot build, that we cannot find compromise in certain areas, that is fine. To say that we both care about public safety, we both want to make a difference but we have a different approach to how we want to achieve it, is fair. However, to stand in the House and say that certain members support criminals, certain members do not support victims, give me a break.

Every single one of us in the House was elected because we care about our communities and our families. Every single one of us in the House comes here every day to try to make a better country, a safer country, with less violence and fewer problems. When we cast aspersions like that, the only thing we do is turn off Canadians and have them tune out. They say that this is not real debate and is nothing but games.

● (1545)

What I am trying to do here, and what we have tried consistently to do over the last number of days, is to point out deep concerns we have with provisions in the bill that eliminate the accelerated parole process for everyone.

Why should we care about that? First of all, this bill does nothing for victims. I mentioned that in my question.

It is worth mentioning that the member for Brampton West asked a series of good questions to victims. He asked what was more important to them and what did they want to see. Their most emphatic responses were around things like restitution and the ability to get money back from the people who victimized them. These are people who lost their life savings. Their first priority is getting back those savings. Certainly one of the first priorities of the government should be to stand side by side with them and say it is going to do everything it can do to get that money back.

One victim talked about his concerns with the idea that somebody like Earl Jones would just leave the country with his hard-earned money. We should be there for the victim every step of the way.

We heard another victim talk about the tax complications that come with this kind of situation. There are tax difficulties. As a government, and I speak in the collective sense of parliamentarians, we should be seeking ways to give tax breaks and different ways of assisting people who have been in that situation to dig themselves out.

Government Orders

We certainly heard from victims about the importance of enforcement, about putting money into the RCMP. It was only two days ago we heard about deep cuts of some \$20 million that had been made to the national police services, which now the RCMP has to fund because there is a shortfall from the federal government. This is for services as essential as the sex offender registry and CPIC. We also know about cuts that have been made to the RCMP task force on white-collar crime.

It strikes me as disingenuous to say that opposition members do not care about victims when we are saying we have to do more to stop there being victims in the first place. We watched more than 70% being slashed from the crime prevention budget. When I talk to not-for-profit groups across the country that do great work in trying to stop crime before it happens and they tell me that they have to focus all their attention and energy on maintaining what little federal funding they have left to stop crime in their communities, that is wrong. When we talk about prevention, it is specifically because we care about victimization. It is specifically because we want safer communities, that we want honest answers for them.

In those examples, by investing in community capacity, by investing in police resources, by passing bills like what we have been pushing for, for well over four years now, to give lawful access abilities to our police to chase after criminals who use electronic media to perpetrate their crimes, by enabling them in those ways, we stop there being victims in the first place.

For anybody who has been victimized, the first thing that goes through his or her mind is how to make sure the pain and hurt and suffering never happens again. How do we stop it? It is not just about punishment.

On the punishment front, I cede to the Conservatives. They want to out-punish us. That is fine. The question is: Where does that lead? If our only objective is punishment, if we do not invest in those things I was talking about around prevention, where all those cuts have been made, we do no service to victims.

The Conservatives hand-picked the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Steve Sullivan. When he came to the conclusion after working with the Conservative government that the Conservative plan for victims will not work and is the wrong direction to go, he was fired. He was let go only because he spoke out.

Why did he say this plan was broken and would not work? It was not just because the Conservatives cut more than 40% from the victims of crime initiative, an initiative that sought to break cycles of victims that feed criminality. We have to remember that many victims become criminals if we do not address the base pain of their victimization. He said that not nearly enough money was being put into prevention and because of the cuts he saw, not nearly enough resources were being put into policing and not nearly enough resources were being put into helping victims once they had been victimized. Those are the kinds of things we have to do.

• (1550)

The Conservative plan to chase after incarceration and only incarceration as the solution, and then to vilify anybody who suggests that we should also look at other ideas, has been tried

before. I mention this because it is important before embarking on a new endeavour to ask if somebody has tried this before.

Here in Canada we enjoy very low crime rates. During the years of Liberal power, we saw the crime rate, year over year, go down. At the same time, we enjoyed very low rates of incarceration. In thinking about it, those things are actually symbiotic. If there is a low rate of incarceration and a small number of people in prison, it is because there is less crime and fewer criminals. If there are overflowing prisons, and we are building more and more and it is growing and growing, it is because we have a lot of crime. It is not a good indicator.

In Canada, we had a strong model and, if we are going to break from that, where are we going? This same hyper-partisan approach to crime was tried by Republicans in states like California where they tried to vilify people who talked about prevention and investing in rehabilitation and programs. They called them people who did not care about victims and talked about them in the same kind of hyper-partisan terms that we have seen on the other side. Then they proceeded down a path of building more and more prisons, just churning them out one after the other.

What happens? Let us look at this bill. This bill disproportionately affects women. Some 62% of the people who will be affected by this will be women. These are women who are coming out of vulnerable situations or who are in situations where they are in a bad relationship or bad associations and end up carrying, not necessarily drugs, but goods of some sort, such as stolen goods. They are probably doing it under duress because they are in a bad situation, an impoverished situation.

If those women are a first-time non-violent offenders, this bill would eliminate their opportunity to move into conditional release. What does throwing them in jail longer and potentially keeping them away from their children for longer periods of time? Does that promote public safety?

In the experience of California, it did not. What ended up happening was that when they took first-time non-violent offenders and put them in jail for longer periods of time, there was a degradation in their condition.

Now that the prisons are more full and more replete with first-time non-violent offenders, there is less money to go around, which means that programs and services will be less effective. We already see that happening here in Canada where there is less money for programs and services. The correctional investigator is saying that we have a developing crisis here and there just is not enough money to deal with all of the people coming in to make them better.

Offenders who go into prison for a minor crime, go into an environment that is overcrowded and that does not have the services to address their root condition, remembering that more than 80% of inmates suffer from addiction issues. In the women's population, a quarter suffer from serious mental health issues. We are giving no money to those issues. In fact, we see it starting to slip away more and more. We then release them and, in this case, it is six months or two years later, whatever the case may be.

Government Orders

What happens when they get out? They start committing more serious crimes. In California, this vicious cycle became so bad that the rate of recidivism, that rate of reoffending, was over 70%, which means that for every 10 people who walked out a prison door, 7 would commit a crime.

We heard an interesting statistic last night. The violent reoffending rate for people who have been accessing the program is 0.3%. We are tossing out the window a program that has a violent recidivism rate of 0.3%. The system we are emulating is the California model that sees violent recidivism rates, not only in the double digits, but over 20%. It does not seem to me like that is something we would want to chase.

• (1555)

The problem in this vicious cycle is that it keeps feeding itself, it keeps chugging. The more those services are cut, the more people who go into prisons and the more stretched we become, the less there is available.

In California's example, it eventually had to go to private prisons where the conditions got even worse, where double bunking became triple bunking and where the lack of services became a complete absence of services. I do not think that is a path we want to cross.

When we look at the bill, we should consider the fact that many legal experts, including the Barreau du Québec, say that it is unconstitutional as well, that the retroactive features contained within the bill are unconstitutional and will not stand up to challenge. It is probably the result of hastily crafted legislation that was done behind closed doors, did not involve the parties and rammed through in three days, but those sorts of things are important to look at.

In a broader sense, in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Cameron is undoing this kind of punishment agenda, while in the United States we see an undoing of this kind of agenda. Newt Gingrich, who is considered the father of this whole idea, is saying that it is broken and it does not work. Canadian Conservatives stand alone in the world, conspicuously so, in chasing after this disaster.

I will point to one other quick example before I make a couple of other points. We need to look at Florida versus the state of New York and the two approaches they took. New York decided that this kind of prison agenda was not making sense, so it actually reduced its overall incarceration rate by some 16%. At the same time, Florida continued charging forward with these types of conservative policies for non-violent offenders. The result was that Florida had an increase of 16% in its incarceration.

If we use Conservative logic, Florida should have been a Nirvana. Florida should have suddenly seen massive decreases in its crime. The opposite was true. Not only was Florida now burdened with billions of dollars in new costs, but its crime rate had gone up. Meanwhile, in New York, which saved billions of dollars and decreased incarceration, its crime rate went down. That is the case, the tale, everywhere it has been tried. This is not some debate in abstraction.

This is a debate with hard evidence and, if we care, not just about costs but also about victims, if we care about making a difference and making our communities safe and we are honest about that

intention and not seeking to play politics, it takes longer to explain but it makes sense to do the right thing.

It is important to read the comments that came in from the correctional investigator. These are his statistics and the concerns that he expressed. He said, "The abolition of APR will result in non-violent offenders remaining in federal custody for significantly longer periods before being released into the community—this with limited net public safety benefit".

He goes on to say, "We can also expect that the Parole Board of Canada will have to hold more hearings than before, as APR typically is conducted by a paper review. These associated costs, in addition to significant incarceration costs, are important and need to be calculated".

"Of course, we have nothing. They refused to give us the figures".

"Statistics show that overcrowding in prisons leads to higher levels of tension and violence and jeopardizes the safety of staff, inmates and visitors".

He continues on to say, "With overcrowding, timely and comprehensive access to offender programs, treatment and meaningful employment opportunities are measurably diminished".

He continues on to say, "Capacity is currently most limited at the most medium security level, where bulk of correctional programming is supposed to take place and this bill will negatively impact it".

He goes on to talk about the overrepresentation of aboriginal people and how the bill will disproportionately impact them. He continues to say that the office is concerned, as I mentioned before, about women offenders and the fact that this disproportionately targets them. We must remember that for women offenders the cost of incarceration is anywhere from \$180,000 to \$250,000 a year.

These are not smart solutions. They are backward, failed Republican solutions and we do not need them here. We need to be smart, not dumb, on crime.

• (1600)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I made note that at the beginning of the member's speech he talked about the desire to take the debate to a higher level and to have an honest question and an honest answer. I am going to ask a fair question and I hope he will provide a fair answer.

With regard to the accelerated parole review, I know he supports the area around fraudsters but that he has a problem with regard to first-time non-violent offenders.

Government Orders

Last night in committee, one of the witnesses, Ms. Lanctôt, described two of the non-violent offenders. One was a drug mule and one was an individual who had a drug operation in his house. Those are the ones with the accelerated parole that the member for Ajax—Pickering thinks works well.

I wonder if he could just provide an answer to the House as to whether he thinks those types of crimes warrant accelerated parole review.

• (1605)

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, let us take the example of a drug mule under this situation. Let us take the example of a woman in a bad or abusive relationship, which, unfortunately, is very often the case, or she is caught up in a crowd that is less than desirable because of an economically vulnerable position, who, because of that economically vulnerable position, makes some bad choices, becomes a mule, not necessarily for drugs, but for other goods that maybe she did not realize were stolen, or maybe even did realize were stolen, what do we do with her?

There has to be a consequence, absolutely, but long periods of protracted incarceration do one thing. They lead to more crime. They lead to less rehabilitation. It has been proven in every jurisdiction it has been tried.

Therefore, keeping that woman, who might be a mother, away from her children, as long as possible in a jail cell does one thing. It reduces overall resources to deal with violent offenders who need to be treated. In that situation, it could cost anywhere from, at a low, \$185,000 to a high of \$250,000 a year to incarcerate her, where conditional release will be \$23,000. It does nothing for public safety and it reduces resources to deal with those who are a danger to society and we do not want to let out.

We need to be intelligent and thoughtful on this stuff.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by the hon. member's comments. To hear him talk, this entire bill should be rejected. He had many questions and criticisms for someone who voted in favour of the bill at second reading and who will vote in favour of it again at third reading this evening if he votes with his party. He should listen to the arguments of those who are in favour of this bill and particularly the arguments of the Bloc Québécois members who are behind this bill.

Members are talking about saving money. In matters of justice, the common good must always be the first priority. Certainly it will cost money to sometimes imprison people, but there are also major costs associated with letting criminals roam free. We always use the examples of Vincent Lacroix and Mr. Jones, but let us also not forget Donald Matticks, the famous drug dealer. He was sentenced to 8 years in prison but served only 16 months. That is ridiculous. Judges must be able to assess the crime based on its seriousness, not based on how the offender behaves in prison or on whether the crime was violent or not.

I am surprised by the hon. member's comments. I am wondering whether he would not be better off siding with the Bloc Québécois to respond to the wishes of the public.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, of course we voted at second reading. As I explained, we wanted to amend it and really focus on the people he is pretending the bill is about.

However, I will tell members what I am shocked by. I am shocked that the Bloc Québécois is willing to vote for a bill when it has no costs, that it is willing to vote on a bill that has no idea of the fiscal implications on it. I am shocked that the Bloc Québécois will vote for a bill that the Quebec Bar Association says is unconstitutional and will not work. I am shocked that the Bloc Québécois would stand up against pretty much every church group that is out there that says that the bill will not work, or against the Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society and an assembly of health care providers that is pan-Canadian from Quebec to Newfoundland to the Yukon that all say that this stuff does not work.

I am shocked that the Bloc did not vote with us two years ago to put in provisions that would have ensured that Mr. Lacroix did not get out. Where was the Bloc two years ago? Why was the Bloc not with us two years ago when we introduced measures to stop large-scale fraudsters? Why is it including everybody else in this in a way that would badly damage public safety?

• (1610)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate about what prisons are and what the philosophy should be. The member rightly pointed out a number of areas. I would also like to refer to some statistics that my hon. colleague from Vancouver pointed out to us today.

The fact is it costs roughly \$150,000 to keep a person in prison and roughly \$185,000 to keep a female in prison today. The cost of parole, including halfway houses, is around \$39,000.

In the past five years around 7,000 offenders were entitled to consideration for accelerated parole and roughly 4,800 were granted it. It had an 84% success rate. Those are not bad statistics. It means these people came out of jail and did not go back to crime.

Is this not what it is all about? Should our crime policy not only allow for punishment, but also ensure that it does not happen again?

Could he comment on that?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. We have to make decisions on the basis of evidence. We have to be able to demonstrate how our policies will work and where they have worked elsewhere. On that basis, this completely fails.

I will speak to cost, and this is for the Bloc Québécois. On the two-for-one remand credit, the Minister of Public Safety told us the cost would be \$90 million over five years. The real cost turned out to be \$10 billion to \$13 billion. Yet the Conservatives bring crime bills, bill after bill, and they refuse to tell us the cost.

Government Orders

How dare the Bloc vote for a bill with no costing, with no information whatsoever? What kind of precedent does this establish? What happened to the members of the Bloc Québécois who stood and demanded information on the statistics before they voted on things?

To play some politics, Bloc members are willing to vote for a bill that has nothing in terms of cost, yet has all kinds of information to show that it is going to hurt rehabilitation and the safety of our communities. I just do not get it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment on one of the many reasons the Conservative agenda is rough on victims and makes Canada more dangerous? Examples of this agenda are: putting first-time offenders in penitentiaries, making them more dangerous; reducing alternative sentencing that has had such a good record; reducing funding for prevention and victims of crime; cutting services to mental health and FAS facilities and situations; creating sentences that would not pass fairness, so the criminals would get away scot-free; doing nothing to reduce the excessive percentage of aboriginal peoples in jail; closing prison farms; not investing in rehabilitation or training; not increasing services for addictions; and, finally, ignoring the root causes of crime.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent list. I do not know if I could build on it. However, when we have first-time non-violent offenders, we should have two objectives.

First is to ensure that they never commit crimes like that again. We want to ensure our rehabilitation efforts are successful. That is precisely why we want to keep something like this. We should keep it when we have the correctional investigator saying that it is effective, that it is needed. We should keep it when we have people on the front lines of rehabilitation saying that it has been an enormous success and we should ensure we do not toss it out.

Second is to be informed and understand that when there are victims, we have to ensure those victims are not re-victimized.

All evidence shows that instead of cutting from things like the RCMP white-collar task force, we need to be putting money into it. Instead of making cuts to the national police service, we need to be investing in it. We need to be putting in things like restitution orders to ensure victims who have been victimized get their money back. This is what we have to be doing.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am thinking of the victims of Vincent Lacroix, Earl Jones and Leon Kordzian—a fraudster who wrought havoc in my riding—as I rise today on Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

For the past four years, members of this Parliament have talked about this provision. There is no doubt that for four years we have wanted to abolish it.

What initially surprised us—and it was not much of a surprise after all—was that the Conservatives stood in the way of the speedy

passage of our bill, which sought to eliminate the one-sixth accelerated parole rule.

Let me provide a little background so that members have a better understanding of the provision we are seeking to abolish.

This mechanism, which allows for the release of inmates after they have served one-sixth of their sentence, is also known as accelerated parole review, and is already contained in sections 119 (1), 125, 126 and 126(1) of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Put simply, a criminal sentenced to two years or more in a federal institution may have early parole after serving one-sixth of his sentence, subject to an accelerated parole review. I want to make this very clear and I am going to come back to it later.

Under the current rules, for a first federal sentence, where an inmate has committed no violent crime involving organized crime or terrorism, no sexual crimes, nor been an accomplice to any such offences, has not been ordered to serve at least half of his sentence for a drug-related crime, and is not likely to commit a violent crime—he can commit another kind of crime, just not a violent crime—the inmate may be released. Those are the criteria in the act as it stands—criteria that we wish to abolish.

Consequently, if an inmate meets all of these criteria, he may, subject to this procedure, be released after serving one-sixth of his sentence. Under this procedure, he may even be released after serving a third of his sentence, which equates to full parole.

The public does take a very dim view of this mechanism, and I understand this perfectly. People wonder why, if a judge has sentenced someone to 13 years, the inmate is released after serving 15 months. We have seen that quite often: we saw it with Vincent Lacroix and we would have seen it with Earl Jones, but that will not be the case, I hope, because this bill will be passed. As my colleague just said, we also might have seen it in the case of certain drug traffickers who delegated the violent jobs to their foot soldiers. It brings the justice system into disrepute and makes it look rather distorted and lax. People are asking questions. I completely understand that the general public thinks it makes no sense.

Let us remember that this bill did not fall from the sky and did not just turn up overnight. I am going to give you a short timeline.

It started in July 2006 with Paul Coffin. I think the Liberals are very familiar with this guy, a player in the sponsorship scandal who was released after serving one-sixth of his 18-month sentence. We are not talking about fraud, we are talking about corruption and the sponsorship scandal. This is a far cry from Vincent Lacroix.

In October 2006, another one, Jean Brault, the founder of Groupaction and a key player in the sponsorship scandal, was released after serving six months of his 30-month sentence.

In June 2007, the Bloc Québécois proposed a justice plan, in which one of the things it called for was the repeal of this provision.

In December 2007, Vincent Lacroix was sentenced on criminal charges for the first time.

Government Orders

●(1620)

In August 2008, Jean Lafleur—that name may ring a bell with some—was released after serving seven months of his 42-month sentence. On September 14, 2009, the Bloc made its first request for unanimous consent of the House for the speedy passage of Bill C-434, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (day parole—six months or one sixth of the sentence rule). As I said, the Conservatives alone opposed it, for purely partisan reasons. On February 15, 2009, Charles Guité was released on parole after serving six months of his 42-month sentence. On October 26, 2009, the Conservatives introduced Bill C-53, to abolish parole after one-sixth of a sentence, but their Prime Minister shut down Parliament, and as we know, the government's bills died.

On March 4, 2010, we tried again. Once more we sought the consent of the House. The Liberals supported us, as they had the first time, and the NDP supported us too. Only the Conservatives did not want to hear anything about it, for purely political reasons. On June 15, 2010, they introduced Bill C-39, which is now in a committee that still has not heard witnesses. So their bill is far from passing. I would remind the House that it contains not only the repeal of accelerated parole review but all kinds of other things that will need very careful study.

On January 27, 2011, Vincent Lacroix was released after serving one-sixth of his sentence. It was the talk of all the media, a huge scandal, and I certainly agree with that. Suddenly the Conservatives woke up. I was in the House myself and saw the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the Bloc leader, head for the Prime Minister to discuss this and try to reach an arrangement. After much discussion, an agreement was reached. On February 10, I asked for the unanimous consent of the House to pass this bill, but the Liberals and the NDP refused, even though they had agreed in March 2010 and September 2009.

As members can appreciate, this bill did not come out of nowhere. It did not emerge out of the clear blue sky. It has taken four long years, and so far as I am concerned, the people of Quebec and Canada have finally glimpsed ultimate victory. Tonight, perhaps, they will be able to cheer that victory. People are fed up, and some of the victims appeared yesterday before the committee to tell us how their daily lives and their families had been affected and how they had suffered psychologically because of these criminals. The abolition of this provision will correct certain aberrations that people most often criticize. What they want is not necessarily tougher sentences but sentences that are actually served.

I want to give a fast overview of our committee meeting last night. It lasted four hours, including two hours of hearings and then the clause by clause study. First, we were told that the passage of this bill would not prevent criminals at very low risk of reoffending from possibly being released. However, there will be an evaluation of various crime-related factors, a real risk-assessment that is not necessarily based on the likelihood of reoffending through the commission of a violent crime. The risk assessment will focus on the actual individual in question. If he is a fraudster, for example, the likelihood that he will reoffend by committing a violent crime is low, but the likelihood of another fraud may be much greater.

●(1625)

We must be careful. We are saying that by eliminating this provision, we will be allowing a more comprehensive risk assessment.

I would like to give some idea of the factors that lead this kind of individual to commit crimes. This is based on the work of psychiatrist Robert Hare who wrote *Snakes In Suits: When Psychopaths Go To Work*. Perhaps some members are familiar with his book. He explains who these white collar criminals are.

It is very simple. There are two types of people who commit fraud. In an interview, Robert Hare once said, "For many ordinary criminals, crime is their job." Like everyone else who gets up in the morning and goes to work, so do they. "They are professionals who understand the risks, but choose to run the risks in order to take advantage of a windfall in the end."

Then there are others: the psychopaths. I am not talking about a psychopath with a knife hidden in the forest. That is not who I am talking about. I am not talking about psychopaths who seek out young children to sexually abuse them. I am talking about psychopaths who follow small investors to steal from them. Such people exist. These psychopaths are not the same as ordinary criminals.

Robert Hare also said, "These people are not the kind who calculate the risks and rewards. They believe they are entitled to the money they are stealing and that other human beings are objects with no feelings or rights. Professional criminals can have a conscience and feel loyalty to others, to their families, for instance. A psychopath feels no loyalty to anyone but himself."

Earl Jones, for instance, defrauded his own daughter. What a perfect example. I could go on forever in order to prove that these people should no longer be assessed based on the risk of violent recidivism, but rather based on the risk of any recidivism. That is what this bill will do, by eliminating accelerated parole review.

Yesterday I was looking at the record of the National Parole Board decision regarding the release of Vincent Lacroix. It is very clear. The commissioner said that the assessment done by the multi-disciplinary team convinced the board that this individual would not reoffend by committing a violent crime, which is true. However, what is the real analysis of the risk of a repeat offence? He is a fraudster. He is not a murderer; he is a fraudster. He is not a pedophile; he is a fraudster. What kind of crime would he commit again? A violent crime? The risk of that kind of repeat offence is very low. He will reoffend by doing what he knows best and what he considers a profession. He gets up in the morning, puts on a nice suit and defrauds seniors. Vincent Lacroix is one thing, but who would Mr. Kordzian defraud? He would defraud seniors, women who were single parents and disadvantaged people who did not speak French or English. Those are the people he would go after, and that is unacceptable.

Government Orders

Yesterday in committee, Mr. Zinger, the Executive Director and General Counsel for the Office of the Correctional Investigator, set the record straight, in my opinion. I asked him whether he was saying that full parole would no longer exist if the bill were passed the following morning—as I hope will be the case—and that people would serve two-thirds of their sentence. He replied that no, it was the accelerated parole review process that would be eliminated. That is clear.

Fundamentally, this accelerated process is a review on paper, based on a file, a criterion that is different from risk.

•(1630)

He is saying that all that will happen is that members will no longer conduct an administrative review of the case; they will have to actually evaluate the offender's risk of reoffending. The members will have to look at the person in front of them and decide whether he should be released or not. That is their job. Are the members paper pushers? No. They are there to meet these people and assess the risk along with a multidisciplinary team. It is high time this ended. They are paid well; they need to do their job. Of course, they have to be given the chance to do their job.

If the law forces them to release someone because they think that the offender, the criminal, will not reoffend by committing a violent crime, they can only do what the law gives them the authority to do. They are completely heartbroken at times because they want to keep an offender in detention, but they cannot. I would be very surprised if the person who let Vincent Lacroix out after one-sixth of his sentence really wanted to release him.

When this bill is passed, the National Parole Board will take into consideration the overall risk of reoffending in order to ensure public safety. It is true that we are not talking about serial killers, but they are still killers; they are economic predators. They destroy lives. Yesterday we heard from one of Vincent Lacroix's victims whose friends committed suicide. What is murder? Is it killing someone directly? What about murder at arm's length? Where did this idea of classifying murder come from? If my brother committed suicide tomorrow because someone ruined his life, would I be pleased to hear that that person did not kill him? What a disgrace. Incredible.

This bill brings up many emotions and we need to stay calm. With this bill, the National Parole Board will no longer be forced to release another Vincent Lacroix, and yes, I said "forced".

I will continue to talk about what happened in committee. Ms. Campbell from the Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate was telling us that this bill does not abolish the one-third of a sentence or day parole six months prior to one-third of a sentence. The bill serves only to remove the provision on accelerated parole review.

Since I have two minutes remaining, I would like to go directly to one of the points she raised. She said that sentences of three years or less would not really be affected by this provision. Day parole review would still be at about one-sixth of the sentence. The difference is the ability to examine the case and, in a way, assess the overall risk of recidivism.

I did a few quick calculations. I asked Ms. Campbell some questions yesterday. She said that the average sentence for female

offenders is approximately three years or less. I asked her for the figures for men for 2004-05 to 2008-09 and she said that just over 50% of male offenders serve sentences of three years or less. Generally speaking, those who are sentenced to three years or less will not be affected by this provision. Offenders who, after assessment, are found to present an unacceptable risk to society will not be released. All those who commit smaller-scale fraud, the offenders I refer to as casual or opportunistic criminals, will not be affected.

•(1635)

There will be a risk assessment and if we can assume the risk, they will be released.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member. The member for Ajax—Pickering stood in the House and said he believes that drug mules and people who are involved in grow ops should be allowed accelerated parole. What is the member's position on whether those people should be eligible for accelerated parole?

The other question is this. Madam Naltchayan, one of her constituents, testified at committee last night. I know that the member has had a lot of dealings and interactions with her. I wonder if the member could shed some light for the House on the costs that Madam Naltchayan has had to endure as a victim, as well as Mr. Gravel, who also testified at committee last night.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. First, with regard to our colleague from Ajax—Pickering, he is entitled to his opinions.

Regardless of the crime committed—here we are talking about non-violent crimes—if society can assume the risk, then it is assumed. The risk has to be assessed by professionals. Correctional Service Canada is a professional body whose professional employees are quite qualified to make those assessments. They are able to determine whether these individuals, regardless of the non-violent crime they committed, can be accepted or not in society. And if they are, there are halfway houses for them to go to. But at the same time, are they likely to reoffend and fall back into a similar offence, like a fraudster into fraud?

In closing, with regard to the witnesses who were victims of Mr. Kordzian and Mr. Lacroix, we know full well that their family and personal lives were devastated. I think we need to listen to those people. That is not to say that my colleagues—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for questions and comments.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, even though I do not agree with my colleagues in the Bloc, I find they approach bills in an intelligent manner, but not in this case. I have a question for the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

Government Orders

Yesterday evening, to add some intelligence to this bill, we proposed an amendment that would establish a \$100,000 threshold for economic crime, to truly identify white collar criminals and differentiate them from other criminals who will of course be covered by this bill.

Why did the Bloc reject the intelligent amendment proposed by the Liberal Party?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, the member wants to know why we voted against the amendment. If we had to do it again, we would vote the same way. If my colleague, who seems intelligent, had read the bill, he would know that what the Bloc Québécois wants to abolish is accelerated parole review. We are indeed talking about white collar criminals, but they are not the only ones targeted by this bill. We are targeting anyone who might reoffend, even if they committed a non-violent offence.

We definitely could not go along with an amendment that would penalize only criminals who commit crimes valued at \$100,000 or more. What about those who steal \$50,000 or more? The member would not have a problem with that? Would the member, with his supreme intelligence, be okay with that? Why not \$20,000? What does he think of fraudsters who steal \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000 at a time from small investors? Then there are all those who have not been caught. What about them? Should they be released after serving only a third of their sentence? I do not find that very intelligent.

• (1640)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the most important part of what the member for Ahuntsic said was, “At least, that is what I understood.”

I did not understand how the Bloc Québécois leader could go in front of the cameras earlier this afternoon. In response to the refusal of experts at the Barreau du Québec to support this bill because they thought it had some huge flaws and it was a massive mistake, the Bloc leader said that the Barreau was wrong. How arrogant.

It is clear from what the member for Ahuntsic said that she does not know what she is talking about. Using pseudo-terminology from her so-called field, in which she is no expert, she lists the crime-related factors, claiming that it is only accelerated review that will be eliminated. She does not seem to have truly understood the essence of the bill that the right—the Conservatives—and the centre right—the Bloc Québécois—support.

Did she really not understand that removing the one-sixth of the sentence provision is the purpose of this bill? That is what they were bragging about last week. For her own purposes, she invented a completely new version today. Now I understand why her leader spouted nonsense in front of the microphones today. He listened to his own member, who was spouting nonsense.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member is very frustrated because he is going to vote against it and he knows he is voting against the people of Quebec. He knows he is voting against victims. Deep down, he knows.

I would like to tell him that I completely understand this bill, as does the Bloc Québécois leader. We are going to abolish the one-sixth rule and the accelerated review process. Day parole is not being

abolished. It can still be granted six months before a third of the sentence is served.

My colleague understands nothing about this bill, which is perhaps why he is voting any which way.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my knowledgeable colleague and I congratulate her on the quality of her speech. She has a very thorough understanding of the bill and more importantly, she did an excellent job explaining why the Bloc Québécois will vote to support it.

To summarize the bill, what it is asking is that members of the parole board do their duty instead of simply being bureaucrats who sign off on automatic parole. That is the change. Board members will be able to examine each case based on the seriousness of the offence. Parole after serving one-sixth of a sentence will not be granted automatically, no matter what the offence.

In her speech, my colleague could have talked about the crimes committed by Liberal organizers in the sponsorship scandal. Is it right that people like Paul Coffin, Jean Brault and Jean Lafleur should be released so easily after they stole over \$100 million from the people of Canada?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I summarized the events that led us to want to abolish the one-sixth rule. It all started four years ago with the sponsorship scandal. We are not talking about just white collar criminals; those who have committed other types of crimes may also be affected by these provisions. For example, there are drug traffickers, drug mules and even mafia bosses or gang leaders who have not been charged with gangsterism, but who have instructed someone else to traffic in drugs.

There may be information but it may not necessarily constitute evidence. We know that some information cannot be proven. Having said that, because the crimes they committed were not considered violent, these people were not charged with gangsterism and there is no court order. They may quite simply be entitled to one-sixth parole under accelerated parole review.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to start by seeking unanimous consent to split my time with the hon. member for Outremont.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway have unanimous consent to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank hon. members for their indulgence in that regard.

Government Orders

I want to start first by talking about victims. Victims of crime in this country experience pain. Victims in this country need support. Victims of crime in this country require justice. Victims in our nation need healing. MPs from every corner of the House understand the need for understanding when it comes to victims of crime and respect for their involvement in the justice system to make sure that their interests are always at the forefront as we consider a proper justice system in this country.

Unfortunately, Bill C-59 before us, despite the rhetoric, would do absolutely nothing for victims. It would not compensate, not give one penny, to a victim of crime, including a victim of fraud, for financial devastation. It would not assist a single victim to get his or her life back on track, an individual who has been abused and affected by any of these crimes.

The government and the Bloc Québécois claim the bill was motivated by the Earl Jones and Lacroix cases. Of course, those are white-collar fraud artists who bilked hundreds, perhaps thousands of investors out of their funds. In the case of one of the fraudsters it was \$50 million and in the case of the other it was \$100 million. This bill would not return one penny of compensation to the victims.

At committee last night we heard from three victims of these two perpetrators of fraud. They told us that they have to work three jobs and are having difficulty with the tax system. Their lives have been thrown into near bankruptcy. They acknowledged that Bill C-59 would not help them one bit to deal with those very real problems.

Bill C-59 would eliminate accelerated parole for all first-time nonviolent offenders. One of the problems with this bill is that, as the Bloc has proposed it and the government has accepted it, it would not target white-collar criminals. It paints a broad brush on every single first-time nonviolent offender. That is the problem with this legislation.

Last night at committee New Democrats moved amendments that would have changed the law in this country to make sure that white-collar fraudsters, like Earl Jones and Mr. Lacroix, would not qualify for accelerated parole. We would fix and surgically target the problem that has been identified by my colleagues on both sides of the House. Those amendments were voted down. I do not know how serious I can take the government's claims that it is really interested in targeting perpetrators of white-collar crime.

My friend from the Bloc just gave a speech saying that this bill would wipe out not just people who commit fraud but all people who are first-time nonviolent offenders. Bloc members think that is a good thing.

I have two words to raise in the House: Ashley Smith. I heard the member for Miramichi talk about New Brunswick. She comes from that area of the country where Ashley Smith came from. Ashley Smith, a 15 year old girl, became involved in the justice system by committing the crime of throwing a crab apple at a postal worker. She ended up in the federal prison system. Why? Because once she was in the system she had mental health issues. She started having oppositional problems with guards. She would struggle. They would charge her with assault. Imagine, a 15 year old girl with mental health problems being charged with assault. These things just snowballed down the hill and before she knew it she was in a federal

institution. She hanged herself in a federal prison cell at the age of 19.

Is that the kind of person my hon. colleague from Ahuntsic thinks should not be let out at one-sixth so she could get the mental health services that she needs? That is the crime? That is the criminal that the Bloc Québécois thinks should not qualify for one-sixth release with supervision in the community?

That is exactly the person who will be caught by this crime and that is why this is a bad bill. It is a bad bill because it paints every single one of the first-time offenders in this country with the same brush. I expect that from the Conservatives. I am shocked to see it from the Bloc Québécois.

Today is a sad day for Canada, because it is a sad day for democracy as the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives combine to shut down debate. There is no urgency to this bill. The Conservatives themselves admit that they did not introduce this bill for four years. There is no pressing urgency that means that the House cannot take the deliberate, careful considered time that my colleague from Outremont so intelligently called for.

• (1650)

If there is good solid evidence, if there is good argument and fact to back up the Conservatives' case, why are they afraid to bring those facts forward and have a fulsome debate to establish that? No, they had to invoke closure on this House.

I was at a meeting last night from 6:30 until 11 o'clock with four hours of debate, as this bill gets returned to the House for report stage and third reading and the vote today because the Conservatives are afraid of debate. They know that these facts will come out.

Here are the facts that we heard at committee last night that I noticed my friend from the Bloc did not tell anybody about. In the last five years, 7,200 first-time offenders were eligible for accelerated parole review and 4,800 were granted day parole. That is approximately 1,000 per year. Some 67% of people who qualified for accelerated parole were granted it. That means that one-third were not. In terms of any notion that Canadians may have that this is automatic and everybody is getting it, that is not true.

After five years the success rate is 84% of the people who were granted accelerated parole over the last five years completed their sentence without committing any offence, not a violent offence, not a non-violent offence. If they did commit any offence, they would immediately have their accelerated parole cancelled and they would be back in a federal penitentiary.

Zero point three per cent of people granted accelerated parole in the last five years resulted in the revocation for a violent offence. There is an 84% success and 0.3% failure. Those are the numbers.

Government Orders

Now, this bill would cancel that completely. Why is this a good program? It is because of the people who committed their first offence, a non-violent offence, who go into prison. We recognize that we can separate the violent offenders from the non-violent offenders and focus our resources on the people who really require the attention. We give them a short, sharp experience with the worst experience in Canada they can have, which is in a federal penitentiary. Then, when we are satisfied they will not commit a violent offence, and that is the test, we move them into another correctional facility.

This is not the case of offenders getting out of prison. We are changing the place where they serve their sentence. Mr. Lacroix and Mrs. Smith will serve their 12-year sentences. Ashley Smith, if she came out, would continue to serve her sentence. The question here is whether we put them in a more appropriate place to serve their sentence instead of being in a crime factory of a penitentiary.

My hon. colleague from Ahuntsic who went with me to prisons across this country knows the true state of services in our federal prisons where 80% of our inmates have an addiction and approximately one-third of them have mental illnesses. She knows and the Bloc knows, or they ought to know, that our federal system is not giving timely, effective treatment to those people.

What does keeping those people in from one-sixth of their sentence to two-sixths of their sentence do? Nothing. Actually, it will make things worse. Or, would we rather have that person at one-sixth being transferred to a halfway house in the community where they can get access to addictions treatment and mental health services, be connected with their family, maybe get a job and maybe get reintegrated slowly. Maybe women could get access to sex abuse therapy. We know that almost every single woman in prison has suffered from sex abuse. I do not hear any talk about that.

I want to finish with cost. It costs \$140,000 a year to keep a male offender in a federal penitentiary and \$185,000 a year for a female offender. In a halfway house, it is \$25,000 to \$40,000. One thousand people a year get accelerated parole. This bill would put 1,000 people in prison at a cost of at least \$100,000 more a year and that is \$100 million a year.

I would rather give the victims of Earl Jones and Mr. Lacroix that \$100 million. I bet they would be happier if we compensated them for their losses instead of sticking the taxpayer with the recurring annual bill of \$100 million that will do nothing to reduce crime and will do nothing for victims.

In conclusion, Marjean Fichtenberg of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes, another person who represents victims, said:

—this law-and-order agenda, where they're building more prisons, is still leaving the victim out because it's still focusing only on the offender.

This bill is bad law and I urge every member to vote against it. It will cost the taxpayers money and it will not do a darn thing for community safety.

• (1655)

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my friend on his very lucid analysis of the current situation.

Last night, in public safety committee, we heard from experts on two main points.

The first point was that victims would not be helped by the bill at all. There are things that should be included, such as restitution, increased sentences, tax relief and those sorts of programs, but they have been ignored by both the Bloc and the Conservatives. The second point is women would be disproportionately affected negatively by these provisions.

Could my friend comment on why the Conservatives and the Bloc have ignored that and the women who would be affected?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, Kim Pate, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, testified last night and was not challenged by anybody, not by the Bloc, not by the Conservatives. She said, "as one of my colleagues in corrections said to me today, if this bill goes through we'll probably need at least several more prisons fairly quickly to incarcerate the women who will be held for longer periods of time". That is the effect on women.

I have been to women's institutions in our country and have seen the types of people in them. They are disproportionately aboriginals, addicts, alcoholics and women victims of sexual violence. These women need support. On a first non-violent offence, we should try to reintegrate and help these women heal in society.

There is no problem to fix here, other than political optics and cheap game playing. The Bloc and the government do not come with statistics that show people released on accelerated parole reoffend at some alarming rate. It is quite the contrary. We heard testimony that this would lead to more prison overcrowding, more tension, more violence in our prisons, more danger to guards and corrections officers and more recidivism.

It is bad policy and it is bad for taxpayers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the member who just spoke. Why change the focus of the debate? The debate is not about the quality of penitentiaries or penitentiary life. Of course there are problems. However, the debate is about white collar criminals and those who commit crimes that are not of a violent nature and who find themselves on the outside after serving just one-sixth of their sentence.

Government Orders

This bill addresses this form of injustice, this process that leads victims to say to themselves that what they went through was not so bad. This logic amounts to saying that they only fleeced people and stole a few thousand or million dollars and that it is not a big deal, but had they committed a violent crime, we would be much tougher. I find it quite difficult to follow this logic.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, nobody is minimizing the consequences of any action. Every person in a federal penitentiary committed a crime that created damage. That is a given. The Conservatives and the Bloc keep repeating that. Obviously everybody in a federal prison has done something wrong. The question is this. As an intelligent society, what is the best way to deal with those people?

This is what the Association des avocats et avocates en droit carcéral du Québec said:

“The accelerated parole review regime removes a significant number of relatively non-criminalized often young individuals from a destructive environment, if the board certifies that they are appropriate cases...it removes them as early as possible, ideally before they fall in with even worse company...The accelerated parole review is not a gift to people. What it does is it extends the period of supervision of these appropriate candidates, supervision in the community. Supervision in the community is not a failure of the system. It's social reintegration in a structured managed way. It's in the interest of public security. It gives us hope that these individuals will not be committing new crimes and creating new victims in the future. That has always been the purpose of supervised release and here we're backing away from it. It makes no sense”.

I would like to correct something my hon. friend said. He said “getting out”. They do not get out. They are still serving their sentence, just in a different environment.

I wonder how many people have been in a halfway house in our country. I have and they are places of incarceration. They are drab places, where there is supervision, conditions and curfews. That is where people serve their sentence. It is still a structured place of incarceration and they still serve their sentence for the entire period. They get out at one-third or two-thirds to be reintegrated into society.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will begin by responding, through you, to the comments that were just made by the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. I said earlier that I am having a hard time understanding the leader of the Bloc Québécois. Although we have our fundamental differences, we have come to expect a degree of analytical rigour from him. Today, he made a big mistake, which is relatively rare for him, when he spoke to reporters, saying that the Barreau du Québec was wrong and he was right. Indeed, the leader of the Bloc was wrong.

The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine just made exactly the same mistake that the leader of the Bloc did, and now I understand why. The pseudo-expert, the hon. member for Ahuntsic, misled them with a false analysis and a complete misunderstanding of the bill in question. I will try to put the hon. member for

Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine back on the right track. The bill is repealing existing provisions—

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, I ask that you warn the hon. member for Outremont against making these personal attacks. I heard the word “pseudo” and other things. To take this debate much further, I would invite him, through you, to stop making this type of personal attack and to get to the heart of the debate.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, since you listened to every word of my speech, you know perfectly well that I was strictly discussing the bill. I referred to pseudo-expertise to explain the fundamental problem we are experiencing this afternoon. The Bloc leader and now the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine are completely wrong about the substance of the bill. I was in the process of explaining it to him. There was nothing personal in what I was saying. When someone says that they understand a bill and that their understanding is based on some sort of expertise, the best way to explain a misunderstanding is to say that the expertise in question is pseudo-expertise. I would also like to say that this debate should certainly not be included in the time allocated to me. If the Bloc members want to start playing that game by interrupting us when we are trying to deal with the substance of a bill, they have—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. parliamentary secretary would like to comment on the same point of order.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Madam Speaker, I would like to support what the Bloc member just said.

Frankly, when the other Bloc member was speaking, I was a bit disappointed to hear the member for Outremont yelling at her that she was bluffing and other things. I am a bit disappointed and I want to support what the Bloc member just said.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I listened to what each member had to say, and I would invite all members to be more careful with their choice of words. Having said that, I do not wish to entertain further debate on the issue.

The hon. member for Outremont has the floor.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, as I know that you were listening to every word of my speech, you would be well aware that we were indeed addressing the subject at hand, that is, a bill that will make it impossible for a non-violent first-time offender to be released from prison after serving one-sixth of his sentence and serve out the following sixth of his sentence in a halfway house.

It is true that these criminals will not be locked up in prison, but that does not mean that they will be completely free. What does this mean, in practical terms? It means that the member for Ahuntsic, the so-called expert criminologist, is presiding over the following situation.

As of Friday of this week, an aboriginal woman who was with a friend when he committed a crime and was handed a three-year prison sentence was automatically entitled to have her file referred for a review to determine whether she could at least begin serving out her sentence in the community, as part of a transition process. This was a first offence and there was no violent crime committed.

Government Orders

For two days, the member for Saint-Boniface, who rose earlier, and her colleagues have been stressing the fact that this is a retroactive piece of legislation. In democracies, however, new penalties are not applied retroactively, since that approach flies in the face of every principle of a democratic society. And yet that is what the right—and when I say the right, I mean the members of the Bloc and their new allies, the Conservatives—are ensuring will happen.

The member for Ahuntsic stated here, in this House, that this is a possibility and that it is only the review process that will change, which is not true. She argues that it is just the accelerated parole review provision that is being scrapped, which is completely false. She has misunderstood the very substance of the bill.

If the Bloc is making the wrong decision—as even the Barreau du Québec argues it is—on the basis of the misguided analysis of the member for Ahuntsic, there is still time for it to change course. I believe, however, that the Bloc is afraid of the Conservatives' political weight in the outlying regions of Quebec. That is what concerns the Bloc Québécois. As Bernard Descôteaux so eloquently stated in an editorial that appeared last week in *Le Devoir*, cheap pre-election “populism” is behind the Bloc's position on this issue.

Last week, when the Bloc made a deal with the Conservatives behind closed doors, its members had the nerve to tell us that because they had gotten something, like victims of the Stockholm syndrome they had to thank the Conservatives and, despite our role as members of Parliament and our primary duty to study bills, there would be no parliamentary committee and no right to ask any questions because they had made a deal with the Conservatives.

I have some news for the Bloc Québécois. There is a party with principles in this House, the New Democratic Party, and we will stand up to the right wingers in Canada. We will stand up for individual rights and freedoms and will not swallow an abbreviated, false analysis cooked up by pseudo-experts who have managed to convince the Bloc leader that this bill does not do what it obviously does. That is why the Barreau du Québec is opposed to the bill. That is why all the experts in penal law are opposed to it. That is why there is opposition to the bill from everyone who has a democratic conscience and hears the Conservatives pat themselves on the back and say that they want to impose another sentence, that after the judge, after the decision, after the sentence, there will be a new, retroactive penalty. It is antidemocratic, and we, for our part, will say that.

We will not let the newly formed right intimidate or influence us or spout nonsense at us just because it is afraid of the Conservatives' strength in the regions of Quebec.

It is disgraceful that there has not been any objective, independent study of the number of cases. My colleague from Vancouver Kingsway gave the best available figures last night: 1,500 cases a year, of which 900 to 1,000 are granted. The cost could well be \$100 million a year.

Earl Jones's victims would like very much to be compensated by the federal government, rather than seeing another \$100 million spent annually because the Bloc is afraid of the Conservatives in the regions—100 million new dollars a year.

● (1705)

On Friday this week, someone who has served the sentence imposed by a judge—the woman in my example—will learn that thanks to the member for Ahuntsic, she has not finished serving her sentence, she may not go to a halfway house, she may not be in the community or be closer to her children. She is going to stay in a penitentiary. What we have here is the new right, the new and improved Bloc Québécois. It is not a social democratic Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois is learning all about political opportunism as the election approaches. Shame.

We are speaking up against this trend. To see where some effort could have been put into this, we need to look at the actual court documents in the Earl Jones case. I am going to read an excerpt from a Royal Bank of Canada document:

● (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Jones returned my call. I offered him our ratelink essential package service because his fees are over \$150.00 every month. He is using this account for business purposes as an In Trust account, however, I told him this is not a formal trust account and he could get himself in trouble....

[*Translation*]

It was years before the case came to light. What did the Royal Bank do? Nothing. What did the inspector of financial institutions, a federal government official, do about the Royal Bank? Nothing. What did the Government of Canada do about the inspector of financial institutions? Nothing. What did Earl Jones's victims get? Nothing, zero. These are documents from the class action that has been launched in the Earl Jones case.

If the Bloc Québécois is really so concerned about Earl Jones's victims, it would be fighting for half of that money, which would compensate 100% of Earl Jones's victims in one stroke, if it were put to that use. Instead, to score a political point, the Bloc members are saying we should spend another \$1 million a year with no objective study about the retroactive effect, the number of cases, the ultimate cost and the kind of cases affected by this half-baked and ill-conceived decision that the Bloc and its new allies in the Conservative Party are imposing. It is a shameful day for democracy. It is a shameful day when the Bloc gets into bed with the Conservatives on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to raise something which people have been nibbling on the edges of, and that is the whole idea of what this House is for when it comes to matters of justice and not vengeance. Who in this House has the right to delight in those emotions that do not belong to us when we can never offer the answer?

I would like to ask the member if he would comment on what he sees happening in this House as it tries to move toward improving this law without those studies, without that consideration. What does it say about us as legislators who should tell victims what we can really do for them, what we can really accomplish and make happen versus what we cannot and what this bill means instead?

Government Orders

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, if the Bloc members were the slightest bit sincere, they would have accepted the amendments that were put forward last night that sought to take care of the real problem: the drug dealers and the fraudsters. It would have been easy to subdivide it to keep the possibility for first-time non-violent offenders of minor offences to go to a halfway house. But no, they are throwing the baby out with the bath water for purely partisan purposes in a pre-election period.

It is a shame to see the Bloc Québécois that was once some force for social democracy in this country throwing its lot in with the right wing. It is a real shame.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that in September 2009, he agreed with unanimously passing our bill, which proposed exactly the same thing we are proposing today. In March 2010, he also voted for unanimous consent. He is putting on a show here because he knows full well that he should be voting in favour of this bill. He knows full well, and—

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

The hon. member for Outremont has a few seconds to respond.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, I will quote “The Coach and the Fly”:

Whereon there did a fly approach,
And, with a vastly business air,
Cheered up the horses with his buzz,—
Now pricked them here, now pricked them there,
As neatly as a jockey does,—
And thought the while—he knew it was so—
He made the team and carriage go,
...
Thus certain ever-bustling noddies
Are seen in every great affair;
Important, swelling, busy-bodies,
And bores it's easier to bear
Than chase them from their needless care.

It is absolutely not true what—

● (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Monday, February 14, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of third reading of the bill now before the House.

[*English*]

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 of the motion will please say yea.

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 183*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Armstrong
Arthur	Ashfield
Asselin	Bachand
Baird	Beaudin
Bellavance	Benoit
Bemier	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Block	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Boughen	Bourgeois
Braid	Breitreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Dechert	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Faille
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Généreux	Glover
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lebel
Lemay	Lemieux
Lessard	Lévesque
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKenzie	Malo

Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nadeau
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paquette
Payne
Plamondon
Pomerleau
Raitt
Rathgeber
Richards
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Shory
Sorenson
Stanton
Strahl
Thi Lac
Tilson
Trost
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Yelich

McColeman
Ménard
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Paradis
Petit
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shiple
Sopuck
St-Cyr
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson
Toews
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Watson

Woodworth
Young — 184

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Bains
Bennett
Brison
Cannis
Chow
Coady
Comartin
Crombie
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dewar
Dhalla
Donnelly
Dryden
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Eyking
Foote
Garneau
Goodale
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Ignatieff
Julian
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
LeBlanc
Leslie
Malhi
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McGuinty
McTeague
Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Oliphant
Patry
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan

Andrews
Ashton
Bagnell
Bélanger
Bevington
Byrne
Charlton
Christopherson
Coderre
Cotler
Crowder
D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dosanjh
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Folco
Fry
Godin
Hall Findlay
Holland
Hyer
Jennings
Kania
Kennedy
Layton
Lee
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Pacetti
Pearson
Rae
Ratansi
Rodriguez

Routine Proceedings

Rota
Savoie
Sgro
Silva
Simson
Szabo
Tonks
Valeriotte
Wilfert
Zarac — 105

Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simms
Stoffer
Thibeault
Trudeau
Volpe
Wrzesnewskij

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (extension of time, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1, to consider Bill C-511).

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals will vote no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote no, with the exception of the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, who had to leave.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP will vote no, and I would like to add the members for Nickel Belt, Winnipeg Centre and Elmwood—Transcona.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I support this motion.

[Translation]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote yes.

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 184)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison

Ablonczy
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose

Routine Proceedings

Anders	Anderson	Brison	Brunelle
Armstrong	Arthur	Byrne	Cannis
Ashfield	Baird	Cardin	Carrier
Benoit	Bernier	Charlton	Chow
Bezan	Blackburn	Christopherson	Coady
Blaney	Block	Coderre	Comartin
Boucher	Boughen	Cotler	Crombie
Braid	Breitreuz	Crowder	Cullen
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge	Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Cadman	Calandra	Demers	Deschamps
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Desnoyers	Dewar
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie	Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Casson	Chong	Dion	Donnelly
Clarke	Cummins	Dosanjh	Dryden
Davidson	Day	Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dechert	Del Mastro	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Devolin	Dreesen	Eyking	Faille
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra	Folco	Foote
Fantino	Fast	Freeman	Fry
Finley	Flaherty	Gagnon	Garneau
Fletcher	Galipeau	Gaudet	Godin
Gallant	Généreux	Goodale	Gravelle
Glover	Goldring	Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Goodyear	Gourde	Basques)	
Grewal	Guergis	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hall Findlay	
Hawn	Hiebert	Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hoback	Hoepfner	Hughes	Hyer
Holder	Jean	Ignatieff	Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Julian	Kania
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	Karygiannis	Kennedy
Kerr	Komarnicki	Laframboise	Lamoureux
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake	Lavallée	Layton
Lauzon	Lebel	LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lobb	Lemay	Leslie
Lukiwski	Lunn	Lessard	Lévesque
Lunney	MacKenzie	MacAulay	Malhi
Mayes	McColeman	Malo	Maloway
McLeod	Menzies	Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Merrifield	Miller	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Mathysen	McCallum
Moore (Fundy Royal)		McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Nicholson	Norlock	McTeague	Ménard
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon	Mendes	Minna
Obhrai	Oda	Mourani	Mulcair
Paradis	Payne	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Petit	Poilievre	Murray	Nadeau
Preston	Raitt	Neville	Oliphant
Rajotte	Rathgeber	Ouellet	Pacetti
Reid	Richards	Pailé (Hochelaga)	Pailé (Louis-Hébert)
Richardson	Rickford	Paquette	Patry
Ritz	Saxton	Pearson	Plamondon
Schellenberger	Shea	Pomerleau	Proulx
Shipley	Shory	Rae	Rafferty
Sopuck	Sorenson	Ratansi	Regan
Stanton	Storseth	Rodriguez	Rota
Strahl	Sweet	Savage	Savoie
Thompson	Tilson	Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Toews	Trost	Siksay	Silva
Tweed	Uppal	Simms	Simson
Van Kesteren	Van Loan	St-Cyr	Stoffer
Vellacott	Verner	Szabo	Thi Lac
Wallace	Warawa	Thibeault	Tonks
Warkentin	Watson	Trudeau	Valeriot
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)		Vincent	Volpe
Weston (Saint John)		Wilfert	Wrzesnewskyj
Wong	Woodworth	Zarac— 151	
Yelich	Young— 140		

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.**PAIRED**

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ACT

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-530, An Act to amend the Northwest Territories Act (borrowing limits), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-530 under private members' business.

• (1805)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 185)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brisson	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Donnelly
Dosanjh	Dryden
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faillie
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Holland
Harris (St. John's East)	Hyer
Hughes	Julian
Jennings	Karygiannis
Kania	Laframboise
Kennedy	Lavallée
Lamoureux	LeBlanc
Layton	Lemay
Lee	Lessard
Leslie	MacAulay
Lévesque	Malo
Malhi	Marston
Maloway	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Mathysen
Masse	McGuinty
McCallum	McTeague
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Mendes
Ménard	Mourani
Minna	

Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Oliphant
Pacetti
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Patri
Plamondon
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan
Rota
Savoie
Sgro
Silva
Simson
Stoffer
Thi Lac
Tonks
Valeriotte
Volpe
Wrzesnewskyj

Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Neville
Ouellet
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paquette
Pearson
Pomerleau
Rae
Ratansi
Rodriguez
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simms
St-Cyr
Szabo
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vincent
Wilfert
Zarac — 150

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Armstrong
Ashfield
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harper
Hawn
Hoback
Holder
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Petit
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Ablonczy
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Baird
Bernier
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chong
Cummins
Day
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Généreux
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoepfner
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lobb
Lunn
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Richards
Rickford
Saxton
Shea

Private Members' Business

Shiple	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young — 140

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from February 15 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 Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), under private members' business.

● (1815)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 186)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Arthur	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brunelle	Byrne
Cannis	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coady	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Donnelly	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)

Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faillie
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gameau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guay	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Holland	Hughes
Hyer	Jennings
Julian	Kania
Karygiannis	Kennedy
Laframboise	Lamoureux
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Neville
Oliphant	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paillet (Hochelaga)
Paillet (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rae
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Siksay	Silva
Simms	Simson
St-Cyr	Stoffer
Szabo	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Tonks
Trudeau	Valeriot
Vincent	Volpe
Wilfert	Wrzesnewskyj
Zarac — 151	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)

Hawn	Hiebert
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young— 138

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[English]

It being 6:16 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA FOR THE REGION OF NORTHERN ONTARIO ACT

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.) moved that Bill C-309, An Act establishing the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak about Bill C-309 once again. For those members who may not be all that familiar with it, Bill C-309 proposes to establish a permanent agency for regional development for the residents of northern Ontario. The existing government program, FedNor, falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Industry who can essentially cut the program's budget or completely withdraw it without warning. It is important to note that, when the previous Liberal government was in power, it never threatened to eliminate FedNor's funding.

Private Members' Business

In fact, in 2005, the Liberal government increased FedNor's annual core funding to \$51.9 million. Unfortunately, when the Conservatives came to power in 2006, they hastily cut nearly \$7 million from FedNor's annual funding, and tried to make Canadians in northern Ontario believe that, somehow, they would receive more money than ever before.

At the time, the industry minister announced that the Conservative government would extend the FedNor program by five years, but that its annual budget would be reduced to \$45.5 million, resulting in a loss of \$6.4 million for the program.

[English]

In an attempt to justify this 13% budget cut, the minister claimed, incorrectly, that the 2005 FedNor budget was set at \$45.5 million with an additional \$6 million going to the new Northern Ontario School of Medicine. In fact, government records clearly show that the \$6 million provided for research facilities and equipment at the school in 2005 was above and beyond the \$51.9 million annual FedNor budget guaranteed by the Liberal government.

My constituents and residents through the region were not fooled by the minister's shell game. Rather, the people of northern Ontario felt betrayed by the Conservatives, and with good reason. The Conservatives are masterful at playing politics of division. They love to pit different regions across the country against one another rather than offering everyone an equal opportunity to succeed.

As the member of Parliament for Nipissing—Timiskaming and a resident of northern Ontario, I can say that FedNor is of tremendous value to the people of the area. This funding is essential in creating jobs and strengthening our regional economy.

The cuts speak volumes to the priorities of the Conservative government and its vision for the future of Canada.

In 2005, the northern Ontario Liberal caucus worked very hard to raise FedNor's stable base funding to ensure that FedNor could undertake longer term strategies for the development and growth of the northern Ontario economy.

My Liberal colleagues and I continue to recognize the importance of making sound investments in people, knowledge, modern infrastructure and a sound and efficient financial sector in order to provide the foundation for global success. We are also committed to ensuring that the people of northern Ontario are given every opportunity to develop and maintain a strong regional economy, as well as diversify and strengthen their employment base. Bill C-309 is a critical means to that end.

It is worth noting that other regions of the country have regional economic development agencies that report directly to a minister of the Crown, thus serving their needs. I firmly believe that the residents of northern Ontario deserve the same privileges and services that these agencies provide to other Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The Conservatives will argue that the establishment of a permanent FedNor agency will do nothing more than create more bureaucracy and cost more to administer the existing program. For instance, in his remarks during second reading of the bill, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made the bogus claim that establishing a permanent regional development agency for northern Ontario would limit FedNor's ability to contribute to other economic development initiatives in northern and rural Ontario.

I will pause a moment to reflect on this assertion. Are we really supposed to believe that making FedNor a permanent agency, one that cannot be subjected to cuts or outright termination, would somehow limit the organization's ability to administer necessary funding to projects throughout northern Ontario?

The people of northern Ontario will not be taken for fools by the Conservative government.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the political spectrum, the NDP will argue that the Liberals had the opportunity to establish a permanent FedNor back when they were in government but they had made no effort to do so.

In 2005, DEQ, the provincial economic development counterpart to FedNor in Quebec, was converted from a program to an agency. While we were in government, the NDP and the Conservatives teamed up together and brought down the Martin government, killing the opportunity for FedNor to become an agency then. They also killed many other programs that would have been very beneficial to us and which the Conservative government does not believe in.

Therefore, in light of the substantial FedNor funding cuts that have already been made by the Conservative government and facing the possibility of more cuts again in the future, we must take action now.

Let us begin by discussing the difference between program and agency, which is a question that is often asked. Technically the words "program" and "agency" have no effect under Canadian law. What separates FedNor from other regional development agencies is that each of its counterparts has an act of Parliament establishing it as a separate entity and outlining its mandate and powers, while FedNor does not.

● (1820)

The legislation means the federal government requires the consent of Parliament to change or alter the agency's powers or its mandate.

Currently FedNor's performance and financial reports are included in a chapter in Industry Canada's reports on plans and priorities and departmental performance reports. We call it a chapter, but it is a couple of pages, if that, and is very meagre and difficult.

If made a separate agency under the Financial Administration Act, FedNor would be required to file detailed financial and performance reports for tabling in Parliament. The reports on plans and priorities would outline the agency's objectives, programs, spending plans and departmental performance reports, which evaluate whether the objectives have been met and provide details on previous spending. Again, I want to point out that this is non-existent with the program.

While a separate agency generally requires its own corporate services and communications divisions to provide human resources and public relations support, FedNor already has its corporate services and communications divisions. If it were turned into a separate agency, creating these divisions would not be an issue.

Since my bill was first introduced, it has gained support and endorsement from many municipalities throughout northern Ontario. They obviously believe, just as my Liberal colleagues and I do, that FedNor should become a permanent regional economic development agency.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

My constituents continue to ask me why the Conservatives are abandoning northern Ontario.

A number of regional development agencies are already at work: the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Western Economic Diversification Canada and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

The 2009 budget announced that two more agencies would be created: the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario and a new economic development agency for northern Canada. Every region of the country now has its own regional development agency. Every region, that is, except northern Ontario.

[*English*]

In the case of northern Ontario, it is left up to the Minister of Industry to look after FedNor. As it happens, the minister in question hails from Toronto, which further demonstrates how out of touch this Conservative government really is when it comes to addressing the needs of northern Ontarians.

Northern Ontario is indeed a unique region that represents unique economic challenges. Residents in northern Ontario are not looking for government handouts. We are looking for funding that will help us build infrastructure that will allow us to maintain the same standards as large urban centres.

Bill C-309 is not about creating more bureaucracy. It is about having people on the ground who live and work in the region, who are best able to assist municipalities, rural communities and not-for-profit organizations to build a robust local economy. Bill C-309 is about equality, fairness and a strong and sustainable northern Ontario. It is about northern Ontario standing up and being treated as an equal in Canada.

In my previous remarks on Bill C-309, I emphasized the fact that Canada was not one homogenous entity. Different regions face different challenges. They have different growth rates, different strengths, different weaknesses. Each region is unique and deserves special attention so it can flourish and allow its residents to provide for their families and to live a decent and prosperous life.

I still believe the Canadian federal government and regional economic development agencies, in particular, have an important role to play in maximizing the potential of each geographic region in our country. In order to maximize the potential of northern Ontario, in particular, we must focus on future investments. I highlight this because, as a separate agency under the Financial Administration Act, FedNor would be required to file detailed financial and performance reports for tabling in Parliament.

I have asked the minister for these reports a number of times while in industry committee. Each time he promises them but they never come because he does not want to show them. He does not want to show what he has been doing with FedNor.

The reports on plans and priorities would outline the agency's objectives, program spending plans and departmental performance reports, which evaluate whether the objectives have been met and provide the details of previous spending.

Being able to review the agency's estimates would allow parliamentarians to take a closer look at the list of proposed funding and activities that are being planned and managed for the upcoming year so we have a better understanding of where the economic development is being directed. As it stands currently, because FedNor is a program and not an agency, the spending details become lost as part of the budget of Industry Canada. This means that there is very little spending information and no breakdown of activities.

In fact, if we take the time to visit the existing FedNor site, we will notice that only certain spending announcements are posted and those that are contain very little in terms of specific project details. Furthermore, unlike an agency, reports for a program can only be seen at year end. Because it takes another six to eight months for those numbers to be published, that means it is generally a full year or more before we are really able to assess whether the investments that have been made are effective and being directed in the right areas.

An example I have used before is it is much like driving a car and concentrating on the rear view mirror. We cannot really look to the future when all we can see is behind us.

With regional economic development, we really have to look ahead and see where we will go and where we want to go in order to find the kinds of programs that will get us to that place.

Interestingly the Conservatives are the only party that fails to see the logic and usefulness of Bill C-309. It is time they stopped treating the people of northern Ontario like second-class citizens. At a time when every region in the country has its own economic development agency, there is absolutely no excuse not to have one for northern Ontario, where we face so many economic challenges.

I would urge the Ministry of Industry and his Conservative colleagues to reconsider their opposition to Bill C-309 and give the people of northern Ontario the support and respect they deserve.

● (1830)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming has brought forward an excellent bill. It would go a long way toward stopping the federal government from treating northern Ontario like a second-class

Private Members' Business

citizen and instead treat us like a colony. The provincial and federal government have to get beyond that and give us the resources and support we need to live up to our potential.

The member will know that I consulted widely on this bill at one time. One question I was asked was how we defined northern Ontario. The only difference in the bill I championed a couple of years ago and my colleague's bill is the definition. My bill suggested that northern Ontario start and end at the French River and the Mattawa River. My colleague has chosen to include Parry Sound—Muskoka in the catchment area as the areas that would be affected by the bill if it goes forward.

Why did my colleague make that decision?

Mr. Anthony Rota: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for all the consultation he has done on this bill. He has been a great proponent of it.

Parry Sound—Muskoka is included now in the region so there was really no reason to change it. Economic development is not about pitting one region against another. The member's bill basically separated Parry Sound—Muskoka from the rest of northern Ontario. I leave that to the Conservatives. They can start wars.

This bill is about economic development. We need help. Help should go where it is needed, not to somebody's preferred area, not to somebody who wants to pit one region against the other. I know the hon. member means well. He put forward a very similar bill, but it pitted one part of northern Ontario against the other.

This bill is about working together, not about working against each other and using our resources to bring each other down. We have to build together.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted I will have a chance to speak to the bill later.

I have heard criticism from the government that seems patently absurd on the face of it. It has been asserted by the government that creating this new agency might increase costs and lead to a loss of jobs. It does not make any sense to me.

Would the member comment on that?

● (1835)

Mr. Anthony Rota: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his support of this bill. He comes from eastern Canada and people in that region understand what a difference ACOA makes there.

The Conservatives are asserting that the cost will go through the roof. That cannot be further from the truth. All the setups, all the organization, the HR, the communications, are already there. All the areas are already in place.

The only difference is the minister can wipe it out without consulting Parliament. He can change the funding. He can pork barrel and put it into his riding. The minister can do whatever he wants with this. This is a play toy for the minister and we have to stop that. An agency would at least control what the minister does with those funds.

Private Members' Business

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, as my previous colleague mentioned, this is basically the same bill he tabled in the House. We certainly support this bill.

The member mentioned a while ago how the NDP brought down the government, but the government really brought itself down. It was the people of Canada who decided they did not want the Liberals in power. The Liberals have a long record of failing to deliver on much of what they propose and I know this for a fact. If we had a responsive FedNor, and this is why we support the bill, Hornepayne Town Centre would not be closed to the public. As opposed to having a functioning town centre complex, Hornepayne received a white elephant.

Once this bill passes, is the member concerned about whether the unelected, unaccountable Senate will see fit to pass it?

Mr. Anthony Rota: Madam Speaker, in spite of some of the comments she made, I want to thank the member for her support.

A fear that we do have is that if the bill does make it to the Senate, and there is no guarantee that it will because we have a Conservative government that does not want to see fairness for northern Ontario, I do not know what direction the Prime Minister will give the Senate. We know that the senators basically do what the Prime Minister tells them to do.

It is an unelected Senate, not what the Conservatives had promised, and the senators take their orders from the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, it sounds as though we are all getting along up in northern Ontario.

I have been reading the book, *Unrevised and Unrepented II*, and I was thinking, have I just heard one of the great speeches out of northwestern Ontario? If I had, I think I would probably call it, "If Only": if only the Liberals had stayed in power longer, we would have had a national daycare; if only they had been in power, they would have had a national home care program; if only they had been elected, they would have made FedNor an agency. I see the policy trajectory here and frankly, I am not impressed.

What I am impressed about is getting back from Thunder Bay this morning after hearing people across northern Ontario and northwestern Ontario talk about the great work being done by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, HRSDC and our highly coveted program, FedNor. They are responsive, effective and efficient in every way.

In fact, I have heard it across northern Ontario. I have been busy making announcements in co-operation with and on behalf of our Minister of Industry who is responsible for FedNor, who has done an outstanding job. It has been a great honour to travel to small towns and cities across northern Ontario on his and our government's behalf to make great announcements to that effect.

Obviously, coming from the great Kenora riding, I am happy to have this opportunity to discuss the implications of private member's

Bill C-309, a bill to create a new federal agency aiming to administer economic development programs exclusively to northern Ontario.

There is no question that communities in northern Ontario continue to face challenges that affect the stability and development of their economy, both in the short and the long term.

This great part of our country certainly deserves the support of the Canadian government. I am pleased to report to this House that it has had that certainly within the last two and a half years in an unprecedented way.

I am proud to say that FedNor has been leading the way for years. I am pleased to hear the support from the member for Malpeque because, on a daily basis, FedNor staff are working with a diversity of people in communities in an effort to build a stronger and more prosperous northern Ontario. They include business leaders and professional groups in the areas of tourism, transportation, telecommunications, resource industries, small business, and research.

It appears the intention of my hon. colleague, the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming, in tabling this bill, is to ensure that the government would provide the support that northern Ontario needs to continue to emerge stronger than ever and be a vital part of Canada's economic engine. What he chooses to ignore is that FedNor is already providing this support through its main programs, which are the northern Ontario development program and the community futures program. Imagine that. People from northern Ontario are making decisions about their local economy and the northern economy.

I think I have heard this before in years and decades gone by. The Liberal government then and the Liberal Party now in a paternalistic way just decides what is in the best interests of people across Canada. The folks in northern Ontario reject that. They simply do not accept that.

● (1840)

[Translation]

I would like to point out the remarkable work accomplished by FedNor through the northern Ontario development program (NODP). I hope that by learning more about the role of FedNor, my colleagues will better understand what this organization represents to the inhabitants of this region. FedNor does much more than just fund individual projects in the many communities it serves.

[English]

When community partners, leaders and stakeholders identify opportunities for development, they come to FedNor with their ideas and their proposals. FedNor staff are closely connected to the communities they serve and know the challenges and needs of those communities. We should let those folks continue to do their job.

When approached with project ideas, our great FedNor staff across northern Ontario work with the proponents to ensure how best to meet their needs, not having an Ottawa-centric Liberal Party telling us what is in the best interest of northern Ontario.

The FedNor folks consider the benefits of specific projects on local, regional and pan-northern Ontario scales, working with partners to maximize the impact of FedNor projects.

In short, FedNor takes a truly holistic approach to economic development, funding projects that will collectively strengthen northern Ontario. At the same time, FedNor keeps an eye on the bigger picture, the Government of Canada's national agenda.

In 2009-10, the northern Ontario development program's annual grants and contributions budgets totalled more than \$36 million. I will explain how FedNor is using this budget successfully to grow the northern Ontario economy.

[*Translation*]

First, I will provide some general information. NODP serves a very vast area. Northern Ontario represents about 90% of the province, extends from Muskoka to James Bay, and borders on the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec. More than 850,000 people live in this magnificent part of Canada.

[*English*]

The vastness of northern Ontario cannot be understated. Its relatively low population helps explain some of the challenges it faces, such as geographic isolation from large urban areas and markets to the south, and limited telecommunications and transportation infrastructures which, under Canada's economic action plan, are under a major overhaul.

I was in Thunder Bay not too long ago making an announcement for more than 25 isolated remote first nations communities that will be getting state-of-the-art broadband service to connect literally with the rest of northern Ontario and Canada. This is something that was never done under the vision of the previous administration of the Liberal government.

We have a high youth out-migration rate and lower than average employment growth. FedNor's Ontario development program is working to address these issues and more.

To help communities deal with the challenges of sudden or severe downturns affecting the local economy, FedNor supports diversification strategies. Never have these types of strategies been more important than they are today during these difficult economic times.

One concrete example is FedNor's successful youth internship program. For more than a decade, FedNor's flagship youth internship program has provided nearly 1,300 young graduates with valuable job experience. Designed to help post-secondary graduates make the transition from the campus to the workplace, the program provides interns with hands-on experience and opportunities to find full-time employment at home in northern Ontario. The internship program also assists small businesses and not-for-profit organizations that are looking to grow.

Recently, FedNor has been charged with administering the northern Ontario components of the Government of Canada's community adjustment fund. This program was strong enough and good enough to administer the community adjustment fund, as well as the economic development initiatives for official language minority communities. With such capacity being so sensitive and responsive to the communities of northern Ontario, there is no

bureaucracy or further expense required. FedNor's flexibility and its ability to deliver programs, such as the economic development initiative and community adjustment fund, are what make FedNor so important.

In short, Bill C-309 aims to create a new entity to do what FedNor already does through the northern Ontario development program. The bill is redundant. It is bureaucratic and it is paternalistic.

I appreciate having been allowed the time to speak on the impact of FedNor's northern Ontario development program and the great FedNor program that is working wonderfully in northern Ontario. We have heard that from mayors and councils, stakeholders and proponents. We are rebuilding downtowns across northern Ontario. We are investing in economic stimulus and job creation programs.

While the opposition member claims to have the interests of northern Ontario at heart, why on earth is he ignoring the north's plea to do away with things like the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, increasing taxes and EI premiums?

Now the opposition wants an unnecessary election. Having travelled across northern Ontario extensively over the last five or six weeks, I can certainly assure members that no one I have spoken to across northern Ontario is interested in that.

Northern Ontarians deserve better. That is what they are getting from this Conservative government. That is what they are getting from Canada's economic action plan. That is what they are getting from FedNor.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today on this bill, especially since this is my maiden speech in the House of Commons as Bloc Québécois critic for regional development.

From the outset, I should say that we are in favour of Bill C-309, An Act establishing the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario. This new federal body's mission will be to promote and develop Northern Ontario, just like the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec does in Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois stands up for Quebec's interests. It is in this spirit that we previously voted against Bill C-9, an Act to create the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois, just like Quebec governments for the past 45 years or more, believe that to formulate an integrated regional development policy, Quebec must be master of its own regional development programs.

Private Members' Business

The regions are the ones with the solutions. There are organizations in Quebec dedicated to regional socio-economic development. They are capable of effectively advising the minister regarding regional needs and of overseeing program implementation. One need only think of the Centres locaux de développement, the CLDs, and the Conférences régionales des élus, the CREs. It is for these reasons that the Bloc Québécois has consistently been in favour of decentralization in this area.

We know that not all governments share the same priorities, and despite instances of flagrant encroachment in the past, should the government of Ontario decide to favour this kind of organizational structure for its regional economies, the Bloc Québécois would be very hard pressed to oppose it.

In 2009, the government created the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. There is still no equivalent agency for Northern Ontario. Northern Ontario does have FedNor, an equivalent program that essentially shares the same objectives as an agency. The main difference however is that FedNor is the responsibility of the Minister of Industry, who can amend its budget as he sees fit. Agencies, on the other hand, are independent and have ministers of state, as is the case with the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

In actual fact, the reason for creating the economic development agency of Canada for the region of northern Ontario is to transform the FedNor program into an agency that would then be more independent of the government's budgetary decisions, as currently exists in Quebec and in other regions served by agencies.

The Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario or FedNor has existed since 1987. Its purpose is to encourage economic growth and diversification and the generation of jobs and incomes in northern Ontario by providing support for private sector projects.

Even though the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the bill, a regional development strategy necessarily includes such diverse things as natural resources, education and training, municipal affairs, infrastructure and settlement of the land, which all fall under provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the Constitution makes the provinces responsible for most of the issues involved in regional development.

From 1973 to 1994, there was a framework agreement between Quebec City and Ottawa. Both governments had to agree, or else Ottawa could not do anything. Most federal government funding passed through Quebec agencies. But since 1994, the federal government has been acting unilaterally.

• (1850)

No more co-operation with the Government of Quebec. No more respect for its priorities and the priorities of the regions. This is very unfortunate and even unacceptable.

Following the passage of Bill C-9 in 2005, the federal government appointed a minister responsible for the regions of Quebec. The result has been more quarrels between Quebec City and Ottawa, more duplication, more confusion, a federal government obsession with raising its profile in the regions, and most of all, less respect for the priorities of Quebec and its regions.

Ottawa should stop interfering in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction and instead start working together with Quebec on determining all federal economic priorities that have an impact on Quebec, while taking into account the economic development priorities of the regions.

Having seen how obviously ineffective the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec actually is, we wonder what use such an institution would be for northern Ontario. The Bloc Québécois would like to warn the Ontario government of the possible harmful consequences of the federal government's integrated, centralized approach.

Take a concrete example. In April 2007, the then Minister of Labour and of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec announced a measure that was heavy with consequences for local groups, such as not-for-profit organizations, working in the area of economic development. He eliminated their grants. Here is an excerpt from the Jonquière newspaper, *Le Quotidien*, of April 28, 2007:

The Economic Development Agency of Canada will no longer provide operating funding for non-profit organizations that work in economic development and will no longer fund pure research.

However, these non-profit organizations play an important role for small and medium-size businesses. They support innovation and the development of international markets. They have become an essential link in the local economic fabric in many regions in Quebec.

As a result of increased pressure by many economic stakeholders in Quebec, the federal government reversed its decision to some degree by creating a new policy concerning non-profit organizations and partially restoring some funding for those organizations. In fact, nearly a quarter of the non-profit organizations that had received funding in 2007 could reapply.

The Bloc Québécois fiercely opposed cuts to the non-profit organizations that had been subsidized in part by the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and were active in the economic sector. This absurd situation calls into question the economic development model that Quebec has been requesting for several decades. Since it is an inappropriate measure that is extremely prejudicial to the economic fabric of the regions of Quebec, it could result in the loss of some jobs in local communities.

I would like to close by saying that the Bloc Québécois does not oppose the will of the Government of Ontario and that we support Bill C-309.

• (1855)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise as my party's critic on FedNor, and as a lifelong northern Ontarian.

I would like to speak to Bill C-309, An Act establishing the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario. New Democrats have always led the charge on the need for an independent regional economic development agency for northern Ontario.

Private Members' Business

[English]

This bill is in fact based on the previous bill by my NDP colleague, the member for Sault Ste. Marie. I want to take a moment to commend my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie for his unrelenting commitment to the social and economic wellbeing of northern Ontario.

During debate on this bill, we have heard some poignant reasons why northern Ontario needs an independent economic development agency, including its geographic span and sizable population, the fact that an independent regional economic development agency is a proven way to support regional economies, and the fact that northern Ontario is the only significant region not served by an independent regional economic development agency, just to name a few.

[Translation]

Currently, we have the following independent regional economic development agencies in Canada, each with their own legislated mandate: the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Canada Economic Development for the Regions of Quebec, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario and the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. The latter two agencies have been recent developments—brought forth by this federal government.

[English]

So we cannot say Conservatives do not believe in the effectiveness of regional economic development. I fail to understand, though, why this government did not set up an independent FedNor when it set up an economic agency for southern Ontario. I can only conclude that the government either has total disregard for northern Ontarians and has little confidence in our ability to function independently in our own best interests, or the industry minister enjoys having the control over decision-making for FedNor. Maybe it does not support an independent FedNor for all of these reasons.

I also want to stress that it would take very little to turn FedNor into an independent agency. FedNor already has a director general, many of its decisions are already decentralized and made locally, and it has offices throughout northern Ontario.

• (1900)

[Translation]

All we require here is political leadership. And clearly, we have none coming from this Conservative government.

[English]

In fact, the industry minister has provided ample evidence why FedNor should be a stand-alone agency, independent of his political interference. From pork barrel funding around the G8 and G20 summits to the cancellation of the long form census for purely ideological reasons, the minister responsible for FedNor has shown that he is not above petty partisan politics.

This bill warrants the full support of the House. It is a good bill in that it specifies an independent mandate for FedNor, its powers, duties, functions and reporting mechanisms. It ensures that in the future the federal government will require the consent of Parliament to change or alter the agency's powers and mandate, and it defines

the geographical area of northern Ontario as comprising the following 10 ridings: Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Kenora, Nickel Belt, Nipissing—Timiskaming, Parry Sound—Muskoka, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Thunder Bay—Superior North, and Timmins—James Bay.

[Translation]

New Democrats have consulted stakeholders in northern Ontario and the sentiment is the same across the board—they agree that FedNor should be an independent agency.

[English]

New Democrats have a vision for northern Ontario that goes way beyond this bill. We see the role of FedNor as aiding our communities in their pursuit of economic diversification, as well as cultural and linguistic promotion.

In order to spur the necessary growth, we need to keep our young people in northern Ontario. Too many communities, including our first nations, are suffering from youth out-migration. Young men and women are educating themselves and becoming creative entrepreneurs and caring professionals, but the lack of growth in many small communities is causing them to head south to larger urban centres.

Northern Ontario is as beautiful as it is unique. In fact, our region was a source of inspiration for Canada's famed Group of Seven painters. However, part of its uniqueness is that we have small communities that are geographically distant from one another. We have few large hubs of economic activity. As a result, our communities face challenges, ranging from their accessibility by bus and rail to infrastructure needs, such as roads, clinics, hospitals, to government services.

I share these challenges with you to highlight the fact that our region needs an effective economic development agency staffed and led by local professionals and entrepreneurs who understand our unique needs.

[Translation]

People often say back home that Ottawa does not understand us. And while many of my colleagues from other parts of this great country hear the same thing, it does underscore why FedNor needs its independence.

This government's cabinet includes champions for every regional economic development agency.

[English]

What confounds me and my New Democratic colleagues is the stubbornness of the government in refusing our region of northern Ontario an independent economic development agency of its own.

I look forward to other members of this House making the same point, as well as this bill succeeding at third reading.

I wish to conclude my remarks with a few words of caution for my Liberal colleagues.

Private Members' Business

While I sincerely appreciate the effort of my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming, I want to remind the House that the Liberal Party has a long-established history of sounding like New Democrats in opposition and then acting like Conservatives in government.

It is crucial that my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming secures the unequivocal support of his party for his private member's bill. We do not want the Liberals developing memory loss if they ever find themselves on the other side of this House. Northern Ontarians' needs have long been ignored by successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

However, it is amazing to watch what happens when New Democrats are elected. With the strong team of northern New Democrats in this chamber, one thing is for sure, that one of the best ways to ensure that the interests of northern Ontarians are defended and promoted is to continue electing New Democrat members.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

We will continue to fight for what is best for our communities, and we will continue to promote our region and advance ideas that strengthen our future and our children's future.

[*English*]

We cannot stand by and watch our communities struggle with out-migration. One of the best ways of getting started is to put in place the right tools and systems. An independent FedNor would be a good start.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak tonight to this important bill, Bill C-309, put forward by my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming. This is an important piece of legislation brought forward by an important and fine member of Parliament. I had the pleasure of being elected to this House in 2004, and since that time I have pretty much sat beside the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming. I have seen how hard he works, how seriously he takes his duties and how connected he is to his community on a whole range of issues.

The bill tonight speaks to that commitment to the community of northern Ontario. The importance of regional economic development agencies in general must never be underestimated. Canada is such a vast country, diverse both in terms of culture, ethnography, geography and in every other way.

From region to region, Canada is different and from one province to the next, and even within provinces. In the province I come from, Nova Scotia we have Cape Breton, the Annapolis Valley, the French Shore in Southwestern Nova Scotia and we have Halifax-Dartmouth. The legislation should reflect those differences across Canada but even within regions.

I want to speak from my own experience with our regional development agency, ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and its value to Atlantic Canadians. I believe the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming would acknowledge that ACOA is a pretty good model. The bill we are talking about today in some ways can trace its origins to the work that has been done by ACOA.

ACOA has done so much good work. One of the key things is it has recognized that Atlantic Canadians are smart and innovative people who have ideas they want develop and market. One of the things that was missing is that Atlantic Canada is not a haven of venture capital.

The Liberal government looked at ACOA and asked why not use this as a way to spur innovation and research so that Atlantic Canada can grow not only now, but for generations to come?" The Atlantic innovation fund was set up. I want to acknowledge Senator Moore. He is still in the Senate and is one of the people who came up with this idea, the rising tides document that came out around 2000 and led to the introduction of the Atlantic innovation fund.

These permanent development agencies with stable core funding really help regions to develop economic potential that is unique to their geography and their demographics. Hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity is at risk of not being used, in other words, of going untapped.

Bill C-309 would establish a permanent and annually funded regional economic agency in northern Ontario as an essential step to building a more secure and stable economy in the region.

The member pointed out that there does not now exist a federal government program that aims to contribute to economic development in northern Ontario. FedNor falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Industry and is essentially now used as a tool, quite often for punishing and bribing of the parties concerned. It is a program, not an agency. It is constantly under threat of having its budget easily cut or eliminated altogether. That is not the way to encourage regional economic development.

Under previous Liberal governments there was never any threat to funding, so perhaps it was not as important in those days. The member acknowledged in his speech that it was not as necessary 10 years ago as it is today because of the threats, the whims, the enemies list of the government. Anything that is left to the whim of a ministerial decision, as we have seen with the minister responsible for CIDA what can happen when a minister gets piqued at something. It is gone pretty quickly.

As my colleague pointed out, the Liberal government at that time actually increased FedNor's core funding to \$52 million. The fact is since the Conservatives took office, FedNor's budget has been slashed by close to \$7 million a year. This bill is designed to ensure that FedNor will not be subjected to further cuts.

Some people asked why did the Liberals not do it? My colleague answered that question. It was not necessary then, perhaps it might have been useful. If we had anticipated that the Conservatives might be coming in, perhaps we would have done that to protect northern Ontario.

In short, the bill seeks to promote economic development, economic diversification and job creation in communities throughout northern Ontario. As an agency, as opposed to a simple program, FedNor would demand greater accountability and will be required to report to Parliament on a regular basis.

Government Orders

Right now, each of its counterparts as a regional development agency has an act of Parliament establishing it as a separate entity. This legislation would mean that the federal government requires the consent of Parliament to change or alter the powers and mandate of FedNor. That sort of stability is absolutely essential for any initiative that aims at regional economic development.

Economic planners and communities need to be able to plan, knowing full well that they can count on an agency, staffed and mandated to be a regular partner with the region's players. To make FedNor into an agency through an act of Parliament is not only good for the region, it is good for accountability and transparency. As a separate agency under the FAA, FedNor would be required to file detailed financial performance reports for tabling in Parliament.

• (1910)

To conclude, let me say that this bill is not about bureaucracy, it is about accountability. It is not about politics, it is about good policy. It is not about cost, it is about benefit. It is about northern Ontario. I congratulate the member. I urge all members to support it and for the government to provide a royal recommendation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and the hon. member for Nickel Belt.

[*English*]

I would also like to thank the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who is an outstanding MP. He has been an outstanding seat mate over the years. He understands what regional economic development means to all areas. Coming from eastern Canada, the Maritimes, he understands what an agency really does for that area.

I listened to what the member for Kenora had to say. He defined FedNor as what it should be and what he thinks it does. I have some emails and there is a big problem with FedNor now. I am not saying it is bad or horrible. It is doing good things. It goes through the Minister of Industry's office and sits on his desk. The Minister of Industry is a very busy man. I am not taking that away from him. He allots certain amounts of time to issues and northern Ontario is not his priority. That is the problem.

If FedNor had its own minister, it would not be a problem. The minister would take care of things. He would be the minister of state for FedNor. That is what we are asking for. It would not sit as a minor portfolio or file on the corner of the minister's desk.

The other thing the member for Kenora talked about was a paternalistic approach. Of the two members for Parry Sound—Muskoka and Kenora, one is from Toronto and the other one is from Paris, Ontario through Winnipeg. Talk about a colonial outlook. What do we have to do? Are we serfs in northern Ontario? Do we go to whoever the landlord sends out and bow to the lords who are there and beg? Those days are over. They are finished. We do not need someone from outside of northern Ontario telling us what we need. That is the paternalistic outlook that the Conservative government takes.

It is worth noting that the Senate committee on agriculture and forestry considered whether FedNor should be a separate agency

during a study on rural poverty between 2006 and 2008. In the committee's final report, Scott Merrifield, FedNor's director of policy, planning and coordination, said that FedNor differs little from the regional development agencies, except for its bureaucratic status. He went on to say:

Functionally, we do pretty much the same thing as the regional agencies; but structurally, we do not have our own legislation like the other agencies do. They would have the status of separate departments, whereas we are within Industry Canada. However, we are functionally similar and do the same kind of work; our approaches are similar, but still respecting the differences of the regions.

Historically, the Prime Minister has been against regional economic development. During the 2006 election campaign, the Prime Minister repeatedly promised that he would not make cuts to regional development funding. In fact, when the Liberals predicted that FedNor would be in serious jeopardy under the Conservatives, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry dismissed these comments as nothing more than fearmongering.

This is not fearmongering. This is just part of the long-term plan for the Conservative government. It does not believe in economic development and FedNor is not being converted to an agency because it will be easier for the government to get rid of it down the road. I urge all members to vote in favour of this important bill.

• (1915)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty to inform members that the notice requirement in respect of a royal recommendation has not been met pursuant to Standing Order 79(2). Consequently, I will not put the question on the motion for third reading of the bill. Accordingly, the order for third reading is discharged and the item is dropped from the order paper.

(Order discharged and item dropped from order paper)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN IRAN

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 11 under Government Business. I do now leave the Chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 11, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of the alarming deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran.

Government Orders

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Chair, a year and a half ago, an extraordinary, peaceful people's movement took to the streets in Iran. This movement rejected the results of the election, which had obviously been rigged, and called for radical reforms. Millions of Iranians took to the streets in June and July 2009, braving suppression, intimidation, arrest and violence by the Iranian authorities currently in power.

As we witnessed the wave of democracy surging through Tunisia and Egypt in recent weeks, we were reminded that Iran had set an example of courage and hope for the Middle East. Canadians and the other members of the international community had promised never to forget the bravery of the Iranian activists.

Where are the green movement leaders now? Unfortunately, while the events in Egypt and Tunisia sent out messages of hope, the events in Iran reveal an oppressive regime. The 2009 activists are now under house arrest; their telephone lines have been cut and security officers have been stationed outside their homes. These leaders were once the Iranian prime minister, the speaker of the Iranian parliament and the country's president. And now, the judiciary and members of the Iranian parliament are calling for their arrest and even their execution for being "corrupts on earth".

[*English*]

The flagrant disregard and egregious abuse of the most basic human rights by the Iranian authorities have always been and will continue to be denounced by our government and by the House. Actions taken by the Iranian authorities against peaceful protesters in Tehran as recently as this week give our government much cause for concern. The hypocrisy of the Iranian authorities' support for democracy in Egypt and the suppression of the same demands in Iran is outright unacceptable. The use of tear gas, batons and pepper spray against peaceful protesters by Iranian security forces is a gross violation of the right to free expression and assembly.

Our government will continue to call on Iranian authorities to allow for peaceful gatherings and immediate release of any protesters who are being unjustifiably detained and we will continue to take Iran to task for its continued violations of human rights and freedom of expression and association.

Unfortunately, these recent events have a long history. We will not forget that many of the young people arrested during the 2009 protest were taken to Iran's notorious Kahrizak prison where they were brutally beaten and packed into small, unventilated cells by the dozens. At least three died from beatings or asphyxiation, while others were reportedly raped by their jailors. The Iranian parliament itself investigated these incidents and found that there were indeed severe abuses, including by Saeed Mortazavi, the same man implicated in the murder of Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi in 2003. However, in spite of the Majlis' conclusions, the world is still waiting for those responsible for the crimes at this prison to be held accountable.

The activists of the green movement have disappeared from Iranian society. Intellectuals, students, senior officials and clerics who joined the quest for freedom and reform are now either locked away or silenced forever. Many of them were forced to appear in humiliating televised show trials where they confessed their so-

called crimes, clearly under duress. Many have been given severe punishment after a highly questionable process by the Iranian courts.

However, in such cases as these, the word "many" can detract from the individual tragedies and suffering involved. In particular, I would call to the attention of the House the stories of Jafar Panahi, the gifted filmmaker honoured this year at the Toronto Film Festival, sentenced to six years in jail and banned from pursuing his craft for 20 years.

Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a respected cleric and former deputy minister of culture, was detained for 160 days. Mostafa Tajzadeh, a former deputy minister, was detained for 10 months and then re-arrested for stating that the 2009 elections were rigged. Ibrahim Yazdi, veteran political leader and activist, was arrested in June 2009 and again in October 2010. He is now in declining health in prison and his trial date is reportedly postponed. I could go on.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

The courageous Iranians who fought for democracy in 2009 are today facing serious consequences, including the death penalty.

On January 29, an Iranian-Dutch woman named Zahra Bahrami was executed on the basis of questionable drug-related charges that were laid after her arrest during an anti-Ahmadinejad protest.

On January 24, Jafar Kazemi and Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei, who were arrested during the 2009 protests, were executed after being accused of having ties to a terrorist group.

The Government of Canada is very concerned and believes that this trend will continue and that the Iranian judiciary will hand down death penalties in the cases of other people who gathered to peacefully demonstrate their democratic opposition. The government is also worried that the approximately 100 civilians arrested during the February 14 demonstrations will be subject to the same non-transparent, draconian treatment.

Government Orders

[English]

Other activists arrested following the election in 2009 are now receiving harsh sentences, including corporal punishment, for their peaceful opposition activities and vaguely defined offences that carry the death penalty. Here again are a few of the many who are suffering at the hands of a government that does not respect their basic democratic rights: Mehdi Aghdam, a youth activist, received six years in prison for participating in demonstrations; Emad Bahavar, a student activist, received 10 years in prison and a 10-year ban from political activities; Amir Khorram, a youth activist, received seven years in prison and 74 lashes; Sarah Tavassoli, a youth activist, received six years in prison and 74 lashes; a construction worker with two young children, Behzad Arabgol, received six years in prison for participating in a demonstration; Shiva Nazar-Ahari, a women's rights activist, received four years in prison and 74 lashes.

These terrible punishments against individuals exercising their universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly are an offence to reasonable people the world over and they must stop.

The Government of Canada condemned the repression after the June 2009 elections and we have continued to condemn the systematic and violent suppression of peace demonstrations ever since. These ongoing and unjustifiable violations of universal human rights will remain a core issue in Canada's foreign policy regarding Iran.

Our stand will not soften, our international leadership will not lessen and our principled voice will not be diminished until Iran's leaders turn away from the path of repression and all citizens of Iran can enjoy the freedoms and rights we hold to be universal and undeniable.

• (1925)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his words and I thank the House leaders for allowing this very important debate on Iran.

I want to ask the minister specific questions in relation to some of the recommendations that were put forward originally at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, of which I am vice-chair, and then at the foreign affairs committee, which ask for specific action from the Government of Canada, including: that the government call upon the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, to refer the matter of Iran's genocidal incitement to the Security Council pursuant to article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations on the basis that Iran poses a threat to international peace and security; that the government list the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps as part of the international terrorist organizations in accordance with Canadian law; and that the Canadian government enforce the standing international arrest warrants that have been filed against Iranian government officials.

Those are part of the many series of recommendations that were put forward. I would like to hear what the minister has to say on some of these recommendations.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Madam Chair, my understanding is that this report was unanimous and that colleagues from all sides of the House endorsed the recommendations.

As members know, the Government of Canada has already initiated a number of the recommendations and actions that were called for, particularly in terms of the genocide issue and the egregious violations of human rights by the Iranian leadership, President Ahmadinejad.

We have always expressed our highest condemnation both here in this House in Canada and on the international scene, particularly at the United Nations. I recall being at the United Nations and walking out with the Canadian delegation when President Ahmadinejad took to the podium to speak to the assembly. This is something that we feel very strongly about.

I want to reassure my colleague that we will look thoroughly at all of the recommendations and be extremely active in pursuing them. Indeed, we have already done quite a bit in terms of following the resolutions of the United Nations, UN Resolution 1929, we have been extremely active. We have put in place sanctions above and beyond the sanctions that have been called for. We have been very active in speaking out against Iran in terms of its disrespect for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its disregard of the IAEA.

I could go on but I think my colleague gets the general idea of where we stand on this issue.

• (1930)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Chair, I congratulate the member for Mount Royal for initiating this very important debate. I also congratulate the minister who is very sensitive to this situation as he has seen the situation in Burma where there is an equally cruel dictatorship. The minister has been great in those instances.

The Baha'i people in Iran have been persecuted for years, incarcerated unfairly, with extra-judicial killings, et cetera. I am hoping the government is against that and I am wondering what type of position it is taking against that type of activity by the leaders in Iran?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Madam Chair, we have indeed spoken out on that particular issue. I can point to my riding where there is a community that has been interacting with myself and that has been, at the same level as my hon. colleague, calling out for action in this regard.

I had the opportunity to meet with Iran's former minister of foreign affairs when our paths crossed in Brussels last year and we discussed, not only this issue, but a number of issues relating to human rights. I must say that it was a lesson that I think a lot of my colleagues here would certainly enjoy. They absolutely do not understand the fundamental notion of what human rights means. I, for one, take back from that meeting with that foreign minister that as long as that government is in place there will be no progress and no chance for freedom for the people of Iran. I think that as one the Parliament of Canada should speak out loudly so that our message can be clearly heard.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his comments today on the take note debate.

Government Orders

I recall that once the shah left Iran in 1979 and the Khomeini regime took over, there was a long difficult period in Iran with the theocracy that was running the country. However, I understand that in the last several years there has been a new group of people developing. The population is very young and well-educated. I think those two facts are something that most people, when they think of Iran, do not think about.

What are the prospects and what are the numbers of people who are actively protesting this regime?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Madam Chair, if my colleague were to go back to the incidents that took place in June, as well as in July of 2009, there were a number of reports that indicated, as he has rightly pointed, that it is the youth of that country, the forward thinking people in terms of protecting human rights and who believe in freedom of expression, who are in the streets demonstrating for things to happen and to find a better way to do things.

The world community has put in place a number of sanctions that, hopefully, will have an impact on the Iranian revolutionary guard so that the people, at the end of the day, will have a chance to have their voices heard and can move forward with fair and free elections and put in place the institutions that a lot of these people are calling for. They are calling for economic reform, for democratic reform. We need to be able to hear the call to ensure we can support the people who are legitimately seeking to pursue their human rights and pursue reforms in that country.

• (1935)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Chair, it is extraordinary for us to walk out on the president of a country at a United Nations meeting, and that indicates an extraordinary depth of feeling.

Could the minister remind those who are watching this debate what exactly caused the Canadian delegation to make the decision to walk out of the United Nations meeting?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Madam Chair, quite clearly, this was done on the heels of the president of Iran coming to the podium. He stated before his comments that he indeed denounced the state of Israel. He said that the west as well as the United States were responsible for the terrible tragedy that took place on September 11.

How can we sit in the UN General Assembly and listen to this when we know that the Revolutionary Guard Corps called for the elimination of the people of Israel? It called for the elimination of the state of Israel. We cannot do that. This is against every fibre in which Canadians believe. That was the reason we walked out.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Chair, Ahmadinejad's Iran, and I use that term to distinguish it from the Iranian people who are themselves the targets of massive domestic repression, has emerged as a clear and present danger to international peace and security, to regional and Middle East stability and increasingly and alarmingly to its own people.

Simply put, we are witnessing in Ahmadinejad's Iran the toxic convergence of four distinct yet interrelated threats: the nuclear threat; the genocidal incitement threat; the threat of state-sponsored terrorism; and the systematic and widespread violations of the rights of the Iranian people.

Let there be no mistake about it. Iran is in standing violation of international legal prohibitions against the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons. Iran has already committed the crime of incitement to genocide, prohibited under the genocide convention. Iran is a leading state sponsor of international terrorism. Iran is engaged in this massive suppression of the rights of its own people, which is taking place as we meet.

Recent developments have served only to expose and magnify this critical massive threat. For example, in the matter of Iran's nuclear weaponization program, the International Atomic Energy Agency has expressed concern that Iran was "advancing in its efforts to construct a nuclear warhead, to develop a missile delivery system for such a warhead, and a mechanism to detonate such a weapon". Simply put, the IAEA and arms control experts have reported that Iran has enriched enough nuclear fuel to build these dreaded nuclear bombs.

In the matter of state-sanctioned incitement to genocide, Iranian leaders have continued their incendiary calls for Israel's destruction. Underpinning this state-sanctioned incitement are the dehumanizing and demonizing epidemiological metaphors characterizing Israel as a "cancerous tumour" that must be excised and the Jewish people as "evil incarnate", the whole as prologue to and justification for Israel's impending demise.

In the matter of the state-sponsorship of international terrorism, Iran appointed as its minister of defence, during President Obama's year of engagement with Iran, in a mocking defiance of President Obama, Ahmed Vahidi, a former head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Vahidi is the object of an Interpol arrest warrant for his role in the planning and perpetration of the greatest terrorist atrocity in Argentina since the end of the Second World War, the bombing of the AMIA Jewish Community Centre in Argentina.

While the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has emerged as the epicentre of the four-fold Iranian threat, both repressing its own citizens at home, while exporting its terrorism abroad.

In the matter of human rights violations, which will now be the focus of the balance of my remarks, while the eyes of the world are understandably turned toward what is happening in Egypt and North Africa and while we identify with the democratization and the cry for freedom in Egypt and in North Africa, Iranian assaults on human rights and state-sanctioned Iranian executions have escalated dramatically.

In 2011 alone, Iran has executed at least 120 people, a rate of about 1 person every 8 hours, an unprecedented execution binge even by wanton Iranian standards, and which tragically has gone largely unnoticed and which has served as the warrant for this take note debate this evening.

Simply put, Iran is engaged in a wholesale assault on the rights of its own people, including a state-orchestrated wave of arrests, detentions, beatings, torture, kidnappings, disappearances and executions. I join with the minister in the identification of the victims of these massive human rights violations. He has appropriately named the inventory of these ongoing victims who are not simply statistics but who are ongoing victims of these massive violations.

Government Orders

● (1940)

Initially all of this was overlaid with Stalinist show trials and coerced confessions, but even that pretense has now been discarded.

This orchestrated criminal campaign has included a widespread systematic assault on women's rights, the oppression of religious and ethnic minorities, targeting especially the Baha'i, the largest and most oppressed religious minority in Iran, and ethnic Kurds, the imprisonment and murder of political dissidents and the criminalization of freedom of speech, assembly and association, including assaults on students and professors, activists and trade unions.

In particular, Iran has imprisoned more journalists than any other country in the world. It leads the world in per capita executions, including the execution of children. It has imprisoned and even murdered the lawyers who seek to represent these victims of human rights violations, the whole constituting crimes against humanity under international law.

We have been witness, just yesterday, to the incredible spectacle of several hundred Iranian parliamentarians calling for the imprisonment and murder of their fellow parliamentarians and leader of the opposition. The utter hypocrisy of Iranian leaders who criticize Mubarak for silencing protests in Egypt are now using patterns of intimidation, violence, imprisonment and execution to silence the voices of protest in Iran.

Therefore, the question becomes this. What must be done? In particular, in the aftermath of the belated yet welcome United Nations sanctions resolution in June and the targeted economic sanctions subsequently adopted by the U.S., the European Union, Canada and Australia, the question often asked is this. What remains to be done?

I will share with the House a 10-point action agenda, while incorporating by reference the recommendations unanimously adopted by the foreign affairs committee and tabled in Parliament in December 2010.

First, sanctions must not only be adopted, they must be enforced. Otherwise, it is as if the sanctions were never adopted to begin with.

Second, for sanctions to be effective, they must be internationalized. Yet, as we meet, not only have important countries not adopted sanctions, but they are indeed mocking these sanctions through their ongoing violation of them. For example, Russia and China, which initially supported the UN sanctions resolution, are enhancing their economic relations with Iran. Turkey and Brazil not only remain outside the sanctions orbit, but have accelerated their trade with Iran. Germany, Austria and Switzerland continue to increase their trade with Iran, with German-Iranian trade at \$6 billion annually.

Third, we need to sanction and enforce the sanctions with respect to Iranian banks, particularly the Iranian central bank, lest it prevent the circumvention of some of these sanctions.

Fourth, sanctions must also target the private sector, as well as the public sector, involving the regulation, the naming and shaming of companies trading or investing in Iran in violation of the sanctions themselves.

Fifth, sanctions must be multi-layered, not only economic but also juridical, diplomatic, political and the like. In a word, a critical mass of threat requires a critical mass of remedy;

Sixth, sanctions must be threat-specific. Thus far, the sanctions regime has focused on the nuclear threat, understandable and necessary, but it runs the risk of ignoring, marginalizing and, indeed, sanitizing the other three threats;

Seventh, in the matter of state-sanctioned incitement to genocide, it is astonishing that, as we meet, not one state party to the genocide convention has initiated any of the mandated legal remedies under international law. I trust the government will adopt the unanimous recommendations of the foreign affairs committee report, which recommended such remedies.

Eighth, in the matter of the massive human rights violations, the response has not only been tepid but indulgent. When there is an outcry, as in the Iranian stoning sentence of 43-year-old mother of two Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, it soon abates while the planned execution still remains, even if not by stoning, and the massive domestic repression continues unabated.

Ninth, negotiations cannot be march of folly. We cannot engage in negotiations with Iran to suspend Iranian enrichment and combat the nuclear threat but airbrush away all the other three threats.

Tenth, in the matter of Iranian-sponsored terror, there needs to be a comprehensive multilateral international effort, not just a U.S. one, to sanction the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In a word, this take note debate must sound the alarm as we stand in solidarity with the people of Iran.

● (1945)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for always being a great champion of human rights around the world, and for sounding this very important alarm especially for countries that have continued to trade with Iran and to ignore the sanctions.

The member referred to the massive assault on human rights in Iran and the need for specific remedies to sanction these human rights violations. Could the member share with us what some of these remedies and sanctions might do?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Madam Chair, I am delighted to do so and to incorporate by reference some of the recommendations in the all-party foreign affairs committee report.

The recommendations include: one, to provide moral and diplomatic support for the democratic movement in Iran; two, to sanction Iranian officials engaged in repression through travel restrictions, asset seizures, and the like; three, keep the issue of Iranian human rights violations as a priority on the international agenda and as a priority in any bilateral relations with Iran; four, hold Iran to account before the UN Human Rights Council. Incredibly, not one resolution has been passed against Iran in the UN Human Rights Council.

Government Orders

The recommendations also include: reappoint a UN special rapporteur with respect to human rights in Iran; recommend at every appropriate opportunity that the Iranian government grant access to international human rights organizations within its borders and allow domestic human rights organizations to operate in Iran without restriction or harassment; that the Government of Canada encourage Radio Canada International to consider programming in Farsi over its worldwide shortwave service, over conventional AM/FM broadcasting in the gulf region, and over the Internet; to take appropriate action to ensure that Iranian foreign offices, bureaus or media outlets in Canada are not used by the Iranian regime as a source of threat and intimidation of the Iranian diaspora in Canada.

The subcommittee also recommended that the Government of Canada completely remove immunity for foreign government officials in cases of ongoing violations of international human rights law.

• (1950)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I also want to thank the hon. member for Mount Royal for his excellent speech and his tireless efforts on this issue.

All of us are aware that Iran is a party to several international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The genocide convention also obligates Canada in many ways, through article I and article III, as we had asked at the committee, to have Canada invite the United Nations Security Council to consider referring to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for investigation and prospective prosecution the case of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and those Iranian leaders participating with him in direct and public incitement to genocide.

The member for Mount Royal has worked tirelessly on this specific issue. I would like to hear his comments on how that is going and what specific concrete action he suggests the government could be doing right now, not tomorrow, but today.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Madam Chair, I was pleased to hear the minister mention again that Canada has been condemning the state-sanctioned incitement to genocide in Ahmadinejad's Iran, but we have to move beyond the condemnation and to act to combat this state-sanctioned incitement to genocide as not only recommended but mandated by the legal obligations set forth in treaties to which my colleague has referred. What are some of those remedies? I might add, this is not a policy obligation; it is an international legal obligation on our part.

First, at the very least, our government, or any state party to the genocide convention, should refer the state-sanctioned incitement to genocide to the United Nations Security Council for deliberation and accountability. It is astonishing that as we meet, not even this modest remedy, let alone any of the other remedies, has yet been undertaken by any state party to the convention which is obliged to do so.

Second, any state party to the genocide convention, such as, Canada, the U.S., any of the European Union countries, can tomorrow initiate an interstate complaint against Iran before the International Court of Justice as Iran is also a state party to the

genocide convention. As such, Iran is obliged to prevent and punish such incitement, which in fact it propagates and intensifies.

Third, we can call upon United Nations Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon who, under article 99 of the United Nations charter, has an obligation to refer a threat to international peace and security to the UN Security Council. What greater threat do we have to international peace and security than the ongoing state-sanctioned incitement to genocide? We have yet to call upon the UN secretary-general to do so. We have yet to call upon the UN Security Council to refer the matter of the state-sanctioned incitement to genocide to the International Criminal Court for deliberation and accountability. Article 25 of the International Criminal Court treaty has a similar prohibition against this incitement to genocide.

I have just mentioned a number of the remedies which we are legally obliged to take and have yet to do so.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Chair, I would ask my hon. colleague to expand upon the incitement to genocide. The offence of incitement to genocide is one that is not necessarily easily grasped. It is a very important and serious offence. It is a human rights violation under the relevant charter. Could he explain exactly technically what it is and exactly technically how the Ahmadinejad regime is currently violating this vis-à-vis Israel?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Madam Chair, I am pleased to respond to that question. The Responsibility to Prevent Coalition is a consortium of 100 international lawyers, human rights advocates, former government leaders, former prime ministers from both parties in our own House, and foreign ministers. In its report the coalition has called upon Iran, which is in standing violation, as they put it, of the prohibition against the direct and public incitement to genocide in article 3 of the genocide convention, to cease and desist from such incitement. Regrettably, Iran not only has not ceased and desisted, but in fact continues in its incitement, as the evidence of the Responsibility to Prevent Coalition report has shown, and as has the witness testimony before the foreign affairs committee's Subcommittee on International Human Rights, which my colleague chairs.

That witness testimony has identified the eight precursors to incitement to genocide in Ahmadinejad's Iran. It begins with the whole phenomenon of the exclusion and then goes on to the delegitimization, demonization, the characterization of Israel and its people as a Satanic enemy, what is called the false accusation in the mirror, where one accuses others of that which one intends to do oneself. In a word, there are eight precursors to genocide which exist in Ahmadinejad's Iran today and which in their collection form the state-sanctioned incitement to genocide.

I can say as someone who prosecuted Rwandans for incitement to genocide while serving as minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, the aggregate of these incitement precursors in Ahmadinejad's Iran even exceeds that which existed in Rwanda for which people were held accountable under the genocide convention.

Government Orders

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Madam Chair, 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 held in that country in 2009 to protest the results of the rigged presidential election won by Ahmadinejad, the so-called green movement is mobilizing yet again.

The political imbroglio of 2009 has yet to be resolved in a satisfactory manner. The regime has done absolutely nothing except suppress dissent. That is why we must demand that Iran practise transparency in its election process and that it allow its people to choose their government and, particularly, a new president eventually.

Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is very ironic and incongruous, since that international convention requires signatories to do exactly the opposite of what Iran is doing. It stipulates that all peoples have the right of self-determination and therefore the right to freely determine their political status and choose their leaders.

Over the past few days, demonstrations were held in Iran in support of the people of Egypt and Tunisia. These demonstrations led to a protest against Iran's existing regime, which was violently suppressed. Shots were fired into the crowd, people were killed and tear gas was used. Meanwhile, opposition leaders were placed under house arrest.

The Bloc Québécois supports these popular and democratic protest movements and denounces the filthy conservatives in the Iranian parliament who now want the death penalty for the opposition leaders accused of leading yesterday's demonstration. The people of Iran must be able to freely express themselves.

The bond of trust between the State and most of the Iranian population has truly been broken. Since the 2009 protests, the regime can no longer claim to represent its people. The Iranian street spoke out in 2009 and it is doing so again now. The people no longer want the status quo. The street has a thirst for freedom.

We will always stand behind those fighting for freedom. Let us remember that freedom is a universal and inalienable right. Democracy and the rule of law are simply the natural expression of a free society. The violence used to repress the demonstrators is not consistent with democracy. This confirms that Iran has to develop a political system that is free, transparent and open to civil society if it wants to play its role in the world.

We condemn the Internet censorship imposed by the government on the Iranian people. The Iranian government must permit full access to the Internet and to the various social sites. Freedom of the press and freedom of expression are not negotiable.

These new demonstrations are yet another chapter in a tragic story.

• (2000)

Let us remember that the country of Iran was robbed of its own true democratic revolution in 1953 when Prime Minister Mossadegh

was forced to resign and placed under house arrest. The uprising was orchestrated by the U.S. and British secret services at a time when Iran was nationalizing its oil industry to ensure the development and progress of the Iranian people. In a speech delivered in Cairo in 2009, President Obama acknowledged this historical injustice.

The call for greater freedom and democracy in Iran is not coming just from western countries. On February 13, 2011, Turkish President Abdullah Gül, while visiting Iran, said:

Radical reforms must be carried out in order to meet the expectations of the people. Sometimes the people demand what the leaders and administrations are unable to achieve. When leaders are unable to assume their responsibilities, the people take over the leadership. After all these developments, our hope is that the people will emerge from the process with honour and happiness.

The Bloc Québécois could not have said it better.

In the beginning, the Iranian government congratulated the Egyptians for liberating themselves from Mubarak. The regime saw it as an Islamic renewal in Egypt. Moreover, the day that Mubarak resigned was the day of the 32nd anniversary of the Iranian revolution of February 11, 1979. Nevertheless, the Iranian government was not really taken in. It sought to propagate a distorted version of the events in Egypt. It filtered information from the foreign media because they put too much emphasis on the democratic aspirations expressed by the Egyptian masses during the demonstrations. Knowing that a protest was being planned for February 14 in Iran, the government took preventive measures with regard to the instigators of the green movement, Iran's democratic movement.

Former chairman of parliament and presidential candidate in the 2009 election, Mehdi Karroubi was confined to his residence as of February 10. Former Prime Minister of Iran and another presidential candidate in the 2009 election, Mir-Hossein Mousavi had his telephone jammed. Some of Mr. Karroubi's and Mr. Mousavi's closest advisors were also arrested. To justify these actions, the government stated that it could not allow Iran to be divided by granting the friends of westerners and henchmen of Zionism the right to demonstrate.

Despite these preventive manoeuvres by the regime, the green movement did not waver. More than 45,000 people signed the Facebook page calling for the demonstration. On the eve of the demonstrations, the regime tried to prevent the mobilization by slowing down Internet speed and blocking cellphone networks. Nevertheless, on Monday, February 14, Iranians steadfastly took to the streets of Tehran. They were there calling for more freedom. Many demonstrators were chanting the slogan "Death to the dictator", a clear message directed to Iranian leaders.

When one of the leaders of the green movement left his house to join the demonstrations, security forces prevented him from going. They also prevented unions, women's groups, student groups, all civil society groups from joining the demonstrators. On Wednesday, there were clashes between pro- and anti-government protestors during the funeral of a demonstrator.

Government Orders

• (2005)

The fact that Iranians are demonstrating in the streets when the repression of 2009 is still so fresh in their minds illustrates how angry they are. They want nothing less than the fundamental freedoms to which they are entitled.

As in Tunisia and in Egypt, the demonstrators are using the new technologies available to them—

The Deputy Chair: I have to interrupt the hon. member. Perhaps he could continue after questions.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Chair, I am pleased to join this important debate tonight. I want to thank the members who have presented so far.

A number of speakers have talked about the subcommittee on human rights and its report. I have the report here. I will be commenting to some degree on it.

The speakers have gone on at length regarding the threat of Iran against Israel, which is very real. I believe that people understand that very clearly.

The Ahmadinejad regime, through its leader, has repeatedly made threats in different locations around the world, which have disturbed much of the world community. There are some people who revel in those threats, and there will always be such people. However, I want to take a few moments to talk about the regime's threat against its own people. The previous member also spoke somewhat about that.

As late as Tuesday of this week, the committee called back some of its previous witnesses to talk about the state of affairs in Iran today. It is very troubling, because we know that the uprisings that took place in Tunis and Egypt are not going to recur in that way in Iran. I can remember seeing on television the people in Egypt walking up to soldiers and shaking their hands. To a certain degree, people were even free to surround the tanks and climb up on them and mark them. It will not be that way in Iran. There is no doubt that the regime, since the elections in 2009, has put down the efforts at that time to drive the country more toward democracy. However, a stark part of the testimony that we heard, and something that stays with me, is the fact that in Iran today someone is hanged every eight hours.

We need to pause for a second and think of the other countries that have had revolutions for democracy. Although these other countries may have had a war or had their militaries fighting against those who were also armed, in the case of Iran it is a civilian population that is being put down and young people's lives taken. Therefore, it is very important to pause in our debate tonight to consider these young people.

What is so troubling is that while we talk about the war on drugs, and the United States regularly talks about the war on drugs along the border with Mexico border and all that is happening there, in Iran its drug laws are being used to take out the leadership and the

activists who are giving voice to the fight and struggle for democracy.

I think that part of the context we need to look at is era of 1979. It was a different time and place and there was a different regime in power. There was a student uprising that was very effective, but the clerics took it over. Today, the current uprising will be very much at odds with the clerics, who are very much a part of the power structure.

Thus we are now seeing a different kind of push for democracy than in the other countries we have just seen. They are facing a much different government. The risks are high and the level of courage required by these young people is great, particularly now, after the brutal way in which people were put down following the election, including the disappearance and torture of young people. One witness described how a woman went to pick up the body of her son at a makeshift mortuary in a meat plant, only to find hundreds of bodies there. Many of them were disfigured from various forms of torture.

I know that part of this has already been put into the record, but I want to speak for a moment or two in regard to the subcommittee report. We held 16 meetings and concluded a report on the state of affairs in Iran. As I recall, it was put forward in December of 2010. I would like to read a bit from the executive summary of that report. It says:

• (2010)

In the summer of 2009, Canadians and the rest of the international community looked on with concern as Iranian security forces cracked down on protesters in the wake of that country's June 12 presidential election.

If we can imagine for a moment, what we actually saw on our TV screens was probably to some degree a sanitized version and only the cellphone pictures that got out were showing the reality of what was happening on the streets.

We all remember the young woman who was, to some extent, just standing by when she was shot by one of the security people. The video of that went viral on the Internet. I believe we can see it on YouTube. The sadness we felt when we saw that young woman's life bleeding away on the ground was in knowing that it was the revolution or the push for democracy that was bleeding with her, because the security forces were being very successful at that point in putting this down and controlling it. Over a period of time we saw, with sadness, it fade.

It did not mean that the people gave up on their need for democracy and to stop the tyranny that comes from this particular regime, but that election gave us a very rare glimpse inside a country that is very controlling.

The dramatic protests in Iran last summer and the response of those Iranian forces and authorities, and then the reaction of the international community, gave our subcommittee a focus to revisit that report again. At the end of the summer, we thought we were finished and yet we had to go back and look at it some more in the context of the more recent events. Again, as I just indicated, we have done the same thing this week.

Government Orders

This is an ongoing tragedy on the one hand, but the courage of the citizens of Iran is uplifting on the other hand, so it draws us back. It is somewhat like that line from *The Godfather* when they were talking about the man who was trying to get out but kept getting pulled back. The striving for democracy in this country does exactly that to anyone who takes the time to study it, or even to those engaged in casual discussions with friends. We cannot help but go back to the struggle of these people.

Our committee was very concerned with the deteriorating rights in that country. We broadened our study to the mistreatment of the Iranian population itself, which I think, if we consider the number of executions, is putting Iran on the level of China. In the world we tend to point to China as the place with the most repression on the face of the earth, but we have to pull ourselves back to what is happening in Iran at this point in time and say that it is very similar.

We heard from expert witnesses and human right activists representing non-governmental organizations, academics and lawyers, and in light of their testimony the subcommittee made a number of recommendations. In our assessment, we recognized that the regime has a long history of systemic and widespread violations of the human rights of its own people.

The abuses violate the population's right to life and freedom from discrimination based on religion. For example, the Baha'is, the Jews and the Christians in that country live a very quiet life, trying not to draw any attention to themselves at all, because there are huge penalties to be paid.

There is discrimination according to sex, language, sexual orientation and political opinion. Normally we talk about political parties where there is dissent, but if someone is expressing a political opinion that is not in line with the regime's, they are opening themselves to horrific torture. It should be noted that oftentimes the Iranian regime is violating its own country's laws. That is how far it is prepared to take it.

The recording and reporting of these violations has been problematic, because domestic human rights organizations are routinely shut down. Government officials, journalists and activists are regularly harassed. I think it goes beyond harassment in many cases.

One of the people who spoke to our committee was Shirin Ebadi, who has been before our committee twice. We were struck by the courage of this woman.

● (2015)

I am getting the signal to wrap up. I am just beginning. I had a ton of notes and got a little carried away.

However, that is the important part of what we have to understand, the need for a passion in support of these people.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Chair, knowing my colleague's wealth of knowledge on this and his participation in the meetings of the foreign affairs subcommittee, I would like to invite him to share more of his thoughts and perspectives if the time did not allow him to do so.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Chair, I thank the member for introducing this in this way. Our own passion for this is below the

surface. When we see Shirin Ebadi or we see the professors and the various people who come before us with tragic stories, it is not just the physical abuse that gets to us. It is the systemic repression of a people and what should be their democratic rights that at two levels we are pulled on this.

On the international front we could talk about the threats to the world community. There is debate as to whether those threats are real or maybe not that real. However, the threats internally to the people on the ground in Iran are extremely real. As I said, the hangings are every eight hours. When we know that they hang juveniles in that country, we are further disgusted and further troubled.

I could probably go on even further, but perhaps there are more questions.

● (2020)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I want to thank the member for his comments today on the take note debate on Iran. He has brought out several important points about the situation.

We had a take note debate on the Egyptian situation just a week or two ago.

What does the member think Canada can or should do about the situation at this point?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Chair, what is critical from the witness testimony is the documentation, the collecting of the facts so that the people of the world, as well as the people of Iran, understand what that government is guilty of and that the Government of Canada can support the development of a centre which helps with that documentation, be it in Canada or elsewhere, because the one thing that will change governments is the information and the understanding by the people of that country the extent of the abuses. They know that their friends and neighbours disappear. But as to the extent of the physical abuse and deaths, I doubt very much if they really understand the depth of the damage being done to the population of that country. The report speaks to this. I would invite people to go online and look at the subcommittee report on Iran because it lays out 24 recommendations.

The key is to get information out and educate the world on what is actually happening.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to alert my hon. colleague that I just received notice that two Iranian naval ships have just moved near the Egyptian territory. I presume that this is sort of—

An hon. member: The Suez Canal.

Mr. Mario Silva: The Suez Canal.

I presume this is sort of a hostile act by Iran and also a warning to the west probably, that it does not want a similar movement taking place in Iran that took place in Egypt.

It is another sign of Iran creating instability in the whole region, from its support of Hezbollah, to Hamas. It is certainly a regime that sponsors terrorism and is quite frightening in terms of its action toward people and also toward the international community.

Government Orders

I wonder, given what happened just a few minutes ago, whether the member has any comments or anything to add to that action by Iran.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Chair, I am not overly surprised at the news but I am disappointed.

Regimes such as this remind me of a magician who keeps someone occupied with one hand while picking his or her pocket with the other hand. Sometimes some of the rhetoric and over-the-top expressions or actions externally outside of the country is used to draw attention away from the very nature of what is being done to the people within a country.

We need to keep our focus right now on the Iranian people and the suffering that is happening there and the courage that is being expressed as they take to the streets once more.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Chair, comparisons have been made with the recent situation in Egypt. I am interested in knowing how the member feels about the role of technology, Facebook, the Internet in both of those movements. In Iran in 2009, the people involved in the protest were very well educated and tech savvy. Al Jazeera has a big effect on the instant reporting. It is almost the CNN of that area.

I wonder if the member has any comments or thoughts about these points.

● (2025)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Chair, I may be incorrect with the number I am about to give, but I believe that 65% of the population of Iran is under 40 years old.

If we go back to the election of President Obama, the member may recall that a flash mob showed up outside the White House. This was not an announced event. Young people used Twitter and Facebook to tell people to go there. In a country of relative freedom like the United States, they were able to do that and express their joy at the change in their government.

In Egypt and Tunis the use of technology showed dozens of cameras being held high in the air by people recording the events. Fortunately, there were enough western media there able to capture that as well, which we will not see coming out of Iran. The use of these tools is second nature to the generations there that has given life to this. People have been contained for so long by this regime, but they finally have a tool that allows them the connections they need.

The problem with the technology now is that the regime itself will be able to tap into it and to some extent identify people, although it depends on the level of the sophistication of the security forces there. People are at extremely high risk, but they are rising to this occasion. They are expressing the courage needed to change their world. It is up to Canada and countries like Canada to support them.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Chair, the leadership in Tunisia and Egypt was very corrupt. With respect to Egypt, perhaps \$70 billion was at question.

Is this the same situation in Iran? Are we talking about a leadership there that is financially corrupt and has amassed some money, or is there a different issue?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Chair, I do not think the issue is to the same extent. We understand that the Mubarak family has something like \$70 billion. When a leader has absolute power in any country that power is open to abuse. There are bribery systems and demands are made on people in the institutions of power.

I went to Saudi Arabia in 1979 as a contractor with Bell Canada. Bell Canada had 1,500 Canadian managers in that country who were attempting to change the culture relative to the phone company's management style. No offence to those managers, but it was too systemic. A technician would be paid to get someone a telephone number and that telephone number would be connected at the switch centre. If the technician were paid enough of a bribe, there would be no record of that number anywhere. Those young men were driving around in Cadillacs, and in 1979 a Cadillac was selling for \$40,000 in that country. The undercurrent of corruption is tied to absolute power.

In answer to my colleague's question, I believe with investigation we would find massive amounts of money.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Madam Chair, part of my duties as minister of state is to look after consular services that are provided to Canadian citizens who travel and live abroad. I want to enter this debate from the aspect of how conditions in Iran impact consular cases and our ability to assist individuals who are suffering tremendous difficulty in that country.

I would like to add my congratulations and thanks to the hon. member for Mount Royal for spearheading this debate. It is important that Canadians know what their elected representatives think, say and know about conditions around the world, particularly in a case like this where we have a very unstable situation and contravention of the values, principles and rights that we as Canadians hold dear.

As background on consular matters, our government offers consular services in more than 260 locations globally. On an average day we open 686 new consular cases. These include distress situations such as medical emergencies, arrest and detention, child abductions and custody issues, and deaths abroad.

I would like to highlight for Canadians our deep concerns about many individuals in Iran who have been sentenced to death after highly questionable processes. In addition, we are troubled by the lack of co-operation from Iran when it comes to Canada's ability to provide consular services to dual-citizen Canadians imprisoned in Iran.

One of the greatest challenges is obtaining access to our citizens who are dual nationals. In fact, many countries, and Iran is one of them, do not even recognize dual nationality and do not believe that Canada has the right to access, visit, or even to any information about our citizens. Naturally, Canada firmly believes that our citizens should have access to consular services regardless of what other citizenship they may hold.

Government Orders

We have made consular services part of Canada's controlled engagement strategy with Iran. The Canadian embassy in Iran is committed to providing the best consular services that it can. Unfortunately, we have had very little, if any, co-operation from the government of Iran.

Fortunately we do not have many cases there, but the ones that do arise pose serious challenges. That is why we have made them important priorities for our government.

Canadians may be aware that laws in other countries often limit or sometimes completely prevent the ability of Canadian officials to provide consular services to Canadians of dual nationality who find themselves in distress. Nevertheless, as in the case of Iran, our government continues to press the authorities for due process, fair treatment and consular access to Canadian citizens detained in that country. Canada will continue to advocate on behalf of Canadian citizens who hold dual citizenship.

I would like to talk about a couple of very high profile consular cases in Iran.

One is the incarceration of a journalist, Hossein Derakhshan, who is a Canadian citizen and has been incarcerated for some time. We have made strenuous efforts to assist Mr. Derakhshan.

● (2030)

Last October, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the minister of foreign and European affairs of France issued a joint declaration calling for the release of Mr. Derakhshan and asking Iran to recognize his dual citizenship and guarantee consular access in accordance with the Vienna conventions. We have enlisted other partners in making our concerns heard in Iran. Our government's position has been clear. Iran must release Mr. Derakhshan and other journalists who have been unjustly detained and sentenced, and it must allow media to report freely.

We also continue to be active in the case of another Canadian citizen imprisoned in Iran, Hamid Ghassemi-Shall. Canada has actively sought and continues to seek consular access to Mr. Ghassemi-Shall. Both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his parliamentary secretary have been in touch with Mr. Ghassemi-Shall's wife to discuss this very troubling case. In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has written and spoken to his counterpart in Iran about the case.

The promotion and protection of human rights is integral to Canada's foreign policy, and it has been under any government in Canada. The protection of human rights is a core element of Canadian values, which is why we are so disturbed about the recent wave of executions in Iran that my colleague from Mount Royal and others have mentioned this evening.

We are also particularly concerned about Saeed Malekpour. Mr. Malekpour is a permanent resident of Canada. He has reportedly been condemned to death after software that he created was allegedly deemed offensive to the regime in Iran. He is one of many Iranian citizens and others facing a harsh sentence imposed for a questionable crime in a country that lacks respect for the rule of law and basic human rights.

As recently as two weeks ago, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs stood in this House and highlighted the case of Mr. Malekpour. Canada continues to be deeply concerned as well by the case of Ms. Ashtiani. As members know, we have taken a firm stand on this case. The House unanimously voted in November to call upon our Minister of Foreign Affairs to take the strongest possible action to demand that the Government of Iran permanently stay the execution of Ms. Ashtiani.

Our government has been a relentless advocate in speaking against a regime that flagrantly abuses the fundamental rights of not only Canadians but its own citizens. We will not be silent. We will continue to speak out and denounce the inhumanity that is so unacceptable to our country and to others around the world.

● (2035)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like congratulate the hon. minister on her new file as Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs).

In her new role as the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas and Consular Affairs, could she talk about what is happening in Venezuela? In speaking with several officials, I know there is concern about what is taking place there, specifically with the Jewish community, and Iran's influence and involvement in that country and around that part of the world. There have been a series of secret flights taken back and forth. We are not sure what it is about. We are very much concerned and are monitoring that situation. I want to know if the minister has anything new to add on that particular situation.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chair, we are very troubled about this situation. As the minister mentioned, there have been some tremendous difficulties in this relation. We are concerned about the shrinking of democratic space, as we might say, in Venezuela. We maintain though a policy of principled engagement with this country. We believe that it is important to bring to bear the opinions and the interaction of our neighbours and friends in the Americas to strengthen democracy and protect the kind of human rights that we are talking about today.

We have had tremendous co-operation from others in the Americas and we will continue to work very hard, not just in Venezuela, but in all countries in our American hemisphere to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law. That will promote the kind of economic growth that will provide a strong future for people in that country.

● (2040)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Chair, the report that the Subcommittee on International Human Rights tabled in the House via the standing committee had 24 recommendations but there are two that I would like a response from the minister on. Perhaps she may be aware of whether the government is considering following these recommendations.

The first recommendation is:

The subcommittee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to provide moral support and should increase, if possible, its financial support for Canadian and Iranian civil society organizations and other human rights groups that document and report on human rights abuses committed by the Iranian regime.

The second one is:

Government Orders

The Subcommittee recommends that the Government of Canada consider funding a research chair at a Canadian university dedicated to the study of Canadian-Iranian relations, including the human rights situation in Iran.

As I said in my remarks a little earlier, the important thing that witnesses have told us is about the documentation and information gathering on this regime and the importance of this to them going forward.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chair, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs said in answer to a similar question this evening, the recommendations of the report are being carefully studied. We appreciate and commend the work that was done by this committee. It was extremely thorough. We share its outrage at Iran's human rights abuses.

However, the report is being studied and there will be a response tabled in the House when it has been completed. In the meantime, and as part of that, we will continue to call on Iran to live up to its human rights promises. In fact, Iran has made commitments, signed on to international treaties. We call on Iran to live up to its word and keep its promises. We are and will remain on the side of those in Iranian prisons who have been unjustly imprisoned on grounds of their religious, political or social beliefs.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I, too, would like to add my words of congratulations to the minister on her recent appointment as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, with specific responsibilities for the Americas and also for Consular Services.

There is no question that all of us in the House are disturbed by the suppressing opposition of the protests that are happening in Iran, the activists who are being arrested, the government's increased crackdown on minorities and opposition groups, Iran's use of intimidation and violence to suppress dissent, and its unjust detention of human rights defenders.

Our responsibility here in this House is certainly to address these situations, and we need to be concerned about all of those in Iran who are suffering, but I think our primary concern as Canadian parliamentarians needs to be the well-being of our Canadian citizens.

I would just like the minister to expand perhaps on her comments earlier regarding Canadians of dual citizenship who are being detained in spite of the lack of due process that was followed in their arrest and detention. Certainly it is important that our government speaks up on their behalf, and I know our minister is working hard in terms of the consular services she is offering them, but I would just like her to expand a bit on her comments about the services that the government is providing to Canadians of dual citizenship who are being unjustly detained in Iran.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chair, the best way to answer his question is to use as an example a very current case, the case of Mr. Ghassemi-Shall. Mr. Ghassemi-Shall is actually a citizen of Canada and, as I mentioned, was arrested and imprisoned in Iran for a website that he designed that somehow offended that regime. Mr. Ghassemi-Shall's wife who is in Canada is very distraught, as everyone can appreciate. We are doing everything we can to assist Mr. Ghassemi-Shall and his wife.

We have run into some real difficulties, which will not surprise anyone. The regime does not recognize dual citizenship, let alone

permanent residency, but we will continue to provide assistance to the family. Since learning of the arrest, we have been in contact with Iranian authorities, both politically and diplomatically, including by diplomatic notes. We have sought consular access to Mr. Ghassemi-Shall.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has written to his counterpart, Iran's foreign affairs minister, demanding that Canada be afforded consular access. Our officials at the embassy in Tehran continue to seek consular access consistent with the provisions of the Vienna Convention on consular relations, which Iran signed on to. We will continue to seek access and provide every possible assistance to his wife and family.

It is of tremendous concern to us that these situations arise. This is just one example but there are others. We are active, we do not let up and we continue to press the case forward for these individuals.

• (2045)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we have all watched the developments in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and other countries that are experiencing considerable political and social unrest. Citizens are demanding greater freedom and political accountability and there are signs in many cases that change is indeed coming.

In recent days, the people of Iran have taken to the streets of Tehran and other cities calling for change. Yet again we have seen from the Islamic Republic of Iran the brutal suppression of those who seek freedom of expression and political change. President Ahmadinejad's regime practises wanton disregard for human rights, the rule of law and international standards of behaviour.

Take, for example, the ongoing case of Saeed Malekpour, a permanent resident of Canada being held in the notorious Evin prison. He was forced through torture to make a false confession and is under constant threat of execution. This is but one instance of the total contempt the Iranian regime has for the rule of law domestically and internationally.

As a member of the foreign affairs Subcommittee on International Human Rights, my colleagues and I have had the opportunity to study and report on the realities of the Iranian human rights violations and the seemingly endless reprehensible conduct. It was made clear in its December 2010 report that the committee firmly believed the Iranian regime's policies and activities within its territory and those it projects internationally constituted gross violations of its obligations under international law.

The litany of oppression and irresponsible international behaviour literally grows by the day. In recent days we have received reports of the terrible oppression of legitimate and peaceful dissents in Iran. The utter hypocrisies of the Iranian regime is incomprehensible.

Human Rights Watch remarks:

Just days ago the Iranian government claimed to support the popular aspirations of millions of Tunisians and Egyptians who peacefully demanded an end to dictatorship...Now Iranian security forces are using batons and teargas to disperse Iranians peacefully demonstrating in support of their Arab neighbors.

Government Orders

The suppression of these peaceful demonstrations was accompanied by the detention of numerous opposition leaders across Iran.

This pattern of intolerable conduct is completely consistent with the regime's human rights records and its intolerable foreign policy objectives. Throughout testimony for the report on Iran, concerns about the policy of Iran's governing regime's on human rights related policies was expressed strongly. Particularly notable among these concerns was its support of various terrorist organizations, its incitement to genocide, its belligerent stance towards Israel, the dehumanization and the intentions of its nuclear program.

In various conflicts throughout the Middle Eastern region, and indeed around the world, the footprints of the Iranian regime are fully in evidence whether it is the support of terrorists or other violations of international law. Its endless contempt and outrageous attacks on Israel are completely unacceptable and must be condemned.

Within Iran itself, we have witnessed for some time now the personal price paid by those who oppose the regime or simply violate its reprehensible standards of intolerance.

As with Mr. Malekpour, these include Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi who died tragically in Iranian custody in 2003 for taking a photograph of a protest outside a prison. Her son, Stephan, put it eloquently by saying:

Through her art, she wanted to inform, connect with and educate people. She gave a voice to the people of those countries she focused on—she even gave them hope.

Victims Mahmoud Asgari and Ayez Marhoni were teenagers executed by the Iranian regime in 2005 because they were gay.

Just today it has been reported by Human Rights Watch that there has already been over 100 executions in 2011 by the Iranian regime, including political prisoners.

In testimony before the Subcommittee on International Human rights this week, Professor Payam Akhavan characterized it as “mass murder in slow motion”.

The Iranian Nobel laureate, Shirin Ebadi, appeared before our committee and said this morning that the Iranian regime:

—are using the familiar tactics of carrying out political execution at the same time as mass executions of prisoners convicted of criminal offences. These executions may increase if the world is silent.

Her words represent an appeal to all nations of the world, including Canada, to ensure that the Iranian regime hears the voice of the world community and understands that they will be held accountable for their actions.

● (2050)

We need that action, but one of the major challenges is the ability to collect information from a society that conducts itself as the Iranian regime does, that criminalizes freedom of expression. In order to get an accurate picture of what goes on in Iran, we must rely on activists and journalists for much of what we have come to know, but they need our support. Action is needed to add the Iranian Revolution Guard Corps to a list of terrorist entities and to amend the State Immunity Act.

One of the groups within Iran about which we have received regular reports is members of the Baha'i faith. Left unprotected by the Iranian legal system, the 300,000 members are singled out for particularly brutal persecution. Their homes are raided. They are publicly vilified and have no means of public recourse, creating what Suzanne Tamas of the Baha'i Community of Canada called “an atmosphere of prejudice, which allows the Iranian government to continue to persecute the Baha'is with impunity”.

People of the Jewish faith remaining in Iran are also targeted for oppression, as are other minority communities such as Christians and Sunni Muslims. Minorities like the Kurds and the Baluchis are always under constant threat from the Iranian regime, so much so that Fakteh Zamani, president of the Association for Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran said judges would simply show up and sentence tortured members of the Baluchis members to death, leading to hundreds of Baluchis on death row for no reason other than they are a minority.

Whether it is Iranians seeking political and social reform, religious minorities or foreigners who appear to threaten their regime, the Iranian government will spare no action in its quest to quench dissent. Indeed, following the marches in cities across Iran this past Monday, the regime has called upon its supporters to participate in protests this coming Friday to demonstrate what it is calling their “hatred” for those who participated in the rallies calling for change. The reformers are clearly in the sights of the Iranian regime once again.

Reformers cannot rely on instruments of the Iranian current political system for any change, as we have seen. The presidential elections of June 2009 were clearly conducted in a manner that was unfair and questionable, to say the least. The results clearly did not reflect the true will of the Iranian people and the regime's ruthless repression of resistance in the wake of the vote merely demonstrated its complete lack of legitimacy.

The Iranian regime represents one of the most pressing threats to stability in the world. The conduct of this regime domestically is reprehensible and intolerable. The public statements of the regime and its leadership as well as policy declarations are a serious threat to both Iranians and to all people of the region and beyond. Israel is a particular target of their vitriol.

While the challenge of dealing with the Iranian regime may at times appear daunting, the price of not taking substantial action will almost certainly be much higher, as history has taught us in such circumstances.

Our subcommittee's report to Parliament makes a number of recommendations that I hope will be adopted and implemented by the Government of Canada. I hope too that it will then stand as an example of the action that needs to be taken by other nations too.

Canada, in unison with nations across the global community, can make a difference. We must ensure that the voice of tolerance, responsibility and freedom is heard by the Iranian regime and, perhaps just as important, it will serve as inspiration to those who labour for freedom in that country.

Let us be an example of this principle in our dealings with the Iranian regime. Let us stand firm.

Government Orders

• (2055)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Chair, I commend the hon. member for his work on the subcommittee. I have had the pleasure of working with him for several years.

I want to take the hon. member back to witness testimony that we had. Witnesses before the subcommittee repeatedly expressed frustration with the fixation of the international community, particularly of the United States, on the nuclear issue as opposed to the grave breaches of human rights that followed the June 12 election.

Professor Akhavan, of whom the hon. member spoke in his remarks, said that the Iranian government was watching and calculating how much it could get away with and if the message of the international community was that the co-operation on the nuclear issue would mean acquiescence to all manner of atrocities, then the hard-liners, as they tried to consolidate their grip, would execute and torture as many people as they could get away with and that we should have no illusions of their capacity to do that.

Would the hon. member comment on the fact that the United States defunded the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center? That documentation centre was one of the recommendations in our report that Canada should take up.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his hard work on the committee. He has certainly witnessed the fact that all members of the committee share a deep concern in what is happening with of human rights throughout the world.

In doing this report, all members were quite clear that we were very much concerned about the deplorable situation on human rights in Iran. We are very concerned about its genocidal tendencies toward the state of Israel and the Jewish people, as well as its nuclear program.

However, I understand the member is trying to say, and that is we need to find a way to get organizations to document what takes place. One of the recommendations in the report is to get funding to ensure we financially support agencies that not just work on human rights but also document human rights abuses that take place in Iran.

The situation is not getting better, and I admire the Iranian people. The hon. member mentioned the fact that 65% of the people are under 40. I had heard the number as 50% of the people are under 25. There is a very young generation of Iranians who want freedom. They are very savvy in terms of technology. They use Facebook and the Internet very wisely, but they need our assistance and solidarity. They need to know the world community is standing behind them as they go through this very difficult time.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very interested in the work the committee and members did. I know they have worked very hard and have a great deal of expertise.

I have a question about consular cases, not surprisingly. In my last answer I referred to Mr. Ghassemi-Shall's case and I should tell the House that I inadvertently got it mixed up with Mr. Malekpour's case as I have been dealing with both of them. I apologize for that and I will try to correct the record in *Hansard*.

My question is about Mr. Ghassemi-Shall, who is a Canadian citizen and was arrested on charges of spying in Iran, and Mr. Malekpour, a computer programmer, who is not a Canadian citizen but a permanent resident. Did the committee come to any conclusions about new avenues, different avenues, more effective avenues that we as Canadians can pursue in order to support and assist individuals like Mr. Ghassemi-Shall and Mr. Malekpour and their families who are in these terrible circumstances?

• (2100)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, we are very much concerned also about consular cases.

We tend to focus on witnesses who actually have on the ground expertise and are witnessing also what is taking place in terms of the human rights abuses taking place in Iran. The reports that came back to us are very shocking and very alarming. We are talking about mass murders of people. We are talking about a government that silences critics, imprisons critics, tortures them, kills them. According to Human Rights Watch, there are mass executions of over 100 people just this year alone, which makes it per capita probably the number one country in terms of mass executions, far outreaching any other country.

In terms of specific consular cases, many of these are done, as the minister would probably know, through diplomatic channels and through different friendly countries who might be able to assist us. We are asking the government to take whatever steps are necessary. It has our support to bring Canadians home safely. We have seen what could happen if a Canadian citizen, or someone who wanted to reside in this country, are captured by the Iranian regime, once they are jailed without even a fair trial, which they never have, the possibility of them being executed is quite great. We have seen what happened with the journalist, Ms. Kazemi. That was a situation where she was arrested and killed. That was basically what took place.

We have to act in an urgent manner, because the lives of those who are taken by the Iranian regime are at risk. It really is a question of life and death. It is not a question of waiting too long. We have to bring pressure and assistance to our neighbours through whatever country that will be supportive. To get their assistance is very important. That would be the appropriate way.

The other concrete thing we said is that we have to support NGOs both domestically and internationally who are working on this file and who could also be witnesses to what atrocities are taking place and to document it. That also requires financial assistance from the government.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, I may be rising on the same matter that the member for Mount Royal is about to rise on.

I want to emphasize that the nature of this debate is about the worsening domestic human rights situation in Iran, but it seems to me that there has been no progress whatsoever domestically in Iran on the regime's willingness to continue to argue and to incite in favour of a massive genocide in which it seeks and advocates the destruction of an entire other country, the state of Israel.

I would invite the member's comments on that ongoing worry.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, I want to thank my hon. colleague for the question and also for the excellent leadership he provides as chair of our subcommittee. It is a great pleasure to be a member of that committee because we tend to find consensus in most issues, unlike some of the other committees where there is a little bit of antagonism. I feel very close to the members of the committee and I am very proud to sit on the committee.

The member makes a very important observation that we have also discussed in our committee, which is the genocidal tendencies of Ahmadinejad's Iran toward the state of Israel and the Jewish people. That is one of the reasons why we are asking that the government make sure that in relation to our obligations under the Geneva Conventions and the specific obligations that Canada has as a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, to enforce them.

We are talking about also raising this with the permanent members of the Security Council. We are asking that this be brought before the human rights council and other agencies. We also request that this issue be raised at the highest possible level, because we have a responsibility through the genocide convention, specifically article III, which I mentioned before, that this matter be dealt with and appropriate action taken to hold Iran accountable for its actions.

• (2105)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to join, also, in commending my colleague for his excellent stewardship of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. As well, I want to recognize my colleague, the member for Davenport, who served as vice-chair of the committee, for his commendable work and submission this evening.

One of the recommendations of the foreign affairs committee and of the subcommittee had to do with providing a civil recourse for victims of gross human rights violations by removing the immunity under the State Immunity Act for foreign officials who perpetrated such violations.

I wonder if the member for Davenport could comment on that recommendation.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, first, I want to thank the member for Mount Royal for his excellent work, not just on this file, but specific on that issue of the State Immunity Act, which he has put forward to ensure that the government in fact allows the legislation so that we can get after those individuals who are creating and perpetrating both genocide and hateful language. That particular legislation needs to be enacted as soon as possible by the government.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am here in my capacity today as the chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I want to take members through the history of the hearings we have had and some of the very extensive evidence we heard at committee in the course of hearings that started under a different chairman in 2007 and continued on under my chairmanship in 2008-09. We thought we could wrap the committee up and then realized that we had to continue on in the wake of the repression following the rigged Iranian elections and the subsequent crackdown. We produced a

Government Orders

report and just recently have had hearings again into further abuses in Iran. Just yesterday we heard some testimony.

When we are dealing with human rights violations on a vast scale we become numb to them. As I was preparing my remarks, I was put in mind of a saying that is attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to Joseph Stalin that "one death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic".

To make the point about just how awful the human rights situation is in Iran, I thought I might draw upon a piece of testimony.

I should mention as I begin that when I was in university I studied Russian literature. Russian literature is rich in prison diaries of people who describe what happened to them, the horrible situation in the gulag, Dostoevsky describing the situation to the czars.

Nothing can surpass the testimony which we heard at committee from Ahmad Batebi:

I was kept for 17 months in a small room by myself, and that room was no more than a washroom. This situation caused health problems. They took me twice for execution. In one case, I was taken for execution with a group of others. Of course, I was not executed. I was in the middle, with one man on the left and another on the right. They blindfolded us and forced us to stand on top of a chair, as if to hang us. They pulled my blindfold aside a bit so I could see what was happening to the other two. These were people who were imprisoned next to me in small cells. I saw their execution.

He goes on to describe some specific tortures to which he was also subjected, but that gives us an idea. That story has been repeated in other versions many thousands of times in Iran over the course of the past three decades.

There have been periods in the past three decades under the current regime that have been worse. There have been periods that have been better. There have been times when one group has been singled out and times when another group has been singled out. At the moment dissidents, those who are calling out for democracy, are a particular target as the government seeks to crush dissent.

The government has a long record of going after groups of all description. For example, there is religious repression in Iran, which includes, as others have noted, the murderous oppression of the Baha'i minority, the largest religious minority in Iran.

But it also includes the repression of Iran's Christian and Jewish populations. It also includes, perhaps to a lesser degree but nonetheless significant, repression of Iran's Sufi and Sunni populations, and it includes the repression of dissident Shia clerics, including the imprisonment for over 20 years of a prominent Shia cleric who issued a fatwa against the murderous behaviour of the regime toward the Baha'i. It was religious repression on a massive scale.

Iran is a country of many nationalities. Under the current Iranian regime it has become a prison house of nationalities. The oppression of, for example, the sizeable Azeri population. The population of Azeri in Iran is perhaps as large or even larger than the population of Azeri in Azerbaijan. They are significantly oppressed.

• (2110)

There is a very large population of Baluchis. They are very significantly oppressed. Arabs face similar oppression. Kurds face oppression.

Government Orders

To give a sense of what that is like, I thought I would quote from some testimony relating to the Baluchi minority. Fakteh Zamani, when testifying before our committee on March 24, 2009, said the following:

What I have heard from Baluchis is that there is a special judge appointed by the government to try these cases. Confessions have been obtained under severe torture, and these people are tried in 10 to 15 minutes in their cells, without a prosecutor or a defence lawyer present. Just because of the special Baluchi situation, a judge shows up and asks a few questions of this tortured individual and sentences them to death. There are hundreds of Baluchis on death row.

That is ethnic oppression.

Iran has a large and quite well-educated population. It has a cosmopolitan past. Tehran is a very cosmopolitan city.

Women acquired, prior to the current regime, a relatively significant role in society. The repression and the stripping away of those women's rights is a prominent feature of the human rights oppression of the current regime.

Trade unionists are repressed. We have heard testimony to that effect.

Sexual minorities are oppressed in a particularly grotesque way. Male homosexuals, gay men, are executed. Being a gay man is a terminal offence in Iran.

However, for peculiar reasons, it is acceptable to get a sex change operation. Sometimes Iranian gays have effectively been forced to undergo unwanted sex change operations to escape the death penalty. Many Iranian gays who do escape are currently in a situation of being effectively unrecognized refugees trapped in Turkey.

Young people are similarly subject to peculiar and extraordinary persecution, unrivalled anywhere else in the world. The majority of the executions of minors in the world takes place in Iran.

If one treats all forms of the death penalty as being a kind of persecution, then Iran is a world leader. In terms of per capita executions it leads every other country in the world. There is some evidence to suggest that with the current increase in executions, it may now be the leader in an absolute number context. Remember that this is a country with 70 million people, which is large but not as large as China with 1.2 billion people. At this point there may actually be more executions in Iran than there are even in China, making it tragically a world leader in a very sad way.

The question arises, could the situation in Iran get worse? We are talking about the worsening human rights situation in Iran. The answer is yes, it could, and it has been worse at certain points in the past. Such a rise of oppression into an outright reign of terror is entirely possible.

To make that point, I will conclude by turning once again to our testimony. Dr. Abbas Milani, who testified before us in October 2009, said that in the past 30 years in Iran, "there have been moments of respite and moments of true revolutionary terror". He pointed out to us that in 1988 there was the "execution of an estimated 4,000 prisoners, who were serving time for other crimes, in order to cleanse the prisons of potential opponents". This could happen again on just as massive a scale.

● (2115)

The prisons were cleared in 1988, according to a witness from Amnesty International, largely to make space for more prisoners. It was effectively a form of housecleaning.

A regime that can do that kind of thing is obviously one that we must speak openly about. I am glad that all members were willing to do so today and it has been a privilege to speak to this matter.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to note that the member is the chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and it has been a pleasure to work with him over the last number of years.

One of the recommendations that came from the subcommittee was to do with the broadcast of Farsi into Iran. Young people are using Twitter and other forms of communication on the Internet, which could very well be shut down or controlled, or could lead to their capture. I would like the member's comments on the recommendation of the committee. Has he heard any reaction from our government on that suggestion?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, to answer the second question first, I have not heard a reaction.

On that recommendation, I have to confess that when the committee was hearing testimony, I remember thinking to myself that a chair is not supposed to express any opinion on matters that do not strictly relate to the rules. I remember thinking at the time that shortwave transmissions are an out-of-date technology and we hear broadcasts on the Internet, and given the fact that Iran has a well-connected, well-wired population and quite a bit of Internet and technical savvy, there was really no need for the old-fashioned broadcasting over the airwaves.

Having watched events in Tunisia and Egypt and the shutting down of the Internet as an attempt to control the population, I have realized that the thoughts I had privately were incorrect. I am only now expressing them to say that I realize that I had been incorrect about them and I did not express them at the time when I might have had some impact on the committee.

● (2120)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I know the member sits on the subcommittee and I am aware of its report. It contains 24 recommendations and I have read them. I realize the report was finished in December 2010, not that long ago, but events are unfolding rather quickly. Could he give me a rundown as to how many of the recommendations have been dealt with specifically?

I also had a question about consular services, but I will ask that later.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, normally after a report is issued, at some point the government issues a response, but if it is a report of the House, there is a requirement that the government respond to it.

Government Orders

It is important to get concurrence in the report from the House. At this point, that has not happened. That is not to say the government should not be looking at it and responding to it, but that would ensure that point by point, all 24 recommendations would be dealt with, perhaps not in the manner the committee or the House would most want but, nonetheless, there is a requirement that it be done.

That being said, I cannot point to my knowing anything specific as an insider. Although I am on the government side, I am not actually a member of the government in the sense of knowing government secrets. I suppose if I were, I would not be able to share them extemporaneously, so I am going to be of less help than I wish I could be.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to commend my hon. colleague on his excellent speech and the work he does in the committee.

The member stated very clearly what is faced by a lot of the minority groups in Iran, whether it be the Baluchis, the Baha'is, or some of the minority Christian and Jewish communities, and how they are being persecuted by the Iranian government.

One community the member knows very well is the Baha'is which appeared before our committee. They documented the incredible persecution they face on a daily basis by that regime, without any access to the media, without any access to any type of state protection.

In fact, the minister of intelligence of Iran, the prosecutor general, said:

The administration of this miscarried Baha'i sect at all levels is unlawful and banned and their ties to Israel and their opposition to Islam and the Islamic regime are clear. The danger they pose to national security is documented and proven and therefore it is necessary that any substitute administration that acts as a replacement for the original be confronted through the law.

In other words, he is making it very clear that this is a group to be targeted. Just as they targeted Israel and the Jewish people, they want to target the Baha'is. They almost put a target on their foreheads and say that it is okay to shoot them, that it is okay to kill them, because it is a sect that they want nothing to do with.

That dehumanization of Iran's own people continually goes on. The Baha'is are peaceful people who originated in that part of the world, in Iran. They are just as much Iranians as are other Iranians. I am struck by the sheer violation of human rights against such a targeted group.

He also mentioned the gay community, which is also targeted by the regime. It continues to target its own people.

It is a country that has an incredible wealth of history. It is a country that has many incredibly intelligent people. Luckily for Canada, many of them are here in Canada because many of them have left that regime. There still is a very young, vibrant population there. They want to see change. They see what is happening around the world. They want to know what we can do, how we can act in solidarity with them.

Does my hon. colleague want to add anything further about the human rights abuses taking place against those communities?

● (2125)

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, the Baha'is face particularly severe persecution. There are probably three reasons for that.

The first is that they are relatively numerous and therefore a bigger target in a sense. The second is that they are a post-Koranic religion; that is to say, they recognize the authority of a prophet after the prophet Muhammad which is seen as being particularly unacceptable by the regime. The third is that the holiest site of the Baha'is is in Israel. I think it is in Haifa, but I stand to be corrected.

It should be mentioned though, and this is an important point regarding the third point, that it is purely an accident of history that Haifa is in the state of Israel. The events that led to its becoming a sacred site had to do with the imprisonment by the Ottoman Turks of the founder of the Baha'i faith in, I think it was the 1840s or the 1850s, obviously in years pre-dating the creation of the state of Israel, which resulted in its being there.

That does not imply in any way that Baha'is are incapable of being loyal citizens of Iran. It does not imply any particular point of view on behalf of the Baha'is, whether they are in Iran or anywhere else in the world, any opinion regarding the state of Israel. The use of that fact by those who would persecute the Baha'is is a terrible wrong against the peaceful people of the Baha'i faith who historically have been very good and loyal citizens of Iran.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to speak to the take note debate tonight on the situation in Iran sponsored by the member for Mount Royal. I know he has a very good command of the issues in this area. We spoke a couple of weeks ago on the situation in Egypt.

As members know, the situation is very fluid and has developed just in the last few weeks. The government fell in Tunisia and then the government fell in Egypt, which I believe was a bigger surprise. Now we are talking about recurring protests in Iran and other countries in the region. I do not know how much of it is facilitated by the up-to-date information that is available today through networks such as Al Jazeera because people can access that information. We are being told that new technologies, such as Facebook, the Internet and so on, have been big facilitators, whereas maybe 50 or 100 years ago we would not have had these types of activities. I do not know that we can actually be 100% sure of that but suggestions have been made that this has been facilitated by these modern mediums. If that is the case, it is important and incumbent upon the friendly support of governments across the world to take action and support the protestors for the purposes of establishing democratic regimes to the extent that is possible in some of these countries.

I must admit that I am impressed with the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights which produced the report on human rights in Iran. Our member and members from other parties are on the committee that produced its report in December 2010. The report contains 24 fairly excellent recommendations that came out of that committee and I think it would be a travesty if those recommendations were simply not followed up on.

Government Orders

I have been around governments for a long time, 26 years as an elected person but a number of years before that working for the political apparatus. I can say that governments of all stripes operate more or less on a boiler room day-to-day crisis management basis. They do things when they have to do them. Often times we find that the follow up is not there. Promises are made by governments, which is why we have a press out there that regularly follows us around to ensure that we are actually doing what we said we would do.

Earlier on tonight, I had an opportunity, which I may have missed, to ask the new minister a question. I would also like to congratulate her on her long overdue appointment. I believe she talked about consular services in 260 locations having to deal with 600 cases a day. I would like to know from her or any other member of the government, should one be around later to speak to this, if perhaps someone could provide me with the number of consular service cases the government has been dealing with on a daily basis over the past year to give us a longer term view of that.

I also would like to know where the government sits regarding the 24 recommendations that are mentioned in the report. I had not intended to but I will go through some of those recommendations because some of them are fairly good.

● (2130)

As we indicated, the situation is changing and is very fluid so perhaps different recommendations that may be relevant today or were relevant in December may not be relevant in a few months. Maybe some more accelerated or extreme measures might need to be taken if the situation gets further out of hand.

Recommendation number one reads:

The Subcommittee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to provide moral support and should increase, if possible, its financial support for Canadian and Iranian civil society organizations and other human rights groups that document and report on human rights abuses committed by the Iranian regime.

Once again the committee has to do a follow-up to ensure these recommendations are adopted. The government member just indicated to us, and I am not sure whether all members of the committee are even aware, that the government has not even adopted this report yet. Assuming that we are all on the same page, the government should get this report adopted tomorrow and then start laying out a plan as to how it will implement these recommendations.

The report talks about providing moral and diplomatic support to the democratic movement in Iran. The government is willing and able to do that, and it has been doing that.

The report suggests that the government consider funding a research chair at a Canadian university dedicated to the study of Canadian Iranian relations, including the human rights situation in Iran. The documentation of cases is really vital to successful cases long term. So much of history's atrocities have not been documented and, without proper documentation, it is hard to prove at the end of the day. If we could get cases documented, then we could move forward and get results through international courts and other adjudication bodies. The documentation is really the worst enemy of the tyrants because they thrive on being able to hide in the shadows, use force whenever it suits them and basically run and escape. It is

only when the cases can be documented and the light is shone on those cases that proper results will be made.

I recall a police person telling me a number of years ago that while he really could not tell what would happen in certain situations, he knew that if the light was shone on it things might develop and people would start scurrying around. Sure enough, that is one of the approaches that it takes.

If world attention is drawn to a problem, then tyrants will not be very happy with that development, particularly if some sanctions are attached.

Another recommendations reads:

...Radio Canada International to consider programming in Farsi over its worldwide shortwave service, over conventional AM/FM broadcasting in the Gulf region, and over the Internet.

This is another excellent idea that must be followed through on and initiated.

We talked about all the modern technological advancements like Facebook, Twitter and the Internet to the extent that we can work around those issues and use those issues. That would be a positive thing to put these tyrants in their place. That is one of the things that we can use against them to try to get results.

● (2135)

There is talk about a prohibition of Canadian registered ships from docking in Iran and Iranian registered ships from docking in Canada. I was wondering about the airline issue. Maybe someone knows about the issue of airline service to Iran and what is happening there.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to comment on something that came from the subcommittees report. We had witnesses before the subcommittee who were hopeful that the change in Iran can and must come from its people. Several witnesses told the members that the new generation in Iran, the children of the revolution, are not happy with the social, economic and political policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The new generation is well-educated, worldly and very realistic.

Professor Akhavan referred to one of the slogans. One of the slogans on the streets now is, "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, I will only sacrifice my life for Iran". They are saying that they are tired of hate-mongering and the use of imaginary external enemies as a way of crushing internal dissent and that they want to live in peace with their neighbours. Professor Akhavan is from this area.

I am wondering if the member is aware of any other totalitarian governments around the world that use what I refer to as sleight of hand or distraction away from what they are doing to their own people by way of pointing at an external enemy.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Chair, one example that I can think of is North Korea where it keeps its people in state of poverty and under control by using that kind of threat that they are about to be invaded. It is very common for repressive regimes to conjure up imaginary enemies to keep their people in line. Once that is broken, they do not have a very good argument for staying in power.

Government Orders

I am still interested to know about the air situation, because with any country that is shut off, sanctions work. Libya was a really good example that faced sanctions because it too was put on the Americans' list as a country of state-sponsored terrorism. It was shut out of a lot economic ventures because of its status. There was really no tourism investment from the United States or Europe. Once Colonel Gaddafi got out of the situation he was in and renounced international state-sponsored terrorism and his continuing role in it, then Libya opened itself up to a large development of tourism and oil development. That was a good reason for him to stop doing what he was doing before. That situation did work and I am sure we will have to look at some sort of isolating tactics like that against Iran.

• (2140)

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Chair, as the government liaison to the Iranian and Persian community, I am proud to rise today in the chamber to take part in this emergency debate on the democratic aspirations of the people of Iran.

Canadians care deeply about the freedoms of people around the world. Our Conservative government has expressed these concerns in three ways: we care, we listen and we act. Let me illustrate how our government cares, listens and acts.

Tonight's debate represents a powerful and tangible expression of our democratic rights here in Canada, rights that have for too long been denied to the people of Iran. In lending our voices in support of reform and democracy in Iran, we embolden the cause of freedom and stand in solidarity with our Iranian brothers and sisters.

One may ask why we here in Canada should care about the plight of the citizens of a country on the other side of the planet. Some might ask if the crisis in Iran is not best left to its own citizens. This is a fair question. Certainly the people of Iran have a basic right to self-determination. However, I also know that Canadians are possessed of a great capacity for compassion. To quote one of the last century's greatest freedom fighters from our neighbours to the south, Martin Luther King, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

It is never too early to stand up for the rights of the oppressed. I am reminded of the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian pastor imprisoned by Hitler, who said: "First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me."

No, we Canadians cannot ignore the oppression by the Iranian regime just because Iran seems so far away. Though Iran is far away, the plight of the people of Iran matters to the conscience of this nation. The flagrant violation of Iranians' basic human rights is intolerable to the people and Government of Canada.

That is why our government has taken a principled and consistent stand against the Iranian regime. For the last eight years, Canada has led in sponsoring and passing resolutions at the United Nations condemning the Iranian regime for its abuses. We have strengthened our assistance to those Canadians who have been targeted by this

regime and we have been unequivocal in our opposition to the abuses of the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

I am proud to be a Canadian and I am proud to have a government that cares. We are a government that cares; but if Canada only cared and did not listen, we would not be able to help. Ours is a government that listens. As the member of Parliament for the beautiful riding of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, I have the tremendous privilege to represent one of the largest Persian and Iranian community in Canada.

Since I was first elected to the chamber in 2008, I have had the opportunity to participate in countless events that highlight the contributions of this community to Canada, from the annual fire festival of the Persian new year, Nowruz, to other cultural events. I have participated in several meetings with members of the Iranian and Persian community and ministers of our government. I have worked on community projects with members of that community and attended local round tables and town hall meetings with them.

On the north shore of Vancouver, Nowruz celebrations have become a yearly highlight, not just for Iranian Canadians but also for Canadians of all backgrounds. Attendance records continue to be broken year after year as Canadians seize these wonderful opportunities to learn about and celebrate the contributions of Iranian Canadians to Canadian society.

Last year, I had the honour of organizing and hosting the visit of Dr. Shirin Ebadi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and one of Iran's most inspiring human rights activists. All across our country, Canadians had the chance to listen to and read about the incredible and often painful story of a woman who has risked everything, including her own life, to bring light and justice to people who have none.

While in Canada, Dr. Ebadi had the chance to meet with our Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. She also testified before the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Ours is a government that listens to many voices in the Persian and Iranian community. Canadians do not turn a deaf ear to the needs of oppressed people anywhere else. We are a people and a government that act. We are appalled by the oppression of the Iranian people by the Islamic regime. Even as I stand before everyone this evening, our Canadian government stands before the world for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

• (2145)

We have joined our voice with the growing global chorus calling for the end of Iran's secretive nuclear arms regime. We call for the ongoing independent inspection of its nuclear facilities. The Government of Canada opposes in the strongest terms the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Iranian republic. We are working with the global community to ensure that the spectre of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons never becomes a reality.

Government Orders

Our government supports UN Security Council resolutions to impose restrictions on the Iranian government. We act in concert with our international allies, but because we care and because we listen, we also act in accordance with the special needs of our Iranian-Canadian community. Therefore, in July of last year, our government announced our own made-in-Canada sanctions against the Islamic regime.

Far too often, with the best intentions, a government imposes economic sanctions on another country, but instead of pressuring the foreign government, the sanctions turn out to hurt the very citizens the government is trying to protect. That is why the Canadian government, a government that cares, listened to Canadians of Iranian background and then acted last year, announcing our sanctions and other provisions under the Special Economic Measures Act.

These targeted measures are designed to hamper attempts by Iran to develop nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs, as well as to persuade it to agree to constructive discussions with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

I repeat, our government cares, our government listens and our government acts.

By using sanctions that put pressure specifically on those responsible for injustice, our government has targeted members of the regime while minimizing harm to the innocent citizens of Iran. It can never be said enough that our government condemns the abuses of the Iranian government but stands proudly and resolutely behind the Iranian people.

Across the Middle East, we are witnessing the advent of incredible change. From Tunisia to Jordan, Bahrain to Egypt, the chorus of voices has never been stronger, a chorus united together for change. The same refrain has been taken up in Iran and its echoes can be heard around the world.

I am proud and humbled to stand here in this chamber, the heart of our Canadian democracy. I am proud to stand united with members of all the parties in this, our plea for freedom. I am proud to lend my voice to that chorus.

History is made in moments such as these. We must never fail to seize such an opportunity and to stand for what we know is right.

Let justice and democracy flow like a mighty river.

[Member spoke in Farsi]

• (2150)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, the hon. member is from a riding that has a very significant Iranian-Canadian population. The member was talking about how the government cares and how he cares. I believe him to be very sincere.

I have to think the member has many constituents who care very deeply and, I suppose, also very knowingly about the state of their ancestral country. I just wonder if the member could share with us a little bit of what he has heard from the Iranian-Canadian community that he serves.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Chair, there are many different immigrant groups in Canada and, certainly, many in the riding I represent.

What I have found is that more than any other group I know, the people of Iranian origin have a visceral attachment to their homeland. That is partly because they have brothers and sisters, and relatives and friends who are imperilled by the Iranian regime. It is partly because many of them have suffered through tremendous strife in recent years.

Anyone who has seen the film *Persepolis* will know that it depicts the plight of a young woman who was doted on by her parents and has all the opportunities that anyone could ever ask for, but who witnesses oppression, who sees an uncle dragged off to jail for political reasons and ultimately executed. She then goes and lives for some time in Europe, has several unrequited love affairs, and struggles through her life and returns to Iran. She is a metaphor for the people of Iran.

She describes so brilliantly the plight of people who strive to be free, people who are well educated, famous for their entrepreneurial spirit, people who do not see it as right or just that a fundamentalist regime holds them in the kind of shackles in which they live in Iran.

With all Canadians, I long for the day when Iran will be a bulwark of democracy in the Middle East, a country with which we can carry on full democratic and diplomatic relations, a country with which we can exchange goods and services and have our people flow back and forth, as we can with other democratic countries.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I rise today to speak on the important matter of human rights violations in Iran.

Human rights both domestically and internationally have long been a concern of Canadians. However, this government, in its five short years, has dramatically silenced the voice of Canada on the international scene. We cannot continue on this path of insularity in an increasingly global environment.

I would like to thank the member for Mount Royal for taking leadership in asking for the take note debate tonight.

According to Freedom House, the number of new electoral democracies has ceased to grow, while the number of backsliders has increased. Countries like Thailand and Kenya, which only a few years ago seemed safely in the democratic column, have sunk into political crisis and uncertainty.

However, the last few weeks have seen a challenge to authoritarian rule in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and, most recently, in Iran. Tonight this debate is focusing on the events that are unfolding in Iran and concerns that are arising in regard to the treatment of those who are protesting.

When protests were taking place in Egypt, Iran was cheering the protesters. However, when the protesters took to the streets in Iran, they were rounded up and put in prison.

Government Orders

The Iranian people have suffered tremendously under this mullah regime. When the Shah was deposed, the people thought they had rid themselves of authoritarian rule. Ayatollah Khomeini had agreed to be an interim leader until democratic elections took place. The Iranian people were in for a rude awakening.

It has now been 32 years that this regime has been in power, and during that time hundreds of thousands of Iranians have been killed. The people killed were intellectuals, professors, thinkers, opposition leaders, journalists, et cetera. Some of these opposition members moved to Iraq for sanctuary, to Camp Ashraf, and they are still not safe from the mullah regime.

What has the world done? It has stood by and let this happen. When Ayatollah Khatami took over from Khomeini, the west thought they had a moderate leader, but that was not so. The west kept on appeasing the mullah regime to such an extent that it agreed to label opposition parties who were resisting the regime as terrorists.

If the Canadian government truly believes in democracy and truly fights for democratic and human rights, it is high time that it follows the example of Britain and the European Union and delists the opposition parties who are resisting the regime so that they can go back and fight the mullahs democratically.

We have heard about thousands of people who have been killed, and the killing continues. I would like to add a few names of people whose only crime has been to resist the government: Zahra Bahrami, Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei, Ali Saremi, Jafar Kazemi and many more.

What was their crime? They supported the opposition. They challenged the government. They fought and died for change.

How are we going to help their memory survive and the memory of Zahra Kazemi, a Canadian citizen, and many others like her who died fighting for freedom?

The Iranian regime's human rights violations are state sanctioned and done with impunity. Many Iranians who have come to Canada attest to the brutality of the regime. The Iranians who fled the brutality of the regime some 30 years ago were young people, the same as we see today protesting in the streets of Iran. However, nobody paid attention to them. These young people risked their lives and those of their families to demand human rights, and the struggle is still going on.

• (2155)

The Iranian people are resolute. They are resisting. The diaspora wants to keep up the struggle. They want the world to help them. If the world wants to see peace, we need to help the Iranian people in their struggle.

Human rights groups have been pressing the UN and the international community to denounce the rash of executions in Iran. The groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, say at least 86 people have been executed in 2011 in Iran. They say at least eight of those killed last month were political prisoners.

Iran Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi joined the call saying that the executions may increase if the world is silent.

Canada must speak out loudly and clearly that human rights knows no borders. We must make it clear that repression and state-sanctioned murder will not go unnoticed. In a country where some 70% of the population is under 30 years old, estimates suggest that 25% to 40% of the youth is either underemployed or unemployed.

The stark realities facing this young population and their desire for change were expressed by Professor Akhavan in his testimony at the foreign affairs subcommittee on international human rights, when he said, "When young people are willing to get murdered in the streets, it is not because they are fanatics; it is because they have no hope; they are desperate. They would rather get killed than remain silent". Canadians must not remain silent while they die.

At this point I would like to digress a little. I would like to bring some perspective on Islam, because after all, that is what the mullahs keep on saying; that this is an Islamic state. Let me elucidate what Islam is and what the Quran says.

Many people are unaware of one of the fundamental principles of Islam: respect for human beings and respect for the total creation. Islam is a religion of peace and submission to the will of God. Islam believes in the dignity of human beings. It regards human beings as the crown of creation and as such, they have to be responsible for all creation. They have to treat the resources of the earth wisely, look after the environment, look after the sick, the poor, the needy and the most vulnerable in society.

The cosmopolitan ethic in Islam stands for respect among peoples of all faith and no faith, that is an ethical respect for the dignity of the human person without any discrimination. At the conference in Amman, Jordan in 2005, where all Muslim countries were represented, the conference reaffirmed the historic plurality of the Muslim Ummah. It reinforced the consensus among all different schools of thought, of the mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of various Muslim denominations, and that pluralism should be cherished.

The Prophet of Islam has clearly stated that difference of opinion is a blessing from God. The Holy Book for the Muslims, the Quran, states that God made us all diverse people and nations so that we may know each other.

The Quran also states, "to take one life is to kill the whole of humanity" and "to save one life is to save humanity". The Quran is very clear in what it states that Muslims should respect all religion and all people, people with religion and without religion, which is the cosmopolitan ethic.

I hope this clarifies the principles that no Baha'i, no Hindu, no Ahmadiyyas or any other denominations, no Christians, no Jews, should be persecuted by the regime of Iran.

When the west talks about Islam, it gets itself confused between the principles of Islam and the Sharia. The Sharia is man made. It is not God sanctioned. I hope that in the Iranian regime, some of the people are watching, because I would like to pose a question for them. How can these mullahs claim to be religious when they are basically violating the fundamental principles of Islam? Why hide these atrocities behind a garb of religion? It is high time that the mullahs left Iran and that democracy was brought back to Iran.

Government Orders

• (2200)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to continue my speech on the take note debate on Iran.

I found that the report of the subcommittee on Iran by the House of Commons committee was quite substantial and made very important recommendations, which I hope to deal with in my speech. Unfortunately, I was unable to get through a lot of the recommendations.

One of the recommendations I was dealing with was the one that Radio Canada International be allowed to consider programming in Farsi over its worldwide shortwave service, over conventional FM broadcasting to the gulf region and over the Internet. I want to make certain the government did follow through on that and did not just pay lip service to it and not do it.

Another recommendation was to ensure that Iranian foreign offices, bureaus or media outlets in Canada would not be used by the Iranian regime as a source of threat and intimidation of the Iranian diaspora in Canada. We have seen in a number of other situations, in Canada and elsewhere, where regimes will go abroad to hunt down and threaten former citizens of their country who are involved in demonstrations and so on against their government.

In addition, the subcommittee recommended that, in communicating its condemnation of the human rights violations of the Iranian regime against its own people, the Government of Canada should use all available tools already authorized under Canada's existing immigration and visa legislation to ensure that high-ranking members of the regime would not be able to access direct or indirect support from within Canadian territory.

In addition, it recommended the reduction of high-level interaction with Iranian government officials and to make any invitations extended to Iranian officials conditional upon effective actions taken by the Iranian government to improve the human rights situation in Iran.

In addition, there was a recommendation that the Government of Canada, in communicating its condemnation of the human rights violations perpetrated by members of Iran's state security agencies against the Iranian people, use all available tools authorized by existing immigration and visa policies and legislation to deny entry into Canada to members of Iran's security agencies, including members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Also there was a recommendation that the Government of Canada institute targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes against those individuals within the Iranian government and the state security forces who were known to have committed human rights violations.

In the case of Egypt, Mubarak and his family have a reported \$70 billion. The question now is where is the money and can the current Egyptian authorities track it down and get it. In the case of Tunisia, some of the ruling family are in Canada. The question is what we can do to try to track down these assets and return the people and the assets to the new authorities in Tunisia.

A very important recommendation of the committee is the idea of the targeted sanctions. I mentioned what happened in Libya a number of years ago when countries took action against Libya and froze Libya out of world affairs and froze its economic opportunities. Libya suffered a lot for a number of years until Colonel Gaddafi came forward and renounced terrorism and promised not to be involved in any more state-sponsored terrorism activities. Only then did the sanctions get lifted and the restrictions removed. Now we see a new tourism industry developing there, much more activity in the oil fields and other activities.

• (2205)

If a country like Iran can look out in the world and see what is the worse possible situation that could develop and happen to it, if it continues violating human rights and if it also sees what happened when Libya gave up participating in state-sponsored terrorism, then it will see it is very short-sighted to continue to do what it is.

It has been reported by several speakers tonight, in a lot of very interesting speeches, that the Iranian population is very young, well-educated and highly motivated. It is only a matter of time before the theocracy and the current government starts to crumble. That just leads to increased repression. However, at the end of the day that will not overcome mass actions on the streets. We saw that in 2009, after the Ahmadinejad re-election. We see it happening right now. It is possible that if things work out the way we hope they will, conditions may change, as they did in Egypt and in Tunisia.

Once again, we talked about this being a moving target, that we do not know what will happen at the end of the day. Members will remember that in 1979, after the Shah of Iran was overthrown, people were hoping for the best for Iran. It was only a matter of time, I am just not sure how long it was, but I think it was just a matter of weeks or months before the theocracy took root and the Ayatollah Khomeini came back from France and assumed power.

I am sure all of us here hope that will not be what will happen in Egypt, or in Tunisia, or in any other of these countries.

I know we sit back, in Canada, with our democratic ideals on our chests, and we recommend those ideals and do what we can to promote those ideals. However, we are dealing with different countries and they do not necessarily always think the way we do. There are a lot of competing interests.

I remember being in Morocco in 1970 and then going back 10 years ago. I saw tremendous changes in that time. I do not know how democratic the government is, but the education level of the population is much higher than it was in 1970. In 1970 it was a relatively poor agrarian country, with most people wearing djellabas and very few people wearing blue jeans. Today, almost anybody younger than me wears western dress. Also, the country was trying to get into the European Union.

Looking at that, Morocco would be a good candidate for the type of democratic reforms that we would be trying to pursue. However, I cannot say the same thing about Iran because I have not been there. However, if we assume that it has a young, educated population, it is a very good sign that it may be willing to adopt a democratic approach.

• (2210)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, the discussion of comparisons between the revolution of 1979 in Iran and what could be categorized as a revolution, which is probably a good way of describing what is underway in Egypt and Tunisia, are not simply a change of heads of state but actually of the regime and its underlying philosophy. That I think qualifies as a revolution.

That thought made me go back and think about another comparison that had been made that I read about many years ago between the Iranian revolution of 1979 and certain earlier revolutions, the one in France in 1789 and the one in Russia in 1917.

I remember reading a book published by a man named Crane Brinton which I would recommend to the hon. member, in which he looks at the patterns of revolutions. It is called *The Anatomy of Revolution*. It talks about revolutions which unfortunately more often than not do not result in additional liberties, at least not in the long run. He does not say it exactly this way but it appears to be because if we lack a framework of laws and a constitutional framework on which to base that revolutionary change, the danger is that naked force will have to be applied and someone in the end applies that naked force.

That is a pretty good analysis of what happened in 1979 in Iran. I think he is right in assuming that the population there is relatively sophisticated but they were in 1979 as well.

I would ask the member if he shares this concern. Should any change occur there it would probably be best to try and do so within some form of recognition of a legitimate set of laws that could guide the transition.

The member, like all of us, would like to see what happened in eastern Europe in 1989 serve as the model where the transformation from dictatorship to democracy took place because law was respected as revolutionary change took place.

That is kind of half comment and half question. I will see if the member has any thoughts on that.

• (2215)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Chair, I thought, and I could be wrong, that in 1979 in Iran after coming off the years of the Shah, that once the Ayatollah Khomeini came back from France that country went through the process of consolidating power, but its power was consolidated as a theocracy. More importantly, the revolution became an export. I remember being in Athens, Greece one day and there was a big demonstration in favour of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

In many respects some revolutions are insular to the country and that is how we hope they would be. But other revolutions that develop on an ideological basis actually become beacons to the world and are exported.

That 1979 revolution in Iran seemed to be an exported revolution. The country spent as much time exporting its ideas to other countries and fomenting activities to support other revolutions and revolutionary efforts as much as it did trying to satisfy its own people. But there did not seem to be as many demands from its own people in

Government Orders

those days. I see it a little different now. Never having been there it seems to me that the people have local demands. We cannot forget that the people went through a war for a number of years with Iraq and that was a very consuming war between Saddam Hussein, who started the war, and Iran.

At a certain point the people will want to see improvement in their own lives, not a degradation of their lives. Even today in Iraq people have not achieved the standard of living they had before Saddam Hussein started to take the country down. The people were higher but they have gone lower. People in Iran right now expect things to get better. Hopefully they will become more insular and will not try to export the revolution and their foreign policy as they are right now.

I hope that answers part of the member's question.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, as we have heard this evening, the human rights situation in Iran is deteriorating rapidly. We have heard disheartening reports of the denial of rights of religious minorities, due process violations, torture and politically motivated executions. Even juvenile executions are on the rise in that country. Iran has violated all of its obligations under international conventions.

Let me deal for a minute with the report of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on Iran, which highlights all of these violations. My colleague, the member for Lanark, is the chair of the subcommittee which issued the report. I want to thank him and the subcommittee for doing such a tremendous job of highlighting these issues and making the report available.

For thousands of years Iran has been a civilization. It is respected around the world because of its culture, human rights, et cetera. The Persian civilization is one of the cornerstones of civilizations around the world. This is a testament to the Persian people of Iran. We are fortunate to have a large Iranian community here in Canada who are contributing not only in culture but in all aspects of human development and history.

Every nation on the earth recognizes and respects Persians and Iranians. That respect has been there throughout the history of time. The people of Iran are now being abused by the current regime that is in power. However, because of their goodwill, other countries around the world are reluctant to speak out about the human rights violations taking place in that country. The shah was overthrown because he did not have a good human rights record. We must never forget that it was the people of Iran who wanted that change, just like the people of Egypt wanted a change. When the shah regime was overthrown, the people of Iran looked at this bureaucracy that has been historically provided and they put their trust into this regime of Khomeini's and the clerics who have served this Islamic revolution. An Islamic revolution does not mean that a regime should suppress the human rights of the citizens of its own country.

Government Orders

What is Iran doing today? Is Iran doing anything other than it did with the Persian empire to settle this? No. The biggest achievement of that government is the biggest repression of its own citizens. Should it get a Nobel prize for the oppression of its own citizens, sentencing them to death, hangings without trials and juvenile killings? What are these leaders doing? They forget their own strength. They are doing this to stay in power.

Look at the demonstrations that are currently taking place in Iran. The current president would not admit that he has lost, nor will he stand up to scrutiny. Instead, he sent out his goons to hit the opposition. We are highly disturbed by the fact that there are people in the parliament of that country who are calling for the execution, I repeat, the execution of its opposition leaders. We cannot imagine that so-called elected officials anywhere in the world would call for the execution of their own citizens or their own leaders. That is a serious flaw.

● (2220)

The Iranian revolution has betrayed its own people, nobody else. The people who are suffering are its own people. Any time an Iranian tries to give a speech or say something, the Iranian government throws the person in jail and, if it can get away with it, will actually execute him or her.

Let us talk about the woman Iran was going to stone to death. President Lula of Brazil, the biggest friend of Iran, had to intervene and say he was going to take the lady to Brazil. That is how bad the situation in Iran is.

This government stands up for its policy of supporting human rights and democracy. Today we are speaking about what is happening in Iran and I hope more people and countries speak out. Even the countries that recognize Iran as a bastion of civilization and have respect for it, they need to speak against this regime. We are not talking about the Iranian people, we are talking about the regime that is in power and wants to stay there at all costs, even by the killing of its own people.

Iran's diplomats travel around the world. I am a Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I travel around the world and meet with Iranians. The regime is using what it has gained in the past, saying that it should be respected. Yes, we would like to respect the Iranians. Canadians of Iranian origin have shown how much they can be respected, but there is a difference. The difference is the regime. The regime is a murderous one. I am sorry that I am using very harsh words. I have been there. Let us really look at what is going on there.

Demonstrators on the streets of Tehran Iranians are dying. Who are they killed by? They are killed by their own government. They are not being killed by somebody else. They are not being killed by outside forces. They are being killed by their own government because they want freedom.

How can we tolerate that government? What happened to the Iranian revolution? What happened when the shah was thrown out? One dictator was thrown out with the intention that the aspirations of that nation would be met, but look at what has happened.

What is even more disturbing is the current president has absolutely no qualms about killing people, in suppressing them. If

he calls himself a democrat or a custodian of the great Persian culture, then why would he not listen to his own people? This is a president who has, in my opinion, let down not only his country but the Persian culture that everybody around the world respects. It is, indeed, a very big tragedy in that country.

● (2225)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas and Consular Affairs earlier about consular services in Iran. She talked about there being consular services in 260 locations and over 600 cases per day. I am trying to find out how many cases there would be in Iran on a daily basis over the past year. I do not expect the member is going to be able to provide the answer tonight, but if he could get it in the next day or two, that would be fine.

The parliamentary secretary is probably aware of the report from the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on Iran. The report has been out since December 2010 and has a list of 24 recommendations on what the Government of Canada should be doing regarding the Iranian situation. As we know, the situation is changing on a daily basis.

I would ask the parliamentary secretary whether the government has fulfilled these recommendations, which ones it has accomplished and which ones it is currently working on?

Mr. Deepak Ohbhai: Mr. Chair, I will get the information for the hon. member on how many Iranian consular cases there are.

As a person who was formerly in charge in consular cases, I can say that Iran is one of the most difficult places to deal with consular issues because the Government of Iran does not respect the rights of its own citizens. I will get back to him on that issue.

I would remind all Canadians that this government has, on a consistent basis, stood up at the United Nations to condemn Iran. We have worked very hard to ensure the United Nations' resolution condemns Iran on its human rights violations. This government has been very successful in getting the UN General Assembly to pass resolutions condemning Iran on its human rights record.

We put in a tremendous amount of diplomatic effort. We worked very hard. We called on our friends. We are very pleased that year after year we get our opinion out to the world. The regime in Iran should be ashamed of its record.

● (2230)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, does the parliamentary secretary know what the government's actions and plans are relating to the persecuted Baha'i community in Iran. As he knows, there are certain actions that the United Nations can take?

Since the 1980s, over 200 Baha'i members have been executed, thousands have been arrested, detained and interrogated, and tens of thousands have been deprived of jobs, pensions and educational opportunities. Their holy places have been confiscated, vandalized and destroyed.

A simple example is that the instruction is not to allow people into universities if they are Baha'i, which is totally against the UN declaration on human rights, which Iran professes to uphold.

Government Orders

I am just wondering about the government's actions and proposed actions.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the member has highlighted exactly what I have been talking about. The Baha'i community are Iranian citizens. The government is suppressing its own citizens. Suppressing the Baha'i is suppressing Iran's own citizens. This is how bad the government is.

That is why we have, time after time, year after year, at the UN General Assembly, raised the issue of Iran's human rights record. The member has highlighted, very rightly, this issue. I think we should be speaking very strongly against the Government of Iran because it exports terrorism to Lebanon and it supports Hezbollah. However, that is not the issue.

The biggest issue is that the Iranian government suppresses its own citizens, including its own citizens, the Baha'i, as the member pointed out. That government should be condemned in no uncertain terms.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on the very high level tone of his comments.

He has made it very clear, as all members have this evening, that there is a fundamental distinction between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people. So often we talk about condemning Iran or any other country where the regime has been acting in a manner unfitting a national government.

The important point is that the Iranians themselves are the victims, including the Persian people, the ethnic majority within the country. Although the minorities are oppressed, the oppression that occurs of individuals who are opponents to the regime, who are challenging the regime or who are seeking more freedom is occurring as much to Persians as to any other group.

I appreciate both that colleague and all colleagues for having stressed that it is a regime here that is acting in such a terrible manner, not a people.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is the chair of the committee that did the human rights study on Iran. The recommendations that have come from his committee to my committee of foreign affairs are highly appreciated and respected.

The hon. member is absolutely right when he says that the whole world knows about this. One of the biggest tragedies is when a government in power tries to stay in power by oppressing its own people. We can look at what happened in Egypt where all those years of that oppression is gone.

It is important to recognize that we cannot suppress the legitimate rights of the people. In Iran, people will die for their rights and they will die for the rights of their children to speak and have freedom.

We must recognize and salute these martyrs on the streets of Tehran today who are fighting this oppressive regime. We should stand up for those protesters who are seeking nothing but the basic freedom all Canadians enjoy. That is all they want and they deserve our support.

● (2235)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to emphasize one aspect that I talked about a couple of times earlier tonight and that is the persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran. I have a Baha'i community in my riding that is a very peaceful, loving, open society with an open religion. The people in that community are shocked, troubled, sad and horrified at the treatment of their fellow Baha'is in Iran.

This is a total violation of human rights, among many other things that have been talked about this evening. As we know, in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, one of the grounds upon which we are not allowed to discriminate is religion. Baha'i, being a well known religion, would be an obvious ground for discrimination.

The Iranian government says that it does not discriminate and yet the UN representative has brought forward concrete documentation of a memorandum of policy from 1993 that is not only secretly discriminating but does so publicly, right in their papers on their policy. In that particular memorandum, it says that the progress and development of the Baha'i community shall be blocked. In it there are directives that deny the Baha'i people access to higher education and many types of employment. This is just one example of overt discrimination.

About three years ago, some of the leaders of the Baha'i religion, which, as everyone knows, is a peaceful, open type of religion, were whisked away to jail and put into horrendous conditions. They remain there still today, for no good reason other than they practised a religion different from that of the president and the supreme leader.

That particular memorandum that I was talking about was not something done by lower level officials. It was actually signed by the president of Iran at the time and the supreme leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini.

It has been a long-time persecution. It is not new. There is denial of this religion to organize as a peaceful religious community. The government and government officials make every effort they can to stop that. As I talked about previously, there are numerous arrests as a result of such types of activity. Many are denied the right to life, liberty and security of person. Their possessions are often just taken away or they are put into jail and lose everything they have for no good reason at all other than they are Baha'i. They are denied access to advanced education when that is found out. As is well known in Canada, how can one progress without an education.

Community properties of the religion are confiscated and destroyed. Imagine how we would feel in Canada or how a Muslim community would feel if the government came in and destroyed all the mosques or decided we were not having these religions and tore down all the churches, mosques and synagogues and any of the holy places in our country. There would be an outrage. Quietly, passively and peacefully, the Baha'is are outraged as well, but, of course, in their position they are helpless.

The great nature of Canada is to help the most vulnerable, whether that is at home or abroad. It is one of our greatest traits. Who could be more helpless than this tiny minority of this very peaceful religion?

Government Orders

• (2240)

They are also denied their civil rights and liberties and there is much incitement to hatred, based on religion and belief. Even sometimes, through this hatred, the government does not have to take action because it incites other people to do that.

There has been long-term persecution, but in recent years, since the 1980s, over 200 people have been executed, often without a fair trial, without good reason, without justifiable legal reasons, extra-judicial killings. Thousands are arrested and interrogated. Tens of thousands are deprived of their jobs, their pensions and their educational opportunities.

The member for Mount Royal talked about the various processes that were available to us at the United Nations to take strong actions against this type of persecution. Some countries in the western world are not taking those actions. In fact, they are not even participating in the sanctions. They continue on with trade as normal.

Because Canada has such a great influence in the world, we can certainly bring that to bear on those countries that do not do as much as they could through their economy, through sanctions, through the international community to make it difficult for the Iranian government in order to try to stop it from taking actions not only against the Baha'i community, but against people in our line of work. We are outraged when we see what it does to people who does not agree with the government, including the parliamentarians. It wants want to execute the leader of the opposition and opposition members in Parliament. It is so outrageous it is almost inconceivable.

Of all the groups of people who have the least power, the peaceful Baha'is are obviously one of those groups.

Last night I had dinner with people who originally lived in another cruel dictatorship. We talked about they ways we helped out. We send money. We spend our volunteer time and some of our personal time to work for freedom in those cruel dictatorships. It seems so tiny and insignificant compared to the people who live there, putting their lives on the line every day, like the Baha'i leaders, like the people who stand up for a peaceful religion. They know the price could be execution, torture or incarceration. They know they could lose everything they have. Probably most painful of all is they could lose family members. When it seems so insignificant, it does not take much to think we should try to do more, as much as we possibly can from the privileged, wealthy, peaceful and free state in which we live.

The great Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Aung San Suu Kyi once said, "Please use your freedom to fight for ours". That is what we should do. That is what all members of Parliament were doing tonight in the House. As was said by the member for Mount Royal, who instigated the debate, now we have to translate this goodwill, the great tradition of protection that Canada has into actions by encouraging the international community and its allies to do what they can through international law and the United Nations.

• (2245)

We appreciate the great outrage the government has shown, just like all the parties here tonight. We certainly look for great leadership from the government in following some of the steps that one of the most famous people in the world on human rights, the member for

Mount Royal, has outlined as procedures for Canada. He provided a list of procedures that we can follow ourselves, as well as through the United Nations, so that we can say that we have done our best to help those innocent people like the Baha'i, who are so downtrodden and are in such horrifying situations, ones that we would never want our families to be in.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for highlighting the persecution the Baha'is face in Iran.

As far as we are concerned, the Baha'i in Iran are Iranian citizens. Like any other Iranian citizens, it is deplorable that their human rights have been taken away by the regime.

The cornerstone of our government's policy is upholding human rights. In that respect, we have worked, as the hon. member has suggested, at the United Nations every year to sponsor and pass a resolution in the General Assembly condemning Iran for its human rights record. To get that resolution passed, we make tremendous diplomatic efforts to get the world on our side, as the member has rightly pointed out. That resolution has actually passed in the General Assembly and has angered the Government of Iran, which has mounted a diplomatic offensive against us as a result. That is fine; we do not mind that.

We work very hard with the international community exactly as the member has recommended. We have been doing that for many years at the UN General Assembly in putting Iran's human rights abuses on record, and these have been condemned.

I would say it is one of our most successful diplomatic initiatives that we have had in condemning the human rights situation in Iran, including the discrimination against the Baha'i, which is one area of discrimination in Iran.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for that. I certainly appreciate the government's strong stance year after year at the United Nations, as just outlined by the member.

In some of these situations, such as in Iran or other areas where we have uniquely horrible autocratic governments violating human rights, we have a nice set of very well worked out and careful policies in how we do things and how money can be spent. It is great to have good controls, but sometimes they are not liberal or open enough. We may need to have exceptions so that we can help democratic groups, for instance. They might not be part of those governments and may not even be within the borders of the states we are dealing with. They may need certain expenses met that are not covered under our present policy.

Government Orders

I would encourage the government, the ministers, the secretaries of state and parliamentary secretaries and the policy-makers in the PMO and the minister's offices to have the courage, when necessary, to make exceptions to the funding rules, when we know these are needed to be most effective in dealing with the problem. With the good will, courage and strength the government has just outlined on these issues, it could make those exemptions.

To the bureaucrats in the department of foreign affairs, at CIDA, and at the Privy Council Office, they need the courage to say in memoranda when speaking truth to power that we need these exemptions if we are going to be effective in this particular unusual situation to help these oppressed people. Certainly the dictators of the autocratic governments in those countries are not following the rule of law and, certainly, we do not want our laws to be so inflexible that we cannot help.

Thus I just encourage our people, where necessary, either to revise the regulations or to ask for exceptions where we could be most helpful with the resources we have to help fight these terrible violations of human rights.

• (2250)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I was happy to hear the member talk about the Baha'is. I recall being in Israel in 1979 and visiting the Baha'i Temple in Haifa, which is the world headquarters for the Baha'is.

There is some very disturbing information about how the Baha'is are treated in Iran. Two hundred and two Baha'is have been killed since the Islamic revolution. Many more were imprisoned, expelled from schools and workplaces, denied various benefits, and denied registration for marriage. Their homes have been ransacked. They have been banned from attending university or holding government jobs. Several hundred of them have received prison sentences for their religious beliefs.

I saw some other statistics which indicated that when the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power the number of imprisonments mushroomed. Under the Shah's regime, fewer than 100 political prisoners had been executed between 1971 and 1979, but the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979, and 7,900 were executed between 1981 and 1985 as the prison system was expanded.

During the Shah's era some prisoners who were interviewed talked about boredom and monotony, but prisoners typically used the words "fear", "death", "terror" and "horror" to describe the Islamic republic's prisons. People revolted against the Shah of Iran but they received something worse. That is an interesting observation.

I have run out of time to ask my question but I am sure the member will be able to provide a response.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his understanding of the Baha'i. I also thank the parliamentary secretary for his support for the Baha'i.

I want to mention again the seven Baha'i leaders who were recently arrested, Mrs. Kamalabadi, Mr. Khanjani, Mr. Naeimi, Mr. Rezaie, Mrs. Sabet, Mr. Tavakkoli and Mr. Tizfahm. Months went by without any formal charges being laid against them, and when charges were laid, their lawyer said there was nothing to substantiate the charges. On August 8, 2010, 20-year prison sentences were announced for these seven people. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to talk about their case.

First and foremost in our mind is that unacceptable situation and we should fight it. Three hundred and fifty-four Baha'is have been arrested since 2004. Sixty-two are currently in prison and 137 have been arrested, released on bail and awaiting trial.

Obviously, we need to be strong, as do all our allies. We need to take these cases to the United Nations. We cannot allow this medieval type of activity to continue in the modern day, the violation of the human rights of not only the Baha'i but, as the parliamentary secretary said, all the other citizens of Iran who do not agree with the government.

• (2255)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Resuming debate.

There being no further members rising, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 11 reported)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 10:54 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:55 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS			
Black History Month		Mr. Harper.....	8227
Mr. Dykstra.....	8223	Mr. Duceppe.....	8227
Employment Insurance		Mr. Harper.....	8227
Mr. MacAulay.....	8223	Foreign Affairs	
Honorius Thériault		Mr. Dorion.....	8227
Mr. André.....	8223	Mr. Nicholson.....	8227
Search and Rescue		Mr. Dorion.....	8228
Mr. Harris (St. John's East).....	8223	Mr. Nicholson.....	8228
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada		International Co-operation	
Mr. Fast.....	8224	Mr. Layton.....	8228
We Welcome the World Centres		Mr. Harper.....	8228
Ms. Dhalla.....	8224	Mr. Layton.....	8228
Taxation		Mr. Harper.....	8228
Mr. Galipeau.....	8224	Mr. Layton.....	8228
Medal of Bravery		Mr. Harper.....	8228
Mr. Paquette.....	8224	Ms. Foote.....	8228
The Economy		Mr. Baird.....	8228
Mr. Watson.....	8225	Ms. Foote.....	8229
Judiciary		Mr. Baird.....	8229
Mr. Cotler.....	8225	Mr. McKay.....	8229
Arthur Meighen		Mr. Baird.....	8229
Mr. Schellenberger.....	8225	Government Spending	
Status of Women		Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga).....	8229
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona).....	8225	Mr. Day.....	8229
Taxes		Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga).....	8229
Mr. Gourde.....	8225	Mr. Day.....	8229
Border Crossings		Telecommunications Industry	
Mrs. DeBellefeuille.....	8226	Mr. Cardin.....	8229
Canada-U.S. Border		Mr. Lake.....	8230
Mrs. Mendes.....	8226	Mr. Cardin.....	8230
Opposition Coalition		Mr. Lake.....	8230
Mr. Anders.....	8226	International Co-operation	
ORAL QUESTIONS		Mrs. Crombie.....	8230
International Co-operation		Mr. Baird.....	8230
Mr. Ignatieff.....	8226	Mrs. Crombie.....	8230
Mr. Harper.....	8226	Mr. Baird.....	8230
Mr. Ignatieff.....	8226	Mr. Rae.....	8230
Mr. Harper.....	8226	Mr. Baird.....	8230
Mr. Ignatieff.....	8226	Mr. Rae.....	8230
Mr. Harper.....	8227	Mr. Baird.....	8231
Mr. Coderre.....	8227	Royal Visit	
Mr. Baird.....	8227	Mr. Richards.....	8231
Mr. Coderre.....	8227	Mr. Harper.....	8231
Mr. Baird.....	8227	Aviation Security	
Mr. Duceppe.....	8227	Mr. Bevington.....	8231
		Mr. Toews.....	8231
		Canada-U.S. Border	
		Mr. Masse.....	8231

Mr. Toews	8231
Mrs. Mourani	8231
Mr. Toews	8231
Mr. Ouellet	8231
Mr. Toews	8232
Government Policies	
Mr. Brison	8232
Mr. Poilievre	8232
Mr. Brison	8232
Mr. Poilievre	8232
Shipbuilding Industry	
Ms. Crowder	8232
Ms. Ambrose	8232
Mr. Stoffer	8232
Ms. Ambrose	8233
The Economy	
Mr. Armstrong	8233
Mr. Poilievre	8233
Border Crossings	
Mr. D'Amours	8233
Mr. Toews	8233
Justice	
Ms. Bonsant	8233
Ms. Finley	8233
Pensions	
Mr. Marston	8233
Mr. Flaherty	8233
Justice	
Mr. Généreux	8234
Mr. Petit	8234
Points of Order	
Take Note Debate on Iran	
Mr. Baird	8234
Motion	8234
(Motion agreed to)	8234
Mr. O'Connor	8234
Motion	8234
(Motion agreed to)	8234
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
Reports of the Commissioner of Lobbying	
The Speaker	8234
Status of the Artist	
Ms. Raitt	8234
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Cannon	8235
Committees of the House	
Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan	
Mr. Breitzkreuz	8235
Public Safety and National Security	
The Speaker	8235

Petitions	
Afghanistan	
Mr. Bevington	8235
Animal Welfare	
Ms. Neville	8235
Veterans	
Mr. André	8235
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	8235
Canada Health Act	
Mr. Rafferty	8236
National Defence	
Mr. Donnelly	8236
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	8236
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Warawa	8236
Skin Cancer	
Mr. Warawa	8236
Multiple Sclerosis	
Mrs. Hughes	8236
Canada Health Act	
Ms. Leslie	8236
Afghanistan	
Mr. Maloway	8237
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	8237
Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lukiwski	8237

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Abolition of Early Parole Act	
Bill C-59. Report stage	8237
Mr. Toews	8237
Motion for concurrence	8237
(Motion agreed to)	8237
Mr. Toews	8237
Bill C-59. Third reading	8237
Mrs. O'Neill-Gordon	8237
Mr. Toews	8238
Mr. Holland	8239
Mr. Cullen	8239
Mr. Holland	8239
Mr. Holland	8240
Mr. Lobb	8242
Mr. Plamondon	8243
Mr. Atamanenko	8243
Mr. Bagnell	8244
Mrs. Mourani	8244
Mr. Lobb	8246
Mr. Garneau	8246
Mr. Mulcair	8247
Mr. Plamondon	8247
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	8247
Mr. Kania	8249
Mr. Blais	8249
Mr. Mulcair	8250

Mr. Kennedy	8251
Mrs. Mourani	8252
Motion agreed to	8253
(Bill read the third time and passed)	8253

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Motion for concurrence	8253
Motion negatived	8254

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ACT

Bill C-530. Second reading	8255
Motion agreed to	8256
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	8256

Canada Labour Code

Bill C-343. Report stage	8256
Motion agreed to	8257

Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario Act

Mr. Rota	8257
Bill C-309. Third reading	8257
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	8259
Mr. Savage	8259
Mrs. Hughes	8260
Mr. Rickford	8260
Mr. Bouchard	8261
Mr. Gravelle	8262
Mr. Savage	8264
Mr. Rota	8265
(Order discharged and item dropped from order paper) ..	8265

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Human Rights Situation in Iran

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 11, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)	8265
Mr. Baird	8265
Motion	8265
Mr. Cannon	8266
Mr. Silva	8267

Mr. Bagnell	8267
Mr. Maloway	8267
Mr. Reid	8268
Mr. Cotler	8268
Mr. Bagnell	8269
Mr. Silva	8270
Mr. Reid	8270
Mr. Dorion	8271
Mr. Marston	8272
Mr. Cotler	8273
Mr. Maloway	8273
Mr. Silva	8273
Mrs. Ablonczy	8274
Mr. Silva	8275
Mr. Marston	8275
Mr. Albrecht	8276
Mr. Silva	8276
Mr. Marston	8278
Mrs. Ablonczy	8278
Mr. Reid	8278
Mr. Cotler	8279
Mr. Reid	8279
Mr. Marston	8280
Mr. Maloway	8280
Mr. Silva	8281
Mr. Maloway	8281
Mr. Marston	8282
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	8283
Mr. Reid	8284
Ms. Ratansi	8284
Mr. Maloway	8286
Mr. Reid	8287
Mr. Obhrai	8287
Mr. Maloway	8288
Mr. Bagnell	8288
Mr. Reid	8289
Mr. Bagnell	8289
Mr. Obhrai	8290
Mr. Maloway	8291
(Government Business No. 11 reported)	8291

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