



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 133 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 17, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 17, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

CITIZEN'S ARREST AND SELF-DEFENCE ACT

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of Justice) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-60, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (citizen's arrest and the defences of property and persons).

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights.

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

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. The purpose of this report is to place the proceedings of the Committee's meeting of Thursday, December 9, 2010, concerning what appears to be a possible breach of privilege, officially before the House.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, Emerging and Digital Media: Opportunities and Challenges.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the tenth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women entitled, Changing the Long-Form Census—Its Impact on Women's Equality in Canada.

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Canada have been living through the most difficult economic times since the Great Depression and many companies have had to restructure or go into bankruptcy, including Buchanan Forest Products a couple of weeks ago in my riding. Thousands of people are not receiving severance or termination pay or pensions.

The petitioners are calling upon the House of Commons and Parliament to affirm that pension benefits are in fact deferred wages, to elevate defined pension benefit plans to secured status in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Canadian Creditors Protection Act, and to pass into law any legislation before it that would achieve these objectives.

[*Translation*]

LOW INCOME HOUSING

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am also presenting a petition signed by the tenants living in low income housing in Sainte-Adèle, a town in my riding. The purpose of this initiative is to condemn the 30% cuts to the renovation budget for low income housing. In support of this petition, I would like to read an excerpt from a press release issued by the Fédération des locataires d'habitations à loyer modique du Québec:

the 2011 budget for the renovation of Low-Cost Housing (HLM) units [some of which are located in my riding] across the province will fall to 200 million dollars from 276 million dollars. This means that in 2011 a cut of 30% will be imposed on all Municipal Housing Offices that administer over 500 housing units and that other cuts will follow for the smaller housing offices in 2012. These cuts also mean that important construction work will again be delayed.

In concrete terms, these cuts will affect thousands of tenants who will continue to live in apartments with bad windows, frayed linoleum, and washrooms and kitchens without ventilation or proper plumbing. It will also mean that several buildings will remain inaccessible for people using personal mobility devices such as wheelchairs and scooters and that, amongst other things, the housing offices will have to abandon its program to retrofit apartments so as to enable the occupants to install individual washing machines and dryers.

Business of Supply

These cuts are due to the refusal of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to finance these renovations. The CMHC should dedicate 140 million dollars of funding per year, however it now wants to limit its contribution to only 70 million dollars.

For this reason, I am presenting this petition and I am sure that I will have others in the weeks to come.

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition demands an end to Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

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 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, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

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

* * *

• (1010)

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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS REQUESTED BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.) moved:

That, given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, the government's continuing refusal to comply with reasonable requests for documents, particularly related to the cost of the government's tax cut for the largest corporations and the cost of the government's justice and public safety agenda, represents a violation of the rights of Parliament, and this House hereby orders the government to provide every document requested by the Standing Committee on Finance on November 17, 2010, by March 7, 2011.

He said: Mr. Speaker, for many months in this House and across the country, the Liberals have been pointing out the cruel irony of the

Conservative government preaching a new-found doctrine of so-called fiscal restraint. It certainly was not there between 2006, when it first took power, and late 2008, when the global recession arrived.

During that period of time, the Conservatives increased federal spending by three times the rate of inflation. They wiped out all of the contingency reserves and prudence factors that had been built into federal budgets to serve as fiscal shock absorbers against sudden adverse developments. They put the country back into deficit again before, not because of, but before there was any recession to blame.

Now, suddenly, they have religion. Now they are going to get prudent all of a sudden, so they are telling average Canadian families there is no room for them on the government's agenda. There is no room for family care, no room for early childhood development, no room for help with the costs of post-secondary education and no room for a better Canada pension plan, while they simultaneously load billions of dollars on big, expensive, high-risk Conservative spending schemes like \$10 billion to \$13 billion on prisons and jails, like \$16 billion to \$21 billion on stealth fighter jet airplanes with no mission statement and no competitive bidding to get value for money, and \$6 billion every year in extra tax cuts for the richest 5% of Canadian corporations, not for small business, just the big ones.

For months we have asked the government repeatedly to provide a factual rationale for these odd and bad choices but we have received no response. Therefore, last November, in the Standing Committee on Finance, our critic, the hon. member for Kings—Hants, put down a detailed motion demanding a full financial analysis. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was asking for much the same thing. Again, there was no response.

Belatedly, while still concealing all the details, the Conservatives came up with the lame excuse that details could not be provided because of cabinet confidences. That was clearly false.

Our Liberal finance critic took the case a step further last week by raising a question of privilege in the House. Again, nothing but belligerence and obfuscation came from the government.

Two nights ago we took another step. We gave notice of the motion that we are moving as the subject matter of this opposition day debate, a House order for the production of documents. Suddenly, at long last, there were rumours that the government might have something to table, some answer to the questions we had been asking.

We have no idea what that rumour entails. We will look into the details, if there are any details, but given the months of stonewalling, given the last minute, death-bed nature of this repentance, if it is one, and given this government's always grudging attitude toward Parliament's unmistakable right to know, the motion we have selected today remains vital and necessary. This is all about a government that is afraid of the truth and determined to hide it in a vast variety of ways.

Business of Supply

Not since 1873, when Sir John A. Macdonald was trying to evade responsibility for his railway scandals, has a Canadian Parliament been as abused as this one today by government schemes to obscure transparency, stifle accountability and hide the truth. Never before has a Canadian government been as pathologically partisan, ideological and obsessed with secrecy and control.

It is Conservative standard practice to so limit and manipulate information that it becomes impossible for Parliament to do its job of holding government to account. It becomes impossible for Canadians to judge their government because hard facts are simply concealed. It becomes impossible to know in truth what is going on and, without knowledge, democracy is impaired.

• (1015)

Oh, yes, the Conservatives can pass all of the fine-sounding accountability acts they want, but these become a mockery when the Prime Minister prorogues Parliament twice in one year, padlocks the central institution of our democracy twice in one year to evade tough questions about his government's misbehaviour. All that fine legislation becomes a mockery when the government sends its ministerial staffers to deliberately and repeatedly interfere with access to information laws. It becomes a mockery when the government condones, even encourages, ministers to falsify documents and then tell the opposite of the truth.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, a position designed and created by the Prime Minister and an officer personally selected by the Prime Minister, warned this week that Parliament was being subverted by the government's obsession with secrecy. He cannot do his job, and MPs cannot do their jobs when the government will not provide the necessary information or, when it does provide it, the information comes out in such garbled or falsified form.

With respect to the two specific requests for information mentioned in the motion before the House today, one relating to extra corporate tax cuts for the privileged few and the other to enormous new prison costs, Mr. Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and every other relevant authority have debunked the notion that this information can be hidden from Canadians because it somehow involves a cabinet confidence. It does not.

One journalist noted the other day that the government uses the false excuse of cabinet confidence to hide information in the same way that Richard Nixon used the excuse of executive privilege. Both are equally odious and wrong, but it is a telling point that the Conservative government seems to aspire to Nixonian standards, complete with its own list of enemies who need to be silenced.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, the claim of cabinet confidence is simply irrelevant, as you made abundantly clear in your landmark ruling on April 27, 2010, about the obligations of government to produce documents when requested to do so by Parliament.

After an exhaustive review of all the arguments and all the authorities going back 125 years, the Speaker reached three essential conclusions: first, that holding the government to account is the House of Commons' fundamental right, undisputed privilege and, in fact, an obligation; second, that in order to discharge that obligation, the House of Commons must have unfettered access to complete and uncensored information; and third, that any limitation on the method

by which that access to information is accomplished must be determined not by the government, but by the House of Commons. The House of Commons decides the process, not the government. As the Speaker said so clearly last April 27, when the House duly adopts an order following proper notice and debate, as we are doing today in this debate, the government must comply.

Why is the information about prison costs so important? It is because Canadians need to verify the work of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. He determined that one or two of the government's crime bills would increase costs to taxpayers by \$10 billion to \$13 billion, and that little, if any, of that new cost had been budgeted. Where will it come from and at whose expense? Parliament needs to know. Canadians also need to know the additional costs associated with 18 other bills of a similar nature for which no cost analysis has yet been provided and for which no budget provision has been made.

Canadians also need to know if every bit of attrition in the size of the public service, which is the Conservatives' one and only plan to reduce the deficit, is being more than offset by the hiring of new prison guards, so that at the bottom line there would really be no attrition at all and, therefore, no savings at all and, therefore, no deficit plan at all.

• (1020)

Canadians need to know how many mega billions in total will be spent on U.S.-style megajails, which have proven in America to be a failure in terms of public safety.

Why are jails the Conservative governments biggest job creation plan? Why are jails the Conservatives substitute for social housing or mental health services or aboriginal inclusion or education? These questions need answers.

Furthermore, why is the information about extra corporate tax cuts important? It is important because Canadians need to verify the analysis done by the Department of Finance showing that corporate tax cuts are the least cost-effective way to generate immediate jobs. That is the federal Department of Finance saying that corporate tax cuts are the least cost-effective way to generate immediate jobs.

Canadians also need to verify the work of the chief economic analyst at Statistics Canada, who says that the job creation value of the government's extra corporate tax cuts is "trivial", "a drop in the bucket".

Business of Supply

Canadians need to know what would be gained by extra corporate tax cuts on top of the 35% reduction in corporate tax rates in Canada that has taken place over the last 10 years. Since Canada already had the lowest corporate tax rate in the G7, except for the UK, before these latest Conservative tax cuts; since Canada already had a 10 point or 25% tax rate advantage over the United States; and since Canada already had a globally competitive corporate tax rate before these latest cuts, what is to be gained by more, and for whom?

Six billion more dollars in borrowed money will need to be repaid at some future date by our children and grandchildren to finance an extra cut now for the biggest and wealthiest 5% of Canadian businesses. To a lot of Canadians that sounds out of whack. Only 1 business in 20 stands to gain, only the privileged few.

Meanwhile, every employer and employee in Canada, including every small business that employs a single soul, is going to be paying more taxes this year because the Conservatives are imposing increased job-killing payroll taxes through higher employment insurance premiums. This year, next year, the year after that and the year after that, up and up those payroll taxes will go.

The Conservatives will rake in \$1.3 billion more this year in these higher payroll taxes, then \$3 billion more next year, then \$5 billion more the year after that and then \$7 billion more. Over four years more than \$16 billion will be taken from every employer and every employee on every Canadian job. Most especially, small business will pay.

In the perverse logic of the Conservative government, it cuts taxes on the corporate profits of big business while it increases taxes on the jobs created by small business. It just does not make sense when they can find billions to blow on jets and jails and extra corporate tax cuts.

It also does not make any sense why the Conservatives give the back of their hand to average middle income Canadian families struggling to make ends meet.

Is there help for family caregivers looking after sick or aging loved ones at home? No, the government says that would be reckless. Is there help for young parents looking for a child care space so they can earn a decent income for their family? No, the Conservatives say, because they just do not believe in that.

Is there room for a voluntary supplementary Canada pension plan to help secure a respectable retirement for two-thirds of Canadians who do not have adequate pensions? No, say the Conservatives. They will only promote private sector plans, even when that means expensive management fees, lower earnings, less participation and less security.

What about access to higher education? If a student gets the grades, should the student not get to go to university or college, or get the trades training he or she may need? From the Conservatives the answer is no, that students just do not matter as much as jets and jails and extra corporate tax cuts.

• (1025)

Canadians need the financial details that we have requested in our motion today in order to analyze these very strange Conservative priorities. However, this motion attacking unreasonable and

destructive government secrecy is important for another reason too. The specific issues that we have mentioned are symptomatic of a much bigger problem, a government that so distrusts Canadians and is so obsessed with controlling everything all the time that, in the process, it erodes democracy.

I have mentioned the arbitrary padlocking of Parliament by prorogation; the tampering with access to information laws; and ministers falsifying documents, trying to cover up and then failing to be truthful.

I hear the Conservatives chuckling on the other side about their transgressions. Well, Canadians are not laughing.

However, there is so much more. The Conservatives instruct their ministerial staff to thumb their noses at parliamentary committees. Contrary to law, they refuse to appear and answer questions.

A Conservative senator warns women's groups to shut up if they ever want to gain anything from this malevolent government.

The nation's single best source of reliable data, Statistics Canada, previously admired around the world for its accuracy and integrity, is now crippled and dumbed down so that the government can base its decisions on bias and ideology rather than hard evidence.

Public servants are threatened and intimidated to keep their mouths shut, the most graphic cases being Richard Colvin, and also the scientists who work for Environment Canada.

Parliamentary watchdogs are systematically attacked, belittled and coerced into toeing the government's line or they get hounded out of office: Linda Keen at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer; the Chief Electoral Officer; the Ethics Commissioner; the Information Commissioner; the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development; Paul Kennedy, chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP; Peter Tinsley, the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission; Munir Sheikh, the Chief Statistician; Colonel Stogran, Veterans Ombudsman; and the list goes on.

In addition to that, outside of government, dozens of groups and organizations are treated the same way, being put on the enemies list or hit list, including the Canadian Council on Learning; the Canadian Teachers' Federation; the Rights & Democracy organization; women's groups; and advocates for the poor and the disadvantaged. There are many more, including KAIROS, of course, which this government hated and wanted to silence so much that it went so far as to falsify a document and then tied itself up in knots.

That is typical of a Conservative culture of defeat. On our side, we will fight it every step of the way.

Business of Supply

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech. It became quite clear to me that the matter is not really the motion today. The member for Wascana is extremely good at this and I compliment him on his ability to change the channel on the real issue. The real issue is that the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP coalition want to hide their high tax agenda from Canadians. That is exactly what they are trying to do today, to take up time in the House to hide the true issue, which is that they want to raise taxes.

We believe high taxes are a threat to jobs; we believe in lowering taxes. We have done this and the truth is right here in our economic recovery. This Conservative government has taken every opportunity to lower taxes and, in fact, has seen 460,000 jobs created in Canada.

I want to be very clear before I get to my question. This really is not about partisanship but about a differences in our philosophies.

When the member was finance minister for a brief time, he said the following in a press release while totally rejecting the New Democratic Party leader's call to roll back corporate taxes:

—the government's tax reduction plan has produced significant economic and social benefits for all Canadians.

He went on to say:

Canadians deserve the facts—

—and that the leader of the NDP's—

—numbers are simply wrong, and [that the NDP was]...trying to obscure the true benefits of tax cuts—namely jobs and economic growth.

● (1030)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Wascana.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the hon. gentleman has referred to that period of time when I had the honour of serving this country as minister of finance.

At that time the Government of Canada, because of 10 years of hard work by the Liberal government, had eliminated the deficit. Prior to that the deficit had existed in this country. The red ink had been flowing for 27 consecutive years. We made the decisions that were necessary to get rid of the deficit. We balanced the books. We ushered in an era of 10 consecutive surplus budgets.

We reduced the corporate tax rates. When we started out they were at 28%. They were globally uncompetitive. We took those rates down on the track that we had established to about 19%. The government added one more percent to take it down to 18%.

All of that was done when the country was running robust surpluses. When we left office in 2006, we left our successors with a \$13 billion annual surplus and fiscal flexibility going forward five years of \$100 billion. Transfers to the provinces had been raised to an all-time record high, including \$41 billion for health care, a new transfer for municipalities and a better deal on equalization, the best deal the provinces had ever had.

The difference now is the Conservatives have put us into \$56 billion of debt and their corporate tax cuts are unaffordable.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what has become very clear with the government is this pathological pattern that it believes there is a set of rules for it and there are rules for everyone else. If anyone else breaks the rules, the government will throw the book at them. There is maximum attack on anyone who does not follow their rules. Yet there is a case where a minister doctored a document and then lied to Parliament. That is about as serious as it can get. If folks back home did that in their workplace, they would be fired. Here, this is the price of doing business.

We see that it is not just that the minister doctored the document and lied, but the Prime Minister of this country, who is supposed to represent an ethical standard, said that what she did is perfectly in line with how the government operates.

I would like to ask the hon. member what it means in this House of Commons, where the laws of this land are made, that it is considered okay as long as it is a Conservative minister to lie, doctor documents, misrepresent the facts and they will be backed up all the way up to the Prime Minister himself. What does it mean for the standard of democracy in this country where a government is willing to go to that level to misrepresent the truth and lie to people?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, sadly what the hon. gentleman has described is an aspect of the well-entrenched Conservative culture of deceit. He speaks of a double standard and indeed there is a double standard. There is one law for the Conservatives and one law for everyone else.

In this particular case the facts seem to be absolutely beyond dispute. The minister has said certain things in Parliament and in committee, and in the last number of days, most recently, she has completely contradicted herself, obviously indicating that a document was falsified, that it was done on her instructions where she had previously said that she had nothing do with it, and where she has quite literally tied herself in knots trying to evade the responsibility for that.

It is absolutely unconscionable. It is unacceptable. The House has already indicated that point of view. A committee report is now before us that indicates that point of view. It is clear that further action is required.

Either the Prime Minister must shoulder his responsibilities and relieve that minister of her duties, or Parliament will do it for him.

● (1035)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I resume with questions, I would like to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than to their colleagues. Second, I anticipate some intense discussion here today and I would remind all members to use parliamentary language.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the former minister of finance did so well for our country at a time when there was a need for a proactive, strong social conscience in government.

Business of Supply

I look at the issue before us in terms of priorities. Is it fair to say that the Conservative government's priorities are wrong? There are the billions of dollars in corporate tax breaks but there are the many needs of our communities. In particular, there is the pension issue. Many pensioners are on fixed incomes with the many needs of today, but the government fails to meet those needs in favour of giving significant corporate tax breaks.

The Conservative member who spoke previously said that the Conservatives were not increasing taxes. Could the member for Wascana explain to this House the payroll tax and how the Conservative government is in fact increasing taxes? Ultimately fewer jobs would be created because of the government's increase to the payroll tax.

Could the member add to that comment?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, governing is all about making choices. None of the choices that confront governments is ever particularly easy, but when it comes to making the budget, one has to decide where the priorities lie.

The Conservative government for the last year or so has been telling us that its priority is around untended jet aircraft, larger jails and extra corporate tax cuts. Those appear to be the main items, certainly the biggest spending items, on its agenda.

The Liberal Party suggests that as we come out of recession, as a lot of middle-class Canadian families are struggling with the highest level ever of household debt, that it is time to give those middle-income families the priority, the attention and the break. After all, the large corporate sector in the country has already had a 35% tax cut.

We would put our emphasis on issues like home care, education, family caregiving and pensions. We would try our best to control the burden of payroll taxes. As the hon. gentleman just said, a payroll tax kills jobs. While the government claims to be reducing income taxes for corporations, it is increasing the payroll tax burden for every small business in this country by a combined total over the next four years of \$16.6 billion, and that will kill jobs in this country.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this very important motion concerning, among other things, the ongoing discussions at the finance committee on the Liberals' plan to increase taxes on job-creating businesses and, consequently, on workers, consumers and families. As a mother of five children, I can say that this would hurt my family, along with many others, particularly single mothers.

Before I begin, let me be clear up front that there has been some confusion as to what we are talking about with respect to our Conservative government's low tax plan. This is not a new plan. This is a plan that was first introduced in 2007 and passed by Parliament in 2007. This is a plan that has been in law since 2007. This is a plan that has been accounted for in the government's books since 2007. Most importantly, over 110,000 businesses have been making their investment and hiring decisions based on our low tax plan since 2007.

I note that at the time the Liberals were more than supportive of lowering business taxes. Indeed, this is what the Liberal leader had to say in the fall of 2007 on the subject. He stated:

I am convinced that a further reduction in the corporate tax rate cut is the right thing to do...How, for the sake of good jobs and rising living standards, can we encourage Canadian companies to increase their investments? The answer is simple... lower the corporate tax rate—

I repeat that good jobs and rising living standards are what the Liberal leader believed are affected by lowering corporate taxes. However, under their new leader, the Liberals have shifted even more dramatically to the left and embraced the business bashing rhetoric and tax and spend philosophy of their NDP coalition partner.

The Liberals' dramatic shift to the left, along with their reckless plan to hike taxes on business, is now the centre of debate here today. The tax hike plan is really getting Canadian businesses and the people who work for them very nervous, especially as they try to climb out of the worst global recession since the 1930s in a period of tentative recovery.

I know the sponsor of today's motion is from the province of Saskatchewan, which is where I was born. I would ask him to talk to his constituents and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. I am not sure that he has done that yet. If he had, I am not sure he would be so keen on demonizing businesses in his home province and advocating for punishing tax hikes.

I would ask him to listen to what the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce wrote in an open letter. It stated:

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is extremely disappointed to see the issue of planned business tax reductions, and the ability of Canada's businesses to foster sustainable economic growth, which has become hostage to political manoeuvring...

Following through on the business tax reduction agenda is critical to moving from government- and Canadian taxpayer-funded-stimulus to a private sector-led recovery. The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce believes improving the business climate to trigger private sector investment is the most significant economic issue now confronting Canada...

The alternative to that, of course, is an increase in taxes. We do not believe raising taxes would be good for growth or employment...

...the tax reductions parliamentarians have endorsed since 2007 will free up capital to be put to work growing Canada's businesses and its economy... If parliamentarians renege on their commitment to continue with promised tax decreases, you can be certain that many businesses will not be able to pursue their plans.

I am going to suggest the people of Saskatchewan will not look too kindly on a politician who suggests that taxes be raised in their province, hurting their local businesses and costing them local jobs for their families. I am also going to suggest that the Liberal Party actually talk to small businesses. In recent weeks, shamefully, the Liberal Party has been standing up bizarrely claiming small businesses want to pay higher taxes.

To be clear, that is 100% wrong and Canadians need to know that. I know because I stood right beside Catherine Swift, the head of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business when she said she supports our plan.

• (1040)

For the record let me quote what the CFIB actually said:

I'd just like to clarify that the corporate income tax reductions are not exclusively a big business issue for a lot of different reasons. The small and medium-sized business sector is very integrated with the large business sector in Canada. Therefore, measures that benefit one also benefit the other. We also have seen, right through the economy, that our very competitive corporate tax climate, which is viewed around the world as very attractive, already brought investment to Canada, and naturally, that's a win for everyone, all businesses and also for the creation of employment. I think also...when a plan gets announced, businesses take that into account in their own planning and to change this now in the middle of the game, I think, creates a lot of very serious problems in terms of our reputation as a country on the international scene and also for our businesses here in Canada.

Having clearly heard that quote from the CFIB in its entirety, I ask once and for all that the Liberals stop distorting the views of Canadian small businesses about the Liberals' tax hike plan. In fact, the member for Kings—Hants should apologize for intentionally misquoting the CFIB.

This all goes to a larger issue. What we have here is a fundamental disagreement. Our Conservative government believes hard-working Canadians should not be paying higher taxes. We believe lower taxes help job creation and economic growth. Our low tax plan has already shown signs that it is working and making Canada an attractive place for business to invest and create jobs.

I think of one example that all Canadians could relate to, which is Tim Hortons and what transpired a few years back. Tim Hortons, that Canadian icon, actually left Canada in the 1990s like many businesses at the time because of the high tax policies of the previous Liberal government. But after Parliament passed our low tax plan in 2007, Tim Hortons recognized that Canada was once again open for business and not solely open to tax business like under the Liberals. Tim Hortons swiftly moved back to Canada as a direct result.

In the words of a *Calgary Herald* editorial at the time:

Talk about a double-double blessing! ...Canada's national coffee—Tim Hortons—is leaving Delaware and coming home, for all the right reasons. That is, after years during which Canadian business rightly complained of being at a tax disadvantage compared to its U.S. competitors, the pendulum has swung and Timmies now reckons it will do better north of the border.... [I]t shows Canada is doing something right. Rule one in public economics is that people respond to the incentives they're offered. That a company such as Tim Hortons is prepared to go through the upheaval of moving its head office to take advantage of a lower tax environment shows business tax cuts...are starting to work.

Clearly, a strong economy means more financially secure Canadian families.

But the Liberal opposition believes Canadians and Canadian businesses are not sending enough of their hard-earned money to Ottawa. That is why the Liberals are pushing for higher taxes, be it a GST hike, business tax hikes or an iPod tax, to help fill government coffers in Ottawa. Why would we do that to Canadians? The Liberals would use taxpayers' money to bankroll their big government schemes, like providing benefits to people after a 45-day work year.

Clearly, when it comes to taxes we have different views.

Business of Supply

This debate has been occurring at finance committee over the past few months. Over the course of the committee's prebudget consultations, group after group and expert after expert was asked what they thought of our government's low tax plan and what they thought of the Liberals' tax hike plan.

What did the finance committee hear? The testimony was nearly unanimous in support of our Conservative government's plan to keep taxes low for job creators and against the Liberals' plan to attack them. Groups like the Mining Association of British Columbia, the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association, the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, the Conseil du patronat du Québec, the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, the Mining Association of Canada, the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and more were all united in telling the finance committee tax hikes are a bad idea for our economy and for jobs.

• (1045)

As the Canadian Chamber of Commerce told the committee:

The single most important or most damaging thing the government could do at this point to stall the recovery would be to cancel the planned tax reductions. Business has been planning on them. The private sector has been hiring based on them.... If suddenly those were repealed at this point, the impact would be to get business to shelve its plans for expansion and getting people back to work.

I am stunned. The Liberal-Bloc Québécois-NDP coalition recently banded together to endorse a Liberal motion to essentially harm Canada's economic growth and kill jobs, especially after all the witnesses before the committee so strongly supported our Conservative government's ambitious plan to support job creators.

Even more recently, the finance committee invited Ian Lee, the director of the Master of Business Administration program at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business. We asked Ian Lee at finance committee what he thought about the debate on business taxes. Here is what he said at length:

Business of Supply

"I've followed the debate over the past two months and I'm just astonished at the debate. There has been no reference to the OECD, to their 10-year tax policy research branch studies. They have published dozens and dozens and dozens of studies which have concluded irrevocably without condition that corporate taxes are the most harmful type of tax for economic growth. There is no ambiguity in the research. None, none, zip, nada. So I know that's going to upset some people but that's a fact....The OECD research for 10 years, across many, many scholars, has found that income per capita goes down. Or you can put it in reverse: the lower the corporate taxes, the higher the income per person. The scholarship is very clear on that. So I'm answering your question: if corporate taxation goes up, income per capita will go down....The scholarship is unambiguous and an increase in taxes is merely a disguised tax on workers or consumers. That's all it is.... It's going to raise prices or cause wages to go down."

That was an expert, Ian Lee, on making sure corporate tax reduction continues. Mr. Lee's findings have been supported recently by experts like the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, University of Calgary Professor Jack Mintz, and many more who have released detailed reports showing our low tax plan is crucial to keeping Canada's economy strong. It will create hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Indeed, I would like to draw the attention of Parliament, and especially of Canadian families, to one finding in particular from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters' report.

We know debates like this can get a little theoretical. We know sometimes we can get lost in big and competing numbers, but let us bring it down to a more personal level. To do that, let us look at two numbers from the report of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. The report, which is available online, indicated for the final two portions alone of our low tax plan, among the many economic benefits would be an increase in personal incomes of Canadians by a whopping \$30.4 billion, or an increase of 2.4%, and an increase of personal income of \$880 per capita. That is \$880 per person.

That might not seem like a lot of money to a Liberal leader who summers in France, but for the average Canadian family, that is a big amount. That is what this debate is all about: jobs, economic growth and how we can make Canadian families more financially secure.

I recognize there is some debate today about our government's record of transparency versus the Liberal record, but I am quite comfortable with what our government has done to better inform Canadians about how we spend their tax dollars. Indeed, we are the government that created the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We are the government that passed a law requiring all federal departments and agencies to produce detailed quarterly financial statements. We are the government that produced groundbreaking progress report after progress report on the economic action plan, something even Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, said, "really put Canada almost at the forefront in fiscal transparency and stimulus". That is our record.

What is the Liberal record? It is spending scandal after spending scandal that had to be uncovered, everything from the sponsorship

scandal to the HRSDC boondoggle, to the wasteful long gun registry, and the list goes on and on.

• (1050)

Today's debate is also about transparency and who will stand up for taxpayers. On that, only our Conservative government has been clear. We will not support tax increases on workers, families and businesses. We will stay committed to our low tax plan to create jobs.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke at length about Tim Hortons. I would like to ask her whether the benefit she mentioned, the return of Tim Hortons, was not simply related to Wendy's, the American parent company that held 100% of Tim Hortons. Through an IPO—initial public offering—and share dividends for its shareholders, Tim Hortons was returned to Wendy's shareholders.

• (1055)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question about Tim Hortons. I would like to take this opportunity to say that we are very proud of Tim Hortons, which is recognized throughout Canada and the United States as a Canadian company. It is because the Conservative government decided to lower income taxes that Tim Hortons decided to return here, to Canada.

I encourage Bloc members to celebrate Tim Hortons, a Canadian company, with us. Quebeckers enjoy their double-doubles with the rest of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the member for Saint Boniface, the motion reads in part, "the cost of the government's justice and public safety agenda, represents a violation of the rights of Parliament".

We are talking about transparency. The member for Saint Boniface made specific reference to the importance of transparency.

Does the member for Saint Boniface not believe that the House of Commons, Parliament, the members inside this chamber have a right to know what the costs are of these megaprisons and the policy the government is espousing in regard to the crime and safety bills, such as the one we passed yesterday?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to hear the Liberal member for Winnipeg North talk about public safety and justice.

There is a cost to ensuring the safety and security of all the constituents in his riding where I worked for most of my police career. There is a cost to making sure they are safe. Almost all Canadians agree with our plan to ensure that we spend the money required to make them safe and secure.

Business of Supply

I worked the streets of the north end; my mother lives in the north end. It is unfortunately one of the most violent areas of the city of Winnipeg. Unfortunately, the city of Winnipeg suffers from the label of having an excessive amount of violent crime. I challenge the member to do the right thing because the members of his community agree with me and they agree with this government to do what it takes and to spend the money to protect them from violent crime.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not even quite sure where to start.

When the member began her speech, she started talking about single mothers and corporate tax cuts. I can imagine her campaign workers wearing huge buttons that say “Single moms for corporate tax cuts”.

Then she went on about the government's tax agenda being particularly good for small businesses. She should come and talk to some of the small businesses on Hamilton Mountain in Ontario that are being devastated by the imposition of the HST.

None of those things are actually before us in the motion we are debating here today. Today's motion is about accountability. It is about transparency. It is about the government's refusal to release to members of this House and therefore, more importantly, to Canadians the cost of the Conservatives' crime agenda and the projections of the cost of their corporate tax cuts.

I want to read for the member a quote from her leader from five years ago when her leader, now the Prime Minister of Canada, said:

Information is the lifeblood of a democracy. Without adequate access to key information about government policies and programs, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions, and incompetent or corrupt governance can be hidden under a cloak of secrecy.

Would the member not agree that her leader was right five years ago when he said that members of Parliament need to have access to information? It is the only way we as parliamentarians can make informed decisions.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I will first tackle the fact that single mothers, which is what I was for three years, benefit from the government's low tax plan. We benefit from other decisions made by the government that were not supported by the NDP. I spent \$1,200 a month on daycare as a single mother. I would have liked an extra \$100 to decide where to put that money because I could not get my children into daycare when I worked shift work.

I would really like the member to speak to the people of Hamilton about that and a number of other things. This what the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce said about our plan:

Our members are from all sectors and collectively employ 75,000 citizens.

We are likewise of the opinion that this remains fundamentally essential to the future well being of private sector jobs and prosperity in Hamilton and Canada.

In 2007 the federal government announced a series of graduated corporate tax reductions designed to keep Canada competitive with our trading partners, many of whom have reduced corporate and payroll taxes in recent years, even through the recent recession.

Employment and investment has been predicated on the availability of funds that, if the tax changes are reversed, will no longer be available. This will have a negative impact on economic growth.

I would ask the member to listen to the people of Hamilton, whom she proposes to represent, because they agree with us, not with her.

● (1100)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I represent a rural riding and it may be a surprise to the opposition coalition that many of the businesses in rural Ontario today are incorporated, such as feed mills, grain elevators, large farms, dairy farms, chicken farms, pork farms and many more. They are the job creators in our communities and the opposition wants to raise taxes on the job creators that are vital to rural communities, such as rural Huron—Bruce.

Would the member for Saint Boniface explain to the House and Canadians watching how our government is helping job creators in rural Canada?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has actually been not just a colleague but a friend to me here in the House. We were elected at the same time and we have learned an awful lot. He is working very hard for his community. I look to him quite often to hear about what is going on in his community so that we can get this right for it.

He has touched on things we are doing right for his community members. He has touched on the fact that our low tax rates will affect not only urban centres, but the rural areas have small businesses that are affected by every tax hike that the Liberals are proposing. They will have to pay higher GST because the Liberals have promised to hike GST. They will potentially be hit with a \$75 iPod tax for their children, which the Liberals have proposed. Those families will have to look at potential carbon taxes, proposed and created by the Liberals and promised.

I appreciate the member sharing the information about his community members to make it better for them. He is doing the right thing and we are alongside him doing the right thing for his community members.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member said that the cost is worth it. She says that she knows the cost, so she should table the cost. What is the cost? There are a total of 24 crime bills before the House. I will not read them all since there are a lot. We have the cost of exactly zero of them. We have the head count of exactly zero of them.

The one bill we did challenge, which is Bill C-25, the minister said:

We're not exactly sure how much it will cost us. There are some low estimates, and some that would see more spent — not more than \$90 million.

The only bill we ever received a number on was the amount of \$90 million, but when the PBO did an eight-month report, with which they stonewalled the Bloc, the cost was \$10 billion to \$13 billion.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives would understand, I would hope, that we are not just trusting them to take a *Father Knows Best* attitude. If the member knows the costs, she should table them.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I know the cost. It is the cost of tears, the cost of blood and the cost of injuries to victims, who I support. It is the cost of nightmares, the cost of personal damage and the cost of property damage. That is the cost of the Liberals' soft on crime agenda. It hurts victims. We will not do that to victims. I will not go to another child autopsy and not have a consequence for the person who murdered that child. I will not do it and I expect the Liberals would not want to do it either.

I encourage the member to stop this nonsense and vote with us to protect victims.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint Boniface has a number of good intentions, but her Tim Hortons in Saint Boniface is a lot like the ones in my riding of Hochelaga. Even the Tim Hortons on Ontario Street in Montreal has always paid taxes to Quebec and Canada. Delaware is not the problem. The fact that the company became Canadian again, as she said, is the result of an initial public offering that was done by the parent company, Wendy's, which has owned Tim Hortons for many years. Obviously we will learn these kinds of things.

We are here today because on November 17, 2010, the Standing Committee on Finance, of which I am a member, adopted a motion. I will read some points:

The committee also orders that the Government of Canada provide the committee with electronic copies of the following...

We were not asking a lot. We did not want a tonne of papers. We wanted electronic copies of the five-year projections of total corporate profits before taxes and effective corporate tax rates from 2010 to 2015. If the Department of Finance was able to publish budget documents last year, it is because it had them.

On November 17, 2010, we asked for detailed cost accounting, analysis and projections, including assumptions, for each of the bills, conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board guide to costing. Again, it was already there. We asked about what the Treasury Board had and asked that it be sent to us electronically.

The committee's motion says the following:

That the committee orders that all information requested in this motion from the Government of Canada be provided to the committee within 7 calendar days.

That is what we wanted on November 17. Now it is February 17, three months later. We asked for the information within seven days, but we have still not received anything 90 days later. On November 24, seven days after our request, we received a response saying that "projections of corporate profits before taxes and effective corporate income tax rates are a Cabinet confidence. As such, we are not in a position to provide these series to the Committee."

That is why we are here. Upon its return on February 3, the Standing Committee on Finance looked at the Government of Canada's pitiful response. We spoke to the committee chair, who, I

must add, does a wonderful job. And this is what was written in the committee chair's report:

...the Committee wishes to draw the attention of the House on what appears to be a breach of its privileges by the Government of Canada's refusal to provide documents ordered by the Committee, and recommends [the Standing Committee on Finance, on which the Saint Boniface member sits] that House take whatever measures it deems appropriate.

I raised questions in the House as recently as yesterday. I first spoke about how the Parliamentary Budget Officer has spoken out against the government's obscurantism and the fact that it too often uses the cloak of cabinet confidence.

● (1110)

I was asking if the government would understand a basic principle of democracy: House privileges exist and the federal spending power is granted to the government by us here in the House. The power comes from here. Therefore, in order to grant that power, we need information.

The President of the Treasury Board replied that if the Parliamentary Budget Officer wanted information, all he had to do was call him and the Treasury Board president would provide it. I poked fun at him and suggested that the two of them had gone out for a beer to discuss it. That is not how a government works or how it should work.

Today's motion states that the Canadian Constitution gives Parliament the absolute power to require the government to produce documents, yet the government persistently refuses to do so, despite our reasonable request. We requested electronic documents and information that have been available in past years. Thus, our requests are reasonable.

Three months later, we have received nothing, absolutely nothing. Is it important? Everyone here has been elected to this House. What are we all doing here, on either side of the House? We are here to exercise a certain power. That power is not to simply sit here on this side of the House and complacently admire what the government does. Some members choose to do that, and that is fine. Let them sit there and complacently listen to what the government tells them to do; let them read their planted questions and complacently read their members' statements. However, they are not exercising the power given to us by voters. I represent Hochelaga. Other members represent other ridings. The voters give us a mandate to exercise some power in the House. Some members have the power to govern, yes, but the power of the House exists and we must exercise it. During the next election—very soon, according to rumours—some voters will say that they sent us to Ottawa to exercise some power and that we failed to do so. That is a serious judgment.

What do we need to exercise power? We need information. It is a universally recognized fundamental principle that information is power. It is our right. You know that better than I do, but I just want to reiterate that to inexperienced hon. members. A long time ago, almost 100 years ago, in 1916, Bourinot said that "it is the constitutional right of either House to ask for such information as it can directly obtain by its own order from any department".

Business of Supply

We can keep quoting from our procedural guides. As a new MP, I read the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* from cover to cover because if I am going to sit here I want to know how things work. It says that, legally, "Parliament has the ability to institute its own inquiries, to require the attendance of witnesses and to order the production of documents". Why does it say that? Because documents are essential to the proper functioning of Parliament. It says that quite clearly.

Further, the Standing Orders talk about the standing committees, which brings me to my point. The parliamentary secretary, who is still here, can sit on those committees. What do the standing orders say about the standing committees? They say the same thing: that we can order the production of documents, etc. It is essential to committee work, they say. To order the production of documents we can adopt a motion to that effect. That is what we did. According to the Standing Orders, this power is absolute and has no limits.

• (1115)

They cannot say: "There are limits". As long as the request is reasonable, we can ask for a document and obtain it.

Further on, it says that if something happens and we do not obtain the documentation, one option at our disposal is to move a motion requiring the government to produce it.

I have not been a member of Parliament for very long. However, this is the second time we have found ourselves in this type of situation. On April 27, 2010, the House took the government to task over documents pertaining to Afghan detainees. Probably all of us have children and grandchildren. When they are admonished once, it does not mean that it applies only the one time and that they can misbehave again. At a given point, enough is enough. This is now the second time, at least since I entered federal politics. It is not right.

On April 27, the Speaker ruled that it is an indisputable privilege, on which the parliamentary system is based, and he ordered the government to do its job.

In the case of the Afghan detainees, national security was the reason given by the government. Today, they are claiming cabinet confidence. Every day, they invent something new. They will invent something else for the next time. I am still trying to understand why the Conservatives are doing this.

Just yesterday, the second question I asked the President of the Treasury Board was why it had become a secret. I even gave him some possible answers. Does the government have something to hide? Is it incompetent? Intransigent? Incapable? Inept? Powerless? Insolent? Motivated by ideology? Perhaps the government does not want to provide the information. For ideological reasons, it wants to hide things.

We have a fine example, that of the Minister of International Cooperation. She hid the facts for one year. We wonder why she did it. She did not do it inadvertently, out of incompetence or for lack of authority. She was motivated by ideology. She did not want to make it seem as though she had changed the recommendation. The government does have the right to decide, but it must do so appropriately, without hiding anything, and without preventing us from exercising our authority to ask questions.

Information management by this government is an issue, and unfortunately not just in this case. There is also the long form census. That is another fine example. Ever since Canada came into being, there have been census forms. We have measurements, we have the right to statistics and information. Why? To exercise power.

I am thinking of the father of the member for Louis-Hébert, who is my brother and a noted demographer. Where will he go for information? His entire career has been based on information collected during the census. What will he do? What will future demographers do? We are talking about the power of information and information management. The Information Commissioner is complaining because it takes too long to get information. Why are they not providing the information? Why are they keeping it? It is important because we are talking about corporate taxes. Corporate taxes are important because our tax system is based on what? Either we tax individuals or we tax businesses.

• (1120)

If we decide to tax businesses, we tax SMEs or we tax large corporations. The government says that it wants lower taxes for large corporations. Why? It must give us some information on that.

Since 2007, the taxes for SMEs have been cut from 12% to 11%, a difference of 8%. But for large corporations, taxes have gone from 22% to 15%, a difference of 32%. Anyone who is familiar with the second derivative can calculate that the tax cut for SMEs is four times lower. I want to know because we believe that tax policy is important. I want to know where the Conservatives are getting their numbers.

The Bloc Québécois has released its budget bible for this year. We think that it should be Quebec's turn. The bible was given to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of State for Finance was there, as was the member for Saint Boniface. They said that it was serious work, and it was. We worked hard with the information we had and we want to continue to do so.

I have the 2010 annual report of the Royal Bank of Canada right here. It is not the report for 1810 but for 2010. The estimates of the taxes that would be payable if all foreign subsidiaries' accumulated unremitted earnings were repatriated are set out on page 125. We have the information from the Royal Bank. The estimates are \$763 million for 2010, \$821 million for 2009 and \$920 million for 2008. I have information. I can say whether or not I agree. I can form my own opinion because I have the facts. The government is hiding the facts from us.

For as long as we are here, we will act as an ethics watchdog. We know what the Liberals' ethics led to. We need only look so far as the sponsorship scandal. They wanted to circumvent or violate the law but they were punished. The Conservatives think that exercising power means having complete control. That is not what it means to exercise power.

Public funds do not belong to the Liberal Party of Canada. They know that; they paid for it. Public funds do not belong to the Conservative Party of Canada. The money is not theirs. They cannot do whatever they want with it, however they want, without any accountability and without telling us how they are using it.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois's opinion has not changed. Why are we working toward independence for Quebec? There are three reasons: to sign our own treaties, pass our own laws and collect our own taxes. We want to have a tax policy that will make it possible to distribute the wealth much more effectively. We have the means to do it because we have information on this subject. A lack of information about big business restricts my freedom. I do not think that I came here to have my freedom restricted.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us has to do with whether a government is prepared to be accountable. As parliamentarians, we have responsibilities. Whenever we raise issues, such as the cost of justice bills, there is this presumption that somehow we will use that argument solely with regard to whether we would support a justice bill. However, the context of the information we asked for was with regard to vetting the government's projections over the next five years.

If we find that the expenditures on justice bills, for example, will far exceed anybody's reasonable expectations, then there may have to be consequences to other areas of policy and fiscal responsibility. It may impact health care. It may impact seniors and pensions. It may affect many of the important issues of the day on behalf of Canadians.

In the context of the motion before us, this is not an issue of whether justice bills are good or bad. This is an issue of whether parliamentarians have the right to information to make their own assessments rather than the government saying that it is a cabinet confidence and it is not going to tell us.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take advantage of my colleague's comment to pay tribute to him. He is one of the most experienced parliamentarians, and he sits with me on the Standing Committee on Finance. I like to watch him work because he takes all of the information that he has gathered over the years as a parliamentarian and links it all together. That is how he works. Sometimes we agree with him, sometimes we do not. But being able to choose to agree or disagree is the basis of democracy. It is very important to know what is what, how the effect of something is calculated and why things are being done. Then we can have discussions. But when we are kept in the dark, it does not matter what party we belong to. We are all in the dark.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to read two quotes for my colleague, and then I want to ask him a quick question. The first quote is from the Quebec Employers Council:

The Quebec Employers Council would like to see the government follow through on its plan to reduce corporate income tax to 15% for 2012. The corporate tax reduction would increase private investment, both domestic and foreign, which would enhance our productivity, create good jobs and improve living conditions for Canadians.

That was said at the October 25, 2010 meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance. Here is another quote. This one is from Michel Leblanc of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal:

We are asking the government to stick to its target of rolling back the corporate tax to 15% in 2012. Cutting corporate taxes will make businesses more competitive and stimulate job creation across the country.

In light of what these people have said, I would like my colleague to explain to his Quebec constituents why he intends to support the Liberal plan to increase their taxes.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is mixing things up, just as she mixed things up earlier regarding Tim Hortons' ownership and taxes and whether it was in Delaware or Toronto. In this particular case, I am not sure whether she mixed them up consciously, but that is what she did. The Bloc Québécois caucus met with the Conseil du patronat du Québec for an hour and a half, much longer than the 10 minutes it appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance.

I do not know whether the Conservative caucus met with the Conseil du patronat du Québec for an hour and a half, but we did. We discussed the recommendations in the document entitled "Au tour du Québec", and that organization agreed with most of them. We discussed things based on what we had on the table. The purpose of today's Liberal motion is certainly not to turn me into a Liberal. If they thought they had the slightest chance of doing that, they would certainly have their work cut out for them. We want to exercise our power with documentation.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday and the day before, during the debate on Bill C-59, speaker after speaker asked government members to give the costing for the proposed new prison system. Not a single Conservative speaker would provide that information. Yet in committee the other night the deputy minister was asked the same question several times and admitted that she did know what it would cost the government to pass Bill C-59. She was not at liberty to give the information because the government had not given its approval for her to do so.

It is totally outrageous that the government actually knows the true cost of the bill, but refuses to provide it. As in the case of an earlier bill on the two-for-one issue, the government misrepresented the amount by deliberating saying that it would cost \$90 million. The Parliamentary Budget Officer later indicated it would cost between \$10 billion and \$13 billion.

The government is deliberately stretching the truth or hiding the information. Why would it want to hide the information? I am told that in the United States legislative initiatives automatically include a costing. The same is true in Canada, except the government is hiding the costs.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I am going to pick up on my colleague's comments to make the connection with what we are currently studying in the Standing Committee on Finance. We are working on the definition of tax avoidance or tax evasion with regard to tax havens. Tax avoidance is when a person tries to legally pay as little tax as possible. They try to avoid paying too much tax. There are even anti-avoidance rules.

Business of Supply

Questions surround tax evasion. People want to know how much tax evasion occurs, and the government is making up numbers. In this case, these numbers are not accurate. By definition, we do not know how much tax evasion goes on. This morning, I made an analogy with someone who escapes from prison. Do not ask me where he is. If I knew, I would go after him. Tax evasion is the same thing.

There is information control for the sake of ideology, but in the case of tax evasion, in the case of tax avoidance and tax havens, I think there is a lack of leadership by this government. It is asking people to make voluntary declarations and saying the slate will be wiped clean. It is too bad, but that is not how things work. That is a lack of leadership.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what strikes me about this Conservative government is this culture of secrecy, and here that applies mainly to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, whose work is similar to the Auditor General's. He has to be independent of the government, and we are pretty sure he needs to have all the necessary documents.

What does my colleague think about how difficult it is for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to get the documents he needs to do his job properly? Does the government truly have no respect for Parliament?

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

If I were to go to her wonderful riding of Trois Rivières to talk to her constituents without having brought any documentation, she would tell me to come back with something on paper.

I have often had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Page, and I have told him just how much I admire him. He is feeling his way in the dark. He is paddling upstream. He has no information, and there is not a hint of co-operation from the government. The proof is in how the Minister of Finance here sometimes responds to questions about Mr. Page's projections. He looks down on Mr. Page. That is disrespectful. The Minister of Finance needs to show more respect for the Parliamentary Budget Officer because he is our Parliamentary Budget Officer.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Vancouver East.

Normally I am pleased to debate issues in the House and to bring the concerns of Hamilton Mountain residents to bear on the important public policy matters that affect their everyday lives. Issues like jobs, pensions and health care are all issues that merit much greater attention from the government.

Today we are using up valuable House time on an issue that should never have had to come before us. We are calling on the government to release information that we should have had as a matter of right.

Let us just go back to the genesis of this issue. In November, the Standing Committee on Finance asked the government to release two things: the costs associated with its justice bills and the

projections of corporate profits before taxes. In the past, governments have routinely released such information, and that is as it should be because access to information is essential for members of Parliament to carry out our jobs.

It is worth reminding Conservative members in the House that in our system of responsible government, the government must seek Parliament's authority to spend public funds. That means that Parliament has an obligation and a responsibility to scrutinize the government's books and to hold the government to account. The ability to do that is the very cornerstone of our democracy. However, instead of sharing that essential information with members of the House and with Canadians, the Conservatives are using every trick in the book to avoid accountability.

In response to the standing committee's request for information, the government sent back curt responses that such information constituted a "cabinet confidence". That is completely absurd, and it is in contravention of the Access to Information and Privacy Act.

Let me remind members what that act says. Section 69(1)(b) states the cabinet confidence defence does not apply to "discussion papers the purpose of which is to present background explanations, analyses of problems or policy options to Council for consideration by Council in making decisions". It goes on to say, "(i) if the decisions to which the discussion papers relate have been made public".

Both in the case of corporate tax cuts and the costs of the government's crime agenda, the decisions are public. Laws were drafted to comply with these decisions, they were debated in the House and they were passed by this chamber. It is absurd to maintain that they are somehow still private. They could not be any more public. Therefore, the background documents with respect to their costing should be available to anyone with \$5 and a form, let alone a branch of Parliament acting under due authority.

The Conservative government ran on a platform of greater transparency and accountability. That is how it promised to differentiate itself from the previous Martin government, when the Liberals were mired in the sponsorship scandal.

I want to remind members that it was only five years ago that the Prime Minister wrote an impassioned op-ed piece in the *Montreal Gazette* in defence of government transparency. Here is what he said:

Information is the lifeblood of a democracy...Without adequate access to key information about government policies and programs, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions, and incompetent or corrupt governance can be hidden under a cloak of secrecy.

Back then he was upset because he believed the Liberal government was intent on weakening the Access to Information Act, which is the law that gives Canadians the right to request federal documents.

Now, almost five years later, that same Access to Information Act, which the Prime Minister defended so vigorously is in shambles. Despite the fact that the act mandates a response within 30 days, Canadians seeking access to information regularly complain that many departments now take as long as a year to release files. When they finally do, records are often so heavily censored that they are unreadable and essentially useless. At one time, the act was a cornerstone to holding governments to account.

Business of Supply

Records released under the law have exposed government wrongdoing and the waste of tax dollars.

It was an access request from the *Ottawa Citizen* that led to the resignation of Liberal defence minister Art Eggleton after it revealed in May 2002 that his office had awarded an untendered contract to his former girlfriend.

Access requests from the *Globe and Mail* helped uncover revelations that members of the Liberal Party were involved in illegal dealings involving federal sponsorship and advertising budgets, a scandal that led to the Gomery Commission in 2004.

The Canadian Alliance, later to morph into the Conservatives, was one of the most effective users of the law. Party researchers used it to obtain records that helped expose the so-called billion dollar boondoggle as well as other cases of poorly managed tax dollars.

• (1140)

However, that was then and this is now. Once in government, the Conservatives immediately clamped down on the release of information to the point where information commissioner Robert Marleau, head of the independent watchdog that oversees the law, complained in 2008 that the government had created a “fog over information”.

It is now at the point where Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, has publicly said that MPs are losing our ability to do our constitutionally mandated jobs because the growing government secrecy means that MPs lack the information needed to cost new initiatives.

By any objective measure, government secrecy has reached unprecedented levels in Canada. Even a landmark ruling by the Speaker of the House has done little to ensure greater transparency by this Conservative government. Members will remember that seminal decision only too well, because it dealt with the release of documents pertaining to Afghan detainees. When the Speaker finally weighed in, he clearly upheld Parliament's right to have access to information.

Yet here we are again. Motions to release information duly passed by a standing committee of the House are being wilfully ignored by the government. The refusal of the Conservatives to release the information requested is, at its base, a fundamental attack on Parliament.

Lest anyone who is watching this debate on television today thinks that this is an isolated incident, let me be clear. Parliament is just one of many public institutions that has come under attack from the Conservative government. In fact, Jim Travers of the *Toronto Star* described the persistent government attack on Canada's institutions as vandalism. The independence of the regulators and senior civil servants has never been so brutalized.

The list is long. Linda Keen, the president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, was fired by the government for doing her job. As Auditor General Sheila Fraser observed, that sacking had a “chilling effect” throughout the whole civil service. It now realizes that anyone who criticizes the Conservative government is putting his or her job on the line.

Here is a short list of those who have been told they will not be reappointed after challenging the government's world view: Paul Kennedy, head of the RCMP Public Complaints Commission; Pat Stogran, Veterans Affairs Ombudsman; Peter Tinsley, chairman of the Military Police Complaints Commission, who was investigating the torture of Afghan detainees; and Marty Cheliak, head of the Canadian firearms program. The head of Elections Canada, Philip Kingsley, was driven out of his role, and his successor, Marc Mayrand, has been subjected to constant attack, including a number of court cases against Elections Canada by the Conservative Party.

There have been others, too, who have not just been summarily dispatched from public service, but whose positions have been eliminated by the government, representing a loss to all Canadians. In that category are: Dr. Art Carty, science adviser to the Prime Minister; Karen Kraft Sloan, ambassador for environment and sustainable development; and Jack Anawak, ambassador for circumpolar affairs. Those important jobs are all gone.

Then, of course, there are those who find themselves attacked publicly for having the temerity to criticize the government. Foreign Affairs official Richard Colvin, Canada's chief statistician Munir Sheikh and Kevin Page are just three of the most prominent examples.

The Conservative government will go to any length to silence its critics, including shutting down the very place in which I am speaking today.

It was that prorogation of Parliament which suddenly made the public sit up and take notice. Silencing MPs by locking the doors of Parliament to suit the Conservatives' narrowly partisan agenda created a huge backlash by Canadians. They realized that the silencing of MPs meant their voices were no longer being heard in the single most important democratic institution in this country. The Prime Minister's obsession with secrecy and control was eroding their democratic freedoms. In the end, it is that public outrage that may well prove to be the government's downfall.

Canadians want transparency and accountability from the government and they deserve nothing less. That is why I will be proud to vote in support of the motion before us today.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to follow my colleague from Hamilton in the House today. She made some excellent points in her presentation.

I rise in the House today to speak in support of this motion that has been put forward by the official opposition.

I have been a member of Parliament now for 14 years. I cannot remember a time when we have had so many motions come forward where we have had to go to extraordinary lengths to compel the government to provide very basic disclosures so that parliamentarians can do their job.

The motion before us today, as has been pointed out, stems from the work of the Standing Committee on Finance when it was attempting to determine some basic facts last year. It wanted to know what the true costs were for the implementation of various justice bills that had been passed by the House, as well as the costs to the justice system for jail time. These are basic facts that we need to know. That is one item.

Business of Supply

The finance committee also attempted to determine the costs of the government tax cuts to the largest corporations. Again, this is basic information that the finance committee needed in order to do its work.

It is quite incredible that what ensued from this premise is basically a battle that has taken place between Parliament and the government. It is not the first time that we have seen it. It is quite shocking that we are here today debating this motion and trying to force the government through a motion of Parliament to provide information so that members of Parliament can actually do their job.

I remember last year when we had the incredible situation in Afghanistan and there were documents that had not been released by the government. As a result of the historic Speaker's ruling from last April, wherein he ruled that parliamentary privilege did indeed require that members need information in order to do their work. As a result of that ruling, a special committee was set up to come to terms with a proposal that would allow those documents to be released. The committee actually was set up. The NDP members decided not to participate because we felt that the parameters around the special committee that was set up were so severe and so restrictive that it would be very difficult for any information to be released. Ironically, since that committee has been set up, in actual fact not one single document has ever been released. That is another story but is very much related to the matter that is before us today.

Here we are again dealing with another issue requiring disclosure and transparency of information. However, what underlies what is before us is the fact that I believe we are facing the most authoritarian and secretive government that we have ever had in the history of this country.

I remember when the Conservative government was elected. It claimed it was elected on a mandate of accountability and transparency. We have gone through the whole sponsorship scandal in Quebec. We have had the Gomery Commission. The Conservatives were riding high and claiming they would change the way things were done, that when conducting business they would do so keeping accountability, better access to information and protection of whistleblowers in mind.

I have heard the government House leader say that many times, over and over again. I think the Conservatives dream it in their sleep. Their first bill was the accountability bill and yet look at where we are today. We are now in a place where members are unable to perform their duties as members of Parliament. They are unable to function adequately on standing committees because they cannot get the basic information required to analyze bills and expenditures, to come to conclusions about government priorities, to determine where effective spending is taking place and where waste is taking place, and to know what the true costs are of some of the legislative measures that have come forward.

●(1145)

I find that very demoralizing. It is very demoralizing for the Canadian public. It adds to the level of cynicism that we see in the public arena about politicians and about the political process.

When we add to that the closure of Parliament itself, the prorogation that has taken place at least twice under the Prime

Minister, that this place has actually been shut down, the doors have been locked, we are not even allowed to come to work to do our job on behalf of our constituents, is really quite shocking. People feel very disturbed that our democracy is being undermined and eroded incrementally, but when we look back and look at the bigger picture, we begin to realize just how much things have changed.

In 2009, when I was involved in one of the committees debating one of these justice bills, Bill C-15, mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes, I tried very valiantly to find out what the costs would be for the implementation of that bill, what it would mean for provincial systems, what it would mean federally. It was impossible to get that information. There was no evidence that was forthcoming. Yet, we were faced with a Conservative government that was hell-bent on a propaganda campaign that the bill would solve drug problems in local communities but it could not provide any evidence that mandatory minimum sentences would work and it could not provide any evidence as to what it would actually cost.

As we have seen, we have had some estimates from the Parliamentary Budget Office, the one independent office that we do have, that were grossly higher than what the government itself has estimated. But, still, we do not have the true and full picture of what that bill, Bill C-15, would cost, never mind all the other bills that have come forward.

The motion that is before us today affirms the undisputed privileges of Parliament under our Constitution for the government to produce uncensored documents when requested. It is a very important motion.

The fact that we have to bring it forward in this House, that we have to debate it, that we have to vote on it, is a reflection of the seriousness of the situation that we are facing, that there is a now a battle that is taking place between Parliament and the Government of Canada. It is not a battle that we want to have. We want to work in an environment where disclosure does happen, where information is flowing, where officials can come forward and provide information and not live in fear of punishment or retribution because they have disclosed information. All of that seems to have gone.

We are now living in an environment of secrecy, an environment of political control through the Prime Minister's Office, an environment where people are afraid to speak out, an environment where the standing committees of Parliament can longer function and do their job. That is why this motion is before us today.

I am sure that the motion will carry. As the motion outlines, it would order the government to provide these documents to the Standing Committee on Finance by March 7.

The reason that we need these documents is to make an objective evaluation and determination about what the costs of the corporate tax cuts are. There has been a lot of debate about the corporate tax cuts. Members of the NDP were very concerned about how the public purse has been, in effect, robbed, as a result of corporate tax cuts. It was \$6 billion in the latest round.

Ironically, these corporate tax cuts were started by a former Liberal government. They were supported by the Liberal opposition in recent budgets.

Business of Supply

We need an examination of the real costs of these corporate tax cuts. We need to have an evaluation of what the impact would be on our public services, our community services. This is a very core issue to how government functions and how Parliament functions in terms of making a balance between revenues and expenditures and priorities as to where those revenues should go.

• (1150)

Having this information and understanding the real costs of these cuts is imperative to the work that we do. I support the motion, and I demand, as other MPs are demanding, that this information be disclosed by the government.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter has been going on for some time and it has not so much to do with anything else other than the unaccountability of the government, the secrecy, the control to make sure that there is no knowledge available for members to be able to do their job, whether that be financial projections for the next five years.

We know the Parliamentary Budgetary Officer has significant disagreement with the government's representation of how it is going to balance the budget within five years. The information we are asking for is going to allow us to assess it rather than the government telling us that this is the way it is, and by the way, the basis of the assumptions are cabinet confidence.

This is a violation of the privileges of parliamentarians and a contempt for the parliamentary system in which we operate. This is our system. We have to operate.

Does the hon. member believe that the government will maybe harm Canadians by hiding away this information and not allow us the opportunity to anticipate the consequences of its fiscal irresponsibility?

• (1155)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe what is taking place here, the amount of harm that is being unleashed concerning the public interest, which is being undermined, but also the harm on the work of parliamentarians is incredible. I do not think we have ever faced such a situation. Now we begin to see a pattern emerging.

As I said, this is the most secretive, autocratic government we have ever faced. This is a government that wants to shut down the legitimate work of the opposition.

Our system is based on the notion that a government has to face an opposition, that the opposition has the right to information, the right to analyze, the right to present alternatives, the right to challenge. All of those rights are being completely undermined by shutting down every system, whether it is the work in committees, disclosure of documents, silencing bureaucrats, every element of the work we do is being shut down by the government. Then, of course, the prorogation itself is just adding insult to injury.

We are facing a very serious situation and it certainly does create a lot of harm.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we were debating the bill to end the two-for-one remand credit, the Minister of Public Safety, when pressed, admitted that his

estimate was that the bill was going to cost the system \$90 million. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated it would be between \$10 billion and \$13 billion. That is one huge difference.

The Conservatives have been asked repeatedly on debate on Bill C-59 over the last couple of days, and every single one of them has avoided and hidden from responding to that question. At committee the other night on Bill C-59 the deputy minister of public safety, when she was asked if she knew the answer, said she did know the answer. She knew the cost of each one of these crime bills, including Bill C-59, but she could not tell the committee. She could not tell the committee because the government will not let her tell the committee.

Would the member like to comment further on what happened at the committee the other night?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is just incredulous. It is outrageous. The member uses the example of one bill and the gap between what the Parliamentary Budget Officer says and the government says is the cost of that bill, \$90 million, and then it is into the billions of dollars. This is astounding. This is why we have to get to the bottom of it.

Bill C-59, which we just passed yesterday, was rammed through by the government in a matter of a couple of days. The committee meeting was held for a few hours at 11 o'clock at night. In fact, there were witnesses who wanted to come who could not make it because of the short time. This is not democracy.

For a deputy minister to say she knows the information but she is not going to disclose it to us is an affront to every element and principle of democracy and to how the House functions. This is why it has to stop. This is why this motion has to be passed and implemented.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by informing you that I will be sharing my time with my former leader, our colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

[*English*]

The motion currently before the House, which my colleagues spoke to earlier this morning, lays out some very basic principles of parliamentary democracy. As the House leader for the New Democratic Party correctly noted a few minutes ago, this is about the ability of elected representatives to have information to base our decisions on as important matters as votes in the House that often involve the spending of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

Business of Supply

The government has been one of the most secretive governments in Canadian history. Many times we have seen its efforts to withhold or manipulate freedom of information or the access to information process. They have stonewalled parliamentary committees. They have even written manuals on how to disrupt committees, if at some point they see a committee headed in a direction that they as government members do not like or, probably more likely, which some junior assistant in the Prime Minister's office does not like as he watches his television in the Langevin Building. They have gone to a great lengths to withhold information from the Canadian people and their elected representatives in the House.

Therefore, this motion once again seeks to require the government to do what constitutionally and democratically it should want to do, and that is to make available accurate, reliable information to parliamentarians and Canadians on matters as important as the spending of billions and billions of dollars.

The motion seeks in particular to obtain the necessary information with respect to the irresponsible borrowing of money to cut corporate taxes for the largest, most profitable corporations in the country, and also with respect to the justice agenda, which the government wants to trumpet all the time but for which it refuses to even identify the cost associated with many of these regressive and failed American policies.

Another area that is of great concern to us is the government's continuing refusal to make public information with respect to another very important expenditure, its proposed expenditure for the acquisition of the F-35 stealth bombers. With the amount of money involved, these things should not be called stealth fighters but "wealth fighters". In fact they are more likely to be "wealth bombers".

The government has, on every occasion, given half information or information that is unreliable, or, in many cases, it has refused outright to give members of Parliament information relating to the expenditure of the largest procurement in military history. It is proposing to do this massive military procurement on a sole-source basis without any public competition whatsoever.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives announced their intention to purchase 65 fighter planes without a bidding process. They made the announcement in the middle of the summer, hoping to avoid criticism. They did not do so when Parliament was sitting last spring. They decided to wait and announce the purchase when the members were no longer in Ottawa and Parliament was not in a position to ask any serious questions.

Even worse, the Conservatives refuse to make public any of the details regarding their purported study and why they chose the F-35, when we know that they did not even take the time or make the effort to seriously look at other options before deciding to purchase the F-35, probably for ideological reasons.

The Conservatives refuse to reveal the actual cost of this choice, this airplane. It was initially valued at about \$50 million per plane. Then it went up to \$70 million per plane and now it has gone up to \$90 million per plane, and it just keeps going up. They refuse to come clean to Canadians regarding the price of that fighter jet.

[*English*]

The Conservatives have also refused to tell us what the real in-service support cost will be. In-service support for 20 years costs at least as much as the acquisition price of the airplane. All of the experts have been clear that at minimum we can double the acquisition price to see the 20-year in-service support cost.

The Conservatives try to make us believe that the in-service support cost for the F-35 will in fact be less than the acquisition cost, which they have evaluated, without any proof or information, at \$9 billion. They are pretending that the in-service support would add another \$7 billion, for a total price tag of \$16 billion.

On this side of the House, we have not been able to get any information as to how the government arrived at these numbers. The member for Vancouver South asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to look into this matter last spring. We wait with great interest for a report that will hopefully shed some light on the real cost and the real financial impact of both the acquisition and the in-service support.

The government has refused to make public the statement of requirements for the replacement of our CF-18 fighter jets. The Minister of National Defence claimed, in a rather surreal moment at a committee meeting we had to force in September, that the statement of requirements was protected by copyright.

That would make no sense at all if the statement of requirements were drafted by the Canadian Department of National Defence. However, if the statement of requirements were drafted by an American aircraft manufacturer, that might explain why they might claim a copyright privilege on what should in fact be an internal Canadian defence department document.

The government has refused to make that statement of requirements public. The Minister of Public Works and Government Services, at that same committee, admitted that the department had received it, but the government has refused to make that public.

The Conservatives have claimed that the F-35 is the only plane that meets Canada's air force needs. Yet at the defence committee, we heard at least four other aircraft manufacturers say that they currently produced an aircraft that met the only requirements the government has made public in a document they called, the high-level mandatory requirements.

There are four other companies, therefore, that are saying they would be happy to submit to a competitive public process. Based on the only information the government has made public, they believe their aircraft would meet those requirements. That is why the only way to bring clarity and responsibility to this reckless financial process is to have a public competition and allow those companies to tell Canadians and the Government of Canada what they are willing to do, not only for our air force but also for the aerospace industry.

Business of Supply

•(1205)

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, as I said, the Conservatives claim they looked at other options. However, they refuse to give us any information about how many times they visited other aerospace companies. We know they went often to Fort Worth, Texas, to visit Lockheed Martin and look at the F-35.

I asked the person responsible for the project, Colonel Burt, to give us those figures. He told us he would let us know how many times they visited Boeing, Eurofighter, Saab and Lockheed Martin. It has been a few months now, and we have not heard anything. The government must be embarrassed that it did not bother looking at any other aircraft.

The Conservatives have been spreading other falsehoods. They are saying that it was the Liberal Party that committed to purchasing that plane in 1997. On the contrary, it was a Liberal government that supported the development of that aircraft, which generated nearly half a billion dollars in economic spinoffs for our aerospace industries. Until 2008, the same Conservative ministers, including Jim Prentice, who was the industry minister at the time, and Michael Fortier, the former public works and government services minister, issued press releases from the Government of Canada confirming that continued participation in the development phase of the aircraft in no way meant that the federal government was committed to purchasing it.

[*English*]

If the government were saying two years ago that continued participation in the development phase of the airplane in no way obliged Canada to buy the plane, then it is surprising to hear the government then stand up to say, “No, it was a Liberal government 14 years ago that made the decision to buy that airplane”. This is another example of the government's inability to come clean with Canadians.

This is really an issue of democracy. If the government wants to spend billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars, it owes it to Canadians to come clean on the real cost and to show, with documents, what it is asking Parliament to vote for.

That is why this motion is so important for Parliament and for democracy.

•(1210)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will not have enough time to refute the legion of things that were wrong in my hon. colleague's statement.

An expert is someone who agrees with you. In the Liberals' case, one of the experts they are relying on is someone who has not been part of the process for six years. The process has evolved beyond that. They continually quote numbers that relate to the American program and not Canada's program. They continually mislead Canadians on that fact, and they do it so often it cannot be accidental.

Yes, the purchase of the F-35s is an ideological decision, and the ideology behind it is to give the men and women of the Canadian

Forces the tool they need to do the jobs we will give them over the next 40 years. That is our ideology: to equip the men and women of the Canadian Forces, to keep Canadian industry current, and to give them the tools they need to survive and to do their jobs at home and abroad.

The information on the visits was given, so the hon. member has completely misstated the facts. The Liberals do have the information on the number of visits that were made by the experts. The process we followed in Canada was the same as the process followed in nine other countries. The experts all came to the same conclusion. It is not an accident that the F-35 was chosen.

The member and his party should get onboard, stop misleading Canadians and get with the program they started. This is the common sense evolution of that program.

Get on with it.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary can shout at the end of his comments; it does not make them any more real or truthful.

The parliamentary secretary says an expert is somebody who says something one wants to hear. For the Conservatives, the experts they rely on are those that the Prime Minister's office bullies into saying things it knows may in fact not be true. If the Conservative government relies on experts, it should then make public the expert surveys or analyses it has. If it had people who were competent and qualified to evaluate these particular airplanes or this particular purchase, then it would have made their analyses public.

The parliamentary secretary says that the Liberals rely on American numbers. Of course we do, because they are the only numbers that we can reliably get because the government refuses to give us accurate financial information.

It is understandable why it is a bit awkward for us to constantly have to wait for the next Pentagon or Congressional Budget Office report. It is because there is nothing but absolute silence and stonewalling from the government. Thank God, the U.S. Pentagon and Congress are more transparent with their elected representatives than the Conservative government is.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberal opposition day motion specifically calls for the government to produce the costs of its crime agenda, specifically the costs related to the individual crime bills it has introduced.

The committee dealt with Bill C-59 just two nights ago. In response to questions by Liberal and NDP members, the deputy minister specifically informed the committee that she knew what the costs of implementation were for Bill C-59, but she was not prepared to provide the information because she did not have the government's approval. She basically said she was being muzzled by the government. This was the Deputy Minister of Public Safety at a committee hearing being asked a direct question by the member for Ajax—Pickering and others about this, and she is being muzzled by the government.

She has the information, the government has the information. Why will they not release it?

Business of Supply

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona has identified yet another compelling example, in this case a very recent one from this week, of the government refusing to make important information public before it asks the House and the other place to vote on important government legislation.

I am not surprised that the government has bullied the Deputy Minister of Public Safety into silence. At least it did not force her to mislead the House or the committee, as we saw recently with some of the horrible circumstances surrounding the Minister of International Cooperation.

The government bullied the Ethics Commissioner into retirement, fired the head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and bullied the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. Surely we should not be surprised that a deputy minister who serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister would be muzzled and forced to appear before a parliamentary committee in an expedited and rushed process and not give accurate or reliable information whatsoever about the cost of a regressive criminal justice measure.

I know my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville has some very strong views on the regressive nature of the justice legislation the government has been asking Parliament to swallow, and I look forward to his comments.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the question is, how far does the Conservative government plan to go in its attack against the proper functioning of Canadian democracy? This is the basic question that would once again have to be asked if the government were to vote against the motion of the member for Wascana.

A hostage to its culture of secrecy, the government is turning its back on Canadians and depriving them and their elected officials of the right to obtain essential information that the government has no real reason to hide.

It is unbelievable. Like the member for Beauséjour said, the government expects the members of this House to support, without argument, the purchase of extremely expensive warplanes, while this same government made its choice without holding a bidding process, without knowing whether these were the best planes in this post-cold war era, and without providing updated estimates or specific analyses from the Department of Finance regarding the cost of purchasing and maintaining these planes. All we know is that the cost will be exorbitant.

Canadians have the right to this information. It is their money that is being spent. Their elected officials need this information to make an informed decision. This is not a matter of state secrecy. The government must tell Canadians how much the F-35s are going to cost them based on the Department of Finance's most recent estimates and analyses. How much? Why is the government so afraid to reveal this amount?

It is even more important that we obtain this figure because the Auditor General has already criticized the government for cost

overruns and extremely long delays in the area of military procurement.

Another thing the government is hiding is the cost of its megaprison program, its delusional prison regime. Against all common sense, the government is stubbornly insisting on bringing a bad anti-crime strategy to Canada, a strategy that failed everywhere, including Great Britain and Australia, and that the Americans themselves no longer want to use because it does not reduce the rate of crime or recidivism. On the contrary, this simplistic strategy drove these rates up. It overcrowded prisons and clogged the prison system forcing governments to bleed themselves dry to pay for these megaprisons.

What this all boils down to is that there is less money available to help victims, less money to equip our police officers, less money to prevent crime, and less money for healthcare, education and the environment.

[*English*]

On January 7 in *The Washington Post*, and as reported in *The Kingston Whig-Standard* today, Newt Gingrich is urging American legislators to think and act with courage and creativity to “save on costs without compromising public safety by intelligently reducing their prison populations”.

Newt Gingrich is not precisely a lunatic leftist intellectual. In talking about the recidivism rate, Gingrich describes it as a catastrophic disaster and says that “half of the prisoners released this year are expected to be back in prison within three years”.

[*Translation*]

Do we want that in Canada? Absolutely not, especially when everyone knows and can prove that the crime rate in Canada is going down thanks to the effective and rigorous strategy used by the Liberal governments to fight crime and protect Canadians.

This Conservative government, which has already reduced its budget to help victims by 43% and its budget to prevent crime by 70%, needs to tell Canadians how much it is going to cost them to import the mistakes that others are trying to correct.

The government is racking up bills, but refuses to put a value on them. It is unheard of. Where is the transparency it used to go on about? Once again, the Conservative government is flouting the Access to Information Act. Under section 69 of the act, the cost analyses of bills are not cabinet confidences.

It is insulting: they have to nerve to demand that parliamentarians support a litany of bills, on behalf of Canadians, without disclosing the government's cost estimates for those bills. The government is mocking people and flouting parliamentary democracy. It is showing contempt for the people and their representatives.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer puts a figure on these extravagant expenses. He is warning us about the additional billions of dollars the Conservatives' prison plan could cost the federal and provincial governments. The government is disputing the findings of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, but where is the government's credibility? Let the government make its own analyses public, and then we will see how serious it is or how irresponsible and incompetent it is.

Business of Supply

Let us look at the most recent ill-conceived bill, Bill C-59, which the government got passed quickly yesterday with the Bloc's help. Instead of targeting only major white collar criminals, this piece of legislation will mean that thousands of petty criminals who are ready to return to society, rehabilitated, and whose risk of recidivism is low will unnecessarily be kept in prison at high cost. We are talking about 1,500 people a year, more than 60% of whom are women. The cost of this exorbitant measure: \$130 million a year. In the meantime, there is nothing to provide more resources to help investigators find the fraudsters, nothing to accelerate the legal process to recover the funds lost by the victims and nothing to help the victims recover their money.

Unlike what it claims, the government does nothing for victims. On the contrary, its appalling policies will increase crime and, therefore, the number of victims. Canadian taxpayers have a right to know how much this mess will cost them. It is their money, after all. And how much will it cost the provinces, which are struggling with huge deficits and which do not know how to pay for the increasing costs of health care, schools and universities?

Why is the government so afraid of making these figures public? No doubt because they will expose the Conservatives' incompetence and ideological blindness. Imagine. The government wants to waste up to \$6 billion a year in borrowed money to fund additional tax cuts for corporations, when it has already sunk us into a deficit of over \$50 billion, when corporate taxes in Canada are already 25% lower than in the United States, and when the Minister of Finance himself thinks that there are better ways to stimulate the economy. If the government wants the luxury of having such a costly and questionable policy, it should at least have the decency to back it up with figures.

The official opposition is not asking for the moon. It is simply asking the finance department to make public its projections about pre-tax corporate profits. That is routine information that the department made public up until 2005, that is, as long as there was a Liberal government. It is not a state secret.

But I am talking about the government and the finance department when really it is the Prime Minister who is at fault. He controls everything and wants to impose his culture of secrecy and his penchant for withholding information on everyone. He is keeping a minister who, on two occasions, not just one, misled the House. And he allows his ministers to ferociously attack the Parliamentary Budget Officer instead of engaging in an open, adult dialogue with him.

This Prime Minister prefers to personally attack the Leader of the Opposition in petty, pathetic televised propaganda instead of providing him, and the rest of us, with the information that we need and that we have every right to see in order to do our job, which is passing legislation that is good for Canadians, with full knowledge of the facts.

● (1220)

The Conservative government, with its culture of secrecy, is threatening the proper workings of Canadian democracy. This time, it has achieved the impossible. It has beaten its own record for withholding information. The government needs to recognize that and can start by complying with the motion by the member for

Wascana and producing all the documents requested by the Standing Committee on Finance.

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, the last time this nation faced a recession in the late nineties, the Liberal government at the time cut health care transfers to the provinces, which created a massive surplus for the government. However, that affected folks in my riding of Cambridge because they could not get medical doctors. It took almost a decade to solve that problem.

The Liberals made cuts to the military, which led to the decade of darkness. They made cuts to science and technology, which led to the brain drain.

We have taken a different approach. We have cut taxes and increased funding for transfers and science and technology, and it is working.

Does the member not believe that cutting taxes will lead to a better quality of life for Canadians, that it will lead to more job opportunities for Canadians, and that cutting taxes, not raising them, will secure our economy now and for the future?

● (1225)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, when we left government in 2005, there was a surplus and all the provinces had a surplus. Canada was considered to be in the best shape one could imagine. Now we have a deficit of \$56 billion that the Conservatives started before the recession. What is the government's plan to address this deficit? Where are the analysts? Where are the numbers?

We are concerned by the fact that many of the Conservatives' plans are costly and bad policies. We want the analysis on the table. The government should table the numbers. We as legislators in this House have the right to see that information. We need to see the cost of the big jets that they want to buy to ensure the cost is the actual amount they claim it to be. We need to see the cost of the government's big jail agenda, which failed in the United States. It will be costly and ineffective.

If the government has numbers that challenge what I have said, then it just has to table them and debate them as we should be doing in a parliamentary democracy.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, does the member think we live in a just society under the Conservative regime given that most of the bills are justice bills? Let us put it in that paradigm.

What happens in the justice system when information is kept from the defence, which is what the government is doing to the opposition? In a court of law, the whole proceedings would be thrown out because the defence was not given information it required. If the same were done here, it could invalidate everything that the government has done.

Business of Supply

Does the member think that by not giving the opposition the information it needs that is a fair and just way to go about doing things?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, Canada is a very solid democracy and I am confident that it will survive the attacks of the government. Canada is a good functioning democracy.

However, I have never seen such a thing. I have never heard of a government not answering questions. The debate today is about why the Conservatives will not table information requested by their colleagues. It has nothing to do with anything else but that. The Conservatives have not answered one question about that. They have not addressed this issue.

Why are the Conservatives hiding so much information from us? Why are they hiding it from Canadians? Are they embarrassed by the real cost of their big jail agenda and by the real cost of the jets they purchased? Are they afraid to show the real costs to Canadians? What would be the benefit of additional tax cuts to corporations at a time when we have a deficit of \$56 billion?

Those are legitimate questions but we have not received any answers. This is unacceptable. This is a shame. The government may not respect Canadians or democracy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I rise to debate another misguided Liberal motion on our plan to reduce taxes for Canadians and get tough on crime.

Whenever a Liberal talks, it seems it is about raising taxes. We prefer to take another tack and talk about lowering taxes for Canadians.

It is a good thing our government has a long record of providing tax relief for hard-working Canadians such that I could continue all day, which I am sure all members here would enjoy.

The Liberals could also talk long about their own tax record. Unfortunately, it would be to discuss all the ways they would like to increase taxes, such as a GST hike, an iPod tax, a carbon tax, and it goes on and on.

Let us look at our Conservative government's tax record. Since taking power, we have cut over 100 taxes. We are cutting taxes in every way that we collect them, from excise taxes and sales taxes, to business taxes and personal taxes.

One of our first actions on taking office was to reduce the GST by 1%, to 6%, but we did not stop there. We then reduced the GST by another 1%, to 5%.

Of course, whenever we cut taxes, we hear howls from the Liberals. Indeed, the Liberals were so incensed that we would lower Canadian taxes that the member for Kings—Hants, when asked if he would repeal the GST cuts, said, "Absolutely". He was joined later by the Liberal leader, who would infamously say, "I'm not going to take a GST tax hike off the table".

Thankfully for Canadians and their wallets, the tax-and-spend Liberals are not in power and a Conservative government that believes in lower taxes is.

This is a government that believes in lower taxes for Canadians, like our seniors, and has demonstrated this with tax relief measures such as pension income splitting. This is one of the most significant tax changes for seniors and is saving some seniors thousands of dollars every year on their income taxes. This is a move that was praised by seniors' groups. The New Brunswick Senior Citizens' Federation said, "On behalf of the 21,000 seniors citizens we represent in New Brunswick, we commend you for introducing the opportunity for our seniors to utilize pension income splitting. This change will mean additional moneys for our seniors who are mostly on a very limited fixed income".

We also doubled the pension income credit and increased the age credit amount by over \$2,000, but our Conservative government did not stop there. We introduced the child fitness tax credit to help parents get their kids into organized sports. We introduced the child tax credit to provide much needed assistance for families across this country. We introduced the public transit tax credit to help people make the decision to take public transit. In our local newspaper this morning when it looked at a raise in the cost of public transit in our community, one of the young students said, "I have that public transit tax credit, so it helps ease the pain".

We lowered Canadians' personal income taxes and, perhaps more important, we introduce a tax-free savings account, the most important personal savings vehicle since the introduction of the RRSP. Nearly five million Canadians are already benefiting from having their capital gains earned tax free.

In the end, the most important thing is what our record of tax relief means for families. Our tax relief measures mean a lot for Canadians. The tax savings for a typical family is \$3,000. Let me say that again: a tax savings of \$3,000 for the average family. That means a lot for the average family in Canada. I am proud to be part of a government that has made that happen.

Let me turn again to the topic that brings us here today: our tax relief for businesses. Let us review some of the ways our government has reduced taxes for businesses.

We reduced the federal capital tax in 2006 which was seriously harming business investment in Canada. To encourage provinces to remove their capital taxes, we introduced the temporary financial incentive to help provinces remove their capital taxes. With our help, by 2012, capital taxes will be eliminated. We reduced the small business tax rate to 11% in 2008. We also increased the income eligible for this lower tax rate from \$300,000 to \$500,000. It was a move that recognized that innovative and growth-oriented small businesses play a vital role in the ongoing health of our economy.

Business of Supply

● (1230)

To help Canadian businesses weather the global economic storm, in Canada's economic action plan we also introduced a number of temporary tax measures to stimulate the economy. For example, to promote the exploration and development of Canada's rich mineral resources, the mineral exploration tax credit was extended in budget 2010. This temporary 15% credit provides important benefits in terms of employment and investment, especially for rural and remote communities. This is especially helpful in my home province of British Columbia. In the words of the Mining Association of British Columbia:

With British Columbia's mining industry emerging from recent economic challenges, MABC is encouraged by this federal budget's initiatives that will help ensure that recovery does not falter.

MABC was pleased to see...a one year extension of the 15 percent mineral exploration tax credit...combined with a stay-the-course plan to continue reducing corporate income tax rates...important to the recovery currently under way in the mining sector.

As the previous quote alluded to, we are lowering business taxes from over 22% in 2006 to 15% by 2012, as passed in 2007 by Parliament.

Canadians are benefiting from permanent tax relief that is broad-based, fiscally durable and structurally sound. Lowering taxes on job creators means that more jobs are created. It is a simple calculation, but an important one. It is one that has been confirmed by leading economists in Canada. The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters as well as Jack Mintz, one of Canada's top private sector economists, have shown that lowering business taxes means thousands upon thousands of more jobs for Canadians.

At a time when we are exiting a global economic recession, now is not the time to hike taxes on job creators. Liberals used to know that, but instead, they have decided to turn a blind eye for cheap political gain.

The member for Kings—Hants knew this when he said, “We cannot increase corporate taxes without losing corporate investment. If we lose corporate investment, we have a less productive economy.... That means fewer jobs. That means more poverty”.

The member for Wascana knew this when he said, “Canadians deserve the facts” and that the NDP leader's “numbers are simply wrong, and he is trying to obscure the true benefits of business tax cuts, namely jobs and economic growth”.

I agree with the member for Wascana. Canadians do deserve the facts.

If we want higher wages, more jobs and a higher standard of living, we need the business investments that result from our government's tax cuts on job creators. Are our efforts paying off? Without a doubt, yes. Compared to other major industrialized countries, Canada is indeed weathering the recession better than most. Our strong economic, financial and fiscal fundamentals have contributed to that success, along with our economic action plan.

Over 460,000 more Canadians are working today than in July 2009, the strongest job growth in the G7. Compare this labour market recovery to the ongoing labour market challenges in the United States, where employment remains well below its pre-

recession level. Tax relief for Canadian businesses has without a doubt contributed to Canada's relative success.

Whether the Liberals really appreciate it or not, tax relief has helped build a solid foundation for economic growth, job creation and better prosperity. Improving the competitiveness of the Canadian tax system of course requires collaboration among all governments to help Canadian businesses compete globally. Fortunately, reducing business tax makes so much sense the provinces are following our example. B.C., Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba have also reduced their provincial taxes on businesses.

The Liberal Ontario finance minister, Dwight Duncan, is a stalwart defender, saying, “Scrapping...corporate tax cuts would hurt the fragile economic recovery by raising taxes on the...forestry and automotive sectors”. He said that scrapping them is “about the most shortsighted, dumb, public policy pronouncement one could envision”. Liberals proposing a shortsighted dumb public policy? Shocking, I know.

The fact is that along with the provinces we are helping Canada build a strong foundation for future economic growth, job creation and higher living standards for Canadians, to the point where Canada is now increasingly recognized as a model for business taxation.

A recent editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* noted:

Twenty-two years ago we wrote an editorial—'North to Argentina'—warning Canada that economic prosperity isn't a birthright but requires sound policies like free trade. Nowadays, that's a lecture Canada could credibly deliver to Washington on business taxes.

● (1235)

The government also recognizes that unnecessary regulation imposes significant costs on business and adversely affects productivity and economic growth. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that businesses in Canada currently spend over \$30 billion each year complying with regulations. Over the past four years, the government has taken important steps to reduce the administrative and paperwork burden on Canadian businesses.

In March 2009 the government met its target of reducing the paperwork burden on companies by 20% and eliminating almost 80,000 regulatory requirements and information obligations with which businesses must comply.

Business of Supply

To sustain that momentum, this January the government followed through on its budget commitment and announced the creation of the Red Tape Reduction Commission with parliamentarian and private sector representatives. It will work to reduce the burden of federal regulatory requirements on Canadian businesses, especially small and medium businesses. As a member of that commission, I must say it is working extraordinarily well. It will consult with Canadians and Canadian businesses to identify irritants that have a clear detrimental effect on growth, competitiveness and innovation. The commission will provide advice on permanent solutions to control and reduce the overall regulatory compliance burden. I am honoured to be a part of that commission finishing the job.

It is important to remain vigilant in maintaining Canada's position on the world stage. That is why our Conservative government's number one priority remains the economy. Canada's economic action plan was intended to help guide the economy while being ever mindful of the country's long-term future. It has provided a balance between stimulating our economy in the short term and building our capacity in the long term. The plan is working in every region of Canada's family—

● (1240)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order on a matter of relevance.

The member is doing a good job of outlining a historical revisionism of what the government may have done. However, the motion before the House is an issue of whether or not the government should release information to Parliament and whether in fact the government has demonstrated that it is in violation of the privileges of Parliament. I hope that before her time runs out she will at least make some commentary on the motion now before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. member for his comments. I will follow the debate a little more closely. I would ask the hon. member to tie in her comments to the subject of the motion at hand.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, it is also important to acknowledge the intervention of my colleague. The context of our current economic situation really creates the conversation in the debate. I appreciate that and ensure that I tie it all together.

In every region of Canada, families and businesses are paying less tax and unemployed workers are receiving better support and new training. Many job-creating infrastructure projects are nearing completion, while colleges and universities are benefiting from new investments. Canadian manufacturers are still in the process of recovering from the recession as they continue to deal with rising commodity costs and intense competition from all over the world.

Reducing business taxes, therefore makes more sense. It will leave more money in the hands of manufacturers that can then make necessary investments in their workforce and in their plants to compete and grow in domestic and global markets. It is no wonder then that the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters say that the question is not if we can afford corporate tax cuts, it is can we afford not to.

We have more than 110,000 businesses in Canada that are benefiting from our tax relief on job creators. By encouraging these

110,000 businesses to grow and encourage more and better paying jobs for Canadians, business tax cuts are raising the standard for living.

A \$6 billion tax hike will do the opposite. It will stop our recovery in its tracks and hurt job creation. It is irresponsible, it is pure politics and it is short-sighted.

If Liberals do not believe what our Conservative government has to say, maybe they should listen to the former Liberal finance minister and Liberal deputy prime minister, John Manley who said, "I support the plan to reduce the statutory corporate tax rate to 15% by 2012".

These reductions have been supported by governments from the left, right and centre of the political spectrum. Behind the strategy is a recognition that few things matter more to Canada's economic health and future prosperity than our ability to attract and retain investment.

For a number of years, Canadians relied on a cheap dollar to make our goods more competitive in foreign markets, but those days are gone. To compete for investment today with our strong dollar and growth in many of our export markets, which are still weak, Canada needs a significant tax advantage.

I do not think we should underestimate the benefits of these changes. We are transforming how Canada is seen by investors looking for places in which and from which to do business globally. Reforming the tax system in a way that promotes business investment and growth is a hugely positive move.

To tie it all together in terms of accountability, our government, not only through the Federal Accountability Act but also through the Parliamentary Budget Officer, is giving the tools to Canadians and to all the parties in the House which were unknown in the past.

Again, I am proud of our government. I am proud of the important work we are doing in terms of tax reduction. I am very proud of the tools that we have been providing to all parliamentarians.

● (1245)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member from Mississauga pointed out, this motion is not about tax cuts. It is about the obligation of the executive to release certain documents. These are very simple documents dealing with the costs of various crime bills before the House, and projections of corporate tax cuts.

The fundamental role of a member of Parliament individually and Parliament constitutionally is to hold government to account. A tool of that role is the ability to send for persons, papers and records. This is what has been done.

The executive has an obligation to respond to requests from Parliament. That goes to the very heart of democracy. It defines the role of the executive. It defines the role of Parliament. It is not our job as Parliament to govern but to hold accountable those who do govern.

Business of Supply

I listened to the member go through her 10-minute speech and she did not say one sentence, one word about this motion. Therefore, I have two questions. They are very simple and I would like a very clear answer.

First, does Parliament have the constitutional right to send for information such as alluded to in this motion? Second, does the executive have the constitutional responsibility to respond to those requests?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, I was sitting in the finance committee a few short days ago. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was there to present his economic forecast. If we want to drill this down to understanding the impact of corporate tax cuts, for example, he said that they had already been included in his economic forecast, that he had considered what the impact of corporate tax cuts would be. He provided very clear documents around the impact of the corporate tax cuts.

It is important to note that it was another economist, who was there shortly after, who also had a very clear idea with regard to integrating the 2007 corporate tax cuts into his fiscal projections. He came out with a bit of a different answer, which indicated that the margin of error was very small.

Many people have analyzed the impact of corporate tax cuts and all of these measures with regard to Parliament and the ability of parliamentarians to make decisions.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, to prove the government is hiding crime bill cost information and muzzling its own deputy minister, we only have to look at the committee hearings of two days ago

On Tuesday, February 15, we dealt with Bill C-59, Abolition of Early Parole Act. The member for Brampton West asked the deputy minister a question about the costs of the crime bill. He asked if she had that information and if she could provide it. The deputy minister said that she had most of that information, that it was part of her responsibility in terms of developing legislation to consider costs. She said that she had most of that information or access to it, but the issue was the disclosure of it because the government had indicated it was a cabinet confidence.

The member for Brampton West went further, asking if she had provided the costing information to the government about what it would cost for these changes. In response she said that she had the information or access to it, but she could not talk about what she provided the government in any detail because she thought it was cabinet confidence of advice.

We clearly have a government that knows what the information is but is deliberately hiding the information from members of the committee and members of the House.

• (1250)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, I have listened to many question periods. When asked how much these crime bills would cost, the minister has stood and given very direct answers.

This morning we were talking about this. One of the colleagues from the NDP said that in white-collar crime there were victims, although some people thought it was victimless. He had great

compassion for the victims of white-collar crime. At that time, we were examining tax havens and people losing their life savings. It would be very interesting to know how the member opposite can look at his victims and his constituents who have had their life savings taken away and say them that the criminal only has to live with one-sixth of the sentence.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member referred to pension income splitting for seniors and the importance of that benefit. Documents are readily available that will show if we take out all the seniors who do not have a spouse to split with, if we take out all the seniors who are already at the lowest possible tax rate and if we take out all the seniors who do not have a qualifying pension instrument, it means only 14% of seniors even benefit and they are the highest income earning seniors in Canada.

Is the member aware of that? Would she maybe like to withdraw her comments that the benefit was for all seniors?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, the member talks about benefits for seniors. To help seniors, it is absolutely a multi-pronged approach. I can use many personal examples where the wife stayed at home and raised the children and the husband perhaps had a benefit. Indeed, those people are benefiting greatly.

Do we need to consider a comprehensive approach? Absolutely. However, is income splitting a hugely important measure for many seniors? Absolutely. I would never withdraw that. I have talked to many pensioners who have found it to be a life saver.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo laid out the history and some of the differences between the fiscal responsibility our government had shown and the fact that we were able to react to the global economic downturn in the way we had. We were able to create and save jobs so our unemployment rate would remain much less than other industrialized countries around the world.

This morning in the public safety committee some of the costing questions were put to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Page. Following that, the minister appeared in committee and the member for Ajax—Pickering threw out the \$90 million figure, which he has continually used in the media. He threw that out and slammed the minister on his difference of opinion.

I do not know how many times the minister has clearly explained the funds that were appropriated, but the member for Ajax—Pickering has a different idea on that. The Minister of Public Safety then had officials from Correctional Service Canada attend to explain, from their perspective, that the minister's figures were correct.

Today there is another motion to try to embarrass the government and have everything costed out perfectly. Could the member continue to explain the responsible way that our government brought forward this legislation?

Business of Supply

• (1255)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, one of the prominent examples that stands out in my mind is our economic action plan, which saw us through one of the worst global economic recessions since the Great Depression. Part of our process was doing quarterly reports. We released them not only to all parliamentarians but to all Canadians.

We knew we were providing significant stimulus and it was going to create a deficit. Everyone agreed it was unfortunate we had to do that at the time, but we were completely transparent, more than perhaps any government throughout time, in terms of sharing with Canadians where their money was going, why it was going there and doing quarterly reports for all Canadians.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak on this issue. I submit it is a very important issue that goes right to the heart of our democracy and the role of the executive and Parliament within our democratic system.

I will speak first about the duties, responsibilities and obligations of members of Parliament individually and of the House of Commons, collectively.

There is a fundamental constitutional obligation on us individually and collectively to hold the executive to account. Our job is not to govern, it is to hold to account those who do. Basically members of Parliament have four fundamental roles: approve, amend and negate legislation; approve, amend and negate tax measures in legislation; approve or negate requests from the government for the appropriation of moneys from the public purse through the estimates process; and, most important, to hold the executive to account and ensure they are fulfilling those roles and functions that have been delegated to them.

The last speaker did not mention one word, one sentence, that dealt with this motion. We have lost sight of that very fundamental role. Some members in the House talk about decorum, which is very important, but the more important issue is for members of Parliament to do what they are supposed to do.

Every member of Parliament, government and opposition, has a constitutional duty and obligation to hold the executive to account, and both are to blame in many instances. In some cases, opposition MPs emphasize too much in drumming up scandal, real or perceived. At the same time, MPs from the government side toe the party line and read only the lines that are given to them in the morning by the Prime Minister's Office.

Right now Parliament and democracy are under attack. We have had two prorogations, the long form census travesty, and the current Minister of International Cooperation debacle. As well, we now have a motion before this House on the absolute refusal of the executive to give costing information about crime bills and projections on corporate tax cuts. Again, these are simple costing measures that have always been available to Parliament and should be available to Parliament.

Parliament has certain tools, and this was affirmed in the recent ruling of Speaker Milliken in April of last year. I quote:

—procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents, even those related to national security.

But it must be remembered that under all circumstances it is for the house to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient. The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent, when it cannot be at once laid before the houses.

What we are talking about today is a very simple request for the costing, which is available. Deputy ministers have all acknowledged that this is available information. It is in the domain and circulated within the executive. That is one request.

The other request has to do with the corporate tax cost projections. This is very simple financial information. There is no constitutional reason, no legitimate reason, no public interest reason why this information has not been made available to Parliament. I would point out that all constitutional and procedural scholars agree with that premise.

• (1300)

This tool has been around for centuries. This followed the creation of our Westminster system which started in or around the year 1208. It is a tool available to Parliament in fulfilling its constitutional duty to hold government to account, and as I pointed out before, Parliament, at all times has an overriding duty to act responsibly, to act in the public interest.

Now we have a situation where that tool, and I submit democracy itself, is under attack. We have a situation where the Prime Minister will do anything in his power to undermine Parliament. When he was first elected he published a booklet advising Conservative chairs how to stop any progress in committee, to hold up committee meetings, to shut them down, leave, adjourn, anything at all. He prorogued Parliament twice. Any officers or senior public servants who disagree with him are blacklisted: Linda Keen, Paul Kennedy, Kevin Page, the list goes on.

We had the Afghan detainee issue which had to go to the highest office, the office of the Speaker, for a ruling. I just quoted from it.

The situation is very clear. Now we have before us the cost of the crime bills and projections dealing with corporate profits and corporate taxes. Nothing could be simpler. This is information that should be available to members of Parliament and parliamentary committees. To say it is a cabinet confidence is not correct.

However, I should point out that in refusing this to Parliament, Parliament being the people, what the Prime Minister is saying is that Parliament does not count, and he is also saying that the people do not count. He is saying that if he wants to give out this information, he will do it, and if he does not want to do it, he will not and it is none of Parliament's business and, more important, it is not the public's business. He is saying that he will do what he wants to do and it is none of their business.

Business of Supply

This is sad. We have a person in power who, I submit, has absolutely no respect for Parliament, the institutions of democracy and the role of Parliament. It is nothing less. The previous speaker talked about tax cuts and seniors' pensions. It is not about that. It is nothing less than a frontal attack on democracy, democratic institutions and the very foundations upon which this country was built and started, in 1867.

This is how countries get themselves in trouble. All it takes is for many people just to shrug their shoulders, do nothing and say, "I'm still getting my pension. The roads are still paved. We still have relative peace. I don't care." All it takes is for people to do nothing. If Parliament is not functioning properly, this leads to a lesser country, degrades institutional integrity and more constant attacks. It is a vicious cycle.

This is not a partisan issue, it is not a policy issue, it is the institution itself that is under attack and there is an obligation on each and every one of us, individually and collectively, to stand on our feet and protect this institution of Parliament.

My suspicion is the motion will pass, but it will sadden me when I see government MPs who took their oath of office to protect this institution vote against this very motion.

Unless and until we can get every member of Parliament to acknowledge his or her role within this institution, Parliament and all its institutions will continue to degrade and depreciate.

I think I have made my point clear. Members will understand how I am going to vote on this motion. I certainly welcome any questions.

● (1305)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government members who are speaking are simply trying to change the channel and hide from what they know is certainly wrong. They want to hide from what they actually criticized the previous government for.

In fact, I was at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security hearing two nights ago, on February 15, when we were discussing Bill C-59, the abolition of early parole act. The member for Brampton West specifically asked the deputy minister of public safety about the costing of the bill. He asked her specifically if she had that information and to provide it to the committee. The deputy minister's response was: "I have most of that information. It's part of my responsibility in terms of developing legislation to consider costs. Yes, I have most of that information or access to it".

The question is, why can she not give out the information to the committee members in the House? It is because the government will not let her.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Madam Speaker, with what is taking place in this debate, I think we are getting a little off track. We can talk about the minutiae of what happened in committees, tax cuts and pensions, but we can lose sight of the forest for the trees.

This is an attack on Parliament. It is an attack on democracy. Parliament has the right to send for persons, papers and records. That is a fundamental right that every member of Parliament has a constitutional obligation to protect and I hope that is done.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the reason we have that right is that bad things happen when there is no proper scrutiny. When the Liberals took office in 1993, they inherited a \$42 billion deficit and in order to balance the budget, there had to be substantial cuts in order to save it. One has to cut 20% to save 80%, otherwise it gets much worse. The real issue is that if we do not know history, we are doomed to repeat it. It is important we have this information and respect for Parliament.

I would ask the member to respond to the assertion that parliamentarians expect the government to be open, honest, transparent and accountable and this motion says it is not.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Madam Speaker, I disagree slightly with the member. It is not a Liberal or Conservative issue and it should not be a partisan issue. It is simply an attack on Parliament.

Parliament has a duty to hold the executive to account. One of the tools that has developed over the years and has been adopted in all Westminster systems is that Parliament, in its duty to hold the government to account, has the right to send for persons, papers and records or, in other words, to send for information. In this case, that information, for no good reason at all, is being withheld from Parliament. For that reason, this motion should pass.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, despite being elected on a platform of openness, transparency and accountability, the Conservative government has been obsessed with controlling and restricting the flow of information and hiding facts from Parliament and the people of Canada.

Most recently, the Conservatives have been obstructing the work of the Standing Committee on Finance by hampering Parliament's attempts to gain a better understanding of the government's fiscal position and the costs of the government's legislation.

[*Translation*]

The Conservative government refuses to reveal to parliamentarians the actual cost of their American-style legislative measures to supposedly combat crime.

[*English*]

The Conservatives have yet to come clean with the details on the full cost of their crime agenda and corporate tax cuts, months after they were first asked for it by the finance committee. On both accounts, the Conservatives have falsely claimed that disclosing the requested information would be a breach of cabinet confidence.

The previous Liberal government had no problem providing projections of corporate profits. In November 2005, in its fiscal update, the Liberal government actually provided that very information on page 83 of the public document for the mini budget, the fiscal update of that time. In fact, it was common practice to provide Parliament with the projected cost of legislation before MPs were asked to vote on it. That is what is important.

Business of Supply

This is not a debate today about the merits of corporate tax cuts versus payroll tax cuts, versus investments in health care for middle-class families. That is the broader issue, but the real issue today is why will the government not tell members of Parliament the cost of the corporate tax cuts. Why will the government not tell members of Parliament the cost of its U.S.-style criminal justice agenda so that at least before MPs vote on that legislation, particularly at a time when we have a \$56 billion deficit, we know the cost and how much these decisions will add to that record Conservative deficit?

The government's excuses were so unbelievable that last week I asked the Speaker of the House to find the government in contempt of Parliament.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

The government is preventing parliamentarians from doing their work by refusing to share this information with them.

In our system of responsible government, the government must seek Parliament's authority to spend public funds. Parliament has an obligation and responsibility to hold the government to account and to scrutinize the government's books.

A knowledge of the actual costs is particularly important in these times of deficit and future budget cuts.

The primary role of members of the House is to monitor the use of public funds. Without the appropriate information, members cannot fulfill this role.

[*English*]

Today I am rising in support of this motion. We are appealing to the government to come clean with the information. At a time when we have a \$56 billion deficit and Canadian families are having trouble just making ends meet, where every dollar counts, this secrecy around public dollars must end.

John Ibbitson of the *Globe and Mail* put it well earlier this week when he said:

The Harper government uses "cabinet confidence" the way the Nixon administration used "executive privilege." The Liberals provided projections of corporate profits when they were in government. And it is ridiculous for the Conservatives to maintain that the cost of their law-and-order legislation is a state secret.

How is Parliament to judge the wisdom of that legislation if it cannot measure the legislation's projected impact in terms of prisons built and guards hired?

This latest episode reinforces the point that the Conservative government's determination to keep such a tight control on information makes it impossible for one to judge their government or for Parliament to do its job.

The fact is that over the last five years there has been an insidious erosion of access to basic information that has made it difficult for Canadians to judge their government, or for parliamentarians to do their jobs representing their constituents.

Since taking power, the Prime Minister has refused to co-operate fully with access to information requests. In fact, the number of cases in which Ottawa discloses information has dropped from 40% to

16%. The fact is that in 2010, the Information Commissioner, Suzanne Legault, admitted that there was a lack of will on the part of the government to be transparent, that Canada was no longer an information leader.

This Conservative government has become notorious for its culture of secrecy.

All Canadians will remember the Speaker's ruling on the Afghan detainee issue. The ruling was a tough pill to swallow for the Conservatives, because it proved the supremacy of Parliament and the role of parliamentarians to hold their government to account. It is an indisputable privilege, obligation and responsibility we have as parliamentarians.

However, the Conservatives appear to have learned absolutely nothing from that ruling. They continue to obstruct the work of Parliament by habitually denying the information that we as parliamentarians need to do our jobs.

Since the Parliamentary Budget Office was created, the Conservatives have vilified the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, and stonewalled his requests for information as his office works to ensure the accuracy of the government's financial pictures.

Nearly a year after the Conservative government's 2010 budget promised to find \$17.6 billion in savings through public service attrition, the Conservatives have consistently refused to provide any details.

Parliamentarians need to know how the Conservatives are going to reduce the size of the public service, or how they will get their spending under control and return Canada to balanced budgets. The only thing that we have learned is that they plan to hire 5,000 more correctional officers, presumably to staff the prison expansions associated with their as yet uncostered justice legislation.

Is it any surprise that in November the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report showed there was an 85% chance of the finance minister and government failing to meet their target of getting Canada back to balanced budgets by 2015-16. The reality is that the finance minister has never met a deficit target in his tenure; his numbers do not add up. The government that he is part of tries to prevent Parliament from having the numbers.

Now that it has become clear the Conservatives will persist in giving a further \$6 billion in tax cuts to Canada's largest corporations despite the fact we have a \$56 billion deficit, it is looking even less convincing that we will get back to balanced budgets under this Conservative government's big spending, big borrowing ways.

At a time when Canadian families are being squeezed and every dollar counts, this kind of secrecy around public dollars is unconscionable. It is not the government's money; the money belongs to Canadians. We are here to defend the public purse.

• (1315)

As the *Globe and Mail* said in its editorial this week:

Business of Supply

Its position is untenable. This is a government that stresses fiscal rectitude and the promotion of financial literacy. Why should Canadians be told to ask more informed questions about private investment or borrowings, on the one hand, and give the government a blank cheque on the other?

It is time for the Prime Minister to end this practice of attacking and trying to intimidate senior public servants and parliamentary watchdogs, including the Parliamentary Budget Officer. It is time to stop curtailing access to information. It is time to stop hiding behind the false pretense of cabinet confidence when the information the finance committee has requested, the costs of the corporate tax cuts and the Conservatives' American-style criminal justice legislation, is vital for our decision-making in Parliament.

It is time for the Conservatives to start respecting Parliament and the Canadians who chose this parliament and Canadian taxpayers, and tell them what their agenda will cost.

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, the last time the country faced a recession, it was nothing of this magnitude but the Liberals were trying to grapple with it and the debt left by Prime Minister Trudeau. They cut health care services to Canadians, which did in fact create surpluses in the government coffers, but hurt Canadians' ability to access doctors and health care services. They cut science and technology, causing the brain drain in this country. They even took \$50 billion out of the employment insurance coffers, money that then vanished. The Conservative government does not believe that is the way to help Canadians get jobs and deal with an economic downturn.

The member's own House leader stated at one point that the true benefits of tax cuts were jobs and economic growth.

Does the member disagree with his own House leader, the member for Wascana, or does he agree that lowering taxes, as we have done during this recession, creates jobs for Canadians, economic stability now and into the future, and improves the lives of Canadians?

Does he or does he not believe that tax cuts are good for Canadians?

•(1320)

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I wish the hon. member had asked a question about the motion. The motion is about the government's refusal to provide to the finance committee the information it needs to judge the government's legislation, including the efficacy or sense of corporate tax cuts today when we have a \$56 billion deficit.

The hon. member made a couple of points that are not related to today's motion, but out of the kindness of my heart, I will respond to them.

In terms of health care investments, not only did the previous Liberal government balance the books but it also increased transfers to the provinces to record highs. It put \$41 billion of new money into health care in 2004 and created most of the research and development infrastructure in Canada through the Canada Foundation for Innovation and through investments in universities. It was the most science friendly government in the history of Canada and that is why the science community is so upset—

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

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, last night we had a take note debate on the promotion of democracy in Iran. The government members spoke all night long about how important it was for the Canadian government to take an active interest in promoting democracy in Iran. Two weeks ago we had a take note debate on democracy in Egypt. Perhaps we should have a take note debate on democracy here in Canada.

We have a Conservative government that is deliberately hiding information from members of Parliament, information that we as members of Parliament have a right to know, because we are tasked with making decisions that affect the entire country. We cannot find out the information that the government already knows on crime bills like C-59.

We had the deputy minister at committee admitting, when questioned by a Liberal member about the cost of the bill, that she had most of the information and would like to tell members the cost of the bill but could not.

The government had muzzled her and would not allow her to provide the information. That is absolutely unfair and not acceptable.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I certainly wish the hon. member would get up more in this House. We do not see him up and on his feet enough. In fact, that hon. member is probably one of the most active members on the floor of this House.

The member raises an important point. The government's argument that this information is cabinet confidence is totally false. Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, said that during his 25 years of public service this kind of information was circulated broadly. It was not held or protected under cabinet confidence.

Earlier I raised the fact that in November 2005, during the Liberal government's fiscal update, this information was provided on page 83 of a public document, for goodness sake. The government's argument that this information and the cost of its legislation cannot be provided to the Parliament that is expected to vote on and judge that legislation is completely counter-democratic and anti-democratic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on a motion of the official opposition, the Liberal Party.

Allow me to read the motion. It is fairly long but also complete.

Business of Supply

That, given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, the government's continuing refusal to comply with reasonable requests for documents, particularly related to the cost of the government's tax cut for the largest corporations and the cost of the government's justice and public safety agenda, represents a violation of the rights of Parliament, and this House hereby orders the government to provide every document requested by the Standing Committee on Finance on November 17, 2010, by March 7, 2011.

As this motion indicates, the Standing Committee on Finance requested access to a certain number of documents it needed to be able to do its parliamentary work. The government refused to provide, forward or make these documents available to the committee.

This is very similar to the saga of the documents pertaining to the allegations of torture in Afghanistan. In that case, the Speaker ruled that the parties must come to an agreement or that there would be contempt of Parliament.

It is unfortunate that the Conservative government, a minority government, is seeking not only to govern as though it were a majority government but also to keep parliamentarians in the dark and prevent them from having all the relevant information. Parliamentarians are holding the government accountable on a certain number of issues. Clearly, the government has to be accountable.

This is extremely disturbing. I have not been a member of the House for very long, only since 2000. Under Jean Chrétien's majority government, which was never an ally of the sovereignists, I never heard of the possibility of a question of privilege leading to contempt of Parliament. And yet, at the time, we were dealing with a majority government. There is something in this government's attitude toward parliamentary institutions and the way democracy should be lived that closely resembles a certain degree of contempt.

We therefore do not hesitate in supporting this motion. I believe that, if the motion is not respected, it will surely lead to another question of privilege. Let us hope that we will soon see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The government consistently relies on pretexts such as national security and cabinet confidence. The decision of the Speaker of the House in April was very clear: parliamentarians are entitled to have access to all necessary information, in an uncensored format. In matters of state security, the Bloc Québécois and the other opposition parties—I believe that they too have consistently maintained this position—are prepared to find accommodations, as was the case with the documents dealing with allegations of torture in Afghanistan.

In this case, however, the government is acting as if the opposition parties were unschooled in these matters when, in fact, we have shown ourselves to be flexible in the past.

In this particular case, we are dealing with documents that have nothing to do with national security whatsoever. In what possible way would knowing the cost of tax breaks for big corporations be a risk to the Canadian state? That information has nothing to do with national security. I do not believe that our allies or enemies in the world are going to glean strategic information based on knowledge of the cost of the tax breaks announced by the Conservatives.

The same is true when it comes to the cost of the Conservatives' justice and security agenda. We know full well how obsessed they are with mandatory minimums. I do not see how the costs associated with this political choice, this ideologically driven vision of the Conservatives that focuses more on punishment than it does on rehabilitation, are a state secret. These documents should be submitted uncensored to the committee and made available to all parliamentarians so that they can, quite simply, do their jobs.

● (1325)

This is not the only area in which the government is trying to hide the facts in an effort, once again, to avoid being accountable. KAIROS, which we are currently debating in the House, is another example. We were deluded for several months into thinking that it was officials that made the decision. I even tracked down a response from the Minister of International Cooperation on April 23, 2010, in which she stated that CIDA, in a report to her, had suggested that the KAIROS grant be cancelled. We are talking about a substantial amount of money for a humanitarian organization like KAIROS—over \$7 million. The Conservatives tried to pull the wool over our eyes. Eventually, a document was obtained through the Access to Information Act clearly indicating that the recommendation made by senior officials had been tinkered with. The word “not” was inserted into the funding recommendation signed by the minister in November 2009.

When we got that in December 2010, or one year later, the versions began to change in one way or another. Even today it is hard to understand the real ins and outs of this affair, apart from the Minister of International Cooperation having failed to tell the truth. We hope the Prime Minister will punish her for that, unless—and this is a theory that is constantly gaining ground—it turns out that she did sign the document authorizing funding for KAIROS. When the PMO and the Prime Minister found out about it, they asked the Minister of International Cooperation to stop the funding for purely ideological reasons with little basis in fact. So the little word “not” could have been added after the minister had signed.

That is all speculation, but it shows how far things have gone. Trying to find the truth is like playing a game of Clue, instead of just gathering all the facts and drawing conclusions in a calm, well informed way.

I am talking about KAIROS here but it could be the long form census. For several weeks, the Minister of Industry tried to make us think that was a Statistics Canada recommendation. The chief statistician resigned in order to demonstrate his disagreement with the government's decision. Once again, they tried to cover up the truth and prevent us from doing our jobs.

Business of Supply

But there is more to it than that. In the case of the census, without the obligatory long questionnaire in its previous form, not only parliamentarians but scientists, sociologists and demographers as well will be denied objective information. That is perfectly consistent with the Conservative way of doing things. Instead of making decisions on the basis of facts and reality, they do it on the basis of an ideology and worldview at odds with reality. Not only do they try to keep us in the dark, but they are interfering with the tools that parliamentarians, experts and scientists in all sorts of fields need in order to study reality on the basis of objective facts and identify problems and solutions. It is very worrisome.

It is obvious as well that the Conservatives are trying to infiltrate the entire machinery of government. We saw it recently with the partisan appointments to the CRTC. There is also the whole Rights and Democracy saga. They appointed people to this supposedly independent organization in order to turn it into a conveyor belt for spreading Conservative government policy on the international scene. They infiltrated the board of Rights and Democracy and fomented a crisis in an organization that had enjoyed great credibility in Quebec and Canada and around the world. They are still persisting in this and intend to reappoint two of the administrators responsible for the current crisis at Rights and Democracy.

● (1330)

When then Prime Minister Mulroney, a Conservative, created Rights and Democracy, he appointed a former leader of the New Democratic Party, Ed Broadbent, to head it. This was meant precisely to send a very strong signal that Rights and Democracy was independent of the Conservative government and could do its job as part of its network in civil society.

That is not the approach the Conservatives take today. They are going to do everything possible to bring Rights and Democracy to heel so it will be a mouthpiece for government policies, particularly in the Middle East. As we know, and I am not telling anyone anything new, they have abandoned the traditional Canadian approach of taking a balanced position on the Middle East, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now Canada stands foursquare behind Israel, regardless of what the Israeli authorities do.

We saw the best example of this in recent weeks when the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and I call this shameful, the very morning the dictator Mubarak left office, rounded up opponents and supporters of Mubarak back to back, as if the opponents who were fighting against a dictator were just as responsible as the ones advocating for him. That is extremely disturbing.

This is not one of our priorities, but I mention it for our Canadian friends and for Canada's image in the world. Canada's failure to gain a seat on the United Nations Security Council was no accident.

We see the same thing at Radio-Canada. There are partisan appointments that try to put pressure on Radio-Canada. Yesterday, again, the Minister of Immigration said that Radio-Canada journalists lie all the time. They are trying to intimidate Radio-Canada journalists and, in fact, all journalists. They know as well as I do that the Prime Minister only gives interviews now to journalists who are sympathetic to the regime. It is part of the effort to infiltrate and control the federal public administration, crown corporations like

Radio-Canada, and independent agencies, and again I will make the connection with KAIROS. By cutting its funding, they are trying to muzzle an organization that is totally independent of the government that obviously, like all non-governmental organizations, needs public funding. They are being denied the resources to make their voice heard to counterbalance the policies of the Conservative government, particularly in the area of international cooperation and international relations.

I have spoken out against this attempt by the Conservatives to stage a quiet takeover of the machinery of government. So far, I have not even mentioned certain religious groups that use their privileges to try to influence Conservative government policy, federal policy. I will not have a chance to do that, but we can certainly tell that there is that intent and a well-planned strategy behind it all, to take control of the machinery of government and put it to work for the Conservative Party and its ideology.

I would like to use my remaining time to critique the government's positions and to argue for access to information we need on the tax cuts for big corporations. This is a political choice that is not only extremely questionable, but comes at a time when there are major strategic choices to be made, particularly with a looming deficit of over \$55 billion.

Since coming into power, the Conservatives have instituted a slew of measures to reduce the tax burden on small and medium-sized enterprises. We have no problem with this when it comes to SMEs. We know full well that these SMEs create jobs in Canada and Quebec, and that they are suffering horribly from the effects of the rising Canadian dollar. Once again, the rise in the value of the Canadian dollar has been driven by the spike in oil prices and the federal government's choices with regard to energy. These choices, and the economic crisis itself, will have an impact on the public purse.

● (1335)

It stated in black and white in the Minister of Finance's budget that there would be a very steep increase in employment insurance premiums. This tactic smacks of a return to a strategy that we had hoped was a thing of the past: using employment insurance fund surpluses for purposes that are not stipulated in the act or that are not in the spirit of the act. This is a return to the ways of the former minister of finance, Paul Martin. The writing is on the wall. That much was clear from the Minister of Finance's budget. There will be a tax increase in the form of higher employment insurance premiums—and this increase will be very steep.

We fully supported the decisions made in this area. There was a drop from 12% to 11.5% in 2008, and then a further decrease to 11% in 2009. This reduction was fast-tracked in response to the economic crisis. We were fine with that choice.

It was announced that as of January 1, 2007, the total allowable revenue for a small company to qualify for the reduced federal tax rate would increase from \$300,000 to \$400,000. We have no issue with this either.

Business of Supply

However, we have a problem with a number of things. There are the big tax cuts for large corporations, especially banks and the oil sector. Their tax rate was 19.5% in 2008 and will be 15% in 2012. That is a very large tax cut with no structural effect on the Canadian and Quebec economies. There is proof of that. It was not just yesterday that they started giving tax cuts to big businesses as well as the small and medium-sized ones.

It is understandable in the case of small and medium-sized businesses that there will be setbacks that explain the need for cuts. But there is no structural effect in the tax cuts the government is announcing because they do not force large corporations to improve their technology or engage in research and development. We think it is more to the point to have tax incentives for adopting behaviours that are good for the economic future. That is true of Canada and it is true of Quebec.

These tax cuts have not had a structural effect. The proof is that productivity decreased again in Canada over the last quarter. What is happening? The tax cuts are going straight into the pockets of the shareholders and company owners. The savings are not reinvested productively and have only fuelled speculation over the last few years.

As I said, it was not just yesterday that the federal government embraced this strategy. The Liberals did the same thing. Paul Martin substantially reduced the taxes on big business as well. That is not the way to ensure a solid, lasting economic recovery. The money could be used in much more productive ways.

If we cut the taxes on large corporations—to an extent we would very much like to know—how are we ever going to return to a balanced budget when our deficit exceeds \$55 billion? Somebody is going to have to pay. There will be cuts, either to services or to transfers to individuals and the provinces. Or else there will be another tax increase, in one way or another, for small and medium-sized businesses, that is to say, a tax increase for the middle class and the most disadvantaged.

It is quite obvious. It is mathematical. There is no other way of doing it. We think they can ask the oil companies and the banks to do their share in this collective effort we call taxes. At present the oil companies receive benefits that come from subsidies on the order of \$1.3 billion a year and the banks are using tax havens to avoid their responsibilities.

We will be supporting the Liberal motion.

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the motion before the House today has to do with the government's refusal to provide documents that it is the right of parliamentarians to receive.

The proof of that is also in today's debate in that every Conservative member who has stood today has spoken about everything except the motion. None of the Conservatives have addressed the motion because they have been handed speeches to read that are about other things, trying to deflect attention away from the issue.

Does the hon. member agree that it is not only the right and privilege of parliamentarians to have that information but it is also useful for the people of the country to have the information so they can tell parliamentarians how they feel about the priorities the government has laid out?

• (1345)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. As I said, the documents the Standing Committee on Finance is asking for are not strategic documents in terms of national security. There is therefore no reason other than wanting to keep the public in Canada and Quebec from having the facts in front of them so they can judge the decisions made by the federal government.

The figures for the tax relief given to big corporations will probably scandalize some people, who see their employment insurance premiums rising even though they are no longer eligible for benefits. The justice agenda that the Conservatives portray as costing nothing—in any event they never talk about it—might give more than one person pause.

Is it more important today to open beds in prisons, as the member for Saint Boniface said, or to open beds in hospitals? When she talked about opening beds, I thought she was talking about hospital beds. Hospitals are where we have to open beds, not prisons. If we need to expand any penal institutions, I certainly want that to be done, but not by making decision after decision that leads only to more prison sentences and an increase in the prison population. Unless this is a Conservative strategy to artificially lower the unemployment rate. Whenever an individual is in prison, they are not in the labour market, and that artificially lowers the unemployment rate. That must be the Conservatives' strategy.

Those documents, as the member said, must be accessible, in full, to parliamentarians and to the public as a whole. That is true for Quebec and it is true for Canada.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, everyone knows that the government had to be dragged kicking and screaming last year over the Afghan detainee issue when it refused to provide the information on the basis that it was national security. In his speech, the member clearly compared the situation last year regarding the national security argument with the issue this year, which is the cost of the tax cuts and the cost of the public safety bills, neither of which could be considered in any way to be a question of national security.

The question really comes down to what the Conservatives are hiding and why they are hiding it. What could they possibly be giving away? What sort of state secrets could they be giving away by giving this information on the cost of the corporate tax cuts? What possible information could they be giving away on the cost of crime bills that would be related to national security?

Clearly, this one is another issue that the Conservatives will lose if they keep fighting the way they were last year. What does the member think they are hiding and why are they trying to hide it?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question, but I am not able to answer it. Why would they be hiding these facts? The only reason I can see is political opportunism. They know very well that there will be an election in a few months, by October 2012 at the latest. They do not want the facts about the policy decisions they have made—the tax relief and their justice agenda—to be available for the public debate that will happen when the election comes. They will still be able to stick to broad generalities. Without information about the facts, they are going to try to carry on a debate that is purely ideological, simplistic, black and white, just like their rhetoric about the justice system.

On the question of Afghanistan, they said that if someone was concerned about allegations of torture it is because they were Taliban or in league with the Taliban. That is Conservative logic. The absence of facts can sometimes influence a segment of the public. Having the facts would allow for a calmer and more informed debate, a debate that would reflect what democracy should be in Canada and Quebec.

Fundamentally, their desire to conceal these documents stems from an antidemocratic vision of political discourse. It is in the interests of both parliamentarians and the public to speak out against this and force the government to make these facts public. This motion will be one more step toward a question of privilege and contempt of Parliament down the road.

• (1350)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, considering that we are struggling to get out of the economic crisis, I would like to ask the member for Joliette, who is an economist by trade, what he thinks about the choices being made to give tax cuts to large corporations when we know that that money will go to the senior managers or shareholders of these companies, compared to the choice to invest so little in research and development for secondary and tertiary processing to try to restructure economies. My region of Trois-Rivières is suffering a lot.

I would like him to talk about these quasi-ideological choices being made by this Conservative government.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Trois-Rivières for her question.

This gives me a chance to come back to the case of the oil companies, because I just touched on this issue at the end of my speech. According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, every year, Canadian oil companies receive \$1.3 billion in the form of direct or indirect subsidies. Based on the tax cuts announced, we can estimate that this will reduce their taxes by \$1.9 billion. For 2010, that would be a total of \$3.2 billion in benefits. That is a huge amount of money when you consider that the current litigation between the federal government and the Government of Quebec is for around \$5 billion.

Next year, it will be another \$3.7 billion for the oil companies. In 2012 it will be \$4.6 billion and in 2013, it will be \$5.4 billion. Since the oil companies will pocket that money, someone else will have to pay one way or another. It will be the provinces, Quebec, taxpayers and the people of Quebec and Canada.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the implications of some of the rulings and decisions that have been handed down as well as some of the opinions, certainly in the case of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, regarding the Truth in Sentencing Act and other consequential acts. A lot of it has to do with amending the Criminal Code.

As a well-experienced person in this House, I was wondering if the hon. member could comment on the substantial increase in imprisonment, and continued imprisonment, of these offenders.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I apologize for interrupting the current speaker.

I am tabling, in both official languages, information on our government's low-cost and tough-on-crime agenda as requested by certain members of Parliament, and as I told the Speaker three days ago that I would do.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS REQUESTED BY STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be brief in responding to my colleague's question because I am sure that I do not have a lot of time left. First, it is obvious that there are costs associated with this. However, I do not know all of these costs. The Parliamentary Budget Officer spoke about several billion dollars for a single measure.

We need a complete picture. It does not mean that the government cannot take certain justice measures. The Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc have all suggested and supported various measures. As long as we do not have the big picture, the total bill could end up being very high, not only for the federal government and taxpayers, but also for the provinces and Quebec. There are a number of ideological choices being made by the Conservative government that will affect people sentenced to two years or less, who will be put into provincial prisons. As a result, the government is indirectly limiting the provinces' flexibility in terms of budgetary decisions. Again, I would prefer to open hospital beds, not prison beds.

• (1355)

[English]

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our founders would be horrified to learn of the motion we are debating today. That today in the House of Commons we would be debating and voting on a motion affirming our rights and privileges is disgraceful. Parliament's absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested is fundamental to our democracy. Would we ever imagine a motion demanding that the government provide oxygen to this chamber? Of course not, yet documents, more specifically the information on them, is as critical to the functioning of this place as the air that we breathe.

That the government would deny the right to these things speaks to an administration that values secrecy, control, manipulation, and ultimately, a complete disregard for this House of Parliament.

I was elected not only to be the voice of the people from Mississauga—Streetsville, but to be their eyes and ears as well. They expect me to hold the government to account, to demand explanations for policy decisions, and to vote for or against those proposals. Without complete information, without clear and unbiased evidence, without a full cost analysis, how can I perform this honoured calling to the best of my abilities? The answer is I cannot.

That is why Parliament was vested with privileges. Our founding articles, the British North America Act, now called The Constitution Act, 1867, established in section 18 the privileges, immunities and powers of Parliament. These privileges are expressed further in the Parliament of Canada Act and in our Standing Orders. In his landmark ruling last year on the Afghan detainees documents, the Speaker upheld the supremacy of Parliament and the right to order documents. He affirmed the House's undisputed role as the grand inquest of the nation and its need for complete and accurate information in order to fulfill its duty of holding this government and any government to account.

Yet over the last five years of this Conservative government, the House has been required to cite its privileges at a rate never seen before in our modern history. Our esteemed law clerk, Mr. Robert Walsh, has never been so busy. Repeatedly he is asked to attend committees to remind them of their rights and privileges when confronted with attempts at obstruction by the government. The examples are numerous: government ministers refusing requests to appear before committees; senior Conservative staff members evading bailiffs with summonses; documents not provided or seriously redacted; and the list goes on and on and on. When committees request documents, the government drags its feet. It obstructs, and when it runs out of options, it flat-out refuses.

There are books that document the amount and degree of Conservative government obstruction. Mr. Lawrence Martin, in *Harperland: The Politics of Control*, a runner-up for the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing at the Writers' Trust of Canada awards yesterday, provides a lengthy list of the Prime Minister's march of audacities.

Since the 2006 election campaign, here are some of the highlights, with due acknowledgement, of course, to Mr. Martin: the elimination

Statements by Members

of the access to information database; the nixing of the court challenges program; the secret handbook on how to obstruct committees; hiding justice department studies on crime; hiding a firearms report to prevent embarrassment on the gun registry; the Rights & Democracy fiasco; slashing the budget of the Parliamentary Budget Officer; withholding details of the stimulus funding, and we all know why that happened; firing the nuclear agency head, Linda Keen; halting Peter Tinsley's probe on the Afghan detainees; ousting Paul Kennedy from the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP; smearing a career diplomat, Mr. Richard Colvin; defying Parliament's right to documents; padlocking Parliament by proroguing not once but twice; the move on Statistics Canada; and the list goes on and on and on.

The Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but we have to proceed with other matters. There will be about fifteen and one-half minutes remaining in the time allotted for the member's remarks when the debate is resumed.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

RENFREW COUNTY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you are invited. Everyone is invited. Renfrew County is having a celebration to honour the 150th anniversary of its founding.

This is going to be an incredible festival with special events happening all year long. The main attraction will be from June 9 to 12, 2011 on the Pembroke Regional Airport grounds. There is something for everyone to enjoy.

People can be a part of a journey through time at our pioneer village. They can listen to fiddlers, clap for the step dancers and admire the antique cars and trucks. They can see the live theatre and displays, aboriginal drumming, with lots more music and Ottawa Valley storytelling. There will be rafting and kayaking, pioneer exhibits, and a kids zone, a whole acre of activities for kids.

We hope to see everyone in the valley, the Upper Ottawa Valley. Everyone should join us for the 150th anniversary celebration.

*Statements by Members***CURLING**

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the annual Scotties Tournament of Hearts, the Canadian women's curling championship, is being hosted in my hometown of Charlottetown starting this weekend.

Curling is an important part of Canadian culture and a great winter pastime. Sometimes, in good humour, it is referred to as Canada's other winter sport.

In the province of Prince Edward Island, we have a very strong and competitive curling community. Men, women and youth enjoy their winters at curling clubs across the province and generally do well in national competitions.

I would like to wish all teams the very best of luck in this year's Scotties Tournament of Hearts, and in particular, the team representing P.E.I. made up of Suzanne Birt, who is the skip, Shelly Bradley, Robyn MacPhee, Leslie MacDougall, Tricia Affleck, and coach Paul Power.

I welcome all teams and fans to Charlottetown for this year's tournament. I encourage all members of the House to tune in to the action and cheer on their respective provincial teams.

* * *

[Translation]

EVENS GUERCY

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since this is Black History Month, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the extraordinary dedication of Evens Guercy, a sociologist and community police officer of Haitian origin who lives in Montreal. Mr. Guercy has made the personal growth and development of young people in poorer neighbourhoods his priority.

In 2005, he founded the Hope Boxing Club in the Saint-Michel neighbourhood of Montreal, where he helped these young people become more disciplined, while focusing on reducing school drop-out rates. A documentary entitled *Les poings serrés*, or Clenched Fists, was even made about the club. The film features two teens from the neighbourhood who have Hope Boxing Club and Mr. Guercy to thank for their success in life.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to congratulate Evans Guercy on his extraordinary commitment to young people. I am proud to know him and to count him among my childhood friends, for we grew up and went to school together in Saint-Hyacinthe.

* * *

[English]

TRANSCONA

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Transcona is a railway town that was founded in 1909 by Lord Strathcona and incorporated as the town of Transcona in 1912. The name derives from a combination of "Transcontinental" and "Lord Strathcona".

A local business group is working with city councillor Russ Wyatt and MLAs Daryl Reid and Bidhu Jha on a plan to revitalize the downtown commercial district.

The group has committed to retain the connection to the hometown feel that has always made Transcona unique. Some of the already completed improvements include a new archway welcoming visitors to Transcona, a new centre median on Regent, new sidewalks, and solar-powered lighting fixtures.

The Regent Avenue area has attracted Universal Studios, which began working on a new movie, *Beethoven Saves Christmas*, on February 15.

This revitalization project is expected to be completed in 2012 in time for the community's centennial celebrations.

* * *

WELLINGTON—HALTON HILLS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of the House a couple of important events in my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills.

As past chair of the board, I am proud that the Elora Festival Singers and their conductor, Noel Edison, were recently nominated for a Grammy award in the best small ensemble performance category for the choir's 2010 recording of the music of Eric Whitacre.

While the Grammy went to another nominee, the nomination has put this local southwestern Ontario choral choir on the map. While we locals always knew that the village of Elora had a world-class choral choir, now the rest of the world knows as well.

I would also like to congratulate the Acton Scouts and Guides on 100 years of scouting in Acton.

Scouts is one of Canada's leading youth organizations offering programs for boys and girls in towns and cities across this great land. Over 74,000 young people are in Scouts which is provided by 23,000 volunteers. Acton has been part of this proud tradition for 100 years.

I congratulate the Elora Festival Singers.

I congratulate the Acton Scouts and Guides.

* * *

● (1405)

MARCH OF DIMES CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION DAY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to commend March of Dimes Canada and recognize next Thursday, February 24, as March of Dimes Conductive Education Day.

March of Dimes, headquartered in Don Valley West, has been delivering programs and services to Canadians with disabilities since 1951. This is its 60th anniversary of working to improve the lives and livelihoods of Canadians with disabilities, advancing accessibility and creating a society inclusive of people with disabilities.

Conductive education is an innovative learning system that maximizes the independence and mobility of children and adults with neurological motor disorders like cerebral palsy, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis and those who have had a stroke or brain injury. The conductive education program has the potential to make a life-changing impact on the mobility and independence of close to nine million people in North America.

I ask all members to please join me in congratulating March of Dimes Canada and recognizing and supporting the conductive education program, a cornerstone of our ongoing efforts in Canada to achieve full inclusion of Canadians with disabilities.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, my colleague, the member for Simcoe North, put forward a bill that would permit farmers to opt out of the Canadian Wheat Board. While I firmly believe it is in the economic interests of farmers to put the single desk Wheat Board to pasture, it is not the economic damage that the Wheat Board causes that I find most obnoxious.

Members should know that the original Wheat Board was installed in the World War I era to keep grain prices down. Then, when the Wheat Board was put into its current form during World War II, it was also aimed at lowering the prices that farmers received.

The Wheat Board did and does this by robbing farmers of the freedom to control their own wheat, their own private property. It is this annual expropriation of property that I find most egregious. No one forces farmers to buy their fertilizer or their fuel from one source and yet if a farmer chooses to sell wheat in his own fashion, he can go to prison.

If freedom means anything at all, it should mean the right to control one's own property, the fruits of one's labours. The Canadian Wheat Board is an assault on the liberties of not just farmers but an assault on the liberties of all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives claim to be champions of respecting provincial jurisdictions, it is troubling to see how indifferent they are to the cross-Canada tour the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources is on to promote a sustainable energy policy from coast to coast to coast.

This Senate expedition stopped in Montreal on February 7 and 8, clearly interfering in Quebec's jurisdictions. The taxpayer-funded travels of these unelected representatives of an archaic costly institution fly in the face of respect for Quebec's jurisdictions. Quebec and Canada have completely different visions of a sustainable energy future. Quebec is focusing on truly green energies and not on nuclear power and promoting the oil sands.

Statements by Members

This Senate committee has no business dictating energy policy to Quebec. Quebec's energy future is determined by Quebecers for Quebecers.

* * *

[English]

FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very excited to return to Saint Boniface tomorrow night to open the annual winter celebration called le Festival du voyageur. This world-class 10-day event celebrates the joie de vivre of the voyageur and fur trade era with food, song and dance. I know festival will be a fantastic display of Franco-Manitoban and Métis culture. I look forward to serving pancakes, visiting the maple sugar shack and enjoying first-class performers.

[Translation]

The Festival du Voyageur is held every February. It is the largest winter festival in western Canada. As a francophone Métis, I have been attending the festival since I was a little girl.

Many thanks to the volunteers, the organizers and the official voyageurs, Roger Chamberland, Michelle Gervais and their two children, who work continuously to promote the festival in our community and elsewhere.

[English]

I encourage Winnipeggers, Manitobans and Canadians alike to please get out to le Festival du voyageur in Saint Boniface.

[Translation]

Enjoy the festival!

* * *

[English]

LITERACY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today around the world, 774 million adults lack basic literacy skills and one in five adults, mostly women, cannot read or write at all. Canada's literacy statistics are just as alarming for a country as wealthy as our own.

Literacy is not just about reading and writing, it is more than just understanding words on a page. Literacy is a powerful tool to eradicate poverty and to advance people socially and economically. Those who cannot access literacy skills are tragically left behind in society and, thanks to the government, we are leaving far too many people behind.

Statements by Members

In the 2006 budget, the federal government announced it was cutting \$1 billion worth of what it called wasteful programs. Part of that was a \$17.7 million cut to adult literacy programming. One in three Canadians who struggle with literacy every day do not think much of that.

By improving literacy skills, a person increases his or her chances to find employment, to lift oneself out of poverty, find or create opportunities and make great contributions to the community.

Today let us recognize those who assist learners, those who bring meaning to words and who open the doors to better lives for those who struggle with literacy for their benefit and the benefit of all of us.

* * *

• (1410)

CANADIAN ATHLETES

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, our Canadian athletes had outstanding performances on the world stage.

Erik Guay of Mont-Tremblant won gold in men's downhill skiing at the FIS World Championship in Germany. This is the second time in a row that a Canadian has won this title.

Calgary's Alex Gough became the first Canadian and the first non-German in 13 seasons to win a World Cup luge race. Gough is one of the many young Calgaryans who had the opportunity to get involved in winter sports because of the outstanding legacies of the 1988 Olympics.

On Sunday, Milos Raonic of Thornhill became the first Canadian to win an Association of Tennis Professionals championship in 16 years. Mr. Raonic's victory against defending champion, Fernando Verdasco, featured serves that clocked at 240 kilometres per hour.

Our government is proud to support our athletes, and in fact the current levels of support are at the highest ever in Canada. We congratulate our athletes on these tremendous accomplishments.

* * *

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our community of Ottawa Centre has always been proud to welcome new Canadians. In 1979, we came together and welcomed 4,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

For the media, they were called the "boat people"; for the government, they were "small boat escapees"; but to our community, they were our new neighbours and, with community support, our new neighbours thrived.

That is how we feel about new immigrants and refugees here. That is why we support settlement programs. That is why we believe the government's \$53 million cuts to immigrant services will undermine the quality of life for all of us.

These cuts will take away child care resources for newcomers, at the same time that the government is making family reunification almost impossible. Language classes will be severely limited,

resulting in isolation and separation, making it harder to find a job, build relations and contribute to our community.

These cuts will hurt our newest neighbours first and all of us in the long run. We call on the government to reverse those cuts now.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader's economic policy is based on tax hikes that will put the brakes on our economic recovery, eliminate jobs and set back hard-working Canadian families.

For example, he is openly and unequivocally calling for a \$6 billion increase in taxes. That is not a freeze, it is an increase.

The Liberal leader wants this tax increase to be reflected in the next budget, and he maintains that if we do not increase taxes, he will vote against the budget and trigger an election.

The last thing we need is an unnecessary election or the uncertainty caused by a coalition, which would jeopardize our economic recovery now that we are entering the home stretch.

While the Liberal leader is criss-crossing the country calling for an unnecessary election, our government will stay the course with its tax relief plan to support employment and growth.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Conservatives never miss an opportunity to let Quebec and all its regions down.

They are the ones who centralized the Canada Economic Development offices to downtown Montreal thereby depriving the regions of significant economic spinoffs. They are the ones who refused to support Bill C-288 so that our young graduates could return to the regions and actively contribute to their social and economic development. They are the ones who are still refusing to provide the forestry industry and its workers with any meaningful assistance to weather the crisis. They are the ones who voted against an employment insurance reform that would have allowed our seasonal workers and others to make a decent living year round. I could go on.

Unlike the Quebec Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois is acting in the interests of Quebec and all its regions, without distinction.

•(1415)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is the timeline of events that got the Minister of International Cooperation all tied up in “nots”:

On October 28, 2010 in the House of Commons, the minister claimed that KAIROS had lost its funding because its work no longer fitted CIDA's objectives and strongly suggested that she acted on the recommendation of her department.

On December 9, 2010, CIDA president, Margaret Biggs, told the House of Commons foreign affairs committee that the agency did recommend the project to the minister. At the same meeting, the minister testified at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs that she did not insert the word “not” in the funding document.

[Translation]

On December 13, 2010, the Liberal member for Scarborough—Guildwood raised a question of privilege in the House of Commons, concerning allegations that the Minister of International Cooperation had made misleading statements. On February 14, 2011, the minister admitted that she had given the order to write the word *not* on a financial document. On February 15, 2011, the Prime Minister defended the minister's behaviour, commended her on her decision and ignored the calls for her resignation.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader is launching a pre-election tax hike tour this week, and the *Toronto Star* is reporting that the Liberals are angling for a May election. A needless election would distract our national efforts from creating jobs and sustaining our fragile economic recovery.

The Liberal leader's plan is a high tax agenda that will stall our recovery, kill jobs and set hard-working families back. He is calling for a tax hike to be included in the budget or he will vote against the budget and force an unnecessary election. The last thing we need is the disruption of a needless election or the uncertainty of a reckless coalition that would jeopardize our economic recovery just as we enter the home stretch.

As the Liberal leader travels Canada calling for an unnecessary election and advancing his high tax agenda, our Conservative government will keep its focus on our low tax plan for jobs and growth in the best interests of all Canadians.

* * *

MERCHANT NAVY VETERANS

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, Ind. Cons.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize John Stapleton, a constituent and tireless advocate of the merchant navy veterans.

John is a past president of the Allied Merchant Marine Association, a member of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada and

Oral Questions

an honorary member of the British Merchant Navy Association. He is also a recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal and was one of 15 veterans recognized by the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation Award in October 2010.

John is a champion of veteran's issues and is persistent in his campaign for fair compensation and recognition for World War II merchant navy veterans. He and his wife, Wanita, and former MP, Paul Bonwick, were relentless in their crusade to establish Merchant Navy Day. Thanks to their perseverance, people across the country join to recognize the sacrifices made by World War II merchant navy veterans every year on September 3.

Every year, during the week of Valentine's Day, I recognize seniors and veterans. Today I pay special tribute to John Stapleton for his inspiration, his wisdom and his leadership.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts in the case are clear. The minister deceived Parliament and then someone altered a document so she could pretend that her officials supported a decision when in fact they did not.

In our democracy, the rules are clear. When a minister misleads Parliament, that minister resigns. Why is she still in cabinet?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation has been very clear that she is the one who made the decision not to provide a \$7 million grant to this Canadian non-governmental organization.

This is the kind of responsibility that ministers are expected to take each and every day. When we spend money on foreign aid, we expect it to make the very best for success in the developing world.

The minister made the right decision. She made the correct decision. I believe she made a courageous decision and did the right thing.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this minister misled the House. She altered a document and claimed that her officials supported her decision, when they did not. In a democracy, a minister who misleads the House must resign.

Why is this minister still a member of cabinet ?

Oral Questions

● (1420)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year in committee and this year in the House of Commons, the minister was very clear that she, and she alone, made the decision not to provide the \$7 million grant. She has always been very clear. The minister made the right decision.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a wider pattern here. It is the government that prorogued Parliament, that shut Parliament down, that silences whistleblowers, that intimidates public servants and now stands behind a minister who will not tell the truth.

The Prime Minister seems to think he makes the rules. He is wrong; Canadians make the rules. When will the government start showing some respect for democracy and fire that minister?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the minister is the one who made the decision. She appeared last year before committee and said so 11 times. She repeated that again this year. She made a courageous decision. The minister did the right thing. Only in our country would a minister get in trouble for not making a \$7 million grant.

When we think about grants and contributions, we still wonder what happened to the \$40 million that went missing in the sponsorship scandal.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is sinking ever deeper and has reached a new low. Earlier this week, the Minister of International Cooperation was caught red-handed. She misled Parliament, and not just by a little bit. Yesterday, in an attempt to defend her, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism told a journalist that it was not serious, that everyone lies, and that Radio-Canada lies all the time.

Is that the Conservatives' new motto: lie and lie again, and if you are a cabinet minister, you will get away with it?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): That is not at all the case. The minister was very clear. Last year before a House committee and this year in the House, she said 11 times that she made the decision to not fund this organization.

The minister made the right decision, that is, to focus our international aid on supporting the most vulnerable people in the world. She made the right decision.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are trivializing lying. Suddenly, lying is not a big deal. By refusing to discipline the Minister of International Cooperation, the Prime Minister is signalling a free-for-all; there is not a problem, and just about anything goes. According to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, it is not serious because Radio-Canada lies all the time.

One person is responsible for creating this mess and that is the Prime Minister. Does he understand that, or “not”?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did note the CBC had a very interesting story about our friend from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin that turned out not to be true this morning.

The minister made the decision not to provide a \$7 million grant to the organization in question because she strongly believed that money would be better spent to help some of the most vulnerable people in the world on the ground, and to get better value for taxpayers. The minister made a difficult decision. The minister made the right decision. The government supports that decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation initially signed a document to grant funding to KAIROS only to then falsify that document to deny the funding. Since we know how the Prime Minister works, we have to wonder whether he was directly involved in this file. If that is the case, this means that the minister, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister are telling us the opposite of the truth.

To be clear, we would like to know, yes or no, whether the Prime Minister intervened and told his minister to change her mind, falsify the document and deny funding to KAIROS.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this will not come as a surprise to the leader of the Bloc Québécois that I reject the premise of his question. Here is what I know: The minister has said very clearly that she was the one who made the decision.

With respect to the note on the form, her own deputy minister, a well-respected public servant of many years, said, “The inclusion of the word “not” is just a simple reflection of what her decision was”. She said that it was clear and quite normal.

That is what the deputy minister said on December 9 before committee.

● (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this sounds like a bad B movie.

If the minister did not agree, all she had to do was refuse to sign the document. But what happened was that she signed it, which would have granted the funding. Based on statements made by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and the ideological decisions of the Prime Minister, she was told that it made no sense and that she should not grant the funding. She added the word “not”, or ordered the word to be inserted in the right spot. That is what happened. She falsified a document.

Do they think we will believe them when they make up a bad story to hide the truth? That is what happened.

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the coalition is in fine form today.

What is true, and the minister was clear, she repeated it—10 times—before a parliamentary committee and said it on Monday in this House, is that she made the decision to deny funding to this organization. She made the right decision and the government supports it.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has still not frozen the assets of the family of former dictator Ben Ali, despite repeated requests from the Tunisian ambassador, who is concerned that the assets stolen from his people will end up in tax havens. And yet, under article 54 of the UN Convention against Corruption, Canada can temporarily freeze these assets.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs realize that, by refusing to take action, he is an accomplice to the Ben Ali family and allowing them to move the assets of the Tunisian people to tax havens?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with the Tunisian government on this issue. We have communicated to the Tunisian government clearly and on several occasions the specific information necessary for Canada to freeze any assets in Canada. The government of Tunisia has not yet responded to our request.

We remain committed to working co-operatively to bring justice for the people of Tunisia.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the Tunisian ambassador not part of the Tunisian government? The minister is completely out of touch with reality. And here is proof: the government's website still says that Ben Ali is Tunisia's president. Despite the fact that the Minister of Foreign Affairs promised to cooperate, the Tunisian ambassador has yet to receive a response to his requests, and Canada has yet to freeze the assets of the Ben Ali family.

Who is the government trying to protect by not taking action?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we stand ready to assist the people of Tunisia in their fight for justice. We have communicated this to the Tunisian government on several occasions. We have asked for specific information on any assets in Canada so those assets can be frozen. The government of Tunisia has not yet formally responded to our request.

We remain committed to working co-operatively to bring justice to the people of Tunisia.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister supports the Minister of International Cooperation; we know that. We know that he supports her decision to cut funding to KAIROS, an organization that is respected around the world for its work. His refusal to fire the minister shows that, for him, forging documents is okay, inventing excuses is okay and blaming others is also okay.

However, we still do not know why funding to KAIROS was cut. Why did they do it?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe to the leader of the New Democratic Party, once any individual or organization gets a grant, they have an entitlement to it in perpetuity. That is not the case.

The minister made a decision on what she thought was best for the expenditure of public funds and the minister turned down this Canadian non-governmental organization's application for a \$7 million grant. She felt that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

The minister has done outstanding work helping the vulnerable people of Haiti, working for women and children in our maternal health initiative in Africa, and she has done a heck of a lot to support women and children in Afghanistan.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is becoming a little too confident in its spin, because that was not an answer to the question. We still do not know why the funds were cut.

The Prime Minister really needs to take a look at this. The fact is his minister did not tell the truth. She forged a document and the Prime Minister says that is okay.

What kind of a civics lesson is that for our young people, that one can go ahead and forge documents? What a travesty that is when it comes to our responsibilities as parliamentarians. We are here to say that this is not the sort of leadership for which Canadians are looking.

It is not too late. Will the government finally take some responsibility?

● (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just because the leader of the New Democratic Party wants to say the same falsehood many times does not make it true, and it will not make it true.

He has his right to come to his own conclusion, make his own opinion on what organizations should get grants, but he does not have the right to decide what the facts are. The fact is, as stated by the deputy minister before committee last year, "The inclusion of the word "not" is just a simple reflection of what her decision was".

Oral Questions

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact that one of his ministers misled the House and arranged for a document to be forged is bad enough. However, it is a pattern of abuse. It is a pattern that shows we cannot trust the government. We cannot trust it on prorogation. We cannot trust it on access to information or on media access. On its own election law, we cannot trust it, for heaven's sakes. We cannot trust it on the census because it does not want real information. We cannot trust the Prime Minister with democracy.

It is not too late. Do the right thing and fire the minister.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member opposite and Canadians this.

Canadians can trust the Prime Minister to do the right thing on taxes. They can count on the Prime Minister to do the right thing on equipping our men and women in uniform with the tools they need to do the job. They can trust the Prime Minister on sovereignty. They can trust the Prime Minister on providing health care funding for the provinces. They can trust the Prime Minister to never make a deal with the Bloc Québécois to form a coalition government.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have a very strange definition of trust. Every time a Conservative rises in the House, we have been asked to believe the unbelievable. They do not just say it is okay to doctor documents; they say it is the right thing to do. They do not just say that it is okay to lie to the House and to Canadians; they say it is the right thing to do.

The Prime Minister is using the minister as a shield to protect himself from blame. Why is he hiding behind the minister and why will he not let her resign?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as a surprise to any member of the House that I do not accept any of the statements made by the member opposite.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is another response that is unbelievable.

The actions of the Minister of International Cooperation show nothing but contempt for our democracy and for the integrity of CIDA officials. KAIROS was funded for 35 straight years, even by the Progressive Conservatives. It should not have been cut.

When will the Prime Minister let the minister resign? When will he show the young people who come to the House that he knows the difference between right and wrong, the difference between the truth and a lie?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is Canadians will never look to the Liberal Party as a bastion of integrity and good government. That is why this government was elected to raise the ethical standards. That is why we brought in the Federal Accountability Act. We stopped the right of every organization in the country to assume that once they got a government grant, they somehow had an entitlement to it in perpetuity.

The minister made the decision not to fund this organization. She felt that foreign aid money could be better spent. She made the right decision.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know where the Prime Minister and the government House leader stand on that regime's attack on KAIROS. Both have condoned the misleading of the House. Both condone the contempt for committees. Both continue to condone the forging of documents.

Will the minister herself please help us out? Did she forge the documents all by herself on her own, or was she ordered to do so and asked to lie about it by the Prime Minister's Office?

• (1435)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): It is quite something, Mr. Speaker, for the member to get up and talk about ethics in government and I think he knows exactly what I am saying. He should be ashamed of himself.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): That was some answer, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor for a supplementary question.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am used to the drive-by smears of the House leader.

The Minister of International Cooperation fails to stand up in the House and answer to the Canadian people, yet she continues to arrive on the Hill in her limo and accept all the parliamentary perks, cars, drivers, staff, a hotline to the PMO. This is the direct opposite of ministerial accountability.

Will she now accept responsibility, do the right thing, and resign?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the actions of the minister and I know the actions of that member. The minister has more integrity in the tip of her finger than the member for Malpeque does.

The minister has taken responsibility for the decision that she made. She took responsibility more than 10 times when she was at committee last year. She took responsibility this week. She made the decision—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. government House leader has the floor. We will have some order please.

The government House leader has finished. The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***TAX EVASION**

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are too complacent about fraudsters who are trying to hide their loot. We need only look as far as their reluctance to freeze the Ben Ali family's assets. Moreover, an internal report from Revenue Canada shows that most tax evaders successfully avoid going to prison and that the Conservatives are only going after small-scale fraudsters.

How can this government, which boasts about being tough on crime, turn a blind eye to tax evasion?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely committed to catching and prosecuting individuals who try to cheat the tax system. We want to ensure that our efforts to go after tax cheats are effective. Internal audits like this help the government to identify and understand where improvements can be made to the system.

CRA has looked at the areas identified in the report and has developed an action plan that will be put in place before year end.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Revenue Canada's report indicates that the criminal economy is depriving the federal treasury of billions of dollars in untaxed income.

In this income tax season, the time when the government requires every taxpayer to do his or her part, how does the government explain the fact that a lack of resources and organizational problems are still hindering a crack down on tax evaders?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's tax system is based on voluntary compliance and self-assessment. It needs to be noted that most Canadian taxpayers do pay their taxes on time.

Our government will take the necessary measures to ensure that this law is abided by. Wilful failure to follow tax laws will result in serious consequences and serious penalties.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism had the nerve to accuse Radio-Canada journalists of lying all the time. Rather, it is the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Minister of International Cooperation who are not telling the truth in the KAIROS file, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice in the file regarding freezing Ben Ali's assets, and the Minister of Industry in the census file.

Will the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism apologize for his comments regarding Radio-Canada journalists?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the reality. The member opposite asked about five or six questions.

The reality is when it comes to the fine work done by the Minister of International Cooperation she has always undertaken her responsibilities with grace and diligence. She has made a remarkable difference in Africa. She has made a remarkable difference in Haiti. She has made a remarkable difference in Afghanistan, where she has helped the cause of women and children.

She is going to continue to do great work for Canadians and great work around the world.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader's reply illustrates just how much this government scorns the entire journalism community.

The Conservative government should take a look in the mirror and stop denigrating the work of journalists, which is extremely important in a democracy.

I will ask the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism again. Will he immediately offer an official apology here in this House?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps he should ask his colleague, the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, the same question. Yesterday Radio-Canada reported that he had been named to head a new integrity commission in Quebec, but today Premier Charest said that Radio-Canada was mistaken and that it was not true.

* * *

*[English]***INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been reports of severe delays in aid support from Canada actually reaching earthquake victims in Haiti.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation update the House on the progress of the \$250 million of matching funds the government has committed?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report to Canadians on our work in Haiti. As we know, Canada has responded overwhelmingly, and of Canada's commitment, two-thirds of that commitment has been disbursed and we continue to work with the commission and the Haitian government on behalf of the Haitian people to improve their quality of life.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that the minister is finally answering questions, I have a few specific questions for her on KAIROS.

Oral Questions

Did the minister originally sign the document that approved the funding for KAIROS before later rescinding it? Who ordered her to make the change? Who specifically added the handwritten word “not” to the document, and why did she not reveal all of this to the committee last December?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has always been incredibly clear. The Minister of International Cooperation said last year at committee some 11 times that she was the one who made the decision not to give the \$7 million grant to the non-governmental organization. She has been very clear that she thought that money could be spent better for those who need assistance in the developing world.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister, since she is now able to answer questions, can confirm that, in fact, it is the Prime Minister's Office that ordered the defunding of the wrong KAIROS, that the Prime Minister's Office ordered the cover-up in all of its answers for an entire year given by the minister and given by her parliamentary secretary, who admitted that in fact he had misled the House, and that the real reason for the refusal to fire the minister is that she was just following orders.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former parliamentary secretary, on learning that he had misspoken, did the honourable thing and immediately got up and corrected the record voluntarily. That speaks to his integrity, to his honesty, and the great contribution that he has made not just to his constituency but to this entire House.

The reality is the minister has been very clear that she was the one who made the decision not to fund this organization, and her own deputy minister has said that her comment on the memo was just reflecting that decision.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the minister is the one who made the decision, then why is she not the one answering questions in the House? It is quite simple.

Why does the government's spokesperson have to answer all the questions today to defend the government's decision? It is clear: it was the Prime Minister's Office that ordered the decision not to fund KAIROS. It was the PMO that covered this up for over a year. The real reason the Prime Minister refuses to dismiss the minister is that she was simply following his orders.

• (1445)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Toronto Centre is just making it up as he goes along.

The Minister of International Cooperation has been very clear in the House of Commons. She said just this week, “ultimately the decision not to provide funding was mine...as minister of international co-operation”, and I accept that.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians right across this country were

stunned when David Chen, a store owner from Ontario, was prosecuted for defending his own store from theft. The Prime Minister indicated to the House that the government would be looking at reforms to ensure that this did not happen to other honest Canadians.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice please update the House on the legislation that was introduced this morning?

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to putting real criminals behind bars. Canadians who have been the victims of a crime should not be re-victimized by the criminal justice system. The legislation introduced today would clarify Canadians' rights when it comes to citizen's arrest.

Our government is also taking the opportunity to clarify the rights of citizens to protect themselves and their property while continuing to recognize that peace officers are the first line of defence against any crime.

I call on all parties to put their support behind this bill.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a meeting between a minister and a lobbyist should never start with the words, “Here's a bag full of cash”, but that is the net effect of lobbyist Michael McSweeney holding a ritzy fundraiser for the very minister he was lobbying, “Here is a sack full of cash, minister. Now how about that clean energy fund grant I needed?” It is enough to make Karlheinz Schreiber blush, and he does not blush easily.

The Minister of Labour has been busted by the Ethics Commissioner and the Lobbying Commissioner. My question is simple. Why is she still in the front row after the shakedown stunt, trying to shake down well-connected Conservative lobbyists?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is still in cabinet because she is an outstanding minister with high levels of integrity and we are proud of her.

The Ethics Commissioner said in her report that the minister “did not contravene the Conflict of Interest Act or the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons...”. She went on to say that the minister “was not involved in the recruitment of these volunteers or the organization of the fundraiser and therefore did not accept these services or contributions”.

She has followed all the rules. We are proud of the good work that she is doing.

Oral Questions

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives said they would clean up the revolving door between their government and lobbying firms. Yet Alanna Heath went directly from the finance minister's office to Barrick Gold as the director of government relations. Guess what her first job was? It was to kill Bill C-300, the corporate social responsibility bill for the mining industry. Then Rodney MacDonald left the Minister of Industry's office to become the director of government relations for Visa, the very file that his former boss was directly involved in.

What happened to those promises, what happened to the cooling-off period for connected political staff and what happened to the integrity of the government?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this government that brought in the Federal Accountability Act. It is this government that brought in the former position of Lobbying Commissioner. It is this government that established the reporting rules. It is this government that made sure some very nervous MPs on the other side of the House were also covered by those lobbying rules.

The legislation is very clear. If people have complaints related to the Lobbying Act, they go to the Lobbying Commissioner. That is what the person is there for.

Further to that, members of Parliament and the committee itself can review the legislation at any time. It is the best legislation among most western democracies and we are going to keep it that way.

* * *

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development insists on imposing the nutrition north Canada program, which has triggered a draconian increase in the cost of nutritious food. The price of lettuce is already up to \$6.75. The northern communities are not getting the federal help to which they are entitled.

Will the minister put the nutrition north Canada program on hold until the socio-economic repercussions of this program have been assessed, as the Bloc Québécois and the Kativik regional government have been calling for?

[*English*]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the nutrition north Canada program is well designed. We have renovated a very inefficient program. We have broad-based support from the retail community, and from the northern communities, which we consulted widely with.

It is going to take effect on April 1, and we are looking forward to a successful launch.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development claim that the change in program is not to blame for the higher prices since the program has not been implemented yet. That is not true. The first phase of nutrition north has been in place since October and its effects have been catastrophic.

Will the government put nutrition north on hold in order to assess the socio-economic impact?

[*English*]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had conversations with the retailers involved in this story in the media about some high prices. Those were not items covered under the old food mail program. They are not covered under the new program that will come into effect, either.

The retailer has stated that it was a mistake. It is an error, and they will correct their ways.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only are they constantly undermining our international relations, but the Conservatives are also making Canadians poorer each time they talk to our neighbours. Yes, we have learned that the American administration plans to introduce a \$5.50 entry fee for all Canadians entering the United States on an airplane or boat. This government has a hard time protecting our interests. First, it was \$1 billion for softwood lumber, and now it is another \$100 million that the Americans want to take out of our pockets.

How did this happen?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at a time when the worldwide economic recovery is still fragile, we believe that it is in the best interests of both countries to find solutions that increase the movement of people, goods and services. That is exactly what the President and the Prime Minister decided two weeks ago. Our prosperity depends on it. The idea of eliminating the exemption is only at the initial stage, and we do not believe that it is a good idea.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike citizens from other countries, Canadians have always been exempt from paying entry fees when visiting our neighbours to the south. This exemption was based on our excellent relationship with the United States, which is our closest ally and primary trading partner. The idea of eliminating the entry-fee exemption reflects the deterioration of our relationship with our neighbours and it is the first bad news to come out of the Prime Minister's visit.

Why is this government not protecting our interests?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that my colleague was mistaken when he said that our relationship with the American government had hit an all-time low. Members will recall the very bleak period in the relationship between the Liberals at the time and the American government. I repeat that it is not a good idea. This is a budget proposal for the 2012 budget and they have not even adopted their 2011 budget.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the scope and the depth of the cyber attack on the Canadian government is truly disturbing. While the Conservatives are trying to downplay the importance of this attack, it is obvious that they did not take these threats seriously.

We now know that the hackers were able to infect the very departments that hold the purse strings of the nation just weeks before a budget, and also an agency of the Department of National Defence. We still do not know if anything else has been compromised.

Will the government tell us what departments were infiltrated, and what was the damage caused?

• (1455)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not comment on the details of security-related incidents.

Our government, however, takes threats seriously and measures are in place to address them. I would point out that the next phase of our economic action plan is still in development and officials have advised that budget security was not compromised.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that this cyber attack caught the Conservatives completely unprepared.

Cyber crimes like this are not the work of suburban kids in their bedrooms, but are sophisticated and organized.

None of this should be a surprise to the government. It has been warned many times before, including by the Auditor General in a comprehensive report years ago. We have seen similar attacks on the U.S. and the U.K., and they have taken measures to protect themselves against such crimes.

Instead of bureaucrats working out of Starbucks for free Wi-Fi, what measures will the government take to ensure this never happens again?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it appears that this member has finally woken up to this issue. We have been talking about it for quite some time.

Secure cyberspace is vital to sustaining and building Canada's economic advantage. That is why we are investing \$90 million over five years, including an increased investment in a round-the-clock information protection centre to combat all types of hackers and cyber attacks.

I can send the member the news release from last October.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been a lot of falsehoods recklessly thrown around on the issue of family class immigration.

Would the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism set the record straight on our government's record on family immigration and how it compares with that of the Liberals when they were last in power, and what Canadians can expect in 2011?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, I can announce that last year, 2010, we received in Canada a larger number of family members than in any year over the past three decades.

In 2011 we are further increasing the numbers for family reunification. The planning ranges last year were 57,000 to 63,000. This year we are increasing the planning ranges for parents, spouses, children and grandparents to 58,500 to 65,000.

That is an increase so that more family members can be reunited with their loved ones here in Canada. We are getting the job done for newcomers.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these days, capital mobility is almost limitless. With the click of a mouse, millions of dollars can be transferred to the other side of the world. For weeks, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been dilly-dallying on the issue of freezing the assets of former Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and his family.

When will he take action? Is he waiting for Mr. Ben Ali to find a real estate agent to sell his house in Westmount?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with the Tunisian government on this issue. We have communicated to the Tunisian government clearly and on several occasions the specific information necessary for Canada to freeze any assets in Canada. The government of Tunisia has not yet responded to our request.

We remain committed to working co-operatively to bring justice for the people of Tunisia.

[Translation]

IRAN

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of their support for the June 2009 opposition movement in Iran, Iranian filmmakers Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof were sentenced to six years in prison. They also had some of their rights revoked for 20 years, including their right to ply their trade.

The Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec is calling for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to speak out against these violations. Does the minister intend to condemn this situation and call for the release of these two filmmakers?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, yesterday evening, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons presented a motion to hold a take-note debate on Iran. During my speech, I spoke about the case raised by the hon. member.

To the extent of our abilities, we will do all we can to ensure that these individuals are released from prison.

* * *

• (1500)

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after every deal the government has made with the U.S., the Conservatives end up looking like the president's doormat.

Just two weeks ago the Prime Minister claimed this time that things were going to be different, but already President Obama is trying to slap a new fee on Canadians crossing the border.

Is this why the Prime Minister is keeping his latest deal with the U.S. secret? What other bad news or hidden fees is he hiding?

Canadians deserve answers and accountability. Why will they not get it?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have responded to this question and the Prime Minister has responded to this question.

We think this is a very bad idea, particularly at a time when we are working on the global economic recovery. We know that it remains fragile.

That is the reason the Prime Minister and the President of the United States got together to be able to develop new ways to increase our economic ties, to be able to work at finding ways to create new jobs in this country as well as in the United States.

We will be able, once again, to make sure that happens.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, public safety and crime

Business of the House

are very important issues for families in all of Quebec's regions. The Bloc Québécois prefers to keep listening to the leftist urban elite from the Plateau and other great thinkers who are out of touch with the reality of Quebec's regions.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice tell the House what the Conservative government is doing to fight crime?

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is listening to the regions of Quebec and their priorities. That is why we are taking effective, reasonable measures to fight drug dealers by imposing minimum sentences. Our government is ensuring that drug dealers are behind bars, not near our schools, our parks and our youth. Unfortunately, the Bloc is still listening to the leftist urban elite from the Plateau, not to the regions, and it voted against this measure.

Our government continues to listen to Quebec families and to the regions of Quebec. And we will keep fighting criminals, no matter what the Bloc and the leftist urban elite from the Plateau think.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all dictators, Ben Ali and his family built their colossal fortune on the backs of their own people. The minister told us he was waiting for an official request from the Tunisian government to take action. Tunisia's ambassador to Canada already said some weeks ago, "We hope the Canadian government will take immediate action to safeguard those assets until justice is done."

How much longer will the minister be an accomplice to those who fleeced the people of Tunisia?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps if the member opposite has some information on where those assets can be found, he can provide them to the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada has communicated to the Tunisian government clearly and on several occasions the specific information that is necessary for Canada to freeze any assets found in Canada. The government of Tunisia has not yet formally responded to our request.

We remain committed to working with the government and the people of Tunisia to provide justice for the people of Tunisia.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the government House leader if he might walk us through the balance of business in the House this week and, of course, what he is contemplating for next week.

In particular, many Canadians are asking where the government stands with two bills that it has been heralding now for months, Bill S-10, which we have yet to see debated in any sense in this House of Commons or at committee, and Bill C-49, which the government continues to talk about and the immigration minister and the Prime Minister keep referring to but we have yet to see.

Privilege

We are anxious to improve the situation on both the law and order fronts for Canadians but also on immigration and refugee reform.

• (1505)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill S-10 and Bill C-49, we will call them when the time is right and when we can get these important pieces of legislation passed by the House of Commons.

With respect to accelerated parole, we found the time was right this week to get that bill done. I want to thank all members of the House for their consideration, particularly those members who supported that important legislation to stop fraudsters, who steal \$100 million from seniors' retirement savings, from only having to go to jail for one-sixth of their sentence. I want to thank all the members who supported that important legislation, particularly on third reading.

Today, we will continue with the Liberal opposition motion. We heard a great speech by the member for Wascana at the outset of this Parliament.

Tomorrow, we will call Bill C-42, the strengthening civil aviation security; Bill C-46, the Canada-Panama free trade bill; and Bill C-55, the enhanced new veterans charter, on which the Minister of Veterans Affairs has done a phenomenal job. I think there have been consultations with the parties, which is good news. We also will call Bill C-20, an action plan for the National Capital Commission. I know there has been a considerable amount of very non-partisan discussion among all the parties. We will have that bill at report stage and then third reading. There will be a few amendments and we have already had some discussion with some members on this.

Next week, as all members will know, is a week the House is not sitting. When the House returns on February 28, we will simply continue where we left off with the list of bills that I gave.

I am pleased to announce to our good friends in the new Democratic Party that Tuesday, March 1 shall be an allotted day.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles referred to the leftist urban elite from the Plateau.

I would have him know that in my riding of Hull—Aylmer, there is a residential neighbourhood also known as “le Plateau”. I hate to disappoint him, but there are no leftists in that part of my riding.

I would like the hon. member to withdraw his comments and apologize to the people of the Plateau in Hull—Aylmer.

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hull—Aylmer has clearly indicated where his residence is not.

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION REGARDING KAIROS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege under the provisions of Standing Order 48 alleging contempt of the House by the Minister of International Cooperation further to the notice that was submitted to the clerk this morning.

I will be asking you, Mr. Speaker, to make a prima facie case finding that a breach of privilege has occurred, specifically that the minister “deliberately attempted to mislead the House by way of a statement”, or, in this case, a series of statements, and “that she knew or ought to have known that the statements to the House were either false or an attempt to mislead”.

I brought this matter before you, Mr. Speaker, in December 2010 following statements by the minister during a foreign affairs and international development committee hearing. It is unfortunate that a question of privilege has to be raised a second time.

Despite being given many opportunities to do so, the Minister of International Cooperation has refused to show any deference toward Parliament and its members and apologize for the misleading statements she made regarding the funding of KAIROS.

The question before you today, Mr. Speaker, is whether any of the additional material would lead you to the conclusion of a prima facie case of misleading the House.

In your ruling of February 10, 2011, you said:

The full body of material gives rise to very troubling questions. Any reasonable person confronted with what appears to have transpired would necessarily be extremely concerned, if not shocked, and might well begin to doubt the integrity of certain decision-making processes. In particular, the senior CIDA officials concerned must be deeply disturbed by the doctored document they have been made to appear to have signed.

However, despite the obvious frustration expressed by many of the members who have intervened in this case and the profoundly disturbing questions that evidently remain unanswered in the view of these same members, the Chair is bound by very narrow parameters in situations such as this one. It may sound overly technical but the reality is that when adjudicating cases of this kind, the Chair is obliged to reference material fully and properly before the House.

The question, therefore, is: Are you less troubled or more troubled by the additional material that is now fully and properly before the House?

The foreign affairs and international development committee report tabled this morning contains much of the quoted exchange between me and the minister, other members' interventions and a supplementary report provided by government members which provides yet another version of events. I would suggest that it solidifies your disquiet, if anything.

The line of argument in the supplementary report would be characterized as an “I do not know” argument. It appears that the minister does not know who signs her documents or whether or not they have been changed. It appears to be plausible the minister at one point actually recommended the grant and then the recommendation was changed after the fact at her direction or someone else's. It is clear that she does not know.

Privilege

Another piece of new information came in the exchanges in question period. You, Mr. Speaker, have been present for all of them so I will mercifully not repeat them. In these exchanges, the government advances two lines of argument. First, the minister apologized so, therefore, that is the end of it. Second, bureaucrats make recommendations and the ministers make decisions.

Mr. Speaker, if I lie to you or mislead you in a personal relationship an apology may well suffice, assuming no further harm. However, if you were a judge sitting in a court and I lied to you, there would be consequences regardless of an apology. It is called perjury. I may even go to jail because we have the highest expectations that truth be told in court; so also in Parliament and before a parliamentary committee.

In Parliament, however, as is stated on page 111 of the 22nd edition of Erskine May:

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt.

I allege that this is what has occurred.

● (1510)

There are four distinct occasions on which the minister or the parliamentary secretary speaking on behalf of the minister have knowingly misled the House which I will now relate.

First, on December 9, 2010, before the foreign affairs and international development committee, Margaret Biggs, the president of CIDA, was very clear in her testimony that, contrary to what the minister had led the House to understand, CIDA had unequivocally recommended KAIROS for the grant. The minister was fully aware of CIDA's position and yet chose to misrepresent the advice of her senior civil servants to cover up a plainly political decision.

We see this in a response dated March 8, 2010 to an order paper question put to the minister by the member for London North Centre. The minister stated the following in writing on a document to which her signature is affixed:

The CIDA decision not to continue funding KAIROS was based on the overall assessment of the proposal, not on any single criterion.

A reasonable person looking at that would clearly interpret that as a decision made by the CIDA department.

Based on both the access to information request document on which the famous "not" was written and the testimony of President Biggs, we know that this is false as the CIDA officials unambiguously recommended that KAIROS continue to receive funding.

Second, when appearing before the standing committee on December 9, the minister, when asked who inserted the "not" on the document, stated, "I do not know". The minister subsequently contradicted this statement at committee by her statement in the House on February 14 when she stated, "The 'not' was inserted at my direction".

Third, in the same statement given to the House on February 14, the minister compounded the untruth contained in the order paper response mentioned above by stating, "At no time have I stated that the decision was that of the department". The above order paper

response clearly alleges that CIDA, her department, made the decision. This is simply not true.

Fourth and last, the former parliamentary secretary to the minister of international cooperation stated in the House of Commons on March 15, 2010, that:

CIDA thoroughly analyzed KAIROS' program proposal and determined, with regret, that it did not meet the agency's current priorities. This is important.

As with the order paper response above and based upon the evidence, we know this to be untrue.

I am pleased to note that the former parliamentary secretary, the member for Kootenay—Columbia, to his credit and his honour, did offer an apology to the House. However, the minister has not yet chosen to do the same thing nor, disappointingly, has the Prime Minister.

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 so that it appears that someone else made the decision.

Mr. Speaker, as you stated:

Any reasonable person confronted with what appears to have transpired would necessarily be extremely concerned, if not shocked, and might well begin to doubt the integrity of certain decision-making processes.

In addition to these clear examples of where the minister has misled the House, there are additional concerns that raise further questions about the minister's integrity.

First, KAIROS had its funding cut in November 2009, and we have been asking for clarification on this decision ever since. Why did the minister not clear up the confusion at the first available opportunity?

Second, it may be a little late but why did she not use her statement on Monday to do the honourable thing and offer an unequivocal apology?

Third, if someone is really going to reverse a recommendation, why would the individual not make the recommendation absolutely clear? Any first year law student would be more careful.

Fourth, why leave the lingering impression that CIDA officials rejected the grant?

It is deeply troubling for a minister of the Crown to behave with such disregard and disrespect for her position, her colleagues, the civil service, the NGO community and the millions of Canadians who support the work of KAIROS.

It is further troubling to see the Prime Minister even today defend and extol the minister's behaviour.

● (1515)

As we all know, privilege exists for good reason. In this instance, as in all others, it compels truthfulness even when embarrassing, even when it does not suit the government's agenda. Privilege exists so MPs can make decisions based on fact, not on fiction. Privilege exists as a core value of democracy because MPs and their constituents, the people of Canada, have every right to expect that public discourse in this chamber is without artifice.

Privilege

Mr. Speaker, you are the guardian of that core value, the value of truthfulness between and among members, ministers and the Prime Minister. Any ruling other than a prima facie case of breach of privilege in this case will inevitably lead to another even more egregious abuse.

I and my colleagues are calling upon you, Mr. Speaker, to put a stop to tampered documents, to blaming others, to casual regard for facts before a committee of the House. We call on you to uphold the highest standards of discourse by ministers in their communications with the House.

Mr. Speaker, with the additional material before you, the case for contempt is even more compelling than it was before. I am prepared to move the motion of contempt upon your direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa Centre has also sent a notice. I will hear him now.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence. As was mentioned by my colleague from the Liberal Party, this question of privilege relates to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development's sixth report, which was tabled this morning.

From subsequent submissions you have received from other hon. members, Mr. Speaker, including from me on December 13, it is clear that the Minister of International Cooperation statements to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development with regard to who was responsible for the government decision to reject a funding proposal for the Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives known as KAIROS were deliberately misleading. I believe my rights and the rights of all hon. members have been breached by the minister's misleading comments.

As has been noted in the December 9 testimony by the minister in front of the committee, when asked who was responsible for inserting the word "not" that led to the denial of funding to KAIROS, she told me and members of the committee that she did not know. As you know, Mr. Speaker, recently in the House it was established by the minister that she did know and she had directed someone to insert the said word.

I want to reference your ruling, Mr. Speaker, on February 10. You said that while giving voice to the disturbing questions with regard to the integrity of the decision-making process conducted by the minister, the absence of a committee report on the matter put a key limitation on your ability to find that there was a prima facie question of privilege arising from the minister's comments to the committee. Such a report was tabled in the House today. This report refers to the transcript of the minister's testimony to the committee on December 9, 2010, as well as a copy of the doctored document.

The original question of privilege submitted to you on December 13, 2010, Mr. Speaker, charged that the minister had deliberately misled the House and the committee on the origin of the government's rejection of the funding for KAIROS. For months, hon. members were led to believe the rejection had been advised by officials at CIDA.

In my submissions to you, Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to your attention new and troubling facts arising from the minister's statement to the House on February 14. Her statement indicated

that her testimony to the committee on December 9, 2010, was knowingly incorrect and deliberately misleading.

I believe that contempt against me, against the citizens of our country, whom I and other hon. members represent, and all parliamentarians, has been one where you will, if you see the evidence before you, find a prima facie case of contempt of the House.

I have three other references which I believe to be relevant citations for the Speaker's deliberation on this matter.

With regard to the issue of contempt of Parliament, I reference Joseph Maingot. In particular, I reference pages 227 to 229, of the second edition, which indicate the parameters of the issue of conduct constituting breach of privilege or contempt. You will find, Mr. Speaker, that this is relevant in this case.

A prima facie, case of privilege for those who are not aware of the Latin meaning, is a case where the Speaker finds evidence enough for us to carry on with a case of contempt of Parliament. Therefore, is there enough evidence in front of the Speaker for us to proceed further with a motion.

I would also like to reference O'Brien and Bosc, page 115, where there is reference to a case that was ruled on and reference to:

Misleading a Minister or a Member has also been considered a form of obstruction and thus a prima facie breach of privilege.

The example cited is from December 6, 1978, in a finding that a prima facie contempt of the House existed. Speaker Jerome ruled that a government official, by deliberately misleading the minister, had impeded the member in the performance of his duties and consequently obstructed the House itself.

• (1520)

I have one final reference. It is the same case on which Speaker Jerome ruled. On page 1856, of the December 6, 1978, issue of *Hansard*, there is his full ruling on privilege. The complaint is the subject matter of a question of privilege and it is one that you will find relevant to this case.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if we are able to establish, and if you are able to rule, that there is prima facie case of contempt with regard to our privileges, I would ask that you consider a motion, as my colleague has, with wording along the lines that the matters raised in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, including all circumstances leading to and related to the addition of the word "not" on the official document contained in appendix A of the report, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

• (1525)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleagues, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood and the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, for their interventions.

Privilege

As you well know, Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity the government has had to listen to interventions on a matter of privilege. I would ask you, as is the custom of the House, to grant approval to the government to delay our response until we bring back to the House a more comprehensive response to answer many of the issues raised here today. I also commit to you that our response will be developed and brought back to the House as quickly as possible.

Since I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, and we are talking about a matter of privilege, I want to bring to your attention what I believe to be a troubling and continuing pattern from the opposition coalition when it comes to privilege.

Particularly in this case, the member for Ottawa Centre, who is a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, said yesterday, as a result of an in camera meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, that in all probability a report, which was conducted and agreed upon by the committee for foreign affairs, would be tabled in the House today. In effect and in actuality that is what happened.

As you well know, Mr. Speaker, in camera discussions are meant to be kept confidential. Unfortunately, we have seen time and time again over the past number of months in camera discussions and their confidences broken by opposition members speaking to the media about confidential conversations held in camera.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that when you make your ultimate ruling on the question of privilege raised today, you would perhaps consider to include in your ruling the fact that in camera conversations held at committee should remain in confidence. As I said, it was troubling. It is a continuing pattern. We have seen it all too often in the past number of months. I think that alone is a matter of concern for all parliamentarians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a ruling made on February 10 on a question of privilege raised in December concerning misleading statements made by the Minister of International Cooperation about the decision not to grant funding to KAIROS, you said:

—despite...the profoundly disturbing questions that evidently remain unanswered in the view of these same members, the Chair is bound by very narrow parameters in situations such as this one. It may sound overly technical but the reality is that when adjudicating cases of this kind, the Chair is obliged to reference material fully and properly before the House. With regard to statements made by the minister, this material is limited to a few answers to oral questions and one answer to a written question, not to any comments in committee.

In the circumstances, with this key limitation in mind and in the absence of a committee report on this matter, the Chair cannot find evidence in documents properly before the House to suggest that the minister's statements to the House were deliberately misleading, that she believed them to be misleading or that she had intended for them to be misleading. Accordingly, I cannot rule that the minister deliberately misled the House and, therefore, I cannot find that there is a *prima facie* question of privilege.

Since you made this ruling on February 10, new facts have come to light. First, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has provided to you certain statements that were made in committee, as well as the KAIROS funding document obtained through the Access to Information Act. You have

been officially apprised of this information by the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Furthermore, the Minister of International Cooperation also read a statement in this House on February 14 regarding funding for KAIROS. Thus, in light of the new facts in this matter, of which you have been officially informed, I believe that there are grounds for you to reconsider your decision. Here is the timeline of the statements in this matter.

On April 23, 2010, the minister told the House:

The criteria for the funding for KAIROS is the same as the criteria for funding for anyone else applying for such funding. KAIROS did not meet the criteria. It did not get the funding. There was no surprise there.

Still on April 23, in reply to written Question No. 106, the minister replied:

The CIDA decision not to continue funding KAIROS was based on the overall assessment of the proposal, not on any single criterion.

On October 28, 2010, she said:

We have an international aid effectiveness strategy and we are acting on it. We are getting results for people in the developing countries and all projects by CIDA are assessed against our effectiveness standards. After due diligence, it was determined that KAIROS' proposal did not meet government standards.

At the December 9, 2010 meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, she stated, "...the decision on my part was not to fund KAIROS..."

During this same committee meeting, when asked who had added the word "not" to the documents, she stated, "I do not know". In the same breath she added, "I cannot say who wrote the 'not'. However, I will tell you the ultimate decision reflects the decision of the minister and the government."

On December 9, 2010, in committee, the president of CIDA, Margaret Biggs, confirmed that CIDA had recommended that the minister approve funding for KAIROS:

...the agency did recommend the project to the minister. She has indicated that. But it was her decision, after due consideration, to not accept the department's advice.

She also added that when she signed the document, the word "not" was not on it. Finally, on February 14, in the House, the Minister made this statement:

There was no decision taken by the department to provide funding. It was only a recommendation. It was my decision to disagree with the recommendation based on discussions with advisers. I was fully aware that my decision was not aligned with the recommendation of the department.

Later on, she added:

At no time have I stated that the decision for funding was that of the department. I have repeatedly and clearly stated in response to questions in the House and at committee that the funding decision was mine. The "not" was inserted at my direction.

In your decision on February 10, 2010, you referred to the following passage from *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*:

In order to establish a *prima facie* finding that a breach of privilege and contempt has occurred, three elements must be present: one, it must be proven that the statements were misleading; two, it must be established that the member at the time knew the statement was incorrect; and three, in the making of the statement, the minister intended to mislead the House.

Business of Supply

•(1530)

On April 23, 2010, in response to a question on the order paper, the Minister of International Cooperation said that the decision not to fund KAIROS was a decision made by CIDA. On December 9, 2010, at committee, she said the opposite, that it was her decision. On December 9, 2010, at committee, she said she did not know who added the word “not” to the document on funding for KAIROS. On February 14, 2011, however, she said in the House that the word “not” was added at her direction.

As a result, the first criterion has been met. The Minister of International Cooperation made misleading statements. Did she know they were misleading when she made those statements? Of course she did. If she made the decision not to fund KAIROS, she knew that it was not the decision of her officials. If she asked someone to add the word “not” in the document, she was fully aware of that when she gave her testimony at committee on December 9, 2010, because she signed the document on November 27, 2009. As a result, the second criterion has been met. When the minister made those statements, she knew they were incorrect.

Why did the minister make these contradictory statements? It is because the decision to cut funding to KAIROS was purely ideological and she did not want to pay the political price. That takes care of the third criterion. Yes, the minister fully intended to mislead the House.

I am well aware, Mr. Speaker, that you might be tempted to rule that this is a matter of debate. However, I believe that it is a much more fundamental question. The role of Parliament is to hold the government accountable and, unfortunately, this government is not co-operating. Over the past few months, we have seen it deny the power of the House to request documents and deny the power of committees to subpoena witnesses, and now it is denying the members' right to obtain accurate information. This is a case of contempt of Parliament. Deliberately misleading the House constitutes contempt of Parliament. In fact, in the 23rd edition of Erskine May, on page 132, it states:

[*English*]

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt. In 1963 the House resolved that in making a personal statement which contained words which he later admitted not to be true, a former Member had been guilty of a grave contempt.

[*Translation*]

On February 1, 2002, in your ruling on a question of privilege in which it was alleged that the Minister of National Defence had misled the House, you stated the following:

The authorities are consistent about the need for clarity in our proceedings and about the need to ensure the integrity of the information provided by the government to the House.

On March 22, 2002, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled a report concerning this same question of privilege. It said:

Incorrect statements in the House of Commons cannot be condoned. It is essential that Members have accurate and timely information, and that the integrity of the information provided by the Government to the House is ensured.

To conclude, I believe that you must find that this is a *prima facie* question of privilege. This is much more than a matter of debate.

Parliamentarians have a fundamental right, a constitutional right, to hold the government accountable and, Mr. Speaker, you are the guarantor of that right.

•(1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of the comments by the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader where he said the government side would attempt to get back on this as soon as it could, I hope you will agree that this is a matter of privilege. Members are required to raise it in a timely basis and the government should also be required to get back on a timely basis. The matter is a priority for the House in terms of its agenda. I know you, Mr. Speaker, will look at it that way and hopefully the government will get back just as quickly.

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their interventions on this point. I will take the matter under advisement and of course await the response from the government as indicated by the parliamentary secretary.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS REQUESTED BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville had the floor. There are 15 minutes remaining in the time allotted for her remarks. I therefore call upon the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Centre, so perhaps I have less than 15 minutes remaining.

The subject of today's opposition day motion also contains specific references to documents requested by the Standing Committee on Finance on November 17, 2010 and March 7, 2011. These are extremely important requests. The first deals with the government's decision to implement corporate tax cuts at the worst possible time, during an economic recession. The finance committee asked for the projections of corporate tax profits before tax, up to 2015. The second deals with the costs related to the government's over-the-top crime agenda that will send many more thousands of our young people down the drain of a broken prison system.

In both cases, the government refused to provide the information and cited the excuse of cabinet confidence.

Business of Supply

Notwithstanding the fact that Parliament has the authority to order the production of any and all documents, including those that are termed “cabinet confidence”, it is curious that the government would choose this excuse. After all, what exactly is cabinet confidence? It is difficult to find an explanation that can capture the complexities of the concept, but the Department of Justice, in its discussion paper, “Strengthening the Access to Information Act”, states that cabinet confidences in the broadest sense are the political secrets of ministers individually and collectively, the disclosure of which would make it very difficult for the government to speak in unison before Parliament and the public.

With this in mind, are the projections of corporate profits before taxes a political secret? Would revealing them make it difficult for the government to speak in unison before Parliament and the public?

Consider that in 2005, the Liberal government released exactly what was being requested in its 2005 economic and fiscal update. Did our democracy crumble to its knees after these projections were published on page 83? Of course not, and why? Because these figures are not cabinet confidences, likewise the costs related to the government's 11 crime bills. Would revealing these figures breach a political secret? Would revealing them make it difficult for the government to speak in unison before Parliament and the public?

Last year the Parliamentary Budget Officer tabled a report regarding one single justice bill, Bill C-25, the Truth in Sentencing Act. He stated that this one bill would increase the cost to government of correctional services by up to \$8.6 billion per year by 2015-16. This is the exact kind of information we are looking to get from the government. It should not be a secret. It should not be privy to only the executive branch of government. After all, it is the legislative branch which is being asked to provide approval for these measures. How can we do so if we do not know what it will cost? Some might say it is like being asked to sign a cheque while the amount is concealed. We would never do so. Why would members of the House be expected to do so? Yet, this is exactly what our Parliament has been reduced to.

I believe in the House. I believe in democracy. I believe in the fundamental right of Parliament, as written by our founders, shaped by our predecessors and now challenged by the Conservative government. I will not stand down in the face of the Conservatives' challenges to the institutions and the power of Parliament that I hold near and dear. I will not stop defending our privileges and our rights.

• (1540)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to my hon. colleague talk about corporate taxes and projections. As I listened to her, I recalled being at finance committee a few days ago when the Parliamentary Budget Officer was there as were a number of economists. They clearly stated that in 2007 when we legislated the corporate tax reductions, and of course the Liberals are now looking at increasing taxes, the projections were built into the forecast.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's forecast included the corporate tax rates as legislated by Parliament. Economists from across the country were at committee.

What we really need to focus on is why the Liberal Party is changing its mind at this critical juncture, when the member for Kings—Hants and the member for Wascana throughout this time have talked about the importance of corporate tax cuts. It is clearly calculated into the economic forecasts by all those in Canada. Why would the Liberals be looking at a job-killing increase at a very important time of recovery in our history?

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, this is yet another smokescreen. It was the Liberals who were prudent fiscal managers. It was the Liberals who reduced the corporate tax rate. What the member is talking about is clearly a smokescreen in the same way that those documents the government just tabled were a smokescreen. It is a continuation of this culture of deceit.

Granted, the government tabled a number of documents that we had requested, but only because we shamed it into it. We asked for documents in three areas. Granted, the government provided a little on corporate tax cuts, but nothing on F-35s and nothing in the area of the corporate crime bills.

We asked for information on 18 crime bills and received nothing. There is insufficient information to make logical, rational decisions on which we base our fiduciary responsibilities.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two days ago we had a committee hearing regarding Bill C-59, Abolition of Early Parole Act. The member for Brampton West asked Mary Campbell, the director general of Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate, Public Safety Canada a question about information regarding the crime bill in terms of what it was going to cost. She said, “I have most of that information. It's part of my responsibility in terms of developing legislation to consider costs. Yes, I have most of that information or access to it”.

The problem is the government refuses to allow her to give the information. She went on to say in response to a second question from the member, “I said that I have the information or access to it. I really can't talk about what I've provided the government in any detail because I think that is cabinet confidence...”.

The final question by the member was, “So if the government asked you, in theory, to provide it, you would be able to answer that question for them”?

Mary Campbell said, “I think I'm able to answer almost all questions that I'm asked about legislative proposals”.

There we have it. The government is caught deliberately hiding when we know it has the information because the director general of Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate said so three times at a committee two nights ago.

Business of Supply

• (1545)

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague who always asks the most insightful questions and provides the most insightful commentary.

Let us not forget what this debate is about. It is about Parliament's right to know. It is about Parliament's right to information. It is a fundamental right and it is necessary for the proper functioning of Parliament. It is the core to our democracy.

Legitimate requests for documents of the government have been rebuffed. This is indefensible. The government is always attempting to defend the indefensible to have us believe the unbelievable, and we will not stand for that. We need the documents we requested. We need them today.

I will give another example where there is insufficient information for us to perform our duties.

Regarding Bill C-16 to end house arrests, from the information provided to the House, how much would it cost? None, zero, but we all know that Bill C-16 would put more people in jail. Yet the government is telling us Bill C-16 will not cost another red penny.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise once again in the House, which has to take time from doing its business in order to do what is best for Canadians, to ask the government to respect Parliament and to table the uncensored documents that Parliament requested. We are doing this once again.

This is not new. The same request was previously made of the government with regard to national security and Afghan detainees. The request went to the Speaker and he ruled. I will read the Speaker's ruling because the government heard what he said at that time and it continues to keep blocking access to information. The Speaker stated:

Before us are issues that question the very foundations upon which our parliamentary system is built. In a system of responsible government, the fundamental right of the House of Commons to hold the government to account for its actions is an indisputable privilege and in fact an obligation.

The Conservative government is walking away from accountability and its obligation to Parliament.

The Speaker went on to say:

Embedded in our Constitution, parliamentary law and even in our Standing Orders, it is the source of our parliamentary system for which other processes and principles necessarily flow, and it is why that right is manifested in numerous procedures of the House, from the daily question period to the detailed examination by committees of estimates, to reviews of the accounts of Canada, to debate, amendments, and votes on legislation.

In other words, how can a government bring forward legislation, ask Parliament to vote on it and then refuse to give Parliament the necessary information it needs, as my colleague just said, to make a reasonable decision on whether it is good for the people of Canada, good fiscal decision making or any such thing when we do not have the information we need to make a decision? Informed decision is what Parliament is about and when we do not have information, we cannot do anything. This is part of the control.

We know the Prime Minister controls his ministers entirely. They are not allowed to do or say anything that he does not allow them to do or say. They even go against the advice of their own departmental

officials who have been there for so long and understand the issues advise ministers, the Prime Minister controls the ministers and they say yes or no regardless of departmental advice.

The departments, as we heard, cannot even give information to committees because they are told not to. There are bureaucrats and officials running around in fear of the Prime Minister's wrath. There are NGOs running around in fear of the Prime Minister's wrath.

It is not enough for the Prime Minister to control his ministers, officials, NGOs and civil society. He must now control Parliament. In other words, the Prime Minister seeks to control every single one of the institutions of democracy in this country. There is a word for when a prime minister or leader tries to control the institutions of democracy. Once again, we have the problem of having to come to the House to ask for the government to give us documents so we can make good decisions for Canadians.

It is not only for Parliament to make decisions. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, who helps advise Parliament on what the costs are going to be and whether there are risks involved and benefits to those particular proposals by government, stated: "There is genuine concern that Parliament is losing control of its fiduciary responsibilities of approving financial authorities of public monies as afforded in the Constitution."

In other words, MPs in Parliament, elected by the people, cannot begin to show fiduciary responsibility because we do not have control over any of the information required to allow us to do so.

He went on to say: "In the recent past, Parliament was asked to approve changes to crime legislation without financial information or knowledge of monies set aside in the fiscal framework".

The Parliamentary Budget Officer cannot do his work to assist Parliament in making the decisions because he does not have any of the information required. He said: "...in 2006 prior to parliamentary approval of financial authorities as did the previous government in 2005 on its expenditure review exercise. This raises the question as to why the application of Cabinet confidence with respect to restraint measures appears to have changed in such a short period of time".

• (1550)

I guess it was because an informed Parliament did not necessarily walk in lockstep with the government, and an informed Parliament could say that it does not think it is a good idea. In order to have control over all of us in the House, we do not get the information anymore.

Business of Supply

This excuse, whether it is, as in the case of the Afghan detainees, of national security or now cabinet confidence, is being raised every time to withhold information regarding, and I will again quote the Parliamentary Budget Officer, “regarding the assumptions used to translate the private-sector economic forecasts into Finance Canada’s fiscal projections”.

Here we have Parliament being controlled by the Prime Minister. It is wrong for any government to try to control Parliament, which is an institution of democracy and which should make its own decisions. But for a prime minister of a minority government to do it is unheard of. The Prime Minister behaves as if he is a dictator, a despot, a ruler, a monarch or whomever else, tells every single person what to do, and we had better click our heels and do it. If we do not, we have to come in here and spend a whole day asking the government to do what it is supposed to do.

The Conservatives ran on accountability and this has been the most unaccountable government we have ever seen.

What is interesting about this is that we just want to have some very clear information. The government has set its priorities. It is going to buy fighter jets. It is going to build new jails when in spite of every single piece of information we have, every single bit of analysis that has been done with regard to jails and institutionalizing criminals is that it does not work. It does not bring down crime.

Of course the government expects us to just agree with it. We ask how much it will cost and we get different stories. We cannot get the actual information that we are asking for so we can decide, for instance, whether or not that is a priority, whether or not this is what Canadians really need, whether or not this will give us the benefits that the government tries to tell us building new jails will bring.

The second issue is lowering corporate tax rates. We have been told that this is the best thing to do at this time. Timing is everything. The thing about priorities and good fiscal management is that the same thing is not done every time. We look at the situation we are in and then decide whether that is the right thing to do at the time.

Canadians understand priorities. Canadians know that they cannot buy a new car, or a new dress, or a new coat if they do not have the money to fix a leaking roof. People make priorities all the time. Ordinary Canadians are tightening their belts. They are deciding what they are going to buy or not buy. They are deciding what decisions to make within their own household expenditures.

The government does not seem to care about that. It wants to build jails and it wants to buy fighter jets. Now the government wants to lower corporate taxes.

If I have to hear another time, somebody from the government side of the House saying, “Oh, but the Liberals did it”. Yes, Liberals did it. We brought down the corporate taxes from 25% to 19%, but we did so in a time when we had 10 balanced budgets. We had \$13 billion in surplus and \$3 billion in a contingency fund sitting there for a rainy day. We did not do this in a vacuum. It was not the first thing we did.

We had to deal with the deficit left by another Conservative government of \$43 billion. We managed to bring that deficit down in three years to remove it. We managed to bring down the debt. We

managed to post 10 balanced budgets. The people who showed fiscal restraint and fiscal accountability and good fiscal management were members of the Liberal government, as we have seen in the past when we did those things and brought the deficit down, brought down the debt and had money with which we could then make decisions about priorities. One of the last decisions we made was bringing down the corporate taxes because we knew that one of the things we needed was to create jobs.

Too many people are working at part-time jobs and cannot make enough money to keep their families going. They are waiting for their mortgages to come up. They do not know if they are going to lose their homes. They are dipping into their savings. They are living off credit cards. The government is paying very little attention to one of the best initiatives that it could take to create sustainable long-term jobs for the people of Canada.

Everyone has told us, including the finance department, that lowering corporate taxes for the large banks and the large businesses is not the way to go. Most of the jobs in this country, nearly 70% of those jobs, are created by small- and medium-size businesses. Yet the government is raising payroll taxes. Over four years it is going to sock it to Canadians and to small- and medium-size businesses to the tune of about \$16 billion.

● (1555)

Does the government think that people are stupid? Does it think that everybody is ignorant? Does it believe that if it keeps its documents hidden nobody will know what is going on? This is the most insulting and disrespectful way not only to treat Parliament but to treat Canadians.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and a bit of amusement, I must admit, especially when the previous speaker commented on the prudent fiscal management and the \$13 billion surplus that her government amassed. However, she forgot to tell Canadians how the Liberals did that. They did it by cutting \$25 billion out of health care and education. I still have municipal people to this day in my area who are still feeling the effects of those cuts that they had to absorb.

Neither did the member say anything about the \$52 billion in the EI fund that somehow got lost in the general revenue fund. How can she call that prudent fiscal management? While she is at it, could she just tell the House where that \$40 million is, because it would really help a lot with me believing her about fiscal management?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that is called rewriting history.

Business of Supply

One of the important things to remember is that the Liberal government did not cut any transfers to health care. It was the last Conservative government that began to do what the present government says that it wants to do, which is to lower the cash transfers for health to the provinces and increase the tax points. We came in and found that. We did not touch health transfers. We did not cut them. I know because I was in that government at the time. In fact, once we had money, one of the first things we did was to put \$41 billion into health transfers.

The hon. member should do his homework if he is going to ask a plausible question in the House.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each one of the government speakers is trying to change the channel and change the topic to get away from the Liberal opposition day motion content that is before us in the House and not give us the answer as to why the government will not provide these documents.

A year ago, the government was arguing that the Afghan detainee issue was an issue of national security and that was why it could not give us the documents. I do not know how it can argue now that the cost of providing corporate tax cuts is supposed to be a national security issue, or how providing the cost for a crime bill could possibly be a national security issue.

I do not know what the Conservatives are trying to do. They clearly lost the detainee issue with the Speaker and they will clearly lose this one. It seems to me that they are just trying to do is to buy some time so that the information on the crime bill comes in after an election.

• (1600)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the question from the hon. member, although it was more of a comment, with which I firmly agree.

I do not want to suggest or to read the mind of the government as to what it will or will not do. It is what it is supposed to do and is not doing that we are concerned about here.

The government has shown a lack of respect for Parliament. It has shown absolute control. It has behaved despicably with regard to producing documents that have been requested. The issue is that we want to know why the government is making the choices it is making. We want to know what those issues are and what the costs are. We want to know what the benefits will be and what the risks will be. We cannot vote in the House until we have that information.

The government is supposed to be accountable and accountability means that the information must be given so that people can understand what is being done and judge that accordingly and vote accordingly.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I note the debate today is on the opposition motion with regard to the information and lack of information. It was easier getting Mubarak out of the palace in Cairo than it is to get information out of the government.

The issue of the corporate tax cuts was mentioned in the hon. member's speech. The member knows that we have been told that we are in the middle of the OECD rate for corporate tax cuts, but if it is

only corporate tax cuts, Ireland is at 13%. Does the member know how that is working out for Ireland?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, we now know what is happening in Ireland. Ireland's economy rose when it received transfer payments from the European Union in order to help with its have-not status. It did very well for 10 years, and then, in order to encourage everybody to invest in Ireland, it kept lowering and lowering corporate taxes to bring in investment. Ireland is now in the doghouse. It is at the bottom of the heap and cannot sustain itself.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today regarding two important matters.

To begin with, I would like to explain to members how crime affects us all and how it is to some degree impossible to gauge the full cost of crime.

Secondly, the steps that we are taking to fight crime cannot be measured or determined solely by their cost. We have introduced wide-ranging legal reforms in an effort to respond to the concerns of victims and to mitigate the human costs associated with crime. These are major investments, and not only on a financial level.

Crime costs victims dearly; I would go so far as to say that it costs them very dearly. Of course, crime is very costly for all Canadians, but we know that it is the victims of crime who have to shoulder the bulk of this cost.

According to a recent study by the Department of Justice, the total cost of Criminal Code offences was estimated at \$31.4 billion in 2008. Since there are no data available for many variables, we know this to be a conservative estimate. Still, it equates to a per capita cost of \$943 for that year.

We know that victims are those most directly affected by crime. Of the \$31.4 billion in costs, \$14.3 billion are the direct result of crimes committed. This \$14.3 billion covers medical care, hospitalization, loss of income, school absenteeism, and theft or property damage. More specifically, the drop in productivity accounts for 47% of the total cost borne by victims. Theft or property damage accounts for 42.9% and health care costs account for the remaining 10.1%. These costs are only the tip of the iceberg since they represent recoverable and identifiable expenses, such as those resulting from loss of property or medical care. There is nothing about this that is hard to understand.

The intangible costs such as fear, pain, suffering and decreased quality of life far outweigh the material costs. It is difficult, well nigh impossible, to precisely measure the cost of the emotional and psychological suffering caused by crime, and yet it is important to try to do so.

Business of Supply

Research has shown that victims of violent crimes experience stress after being victimized. A crime can influence how victims view the world around them and how much they trust others. It can cause pain and suffering. We know that the psychological effects of crime-related trauma can last a long time. Because of a lack of data, early studies of the costs of crime did not take into account the pain and suffering experienced by victims. The situation is starting to improve because the intangible costs to victims are much too high to be ignored.

According to the results of the study by the Department of Justice, which I mentioned earlier, the intangible costs to victims total around \$68.2 billion. Thus the total cost of crime in Canada in 2008 would be \$99.6 billion. If we take into account intangible costs, the costs borne by victims represent 82.8% of the total costs. It is a fact that crime is costly for the victims.

The victims are the people most affected by acts of violence, but other people suffer as well. Family members mourn the death of a loved one or must put their daily activities on hold to accompany victims to court or to doctor's appointments, for example.

Governments provide various victims' services and compensation programs to directly help victims, and they work on strategic plans on these issues.

● (1605)

The third-party costs take all these costs into account. In 2008, the total third-party costs were about \$2.2 billion.

Why do we need to know the cost of crime and the cost borne by the victims?

We know that no amount of money can adequately compensate a victim of crime or his family, especially when it comes to homicide. No one would choose to die in exchange for \$2.5 million or would agree to an assault on his child in return for \$10,000.

It is important, though, to establish these estimates. We know that resources are scarce and that programs such as those to increase the number of police officers on the beat or provide funding for health and welfare, to improve the environment, or to build highways and parks are always competing with one another for a share of the public purse.

There must be several facets to our attempt to allay the enormous costs incurred by the victims of crime.

Our government is determined to enhance the safety of all Canadians and raise their confidence in the justice system. That is important. We want to start by dealing with the main concerns of crime victims, those people who have discovered how the system works as a result of an unfortunate experience and have told us that changes are needed. We listened to them.

Canadians are proud of their justice system. It is admired the world over for its fairness. There is always room for improvement, though. Our government is determined to ensure that our justice system continues to be the envy of the world and, most of all, that it is valued in Canada.

In 2006, our government set out its plans for changes to the criminal justice system, and over the last five years, those plans have

been realized. It was not easy to ensure that the key changes passed. We were and still are a minority government.

It is easy, though, to see that Canadians support our program to fight crime.

Canadians agree that the personal, financial and emotional consequences for crime victims and the public are too severe and that measures to make Canadians safer, hold offenders responsible and raise confidence in our justice systems are worth the investment.

Allow me to describe a few key legislative changes that illustrate how concerned we are about crime victims and the people of Canada in general.

Our changes were intended to make the punishment fit the crime a little better, something that crime victims and many other people had been demanding for a long time. Changes were made to protect children, our most vulnerable victims. Some changes focused on issues that affect Canadians in their daily lives, such as automobile theft, identity theft, drug-related crime, fraud and street racing.

I would remind the House of Bill C-25, the Truth in Sentencing Act, which was introduced on March 27, 2009 and passed three months later on June 8, 2009. The bill received royal assent on October 22, 2009, and the changes came into force on February 22, 2010.

In general, these changes limit the credit for time served in preventive detention to a one to one ratio. A maximum ratio of one and a half to one applies only when circumstances warrant. A maximum one to one ratio applies to the credit accorded offenders who broke their bail conditions or were denied bail because of their criminal record. No higher ratio is allowed than one to one, regardless of the circumstances.

This amendment to the Criminal Code was welcomed by those who were appalled by the two- or three-for-one sentencing credits being given to offenders who were detained before their trials.

● (1610)

Victims of crime welcomed this amendment, which is designed to guarantee that offenders serve their sentences. Victims do not want revenge; they want sentences to fit the crime. Bill C-25 addressed this concern.

Business of Supply

Bill S-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and another Act, which dealt with the faint hope clause was recently passed by the House and the Senate and will soon be ready to receive royal assent. It will abolish the faint hope clause for individuals serving a life sentence for murder. Those who commit murder after this bill comes into effect will no longer be able to avail themselves of the faint hope clause. Family members of murder victims have been calling for the abolition of this clause for many years. We listened to them.

Our government is committed to abolishing the faint hope clause, which allows murderers who are serving life sentences to apply for parole after serving 15 years of their sentence rather than 25 years. As you can well imagine, murder victims' families could not understand how a life sentence could turn into parole after only 15 years. It was absolutely scandalous. As I said earlier, victims are not acting out of revenge; they just want the sentences to be reasonable. We listened to them.

I would also like to remind the House about Bill C-48, the Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act, introduced on October 5, 2010. This bill deals with multiple murders and responds to the legitimate concerns of victims of crime, who feel that every homicide victim has to count and every sentence handed down to a murderer has to fit the seriousness of the crime. Life imprisonment means spending life in prison. It is impossible to give multiple murderers multiple life sentences since we have only one life. Nonetheless, Bill C-48 will allow a judge to impose consecutive periods of 25 years with no chance of parole for each murder conviction. For example, a person found guilty of two murders—the easiest case to understand—might have to spend 50 years in prison before being eligible for parole. Bill C-48 was passed by the House and is currently at second reading stage in the other place. This bill is another example of our goal to make the punishment fit the crime and to ensure that offenders are held accountable for their actions against victims.

I also want to talk about other reforms centred around victims. I am sure that my colleagues in this House will recall Bill C-21, the Standing up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act, which was introduced in the House of Commons on May 3, 2010 and passed by the House on December 15, 2010 and is currently before the other place. Bill C-21 provides a mandatory minimum sentence of two years for fraud over \$1 million. As pointed out in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, of which I am a member, many cases of fraud involving large sums of money already end in prison sentences greater than two years.

I would also like to point out that Bill C-21 has been long awaited by victims of white collar crime. These reforms will do more than just add a minimum sentence. They will allow the court to issue an order prohibiting people who have been found guilty of fraud from having any authority over anyone else's money or property in order to ensure that they do not defraud others. Restitution for victims of fraud will be given greater importance, and the courts will be allowed to take into account community impact statements concerning the repercussions of the fraud. Community impact statements will be a vital tool that will serve to remind the court, the offender and the public that these crimes have negative repercussions on communities and on the victims who suffer direct financial losses.

●(1615)

We listened to victims.

Who among us has never had their car stolen or does not know someone who has had their car stolen? Car theft is common. It is a real scourge. It has a huge impact on our daily lives. Victims of car theft feel huge frustration that is compounded by the fact that the thief is not held to account. Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), also called the Tackling Auto Theft and Property Crime Act, was broadly supported and received royal assent on November 18, 2010. That bill will come into force soon.

These changes create new offences related to motor vehicle theft; altering, removing or obliterating a vehicle identification number; trafficking in property or proceeds obtained by crime; and possession of such property or proceeds for the purposes of trafficking. In addition, it provides for an *in rem* prohibition on the importation and exportation of such property or proceeds.

Bill S-9 also sets out mandatory minimum sentences for repeat offenders.

I will spare you the details of the bills aimed at amending legislation that have been passed by the government. The list is too long. However, I want to point out some, in particular the ones meant to protect our children.

For example, Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service requires Internet service providers to report any child pornography on their network. A breach of that requirement could lead to a series of increasingly higher fines and the person could be put in prison for a maximum of six months for a third infraction and for each subsequent offence. Bill C-22 was widely supported in the House.

It goes without saying that Bill C-22 addresses the concerns of victims of crime. We listened to them. The bill aims to reduce the number of new victims of Internet child pornography. The federal ombudsman for victims of crime was very clear on the need for such a law; we created that ombudsman's office.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I did not mention Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sexual offences against children), also known as the Protecting Children from Sexual Predators Act, which was passed on November 4, 2010.

These amendments will help us better protect children from sexual exploitation because of two new infractions, namely providing sexually explicit materials to a child for the purpose of facilitating the commission of a sexual offence against the child and agreeing or arranging to commit a sexual offence against a child.

These amendments will also require the court to consider attaching conditions to sentences for offenders found guilty of committing a sexual offence involving a child and offenders suspected of having committed this type of offence to ensure that they are not in contact with children under the age of 16 and that they do not use the Internet without supervision by a designated person.

This will allow for a more consistent enforcement of sentences for sexual offences involving children.

Bill C-54 is currently being studied by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, of which I am a member, and I suggest that, when it is returned to the House, all members show their support for protecting children by ensuring that this bill is passed quickly.

The government is proud of what it has accomplished for victims of crime and for the people of Canada. We are listening to victims of crime and to other stakeholders in the justice system, and we are making reforms that address the needs and concerns of Canadians.

Our government has listened to victims.

•(1620)

[English]

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of his speech, the member talked about a serious issue for me, as I am sure it is for him. He said that whenever a policy goes into place, no matter what it may concern, social costs, crime, justice, employment insurance, whatever, it always has a price tag. He mentioned that the price tag should not be the overriding factor when it comes to imprisoning people who have committed major offences.

Recently, in St. John's and in Gander, my riding, we held hearings on search and rescue. We talked about response times and heard from victims, which the member also talked about, the people who had lost family members some time ago.

I know very well that the people who work for search and rescue always do their best. They are an incredible group of people and I take great pride in what they do.

On the other hand, it is a question of resources. I suspect that from this study, we are going to increase the amount of resources available for search and rescue, but there is going to be a price to it. Every time we have discussed this, the price tag has also been brought up and how much money it will take to save lives.

Obviously, with this in mind, I think the member would agree or maybe disagree that this should be the case for search and rescue. Perhaps he would also like to talk about how this could be applied to the big price tag when it comes to the F-35 fighter jets.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is very relevant. I will say that we are forced to introduce these bills today because, during 13 years, the Liberals did nothing. That is the problem.

Now, despite the fact that we have a minority government, we are forced to compress legislation. As a minority government we have found it very difficult. I sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and I can say that many times opposition members—from the NDP, the Liberals or the Bloc—have gotten together to stall our bills. Nevertheless, we have managed to pass the bills that I mentioned.

There are two types of costs. As I explained earlier, there are tangible costs—hospitalization, lost wages, lost jobs, etc.—and intangible costs. They never thought about those. They were in power so long that they never added up the numbers although they should have. They were in power for 100 years and they never did anything for victims. That is serious.

Our government listened to victims. We are there and we plan on continuing to help victims, regardless of the cost. Some costs we can add up, but it is not possible to do so for the intangible costs.

•(1625)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary's speech, which was full of very good information, but not one word of it had to do with the Liberal opposition day motion we are talking about today.

The fact of the matter is that the government has been hiding information from the House on a consistent basis for a long time. Last year, it argued about the release of Afghan detainee documents on the basis of national security. The government had to be dragged kicking and screaming and we had to have a Speaker's ruling on the issue before the government would comply. Now it would like us to believe that somehow the cost of tax credits and of a public safety bill is a national security issue as well.

The question is why is the government trying to hide this information? The government clearly has it, because Mary Campbell, the director general of the Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate, Public Safety Canada, at the committee hearings just two nights ago on Bill C-59, indicated that she had the information but that the government would not let her give it out.

The question is, why is the government afraid of letting this information out? Does it think it is going to be embarrassing? Does it think it is going to change people's minds against the crime bill?

Is its strategy to make certain that the information does not get out until after an election? Is that what its strategy really is all about?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, the question asked by the hon. member is very pertinent. First of all, I would point out to him that it is not a question of determining the exact cost, but rather a question of whether or not we are fulfilling our duty to our constituents. There are many victims among our constituents. For some time now, the opposition parties—one of which was in power for nearly 100 years—have done nothing. They have never done anything about it. We, on the other hand, are listening to victims. Because we are listening, we have to condense many things into our legislation, which is what they should have done.

The NDP has been here in the House for nearly 40 years and has never proposed any legislation to help victims. All we ever hear from the NDP is that we should give the poor criminals fewer sentences, and now they want to know the costs associated with these poor criminals. Why? Because in reality, the NDP members do not want anyone to be sent to prison. They want criminals to be on our streets.

That is not what we want. We want people who are convicted in a court of law to be sent to prison for however long the judge orders. That is what is important. Nearly 80% of the cost, as I said, is suffered by the victims, while criminals do not pay anything for nearly the entire time they are in prison. The only thing they endure is three meals a day, while they are being housed and clothed and so on. That is not the case for victims, since they are the ones who lose everything.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that my colleague has an incredible background in the legal profession. He has an amazing amount of empathy which was so obvious throughout his speech. He was talking about the victims of crime and the emotional costs, the non-material costs that come along with crime.

I have had the privilege of meeting with a number of families of victims of crime in my riding. It is incredible to try to understand the pain and the emotional suffering they go through, not just themselves but their extended families.

My colleague indicated that the families are not looking for vengeance. They are simply looking for an increased amount of safety for themselves and their families.

Are there costs? Yes, but the people whom I spoke to in my riding are more than willing to pay the costs for increased safety in our community when they consider the emotional costs to the families and to the victims of crime.

Has my hon. colleague found that same kind of response in his community from people who have been victims of crime? He does not have to give any specifics, just general comments.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's question, I would say that, in my community, the same people, the same victims, came to tell us about their experiences. In my region of Quebec City, in my riding, we use the term "sentences bonbon", meaning lenient sentences. Why? Because before our time, when a

person was sentenced to six years in prison and had served six months on remand, which counted for double or one year, do you know what happened? That person got out of prison the next morning.

This was a serious problem of the Liberals' invention. It is a revolving-door system. We oppose this system and victims want nothing more to do with it. We want justice, and it is important to ensure that, when the courts render a decision, there is no way to get around the legislation and thereby enable offenders to get out of prison after only approximately six months, which counts for double, and return directly to society. When this happens, it is the victims who are penalized.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Public Service of Canada; the hon. member for Labrador, Status of Women; the hon. member for Davenport, Haiti.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis, a great riding which has great representation.

I want to start by talking about the comments that were made by the hon. member who just spoke. He was very passionate about the issue of crime and making our communities safe and secure. I applaud him on his passion. The only thing is, I would like to point out that many years ago a lot of American politicians, congressmen, senators and the like, including Newt Gingrich, I believe, and even state politicians, spoke with the same amount of passion, and now they have come back from that and said that they should have put more emphasis in other areas, which the government is not doing currently.

When it comes to recidivism rates, it should be looked at in a holistic way and not just from the incarceration aspect. I will put that aside for a moment.

We are talking about accountability. It has been a while since we talked about the Federal Accountability Act. After several years of having the Federal Accountability Act in place, it reminds me of back in the 1950s when Ford introduced the Edsel. It went over like a lead balloon. It really just stuck around for no apparent reason and wheedled its way out of existence, but we certainly did not forget.

In this particular case with the Federal Accountability Act, it seems to be one of those issues with which we have become familiar when it comes to the Conservative government, where one has to practise what one used to preach.

Business of Supply

There is a certain amount of accountability, to say the least, in all of this, including areas of the east coast, where the Conservatives talked about custodial management of the fisheries, when they talked about the Atlantic accord. These were issues that were put out there in the storefront as to what the Conservatives would do as a government. By the time Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Nova Scotians picked up the product from the window in 2006, metaphorically speaking, and brought it to the counter in an election, it turned out to be a different product entirely. Members will get the idea of what we are talking about, and it goes to the crux of that issue and several more over the past four or five years, and certainly in 2006.

I would like to congratulate my colleague from Wascana for bringing this motion forward. I think he makes some very good points, even in the wording of the motion itself. He talked about the government complying with reasonable requests for documents, particularly related to the cost of the government's tax cuts for the largest corporations and the cost of the government's justice and public safety agenda, which I have already talked about, and a violation of the rights of Parliament, and that this House hereby order the government to provide every document requested by the finance committee by March 7, 2011.

At about 2 p.m. today, the Conservative government tabled documents in response to our request for information. Kicking and screaming, the Conservatives tabled the documents with the House.

At first blush the documents pertain to corporate profits before taxes, cost estimates of the F-35 stealth fighter purchase, detailed cost estimates of the Conservatives' 18 justice bills, including capital operations and maintenance costs by departments. Once again, that is what was in the title.

After a short little while and some investigation, we realized some of the issues that we must address after that tabling in the House. There was no information provided with regard to the F-35 purchase. The government documents do not provide any detailed costing of its 18 justice bills, just surface material. The Conservatives estimate that the 18 justice bills will cost only \$650 million over five years. However, earlier this year the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that one single bill, Bill C-25, would cost federal and provincial governments about \$5 billion per year.

The discrepancies are incredibly wide. The logic by which it is brought in is probably about two inches thick. It is time for us to give this some serious, sober second thought. That is why I am glad we are having this debate today and making the demand. I certainly hope, and anticipate, that the opposition parties will vote in favour of bringing the information to the House.

Also, Bill C-16, ending House arrest, would have no cost impact according to the Conservatives. Bill C-21, the white-collar crime bill, would have no cost impact according to them. Bill S-6, serious time for serious crime, would have no cost impact as well, on which we throw a lot of doubt, given the fact that we have seen some of the evidence, both in committee and in the House.

• (1635)

Each and every one of those bills would put more people in jail, would require the construction of new prisons and would require

more personnel and operating costs. It is not credible that those bills would not require more expenditure. That certainly is the case. Time and time again the Conservatives bring the cost estimates into this House, yet the members that are debating this motion today state they are no longer a factor. The costs must be racked up in order for our communities to be safe and secure. I have nothing against that. The problem is one can say one thing to one group of people and then turn around and say something else.

I mentioned earlier to an hon. member from Quebec about the situation with search and rescue. We hope that sometime soon there will be a commitment to purchase an aircraft for fixed-wing search and rescue or search and rescue airplanes regarding the five bases.

In this situation, in testimony given at the defence committee, we heard from victims whose family members were lost at sea. It is not just search and rescue, it is the Coast Guard as well. At the time the Coast Guard and search and rescue did their utmost to ensure those lives were saved. What we are doing now is questioning the response times and the parameters of response times. Should they be shortened, it would require more resources, not better personnel because they are already the best in the business, in my opinion, but it would require more resources. As a result of that, the questions that came from the government were, "Do you realize the cost of this? Do you know that it is going to cost an extra \$200 million, \$300 million, \$400 million?"

Costs become a factor there, but not a factor when it comes to this. That is certainly something we should question a little further.

I did mention the F-35s in this particular situation. There are many countries around the world that are now casting doubt upon their acquisitions when it comes to not just the purchase price, but also their operations and maintenance over many years. We must question whether this is the right time to be doing this.

As I mentioned earlier, the other issue is the corporate tax cuts. If we look throughout the European Union right now, I will not say that it is becoming a veritable basket case, but nonetheless it is a tough situation for the major countries, and not just some of the smaller economies such as Greece, Ireland and other countries, but also for Germany and in the U.K.

The U.K. is going through major cutbacks and increased fees, measures such as these, in order to curb what is about to become a staggering deficit that not just people's children but their grandchildren will have to pay off. In doing so, it is exercising prudence.

I remember during the election campaign in the United Kingdom the parties were not just bragging about how they would reduce taxes, but they were also bragging about how they were going to reduce costs. It seems as though every party involved, whether it was Liberal, Democrat, Labour or Conservative, was bragging about the fact that that party would cut more.

Business of Supply

In this particular situation, information is needed. If the Conservatives are saying that they do not want to create more revenues through taxation, I have nothing against that, but I do when it comes to other things like fees. Recently they imposed a security fee at airports. They can attack us and talk about an iPod tax and the like, but why do they have a tax on travellers? Am I being facetious in saying this? A little, but I am illustrating the point. There are security fees involved because at the end of the day, they cannot pay the bills. It has to come out of general revenue, so there has been an imposition of fees on particular segments of the population.

I even would go so far as to say that recreational boaters now have to get a licence that requires a fee. Is that a cost recovery issue? It just might be, but it is an illustration of how things have to be done.

To curb this \$56 billion deficit, if the Conservatives want to get back to a zero deficit in five, six or seven years, there will be some serious decisions that have to be made.

My hon. colleague across the way spoke of cutting transfers. Let me talk about that. They have a big issue coming up when it comes to health care and health care transfers. I would like my hon. colleague to stand up and talk about that for just a moment because at some point he will have to justify giving the same or more money at the same time as he is going to reduce this \$56 billion deficit. Let us see if he can jump through those hoops.

• (1640)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is we should not have to fight the government for every piece of information. It should be automatic. My understanding is that in the United States legislative proposals are costed out and presented that way to the legislators.

Why would a government think that somehow 308 members of Parliament are supposed to make a decision without knowing the costs? The government does not provide the information until we have to go to great lengths, such as bringing in opposition day motions, and, as with the Afghan detainee issue, conducting a virtual war against it to get this information. Even then it is given very reluctantly. Now it is giving just partial information that does not really give us all the bases that we need to make a decision. That, unfortunately, is the relationship we have with the government.

There are many examples. I mentioned I ran into Gary Filmon, the former premier of Manitoba, over Christmas. He said that he sent the government a long email about how to make minority government work. He did a great job of making a minority government work, with Senator Carstairs and Gary Doer. A lot of things were done in that two-year period. It has been five years and the government has not even responded to his email. That is how it treats the advice of a former premier who knows how to work with a minority government.

The government needs some counselling because it simply does not seem to get it.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I remember my colleague mentioned the story about the former premier of Manitoba and some of his input regarding minority parliaments. We accomplished a lot

when it came to minority governments back in the 1970s, great social policy such as the CPP, the QPP and other reforms as well.

He is correct. It almost seems like the idea of making great policy in the House is as result of severe brinkmanship. It comes to the point where the discussion has been downgraded to bumper sticker slogans time and time again. I think maybe all members of the House might be responsible for that.

However, at some point, we have to ask ourselves if we can elevate the debate. My hon. colleague from Scarborough pointed out several times in the House that all the crime bills could be reduced to just a few. The government keeps going over and over it again, giving bumper sticker titles and everything else. If it is about advertising for the Conservatives, then they should take out an ad. In fact, they did take out an ad. However, they did not talk about that. They talked about people's personalities and something that was irrelevant to public policy in our country.

Again, fundamental decisions have to be made. The 10-year agreement on health care transfers has to be discussed. Yet we do not seem to be having those discussion. We find ourselves focused on smaller details time and time again.

I appreciate the advice of Mr. Filmon.

• (1645)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is aware that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been frustrated in his attempts to assess the government's stated goals in relation to reducing or eliminating the deficit by 2015, which he and the IMF have said that their numbers indicate the government will not be anywhere near balancing the books by then. He has been trying to get access to information to assess how the government is planning to go about this. The government, unlike previous governments, and even the Conservative government in 2006 its first year in office at least, will not give this information. It claims it is a cabinet confidence.

Why does he think the Conservatives are so secretive? What does he think they are so afraid in hiding this information?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, because the Conservatives feel an election is around the corner.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the House in the debate on today's opposition motion. When I speak with my friends and constituents, I often sense their frustration when it comes to public affairs. They tell me that governments should be run like companies. In other words, when it comes to public governance, private sector principles should apply. It is obviously difficult to compare the two. The two domains are quite different, and some would argue that there is little overlap between them. They do however have one thing in common. In democracies, as in financial markets, there must be, to the greatest degree possible, a fast and unfettered flow of precise and accurate information.

Information must not, however, be confused with propaganda, a brand of freedom of expression where information is carefully controlled and manipulated by a head of state, for example, who may, for partisan purposes, wish to conceal the truth from the public or misinform voters. I am referring, of course, to our Prime Minister, whose political staff, as we know, occasionally devote their time to drafting hefty, secret instruction manuals for the benefit of Conservative members as they go about their task of creating confusion in committees, thereby stifling democratic debate, which is intended to be a way of informing the public about important issues of the day, issues that the public cares about.

Allow me to use the analogy of the financial markets. The government's behaviour is akin to that of a person who manipulates information in order to benefit one investor over another, or to benefit himself.

I will digress for a moment. I am reminded that my colleague, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, attempted to amend the bill on white-collar crime, Bill C-21, in an effort to introduce tougher penalties for crimes that involved manipulating the financial markets. Her amendment was, unfortunately, defeated. I will not say more on that issue, though.

We cannot make informed decisions without having as much information at our disposal as possible. A dearth of complete and reliable information leads to poor decision-making—everyone knows that—whether in business or in politics.

In politics, an absence of information is an attack on democracy and an absence of transparency is a sign of the government's contempt for the electorate. And in practical terms, it ultimately leads to ill-conceived policies and programs that produce results that disappoint the public, results that are not what the public wants and expects, results that run counter to their welfare.

In a parliamentary democracy, the tabling of a budget and the debates and votes that follow are a crucial process and are at the very heart of our parliamentary democracy. The budget embodies the government's vision and the priorities that flow from it. It is the plans and specifications, the government's actual architecture for the year to come. Canadians must be able to see their values and their aspirations reflected in the budget.

As parliamentarians, we have a heavy responsibility when it comes to the budget. We, on behalf of the electorate, must decide whether it reflects their priorities and achieves the budgetary balance

that will enable our society to progress, socially and economically, while at the same time not creating a burden for future generations. More specifically, in the present circumstances, there is an urgent need to know, on behalf of the electorate, how much the incarceration plan put forward by the Conservative government will cost. We are trying to find out how much the irresponsible policy of cutting corporate taxes will cost Canadians in the long term.

● (1650)

In short, absence of transparency has become the trademark of this Conservative government, which is weakening our democracy with its complete lack of respect for the right of parliamentarians and our constituents to have access to the best possible information. Canadians are the ones paying the bill, at the end of the day. We are dealing with a government that wants to spread disinformation for purely partisan political purposes. That is called manipulation, contempt, a lack of ethics—in short, corruption of Canadian democratic values.

It feels as if we have gone back to the Duplessis era, the Nixon era, the Joseph McCarthy era. They are blithely drawing up lists of enemies of the state and of good, committed people, like Colonel Pat Stogran, the Veterans Ombudsman; Canadian diplomat Richard Colvin; Marty Cheliak, Director General of the Canadian Firearms Program; Linda Keen, President of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; Peter Tinsley, Chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission; Paul Kennedy, Chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP; Adrian Measner, CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board; Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician; Steve Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime; Kevin Page, Parliamentary Budget Officer; and Rémy Beaugard, Chairperson of Rights and Democracy. The list is much too long for me to be able to finish it in the limited time I have.

Before we can decide whether or not to support the budget, it is very important that we know how much the government's justice policies are going to cost, not only this year, but in years to come. We have to know what the burden will be on our children and our grandchildren. This will create additional expenses, debts that we will not be able to wipe out as quickly as the Minister of Finance thinks.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said many times that we will not even have a balanced budget in 2015. He recently added that we now have a structural deficit of \$10 billion. We have to address this because as the Canadian public ages, there will be additional health care costs. There will be additional costs associated with the Canada pension plan. This will become a sort of demographic deficit with regard to the federal budget.

That is why, before voting on this budget, we need to know what the financial impact will be of the measures the government is announcing before the budget, the justice laws to incarcerate more Canadians and undermine the safety of our communities.

These are the types of things we need to know if we want to act as responsible parliamentarians.

Business of Supply

•(1655)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Liberals for introducing their motion today. It would appear it has already achieved some results. The government has provided us with some of the information for which we have asked.

As our party, through the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, has pointed out, the information that we have is certainly not as complete as we would expect it to be, but it is a good step.

The fact is we should never have to resort to opposition day motions and other forms of legislative action to force the government to do the right thing. It should be an automatic common sense approach when the government brings forward a legislative agenda.

For example, when we are in an election period in the next month or so, the reporters will hold all parties accountable, particularly the government, to every promise they make in the election. The Prime Minister will have microphones in his face and he will have to cost out each of his proposals for the election campaign, as will all the other leaders. What is the difference here? As members, we expect to get proper information from the government. Why do we have to fight for that information?

Does the member have any further comments about that?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, if the past is any guide to the future, the government will make promises during the election campaign. Based on its past performance, it will probably not be able to cost those promises until maybe 8 o'clock in the evening on election day.

Therefore, the member has raised a very good point. We have seen the government's style in doing things and I do not think it will change during an election campaign.

It is true that the government has tabled some documents, but at the last minute. Obviously, none of us have had a chance to go through the documents. However, I would have expected the government, with all of the resources at its disposal, to provide summary information, succinct tabular information, to allow us to understand what it has tabled in the reams of documents it has tabled for show only.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech, which I very much enjoyed. We are talking about details, figures, that have to do with the future budget and the government's expenditure plan, which concern the Parliamentary Budget Officer. This position was created by the Conservative government, which appointed the incumbent. Now, the government does not want to assist the Parliamentary Budget Officer. It does not want him to have information and to have enough money to do his job. It is trying to hide the real facts from him.

On the one hand, the government does not want anyone to know about its plan and how it makes its budget decisions. On the other hand, it does not want to say why, for example, it decided to cut funding to KAIROS. It did not want to give the real reason. It says

that it was CIDA's decision, but in reality it was a decision based on its ideology.

In my colleague's opinion, why is the government so secretive?

•(1700)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. There is a common thread in the government's actions. It wants to hide the truth as much as possible from Canadians. That should come as no surprise. We have spoken for years about the Conservative Party's hidden agenda. If a party has a hidden agenda, then naturally, once elected, it will want to hide its agenda.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the Liberal opposition day motion. I must admit that this is one opposition day motion I like a lot and that my party will be supporting.

I would like read the motion. I listened to a lot of speeches and I never heard one word by any government member dealing with this motion in any way, shape or form. It reads as follows:

That, given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution—

—and, obviously, the government does not believe that because it is disputing it—

—including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, the government's continuing refusal to comply with reasonable requests for documents, particularly related to the cost of the government's tax cut for the largest corporations and the cost of the government's justice and public safety agenda, represents a violation of the rights of Parliament, and this House hereby orders the government to provide every document requested by the Standing Committee on Finance on November 17, 2010, by March 7, 2011.

That is the actual wording of the Liberal opposition motion today. The question is why a party in the House would have to bring a motion like this in the first place. There are many other topics the Liberal Party could be dealing with and that we could be debating today in the House, rather than presenting a motion requiring the government to do something that any sensible government would and should do in the first place.

A member of the Bloc spoke earlier today and I was rather impressed by his comments when he was drawing the parallel between this particular fight and the fight last year with the government over the Afghan detainee issue.

At that time the government said it could not provide the information because it involved national security. It was able to sell that argument to the public somewhat. Some members of the public might believe there may be some national security aspect to the information and that it should not be released.

However, the member went on to say that the information we are asking for now is the costing of tax cuts into the future. It is actually a projection. How could that possibly be called a national security question? If the Conservatives do not call it that, they will call it something else.

Business of Supply

What possible argument could they have for not providing the information? Obviously they did not have an argument because, at the end of the day, they ended up tabling information just a couple of hours ago, which we have not had a chance to thoroughly digest yet. However, from what we can see of the information, it is certainly not the complete or full information that we would expect before we are required to make parliamentary decisions in the House, which could have long-lasting effects and cost billions of dollars.

The second part of the motion is the cost of the public safety bills. This is an issue that has been before the House for some time. There has been a lot of debate about it. We know that in other jurisdictions, the United States and elsewhere, there is a requirement that when a bill is brought in, it be fully costed.

As I had indicated briefly before, during election campaigns, reporters will be chasing all party leaders for costing of items. It is just something that is done. Why and how the government thought that somehow it could bring in this whole program of so-called tough on crime initiatives without anyone asking whether there was a cost to these items was absolutely crazy for them.

Therefore, we know the government has the information and we have been asking for it. Just two days ago in a committee meeting on Bill C-59, the Abolition of Early Parole Act, the Liberal member for Brampton West asked a question of Ms. Mary Campbell, the director general of the Corrections and Criminal Justice Directorate at Public Safety Canada. He asked her if she had the information regarding Bill C-59 in terms of its cost, and if she could not provide it, did she have it all.

●(1705)

Her answer was, "I have most of that information. It's part of my responsibility in terms of developing legislation to consider costs. Yes, I have most of that information or access to it."

She told the member for Brampton West that if she did not have it, she had access to the information he was looking for.

However, she also said that the issue was the disclosure of it. She stated, "As I said, the government has indicated it's a cabinet confidence."

Therefore, the member for Brampton West continued, "So you've provided the costing information to the government about what it would cost for these changes?", meaning Bill C-59.

She responded, "I said that I have the information or access to it. I really can't talk about what I've provided the government in any detail because I think that is cabinet confidence of advice."

Finally, the member for Brampton West asked, "So if the government asked you, in theory, to provide it, you would be able to answer that question for them?"

She stated, "I think I'm able to answer almost all questions that I'm asked about legislative proposals."

There is the answer to the question. The information is available just like we knew it would be. The information is there. The Liberal member asked three times at committee and Ms. Campbell said she had it and had access to it, but she could not give it to him because

the government said it was a confidence issue and, therefore, he could not have that information.

That is a terrible way to be running a government. It is little wonder that the government finds us quite upset with the approach it takes and that the Liberal Party has brought in its motion, which will get the approval of all three parties in the House.

The government knows it is not a matter of national security. Therefore, it knows it will have to provide the information sooner or later. Therefore, perhaps the government thinks that somehow this information will be damaging if the public were to know how much it would cost to implement a crime bill.

Given that the Conservatives know when the election is going to be, or at least they think they know, perhaps their strategy is to put this off until after an election. The Conservatives want the benefit of running on the tough on crime agenda but not have to answer any questions on what the cost of that agenda would be. That is my guess at this point, because I know that the government will have to provide the information.

Some of this information can be put together just by extrapolation. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh has done calculations. In the case of the two-for-one remand credits, the member for Ajax—Pickering asked the government what those would cost. I believe he was told that the cost would \$90 million. When he consulted with the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the latter said, no, the cost would \$2 billion a year. Of course, the final costs are projected to be somewhere in the \$10 billion to \$13 billion range.

Also, there are implications for the provinces. No less than a few days ago, we had the Premier of Ontario being quoted in one of the national newspapers as saying that the federal government was simply transferring costs to the provincial governments. With the Conservative government planning to bring in \$9 billion worth of prison development in the near future, we are going to see a lot of that cost absorbed by the provinces.

●(1710)

The provinces will be under a lot of pressure as they are already. The federal government will not just assume the extra costs, the provinces will as well. The government is off-loading part of that agenda onto the various provinces. The provinces are probably fearful of that, which, to me, is probably the reason the government is trying to hide the information.

When we ask for information from the government and, if it is a straightforward answer, it provides it. If the government does not see any negatives in providing us with the information, it will provide it to us. There is a lot of concern on the government's part about providing this information, perhaps because it thinks members of the public will be upset when they find out the true cost.

Bill C-59 was a good example. All the presenters at committee simply wanted their money back. They were not there to hear about the parole law for white-collar criminals in jail being changed from one-sixth to one-third. They will be quite surprised with the tough on crime government when they find out that Mr. Jones will stay in prison for an extra year. He received an 11 year sentence—

Private Members' Business

Mr. Joe Preston: You want to make it tough on him then let's get tough.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Yes, the government wants to be tough on crime but I think the public will be quite disappointed. The public will be saying that Earl Jones was put away for 11 years for white-collar crime but, after going through a big charade with the Bloc and pretending you were doing something, what did you do? You simply increased his sentence from 2.5 years to 3.5 years. Now he will be out after 3.5 years. Good job, Mr. tough on crime—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member seems to be inferring that I was doing something but I think he was referring to perhaps the government. I would just remind him that when he uses the first person, members of the House might assume that he is referring to the Speaker. I would ask him to refer to his colleagues either as members or by their riding names.

It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the vote stands deferred until Monday, February 28 at the end of government orders.

• (1715)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall I see the clock as 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CHARITABLE DONATIONS

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: When this motion was last before the House, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona had six minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion by the member for Kitchener—Waterloo reads:

That the Standing Committee on Finance be instructed to undertake a study of the current tax incentives for charitable donations with a view to encouraging increased giving, including but not limited to (i) reviewing changes to the charitable tax credit amount, (ii) reviewing the possible extension of the capital gains exemption to private company shares and real estate when donated to a charitable organizations, (iii) considering the feasibility of implementing these measures; and that the Committee report its findings to the House.

On the surface of it, I do not think we would have a problem supporting this particular motion but there are some observations that I would like to make about it.

The member indicates that the sector is a very significant part of the economy, that it employs over 1.5 million people, that it generates an estimated \$100 million a year and that it represents 7% of our GDP, which is larger than the tourism industry, the automotive manufacturing industry and the agriculture sector. I was certainly not aware of that and I do not think a lot of people would be.

We have a number of issues that need to be dealt with, which is why it is a really good idea to conduct this study. As has been pointed out, there are a number of indicators, bad omens, showing that the number of donations actually dropped during the recession, which has put some pressure on some of the organizations.

There is also a need to cost the item because, with a \$56 billion deficit, the government will need to look at dealing with a program to reduce and eliminate that deficit. I think we would want to know, before we approve it, how much revenue the government would be losing as a result of any changes that it would want to make.

I do want to mention an approach that I found quite exciting. It is what is happening in the United States with Warren Buffett and Bill Gates. Over the last three or four years, they have collectively gotten together and committed to giving away, while they are still alive, I believe it is half of their assets. Since they are worth about \$50 billion each, we are probably talking about \$25 billion each. More important, they have encouraged other billionaires to get involved in their club and quite a number of American billionaires have joined the club. I think they are on to something. They have certainly started something. They are both very interesting people, if members read about them.

Private Members' Business

Warren Buffett's attitude toward American capitalism is not what one would think. He is actually highly critical of most of the big corporate elites in the United States and the salaries they get. Warren Buffett, himself, is a man whose salary is \$100,000 a year. He still lives in Omaha, although he does have some other houses, but he is easy to find when driving through Omaha. He is a hands on type of guy. He has decided that his children do not need all his money. The children will be well taken care of but they will not be given billions when their parents die.

Bill Gates seems to be taking that same approach. They have now enlisted, and I am not certain what their current numbers are in terms of American billionaires, but their goal is to give away half of their assets while they are still alive.

Bill Gates and Warren Buffett's charities are heavily involved in sending prescription drugs to Africa, which is a very commendable direction for them to be involved in.

• (1720)

I would encourage Canadian activity in this area. I do not know if there are any Canadian billionaires being invited into this group but it is certainly something that I hope gets a lot of encouragement.

We have indicated that donations dropped off during the recession. There is also the odd complaint about the salaries and benefits of some of the managers of the charities. There was an example in Toronto where the charity head was making very excessive amounts of money, in the opinion of some of the donors.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to lend my strong support for today's motion, introduced by the member for Kitchener—Waterloo, to look at ways we can better support Canada's charities. I had the honour to second the motion.

Let me applaud the member for Kitchener—Waterloo for the great job he has been doing here in Ottawa for his constituents. Since his election in 2008, he has proven to be a strong advocate for members of his riding, ensuring that their interests are at the table, as well as contributing to the debate on national issues with great insight and innovative solutions.

He is building on that record with today's forward-looking motion that would have the Standing Committee on Finance conduct an in-depth study on how we could better support the great work of charities in Canada through our tax system.

The member for Kitchener—Waterloo has put forward a strong method for studying an issue, getting members together from all political parties, bringing together the best minds on the issues, bringing in all the charity groups, both small and large, holding public hearings and then coming up, after all of those consultations, with the best recommendations.

I understand that the members of the finance committee welcomed this idea and are more than willing to set aside time to look at this important issue. Indeed, all parliamentarians understand the importance of charities and their tireless work in communities across Canada. Every day, charities both large and small play an invaluable role in the daily lives of Canadians in need and much more.

As Ray Penning of the noted social policy think tank Cardus observed in the *Telegraph Journal* recently:

Of Canada's 161,000 charities and non-profits, two-thirds report annual revenues of less than \$100,000. Yet, they all combine to provide services, many of them essential, which enrich the social, physical, and spiritual lives of Canadians.

A strong charitable sector including universities, hospitals and hospices, arts and sports groups, poverty and publishing programs, synagogues and churches, provides ways for Canadians to be their best and show compassion to the least.

Charities are not vehicles for greed, excess or profit. They are the products of our generosity, kindness and creativity—vital components of a healthy society without which financial economies cannot thrive.

The recent global economic downturn also highlighted the vital role charities play in our communities and towns, especially in those communities that were harder hit. In recognition of that vital work, the study the member for Kitchener—Waterloo is proposing is the right thing to do. I know all parliamentarians agree that we need a healthy and strong charitable sector. That is something that benefits all Canadians.

I would also hope they believe we need to ensure charities, and the people who tirelessly give of themselves with those charities, have the right tools to keep doing the great work they perform in helping those in need. Canadians value the work of our charities through their generosity, both in time and in financial support.

Indeed, Statistics Canada shows that Canadians given approximately \$8 billion to registered charities each year. What is more, over 80% of the population aged 15 or older will make a financial donation in any given year. Even better, nearly 12.5 million Canadians, roughly half of our population, will volunteer about two billion hours of their time to help charities in their communities. That is great to hear and we applaud all those Canadians who give of their time and some of their hard-earned money to support charities. Our Conservative government has understood the importance of encouraging and supporting those who give to charities.

The tax system provides many incentives for Canadians to give generously. The charitable donations tax credit is the most prominent and long-standing incentive in the tax system. The tax credit encourages charitable giving by providing higher tax assistance as donations increase. Specifically it forgoes 15¢ in tax revenue for every dollar donated up to \$200, and 29¢ for every dollar donated above that \$200 mark. Our Conservative government has built on that tax credit with further incentives to encourage increased giving to support Canada's charities.

Private Members' Business

• (1725)

Indeed, since taking office in 2006 we steadily have been increasing the generosity of the charitable donation tax incentives. For instance, in 2006 we completely exempted capital gains on the donation of publicly listed securities to public charities. We also extended the exemption of donations on ecologically sensitive lands to public conservation charities. In 2007 and 2008 we further extended the exemption of donations of publicly listed securities to private foundations and to certain donations of exchangeable shares. When those positive tax incentives were announced they were really very well received by Canadians at the time.

Community Foundations of Canada applauded it and exclaimed, “We all win when the government encourages people to give. This tax relief will be welcome news”. Philanthropic Foundations Canada also applauded it as well, remarking, “This tax change will spur donations and enable private foundations to do even more for Canadian communities”.

I am happy to report that in the years following the introductions of those numerous tax incentives the results have been extremely positive and the action effective. Indeed, listen to what was reported in the *Toronto Star*, which is no fan of our government, in January which I will quote at length: “In 2006, the federal government changed the tax laws to make donations of securities to registered charities exempt from capital gains taxes”.

“It has become much more accessible for the average donor”, said CanadaHelps' chief executive officer, Owen Charters. “We've been quite surprised by the popularity. It was small steps at the beginning, but it has really grown”.

Last year about \$1.2 million in donations of securities went through CanadaHelps. That is up 65% from the year before, and it is an approach that is becoming more and more popular as more Canadians learn about the tax advantages.

Canadian hospitals, universities and charities have gained millions of dollars from donations of securities. “We're definitely seeing an increase in this type of giving”, said Julie Gorman, vice-president of resource development for United Way.

However, we realize there is much more to do. During the worst of the global recession we have seen the number of Canadians making tax supported donations fall. We have also heard concerns about the rising average age of Canadians making donations along with the fears that some Canadians may be falling out of the habit of donating. Indeed, as noted through the recent survey findings from Imagine Canada, a national organization representing Canada's charitable and non-profit sector, half of the charities surveyed felt some degree of financial pressure.

Clearly, we should take this opportunity, as parliamentarians, to determine what more we can do in a fiscally responsible manner through Canada's tax system.

The motion of the member for Kitchener—Waterloo provides an excellent opportunity for parliamentarians to do just that. Once more, it will allow us to do that by hearing directly from those involved in the good work of Canada's charities. I strongly support this motion. I

urge all members to support it as well, and I applaud the member for Kitchen—Waterloo.

• (1730)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in the House to speak to Motion No. 559, which directs the finance committee to study the tax treatment of charitable donations.

As vice-chair of the finance committee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion. Now when I say “vice-chair of the finance committee”, it is just an aspiration of mine, and sometimes I like to pretend I am, but I am really not. Nonetheless, I do want to respect the finance committee for bringing this to the House. I also want to thank the previous speakers for their speeches.

The size of Canada's charitable sector has been described as being as large as the economy of British Columbia. The federal government plays an important role in supporting Canada's charities. The federal treasury provides charities with both direct support through grants, and indirect support, in the form of tax credits on charitable donations.

According to the papers published by the C.D. Howe Institute in 2009, tax-receipted charitable giving in Canada has grown by 140%, from \$3.6 billion in 1995, to \$8.65 billion in 2007. In fact, it estimated that, in 2009, tax credits for cash donations cost the federal treasury approximately \$2.2 billion.

Despite this growth in the total amount of charitable donations in Canada, the number of Canadians making tax-receipted charitable donations is actually in decline. This number has been declining for more than a decade. According to the C.D. Howe Institute, in 1990, 30% of Canadian taxpayers claimed a tax credit for a charitable donation, but by 2007, that number had fallen to 24%. So, charities are relying on an ever-diminishing base of donors. Not only is this unsustainable, but it leaves the charities more vulnerable to even small changes in the level of giving, as we have seen recently in the economic downturn.

On top of this, we are seeing a trend where donations are becoming more concentrated. Larger donations are being made to a small number of large charities and foundations, while revenues for smaller charities are, in some places, actually in decline.

Imagine Canada, a national charitable organization whose mandate is to support Canadian charities and non-profits through both debate and consultation, has surveyed over 1,500 leaders of charitable organizations. According to Imagine Canada's most recent survey, about half of Canada's charities are finding it difficult carrying out their mission because of increased demand for their services, coupled with stagnating or declining revenues. They believe this increased demand is connected to the economic downturn.

In fact, about a quarter of the charities reported that their very existence is at risk because of the increase in demand that they are facing. It appears that many of Canada's charities, particularly of course our smaller charities, simply do not have the resources they need to carry out their mission.

Private Members' Business

The question we must ask is, what can the federal government do to improve the situation? It is a pertinent question, I would imagine. What are the policies that would encourage more Canadians to donate to a Canadian charity?

The finance committee is well situated to study this issue and hear from expert witnesses who can provide us with examples of best practices that Parliament may wish to consider. And a couple of ideas that are already on the table include: one, expanding the capital gains tax exemption for gifts of listed securities to include gifts of private company shares and real estate; two, introducing a stretch tax credit in order to stimulate new charitable giving by increasing the credit that would apply to donations exceeding a donor's previous highest giving level.

Malcolm Burrows has written about the first proposal in depth. Perhaps he is an expert witness that the finance committee may wish to hear from in the future. In his paper, "Unlocking More Wealth: How to Improve Federal Tax Policy for Canadian Charities", Mr. Burrows estimates that the proposal would cost federal and provincial governments between \$190 million and \$440 million per year. While he generally argues in favour of the proposal, he also brings forward some potential challenges with the idea.

For example, he notes, "concerns about determining fair market value for gifts of taxable real estate. As well, real estate presents additional complexity and liability for charities, such as environmental issues, maintenance and property taxes".

● (1735)

The finance committee may wish to examine this more closely. I would love to be a part of the finance committee and unfortunately I am not, but there are several things the finance committee could to work on this on behalf of all Canadians and certainly for the charities involved, as pointed out in some of the evidence I put forward.

I would be remiss if I did not point out some of the challenges that the committee is currently facing. Today's debate on the supply motion by the member for Wascana has concentrated on the Conservative government's refusal to provide the documents ordered by the finance committee. The committee has been trying to determine the cost of the government's justice bills and corporate tax cuts. It is certainly a challenge for the finance committee.

The government is deliberately frustrating the work of the committee. Despite the government House leader's intervention this afternoon, the Conservatives continue to refuse to provide the detailed costing information we have requested. They are falsely claiming that it is covered by cabinet confidence.

Section 69 of the Access to Information Act is clear. Detailed cost estimates for justice bills are no longer covered by cabinet confidence once cabinet has made a public decision to introduce the legislation. Therefore, the finance committee has requested a very detailed breakdown of the cost of 18 justice bills that have already been introduced in the House.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon, the government provided very little information on the cost of 13 of those justice bills and no cost for the remaining 5 bills. Clearly the information was not near enough to satisfy—

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize for interrupting the member's remarks, but the debate at hand is on a private member's motion concerning charities and a study that might be done by the finance committee. I would ask that the you consider the relevance of the member's remarks as I do not think they are relevant to the issue at hand.

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask the member, in his last three minutes, to ensure that his remarks are kept to the subject matter of the motion before the House.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I would like to throw in a few comments of my own. I am a fan of the stretch tax credit and I hope, in future, we will give a lot consideration to it. I made points in my speech about the economic downturn. What we can do is provide legislation, maybe spurred on by this motion, that would allow many charities to find other means by which to raise money.

As I noted in my speech, there are many charities across the country. I am from Newfoundland and Labrador, where some of the most charitable people reside. I hope we are able to provide the flexibility to allow a lot of the charities to use other resources and means in times of economic downturn. That is a pertinent conversation and I want to congratulate the member for bringing this forward.

Let us face it, economic downturns and upturns happen. In the future we need to be flexible. We need to look at our policies in ways as pointed out by many charities, for example, the stretch tax credit. The motion covers that as well.

I support the motion directing the finance committee to study the tax treatment of charitable donations. I also call on the Conservative government to respect the Parliament that Canadians elected. That way all parliamentarians can have a wholesome debate, just like the one today. I hope Canadians will realize there are many ways by which they can make donations to charities, which provide the benefit of spurring on the ability to do so. Many volunteers in the sector depend on it.

An example of helping volunteers would be something like the \$3,000 tax credit for volunteer firefighters, as an aside. I apologize if I have offended anybody. Nonetheless, as far as charities are concerned, I believe this would go a long way. What an opportunity parliamentarians have been given to actually flesh out some of the great ideas discussed. The stretch tax credit is another reason.

● (1740)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Motion 559, which directs the finance committee to undertake a study of the current tax incentives for charitable donations with a view to increase giving. A number of stipulations are contained within the motion itself.

On the surface, the idea of conducting a study by the Standing Committee on Finance is something that we can support. I will come back to some of the misgivings we have in a moment.

I would like to address the situation of charities in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster.

Private Members' Business

There has been a decline in giving right across the country over the last few years. I will come back in a moment to some of the economic reasons for that. Nonetheless, the charity sector is struggling and having a harder and harder time to make ends meet in the same way Canadian families are struggling and finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

My riding of Burnaby—New Westminster is blessed with an abundance of strong charitable organizations that provide good service to individuals and families. I would like to cite a few of the very credible organizations across the riding that I am proud to represent.

The South Burnaby Neighbourhood House provides services to families throughout southern Burnaby. I will be attending its charitable function on Saturday night in Burnaby, and I am looking forward to it. As well, the Purpose Society of New Westminster, which is a long-standing organization, does good work on behalf of families.

Tragically, an increasing number of Canadian families are having difficulty putting food on the table. The Union Gospel Mission and the New Westminster Food Bank provide support, as do a wide variety of faith-based groups throughout Burnaby and New Westminster. I have often attended the Union Gospel Mission lunches in downtown New Westminster. With very few resources, it does a terrific job of feeding tens of thousands of people in our community over the course of the year.

The Last Door Recovery Society provides addiction treatment programs and does a very effective job. The Credit Counselling Society provides help for those people in the community, who are simply overwhelmed by their financial circumstances, on a shoestring budget.

The firefighter foundations for both Burnaby and New Westminster provide funding for a whole host of programs throughout Burnaby and New Westminster.

The New Vista Society and Century House are examples of seniors organizations, and there are many. The New Vista Society provides support for seniors who are losing autonomy but want to live in a welcoming environment.

The Immigrant Services Society along with many other immigrant-oriented organizations like Success Immigration Services and PICS provide services to immigrants.

A wide variety of organizations provide support for people with disabilities. The Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which I was proud to lead, won a number of business excellence awards and continues to do so in providing support to the deaf and hard of hearing. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind provides support for blind and visually impaired Canadians. The British Columbia Paraplegic Association provides support for physically disabled British Columbians. The Coast Mental Health Foundation provides support for those with mental health issues. I could go on and on in this sector for people with disabilities as there is a wide variety of charities that provide those supports.

Byrne Creek Streamkeepers is an example of an environmental organization that was brought to bear with volunteer labour and has

subsequently made a significant impact on environmental education in the community of Burnaby.

These are just examples of a wide variety of charitable organizations.

● (1745)

It virtually all started with volunteer labour that depended on fiscal policy to ensure those who contributed to charities actually had some incentive to provide that support. All of those organizations, and dozens and dozens that I do not have time to mention in these few minutes, provide important contributions to quality of life in the community.

It has often been said, and it is an important point to note, that the political tax credit, which was voted on in the House of Commons, provides more of a fiscal incentive to those who contribute small amounts. We certainly support that. Somebody who provides \$100 contribution gets a tax credit back of \$75. If more is provided, there is a lessening amount of a tax credit on a percentage basis.

We should look at that same philosophy in the charitable sector. I personally believe we need to look at the charitable sector in a more holistic way and provide those incentives in a way that we can boost the contributions that the charitable sector makes in our communities.

However, we cannot deny that the cutbacks over the past few decades, starting under the former Liberal government and continuing under the current Conservative government, have had a profound impact on the charitable sector. The federal government, through the tax base given by all Canadians, has a major role to play in providing supportive programs so the charitable sector can provide those good programs.

When we talk about people with disabilities and seniors, all of the organizations I have cited, and the many more I have not had the time to cite, provide an effective contribution in the community. The federal government has a responsibility to provide, through some of our tax dollars, that supplemental support, which can make a huge difference in the life of charitable organizations and then, as a result, a significant difference in the lives of families and individuals in the community, whether in Burnaby—New Westminster or in any other community in Canada.

The federal government has a responsibility to fund. Over the past five years, and longer actually, we have seen a direct trend toward massive corporate tax cuts rather than funding the kind of charitable organizations and other programs that support the way of life and quality of life of Canadians. In our opinion, that is just a wrong-headed approach.

I mentioned earlier that I would talk briefly about the causes of why the charitable givings were in decline. It is no secret that Canadian families, middle class and poorer Canadians, have lost income over the past 20 years. That is a fundamental reality. We have seen an increase in inequality that we have not seen since the 1920s. The inequality in Canada in 2011 is exactly the same as it was in the 1920s. We have had wrong-headed economic approaches.

There is absolutely no doubt about this. Canadian families have had to bear the brunt of what simply have been economic experiments, first by the Liberals and now by the Conservatives. During this same period, the debt load of the average Canadian family has doubled. Very clearly the problem is the benefits of these economic experiments have only gone to the wealthiest Canadians. Tragically the wealthiest of Canadians now take most of the Canadian income pie. It is no secret why the middle class and poorer Canadians have seen a decline in real income and a doubling of their debt load. That makes it even more difficult for Canadians to contribute to their charities.

In terms of the motion, there are some components that we would support. However, to look at bigger and broader big business exemptions through some of the mechanisms seen in the motion would be exactly wrong-headed. We need to ensure that individual contributors receive perhaps a larger fiscal incentive.

• (1750)

Ultimately, as parliamentarians we have to make sure that all Canadians are prospering, not just the wealthy, and that all Canadians, the middle class and poorer Canadians, see a rise in real income.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

There being no other members rising, I will return to the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo for his five-minute right of reply.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to summarize and highlight the points that have been made by all parties involved in this important debate.

I want to begin by thanking all of my hon. colleagues from all parties in the House of Commons for participating in this important discussion. In particular, I want to thank my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London for his excellent speech this afternoon.

My Motion No. 559 asks the finance committee to study the many facets of charitable giving in Canada. As all of us know, Canada is known throughout the world as one of the best countries in which to live. Canadians have a strong sense of social responsibility, and we support through our taxes important programs, such as, universal health care, employment insurance and old age security.

This strong sense of social responsibility also motivates Canadians to give generously to the vital social service organizations and charities that meet the needs of the vulnerable in our society. These organizations help to make Canada the caring and compassionate society that defines us and that gives us a significant sense of pride.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the charitable organizations in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo for their remarkable work to improve the quality of life in our community. I am committed to strengthening my partnership with these organizations and ensuring that they, and in fact the entire charitable sector across our great country, have a voice here in Ottawa in this place.

This debate has helped to increase our awareness and understanding of the complex challenges faced by those in the charitable

Private Members' Business

sector all across Canada and will inspire us to find ways to further support them.

During the debate I was pleased to hear the widespread agreement on the value that charitable organizations bring to all aspects of our communities. We all agree that the charitable sector is to be commended for its dedication and commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. We agree that the sector needs the support of government and individual donors.

I think we can also agree that the tax system has a role to play in providing an incentive for Canadians to give as much as they are able to the charities of their choice.

Through a comprehensive study by the finance committee, we may be able to bring forward recommendations that will encourage increased charitable giving, benefiting both the charitable organizations themselves and of course the donors who support them.

My motion suggests that the committee look at specific areas of reform, changes to the charitable tax credit for example, and the removal of capital gains tax on donations of privately held securities and donations of real estate. Both of these measures would make a difference in the level of charitable giving. However, it would be up to the finance committee to assess their feasibility and determine whether these changes, or perhaps any other changes, should be made.

In conclusion, I ask all members to support my Motion No. 559. It is incumbent upon all of us as members of Parliament to study this issue that could have a profound impact on the charitable organizations that make such a significant contribution to all communities across Canada.

I would also like to encourage all of my colleagues in the House to become fully engaged in this important dialogue. Let us show the people of Canada that we are united in our goal to champion charities across our country and to work with them to build a better society.

• (1755)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 2 immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Adjournment Proceedings

* * *

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 is deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to discuss a question that I asked a few weeks ago about the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner.

The commissioner's office has been in a state of upheaval for several months now, since the Auditor General presented a very damning report on its operations and its previous commissioner, who has since resigned.

The mission of the commissioner's office is very clear: to ensure that public servants are able to speak out about any abuse, fraud or wrongdoing that is harmful to the government and the people of Canada.

This was still a fiasco. The commissioner's office was in operation for three years before the Auditor General presented her report. Over those three years, 228 complaints were received but only five of them were lightly investigated. In the end, no charges were laid in any case nor was any follow-up conducted. From 228 to zero—it is not very impressive. The government claims to be open, transparent and accountable. Where is that accountability? How is it that the Conservative government has done absolutely nothing since the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner was established?

In its place, after a year, I would have wondered why no complaint ever progressed. After two years, I would have asked myself some serious questions about the work done by the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner. Three years without a complaint progressing means that something is not right. Maybe that is what the Conservative government wanted. The government was expecting the commissioner to ensure that there were no complaints, as though everything were fine with the federal government, as though everything were fine with the Conservatives. Now we see that that is not the case.

The Conservatives dropped the ball. They let three years ago by without a single complaint making it to the next step. What kind of deal did the commissioner's office and the government have? What did the Conservative government want? They wanted to ensure that none of the complaints went anywhere, which is rather incredible. As if by chance, cases of fraud went nowhere. One has to wonder.

That is one of the reasons why it is important that the former commissioner appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I believe that the parliamentary secretary will say that they did great things and that the commissioner will certainly come meet with members of Parliament. The reality is that no fraud or wrongdoing was reported. In the end, none of the complaints went anywhere. How can government officials and the public trust in a

system that cost over \$11 million and did not produce any results? It is unbelievable. That is money that the Conservatives wasted, money that many individuals and families could have used.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the suggestion made by the hon. member opposite, that the government has something to hide because the former Public Sector Integrity Commissioner has resigned. This could not be further from the truth. Our record of strengthening accountability, increasing transparency in the public service and restoring Canadians' trust in government holds up to the utmost scrutiny.

[*Translation*]

This government has a long list of accomplishments to make the public service more open and more accountable to Canadians. The first thing we did when we came to power in 2006 was to establish the Federal Accountability Act.

[*English*]

This is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. That act and its supporting action plan contained dozens of measures and hundreds of amendments to some 45 federal statutes, which touched virtually every part of government and beyond. It gave agents of Parliament additional powers. It dealt with issues such as the financing of political parties, lobbying and whistleblowing by creating the new position of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner in the first place.

I must, however, take this opportunity to correct the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche. When he asked the question on December 9, it showed how he obviously does not know the background on how the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner is appointed.

I would like to take a moment to remind the House that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. She was appointed with the approval of all opposition party leaders and Parliament, but do not take my word for it. Let me provide a quote, which states:

Therefore, we seek unanimous consent that the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates dealing with the certificate of nomination of Christiane Ouimet to the position of Public Sector Integrity Commissioner be deemed tabled and concurred in.

Who said that? It was the Liberal chair of that committee.

Ms. Ouimet's appointment was considered by the government operations committee on June 14, 2007. Her nomination was considered by the Senate on June 19, 2007. The Senate agreed to appoint her on that very same day.

When it comes to accountability and openness, our record speaks for itself. The member needs to stop and examine the historical record. In fact, that is exactly what the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre did. He stated, "We're the oversight committee for the office of the integrity commissioner and we failed whistleblowers and I'm the first to admit it".

Adjournment Proceedings

We have made Canada's public institutions more open, accountable and transparent than at any time in this country's history. We have a process in place for ensuring the independence and objectivity of the integrity commissioner. We are pleased that the interim integrity commissioner has indicated that a third party review will take place to ensure no valid concerns were overlooked.

I would simply ask the member opposite, where is the beef?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary should not forget that it was his party, his government, his Prime Minister, who decided on Ms. Ouimet's appointment. It was no one else. It came from that side of the House. They were the ones who decided who would apply for the position of integrity commissioner and how she fulfill that mandate.

When I hear the parliamentary secretary say they wanted a more accountable public service, I wonder what will happen to the minister responsible for CIDA? Her officials had recommended going ahead with funding KAIROS. They said it was a good project and that we should continue to help that agency. What did the minister do? She added the word "not", to not approve the financial contribution.

They want to make people more accountable. Those are fine words. That is what they are saying on the government side: the officials are accountable. Who is not? The government and its ministers are not. That is the reality. If they want to talk about accountability, they should look in the mirror first.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, when our government took office, we promised to bring accountability to Ottawa, something that was severely lacking under the previous Liberal government.

As part of that plan, we created the position of Public Sector Integrity Commissioner to ensure that public servants can speak out about wrongdoing without the fear of reprisals. We made the position an independent officer of Parliament who reports to Parliament. Not only is the position independent of government, but appointments to that position are approved by all parties. An appointment is made after consultation with the leader of every recognized party in the Senate and House of Commons, after approval in the Senate and House of Commons.

In addition, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates examines the qualifications and competence of the nominee and reports to the House. This was the process used for the former commissioner.

Why is the member opposite criticizing the government for the actions of a commissioner approved by his own party? The new interim commissioner has committed to reviewing the disclosures of wrongdoing and complaints of reprisal and to reporting his findings to Parliament.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to address a couple of questions that were raised back on November 5 regarding 600 murdered or missing aboriginal women.

Of course, these women were victims of sexualized racialized violence. At that time, I asked the minister responsible if the government would call a public inquiry into the 600 murdered or missing aboriginal women and girls.

Also at that time, I asked the minister responsible why the government had cut funding to Sisters in Spirit, a groundbreaking initiative that has been taking place over five years. It has been largely responsible for documenting the cases of these aboriginal women. It has also been the chief advocate for these women and their families.

In the throne speech and in the budget, the government had committed to move forward on this particular file. In October of 2010, it did announce a \$10 million funding grant. However, the funding was not directed specifically toward aboriginal women. It was announced without consultations with NWAC, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and the Sisters in Spirit organization.

In terms of the developments, NWAC summed up its feelings and analyses in a press release. It said that it did not specifically speak to aboriginal women, that it did not include measures to address serious crimes like murder and speak only to violence as a whole. It said that it reinvents and conducts work that has already been done by Sisters in Spirit. It indicated that the announcement did not address the jurisdictional issues of the RCMP and that it allowed any community group to access funding, not necessarily aboriginal or women specific.

Although the government had promised to fully tackle this serious issue, which is a national tragedy, it did not deliver on that promise. In fact, the government denied Sisters in Spirit funding. It indicated that it was not allowed to use its name, its slogan or its logo, Grandmother Moon, which has become so enmeshed with the fight for justice for these women. It indicated that it would not be allowed to perform advocacy work. Some people have said that it was telling aboriginal women to shut up and that it could not speak for these women who could no longer speak for themselves.

The government should revisit its decision to not hold a national public inquiry. I ask this House, as I have asked many times, how it is that 600 people can be murdered or go missing in this country and no national public inquiry is called. When the salmon went missing in the Fraser River, the government said that it would call a public inquiry. However, it will not call a public inquiry for murdered or missing aboriginal women.

I ask the government to revisit its decision to cut Sisters in Spirit's funding and to fully fund it and its objectives, collaboratively and in consultation.

Adjournment Proceedings

In closing, I would just like to say that these are not nameless, faceless people. There are 600 of them. I would ask anyone listening tonight to visit the NWAC web site, scroll down, look at their faces, read their stories and act.

• (1810)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for giving me the opportunity to correct some misunderstandings about the government's response to the important issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

[*Translation*]

The member's question is a good example of the misinformation that has circulated. In my opinion, the issue is too important to play petty politics. The lives of young women have been tragically cut short and the families have been devastated by grief. In all sincerity, I would like to respond fully to the member's questions.

[*English*]

On October 29, the Minister for Status of Women announced the seven elements of the government's most recent advancements in addressing this disturbing high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women identified in the Sisters in Spirit report.

What my colleague referred to as a laundry list is a reality, with a carefully balanced and targeted package.

[*Translation*]

First, the focus is on improving law enforcement and the response of the justice system. This is consistent with the commitment made in the throne speech to treat measures to fight the disturbing number of unsolved cases of murder and disappearance of aboriginal women as a criminal justice priority, and the commitment in the budget to take concrete action to ensure that law enforcement and the justice system meet the needs of aboriginal women and their families.

Consequently a significant portion of the funds will be used to establish a new RCMP national police support centre for missing persons. The new centre will ensure that police officers throughout Canada will have better access to more complete information about missing persons, so that if a person is being held for any reason, police officers will immediately know if a missing person report has been filed.

This measure responds directly to the concerns described in the report by the Native Women's Association of Canada and by others, including the Association of Chiefs of Police who passed a resolution calling on the federal government to show leadership with respect to missing persons, and the recent report by the federal-provincial-territorial working group on missing and murdered women. This will help police forces to search for and, most importantly, to locate missing persons.

The new national police support centre for missing persons will help Canada's police services by coordinating missing persons investigations and will provide specialized support.

The national information website will be modelled after certain provincial websites, such as Ontario's, which have led to new arrests in unsolved cases by encouraging the public to submit information to help identify human remains.

Amendments to the Criminal Code will also help police in their investigations, in response to calls, including calls from provincial attorneys general.

I completely agree with the hon. member opposite. A support centre for missing persons is necessary. I also recognize that resources need to be dedicated to the other factors in this complex issue that lead to higher rates of violence against aboriginal women—

• (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Labrador.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her words. However, I would reiterate that what I have said here in this House are not just my words. These are the words of the Native Women's Association of Canada and the words of the Sisters in Spirit. These are people who have worked at this for five years and some for decades.

The Native Women's Association of Canada also said that we need to establish a new and transparent partnership with the government, that the government needs to do this; that we need to create a fund made available to families and communities of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls; and that we need the government's ongoing support to the Sisters in Spirit movement and to the Native Women's Association of Canada. Obviously, when they are asking for this, it is not in the announcement. This was post-announcement. So these are obvious drawbacks in the government's approach and in what the government announced in October.

Will the government fully fund Sisters in Spirit, allow it to continue the fantastic work that it has undertaken for the last five years, and will the government call a national public inquiry into the 600 murdered or missing aboriginal women and girls?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that a government has set up place a system like ours. No one had ever thought about it before, especially not the Liberals.

Therefore, five of the seven initiatives are directed at some of the other aspects. Additional funds will be provided in the western provinces, which have had a higher number of missing and murdered aboriginal women, according to the information collected by Sisters in Spirit. This will enable them to better adapt the services to the victims' culture. There are funds available to develop victim services for front-line aboriginal groups and organizations in order to address the unique needs of the families of missing and murdered women. This will help aboriginal victims and the families of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

There are also funds for aboriginal communities so that they can get together and develop community safety plans, to identify and respond to their own needs in their own communities and make a lasting difference.

Adjournment Proceedings

There is money available for projects newly developed by aboriginal groups and front-line organizations working to reduce the vulnerability of women and young girls—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Davenport.

[*English*]

HAITI

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the January 2010 earthquake, the people of Haiti have struggled to rebuild their country after over 200,000 people lost their lives and millions were left without shelter. Canadians watch with growing concern as the already frail infrastructure and the societal structure of Haiti literally fell to pieces.

Canadian opened their hearts and their wallets and donated time and money to Haiti. Donations totalled over \$220 million matched dollar-for-dollar by the Government of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Haitians have had to endure innumerable challenges over the course of their country's history. They have endured a lack of development, a shattered economy, a ravaged environment and a corrupt political system, along with the recurring natural disasters. Many of these problems appear insurmountable. Although Canadians offered immediate financial assistance, it has taken a long time for it to arrive in Haiti.

[*English*]

Canada's military did a wonderful job in Haiti despite the challenges. Our troops were vital to clearing rubble and reopening roads. However, requests for Canadian troops to stay in Haiti past its mandate of six weeks were rebuffed by the government. The reality today in Haiti is that the country is completely dependent upon external support structures. When the Canadians left, a void was created as we took back our heavy equipment and expertise.

Canadians made significant donations to groups like the Canadian Red Cross and Humanitarian Coalition, a group of NGOs that came together to deliver the humanitarian aid more effectively and efficiently. There needs to be a more effective process for delivering this aid.

Haiti faced significant and prolonged challenges even before the earthquake. The UN report by Michel Forst identified six areas where Haiti needs the assistance of the international community, including the penitentiary situation and prison overcrowding, violence against women, lynching, human trafficking, deportation and the lack of economic, social and cultural rights.

These are specific areas where Canada and the world can help. In order to foster improvement in Haiti we should work to assist Haitians in establishing the rule of law. We also need to work with the Haitians more closely to stop criminal activity so that Haitians can feel secure.

Only 25% of the \$600 million it had promised Haiti has been appropriated. These realities are taken in the context of the government spending almost \$27,000, which is 55 times the gross

national product of the average Haitian, on a single-use backdrop for its conference on Haiti just days after the earthquake.

This is also the government that promised to fast-track family reunifications for Haitians with relatives in Canada. Just last week we learned that the government rejected almost half of the so-called special applications. Recently an Ottawa resident who wanted to bring his daughter and granddaughter to safety applied to have his family reunited, only to have the application rejected even before the deadline to submit the documentation had arrived.

What remains is a country still in desperate need of help. Millions are still living in tent cities where real cities once stood, in squalid conditions with rubble resting where it originally landed over a year ago. Fetid and bacteria-laden water gave rise to the epidemic of cholera that has killed over 4,500 patients to date.

The political system is in chaos and there is still no clear winner of a presidential election beset by fraud and irregularities. Violence against women and children is rampant and the threat of rioting in the streets is constant.

On November 19, I asked the Conservative government why it was not showing leadership and why we were not hearing anything from it in this regard and on the ongoing humanitarian crisis. I ask again, when will the government report to Parliament and give us an update on its promise to help the people of Haiti? When is it going to honour the terms of its pledge to expedite family reunifications?

● (1820)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that it has been said in this House before, but I want to reiterate our government's unwavering support for the people of Haiti.

Like all Canadians, our government is very concerned about the people affected by the outbreak of cholera, particularly those living in the makeshift emergency shelters dotting the landscape outside the urban centres.

Our most recent information indicates that over 4,500 people have succumbed to this deadly disease and over 120,000 people have been hospitalized.

We know the epidemic started in Saint-Marc in the Artibonite region north of Port-au-Prince but that it has since spread to most of the country, including the city of Port-au-Prince and the camps.

I know we live in a media age where every tragic event is broadcast around the world almost instantaneously, and I know that some can become very desensitized. However, when I see the haunting images coming out of Haiti, a country where close to 1.3 million are still homeless, I cannot help but to imagine what it must be like.

The devastating progress of the disease was hastened by inadequate sanitary conditions in many parts of the country, and grew worse because of the heavy rains brought on by hurricane Tomas. Members will also recall the civil unrest in the north, which slowed the response times and hindered some activities in response to the initial outbreak.

Adjournment Proceedings

This is a very serious situation, indeed, and Canada's response to the cholera epidemic now totals \$7 million. Last year on October 23, Canada's Prime Minister was among the first world leaders to announce support for Haiti. In fact after the initial announcement of \$1 million, Canada quickly responded with an additional \$6 million.

Working with the Pan American Health Organization and the Haitian government, we moved quickly and efficiently to ensure that humanitarian assistance was getting to the most vulnerable. Through our support to PAHO, we were able to provide supplies to treat approximately 80,000 cases of cholera in the early stages of the outbreak.

Our support to UNICEF and its 74 partner organizations provided over 13 million water purification tablets, 2 million oral rehydration salts, and over 600,000 bars of soap.

When a devastating disease such as this occurs, education and prevention become key. I am pleased to tell the hon. member who raised this issue tonight that through UNICEF and its partners, we have reached over 5,000 vulnerable schools, representing 1.2 million children in our effort to educate and stop the spread of cholera.

We are also working with World Vision Canada and Médecins du Monde Canada.

World Vision Canada has provided up to 120,000 cholera patients with life-saving treatment in specialized health facilities, and will provide additional families with access to clean water and the necessary supplies to slow the spread of the disease.

Médecins du Monde Canada has established rehydration centres and cholera treatment centres, providing life-saving medical treatment in Cité Soleil. The organization is also providing further training in cholera treatment and prevention measures to community-based and hospital health workers.

Canadians can be proud of the government's partnership with the Canadian Red Cross. Through a contribution announced by the Minister of International Cooperation last November, the Red Cross has set up its new emergency field hospital. This state-of-the-art mobile hospital includes the medical materials and supplies, as well as professionals, needed to treat thousands of Haitians.

I assure the members that the Government of Canada continues to monitor the situation very closely to help ensure the needs—

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, it is important for Haiti that Canada and all nations of the world demonstrate determined and prolonged leadership in assisting this country.

The recent return to Haiti of former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier only serves to create more instability. I am regularly in touch with Haitians who are presently working to assist in the prosecution of Duvalier. Human Rights Watch, just days ago, stated that:

The government of Haiti should be encouraged and supported in its decision to move forward with the prosecution of the former dictator Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier—

The Government of Canada needs to lend assistance to this process.

Haiti can benefit from unprecedented levels of international support. Work to build government structures, security and sustainability, as outlined in many UN reports and other studies both before and after the earthquake, must take place.

Our shared history with Haiti is rich and our shared culture is still growing. I would encourage the government to forcefully and with greater resolve undertake every possible action to assist the people of Haiti and to reverse the country's longstanding trend toward failed state status.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the response this government and Canadians have shown in providing support for our friends in Haiti.

The hon. member talked about showing leadership. Canada was on the ground almost immediately when Haiti called for help after the earthquake, and we have continued to show that leadership in all of the efforts we have undertaken and demonstrated over the last year.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from the Prime Minister's January 25 speech when he was talking about our efforts to rebuild Haiti. When characterizing Canadians' response, he said:

This generosity—both public and private—is a testament to the kindness and compassion that unites humanity in the face of catastrophe.

I could not agree with the Prime Minister more.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:28 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, February 17, 2011

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Citizen's Arrest and Self-defence Act

Mr. Baird (for the Minister of Justice).....	8293
Bill C-60. Introduction and first reading.....	8293
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8293

Committees of the House

Environment and Sustainable Development

Mr. Bezan	8293
-----------------	------

Foreign Affairs and International Development

Mr. Patry	8293
-----------------	------

Canadian Heritage

Mr. Chong	8293
-----------------	------

Status of Women

Ms. Fry	8293
---------------	------

Petitions

Pensions

Mr. Rafferty	8293
--------------------	------

Low Income Housing

Ms. Deschamps	8293
---------------------	------

Afghanistan

Mr. Maloway	8294
-------------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski	8294
--------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Documents Requested by the Standing Committee on Finance

Mr. Goodale	8294
Motion	8294
Mr. Goodyear	8297
Mr. Angus	8297
Mr. Lamoureux	8297
Mrs. Glover	8298
Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga)	8300
Mr. Lamoureux	8300
Ms. Charlton	8301
Mr. Lobb	8301
Mr. Holland	8301
Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga)	8302
Mr. Szabo	8304
Mrs. Glover	8304
Mr. Maloway	8304
Ms. Brunelle	8305
Ms. Charlton	8305
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	8306
Mr. Szabo	8308
Mr. Maloway	8308
Mr. LeBlanc	8308
Mr. Hawn	8310

Mr. Maloway	8310
Mr. Dion	8311
Mr. Goodyear	8312
Mr. Bagnell	8312
Mrs. McLeod	8313
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	8315
Mr. Maloway	8316
Mr. Szabo	8316
Mr. Sorenson	8316
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	8317
Mr. Maloway	8318
Mr. Szabo	8318
Mr. Brison	8318
Mr. Goodyear	8320
Mr. Maloway	8320
Mr. Paquette	8320
Mr. Szabo	8323
Mr. Maloway	8323
Ms. Brunelle	8324
Mr. Simms	8324

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Public Safety

Mr. Baird	8324
-----------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Documents requested by Standing Committee on Finance

Motion	8324
Mr. Paquette	8324
Mrs. Crombie	8325

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Renfrew County

Mrs. Gallant	8325
--------------------	------

Curling

Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	8326
----------------------------------	------

Evens Guercy

Mrs. Thi Lac	8326
--------------------	------

Transcona

Mr. Maloway	8326
-------------------	------

Wellington—Halton Hills

Mr. Chong	8326
-----------------	------

March of Dimes Conductive Education Day

Mr. Oliphant	8326
--------------------	------

Canadian Wheat Board

Mr. Trost	8327
-----------------	------

Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources	
Ms. Brunelle	8327
Festival du Voyageur	
Mrs. Glover	8327
Literacy	
Mr. Savage	8327
Canadian Athletes	
Mr. Carrie	8328
Immigration Settlement Programs	
Mr. Dewar	8328
The Economy	
Mr. Gourde	8328
Regional Development	
Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	8328
International Co-operation	
Mrs. Mendes	8329
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada	
Mr. Jean	8329
Merchant Navy Veterans	
Mrs. Guergis	8329

ORAL QUESTIONS

International Co-operation	
Mr. Ignatieff	8329
Mr. Baird	8329
Mr. Ignatieff	8329
Mr. Baird	8330
Mr. Ignatieff	8330
Mr. Baird	8330
Mr. Rodriguez	8330
Mr. Baird	8330
Mr. Rodriguez	8330
Mr. Baird	8330
Mr. Duceppe	8330
Mr. Baird	8330
Mr. Duceppe	8330
Mr. Baird	8331
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Dorion	8331
Mr. Dechert	8331
Mr. Dorion	8331
Mr. Dechert	8331
International Co-operation	
Mr. Layton	8331
Mr. Baird	8331
Mr. Layton	8331
Mr. Baird	8331
Mr. Layton	8332
Mr. Baird	8332
Ms. Neville	8332
Mr. Baird	8332

Ms. Neville	8332
Mr. Baird	8332
Mr. Easter	8332
Mr. Baird	8332
Mr. Easter	8332
Mr. Baird	8332
Tax Evasion	
Mr. Carrier	8333
Mr. Ashfield	8333
Mr. Carrier	8333
Mr. Ashfield	8333
International Co-operation	
Mr. Paquette	8333
Mr. Baird	8333
Mr. Paquette	8333
Mr. Kenney	8333
International Co-operation	
Ms. Ratansi	8333
Ms. Oda	8333
Ms. Ratansi	8333
Mr. Baird	8334
Mr. Rae	8334
Mr. Baird	8334
Mr. Rae	8334
Mr. Baird	8334
Justice	
Mr. Hiebert	8334
Mr. Dechert	8334
Government Accountability	
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	8334
Mr. Poilievre	8334
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	8335
Mr. Day	8335
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Lévesque	8335
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	8335
Mr. Lévesque	8335
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	8335
Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Garneau	8335
Mr. Cannon	8335
Mr. Garneau	8335
Mr. Cannon	8336
Government Computer Systems	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	8336
Mr. Toews	8336
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	8336
Mr. Toews	8336
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mrs. Grewal	8336
Mr. Kenney	8336
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Trudeau	8336
Mr. Dechert	8336

Iran	
Ms. Deschamps.....	8337
Mr. Cannon.....	8337

Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Masse.....	8337
Mr. Cannon.....	8337

Justice	
Mr. Généreux.....	8337
Mr. Petit.....	8337

Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Trudeau.....	8337
Mr. Dechert.....	8337

Business of the House	
Mr. McGuinty.....	8337
Mr. Baird.....	8338

Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. Proulx.....	8338
Mr. Baird.....	8338

Privilege	
Statements by minister of international Co-operation regarding Kairos	
Mr. McKay.....	8338
Mr. Dewar.....	8340
Mr. Lukiwski.....	8340
Mr. Paquette.....	8341
Mr. Lee.....	8342

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Documents Requested by the Standing Committee on Finance	
Motion.....	8342
Mrs. Crombie.....	8342
Mrs. McLeod.....	8343
Mr. Maloway.....	8343

Ms. Fry.....	8344
Mr. Albrecht.....	8345
Mr. Maloway.....	8346
Mr. Cuzner.....	8346
Mr. Petit.....	8346
Mr. Simms.....	8349
Mr. Maloway.....	8349
Mr. Albrecht.....	8350
Mr. Simms.....	8350
Mr. Maloway.....	8352
Mr. Regan.....	8352
Mr. Scarpaleggia.....	8353
Mr. Maloway.....	8354
Mr. Regan.....	8354
Mr. Maloway.....	8354
Division on Motion Deferred.....	8356

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Charitable Donations	
Motion.....	8356
Mr. Maloway.....	8356
Mr. Preston.....	8357
Mr. Simms.....	8358
Mr. Julian.....	8359
Mr. Braid.....	8361
Division on Motion Deferred.....	8362

Adjournment Proceedings	
Public Service of Canada	
Mr. D'Amours.....	8362
Mr. Saxton.....	8362
Status of Women	
Mr. Russell.....	8363
Mrs. Boucher.....	8364
Haiti	
Mr. Silva.....	8365
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora).....	8365

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>