



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

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MAIN ESTIMATES, 2011-12

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 2012 was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

* * *

•(1000)

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to article 19 of the International Labour Organization Constitution, member states are required to introduce new ILO conventions and recommendations to the competent authorities. I am pleased to submit to the House, in both official languages, two copies of the report on the Canadian position with respect to conventions and recommendations adopted at the 91st, 92nd, 95th and 96th sessions of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, Switzerland.

With respect to ILO Convention 187, on a promotional framework for occupational safety and health, which is referenced in this report, in January I met my provincial and territorial counterparts and I am working closely with them towards Canada's ratification of this convention.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence concerning the condemnation of stoning in Afghanistan.

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

•(1005)

[*English*]

In accordance with the order of reference of Monday, December 6, 2010, your committee has considered Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sexual offences against children) and agreed on Monday, February 28, 2011 to report it without amendment.

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

In accordance with its order of reference of Wednesday, May 26, 2010, your committee has considered Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection), and agreed on Tuesday, February 15, 2011 to report it with amendments.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development entitled, "From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada".

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration presented on Monday, February 14, be concurred in.

I am moving this report to concur in the motion that I placed before the citizenship and immigration committee to reverse the funding cuts to settlement services agencies. This cut of \$53 million was announced quietly just before Christmas.

We know that citizenship and immigration services are often the lifeline for newcomers who arrive in Canada often not knowing where to find a job, housing or language training. They rely on these service agencies to provide them with this kind of connection. The sooner these new immigrants can get settled, find a job and their kids can find a school and adapt, Canada will be a more productive place.

Routine Proceedings

It is unfortunate that this cut was made because last year Canada accepted more new immigrants than ever before. Therefore, it makes no sense to inflict the cut at this time.

We understand that many of the staff in some of these agencies work long hours but are not well paid. Many of them volunteer their time and have their relatives and friends help them out. They are involved in fundraising activities in their communities to enhance the service that can be provided to them. I dare say that for every dollar that the government invests in these services agencies, these people raise much more and we get many more hours of volunteer activities from them.

It is shocking that this elimination of services for these agencies is done without any transition plan. Many of the agencies are in leased premises. We have heard that the Afghan Association of Ontario signed a five year lease but now, with only two years remaining on the lease, it has had its funding pulled. We were told that it was Citizenship and Immigration Canada that asked it to sign a long-term lease in the first place. The cutting of the funding for the Afghan Association means that the voluntary board of directors and the members themselves are now on the hook for two more years, something like \$300,000, for an office it no longer can afford.

We also heard that because there is no transition plan, instead of the staff being let go through attrition, the community action resource centre estimates that over 1,000 workers from these agencies across mostly Ontario will be facing layoffs within the next two months. Without this funding, agencies will be forced to shut their doors and their valuable services will be lost. It is not good for the economy and it is not good for Canada's productivity.

Given that many of these agencies will be closing down, I thought it would be good today in the House of Commons to read out the names of these agencies so that those who support this cut can hear directly from the agencies that are being eliminated.

● (1010)

The list of organizations that will not have their contracts with CIC renewed include: the Afghan Association of Ontario; African Community Services of Peel; African Training and Employment Centre; Albion Neighbourhood Services; Asian Community AIDS Services; Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario; Audmax Inc. in Mississauga; Bloor Information Life Skills Centre in Toronto, which is in my riding; the Canadian Hate Prevention Network in Brampton; *Canadian Newcomer* magazine in Toronto; the Community Action Resource Centre in Toronto; Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga; Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre in Toronto, which is next door to my riding; Eritrean Canadian Community Centre in Toronto; Ethiopian Association in Toronto; Gateway Centre for New Canadians in Mississauga; George Brown College in Toronto; Northwood Neighbourhood Services in Toronto; the Ontario Chamber of Commerce; Ryerson University in Toronto; the Salvation Army in Toronto; San Romanoway in Toronto; Social Planning Council of Peel in Mississauga; South Asian Women's Centre in Toronto; Tropicana Community Services in Toronto; the University of Western Ontario in London; Workers' Action Centre in Toronto; York Weston Community Services in Toronto.

I do not have time to name the other agencies that will receive less funding.

What is most tragic about this is that the immigration committee of this House spent many months last year studying best practices in settlement services. We looked at agencies and programs that would best deliver settlement services across Canada and have a series of recommendations. Just as we were about to embark on massive improvements to the settlement services, \$53 million were cut.

There are six areas of programming that should receive funding: information and orientation, language and skills development, labour market participation, community connections, needs assessment and referrals, and support services. These programs would help newcomers make informed decisions about their settlement, understand life in Canada, have the proper skills needed to function in Canada and be able to find employment commensurate with their skills and education. As well, newcomers would receive help to establish social and professional networks so that they are engaged and feel welcome in the community.

These programs would ensure effective delivery and achieve positive settlement outcomes across Canada. They are the kind of programs that we believe will make a big difference in people's lives. After all, immigrants are nation-builders and are not in Canada just as economic units. We believe the faster they integrate into the community, the more productive they are and the better it is for Canada. That is why we firmly believe that spending \$390 million last year to settle newcomers was a good direction. We do not want to see cuts to these services.

The committee proposed that, if possible, agencies should work together and submit joint proposals for a comprehensive approach. Because of the committee report, the agencies spent quite a bit of time connecting with each other to ensure that the services they provided were not duplicated and that services would be delivered in the most efficient way.

After they went through that exercise, some of them, unfortunately, were told that their services were no longer needed, which was a huge disappointment. They felt that the Government of Canada told them to work with each other but in the end they were being eliminated. It is seen as a betrayal by many of these agencies as they tried to improve their services.

● (1015)

We also noticed that there was really no performance review to tell these agencies that what they did was not up to par. There has been no attempt to talk to the agencies to tell them that they need to do something else in order to make sure their service is delivered well. Some of the service agencies that lost their funding have been commended and have received awards for delivering good services.

Routine Proceedings

We also noticed that there was no transition plan to ensure that the newcomers these agencies served continued to receive service from other agencies. As a result, thousands of newcomers to Toronto will not be able to get the kind of service they need to help them settle in Canada quickly.

We find that the funding formula is deeply flawed. The minister said that funding to Ontario had been cut because it had fewer immigrants. There were only 4,000 fewer landed immigrants in Ontario last year, which is at most a 3.6% decrease, but 81% of the \$53 million cut this year was inflicted on Ontario. Ontario has been shortchanged. It has 3% or 4% less immigrants, yet its funding was cut by 81%.

There is no justification for treating Ontario this way. Ontario continues to attract a large number of immigrants. Many immigrants choose to stay in the greater Toronto area. The majority of agencies being eliminated are in Toronto. It is as if Toronto is being punished for its successful method in settling newcomers. That is blatantly unfair and that is why we believe those cuts should be reversed.

The agencies that I mentioned will have their funding cease by March 31, which is in a few weeks time. Even though the immigration committee recommended that the Government of Canada continue to support and expand these immigration partnerships in Ontario and look at some of the pilot projects that have been successful in Ontario, it should be spread to other interested provinces. We studied the local immigration partnership and we believe this is a good route to take. Yet, Ontario is being punished.

The immigration committee thought it was important that we not only provide training to newcomers but also help them find jobs. Newcomers may have family issues, so we feel family counselling should be included in the theme of support services.

The six recommendations that came from the immigration committee on the best practices in settlement services need to be implemented and the funding cuts need to be reversed.

At the end of the day there are really only two ways to treat immigrants. First, we can tell them that they are in Canada only because we want them to work and we see them as economic units in the labour force.

● (1020)

That is one way of looking at immigrants. Another way is to say that they build our nations, that we welcome their families and their children, and that we believe that as their children go to our schools, libraries and community centres, they will enhance our communities and neighbourhoods.

A country that is willing to look ahead, be creative, and to help newcomers to adopt is the kind of country that would be far more productive and successful in the global competitive market. That is why we firmly believe that the \$53 million in cuts to immigrant services really should be reversed.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague with respect to her overview of what has been described as a desperate situation that exists in Ontario, particularly in the greater Toronto area and Toronto.

The member has given some statistics with respect to this impact. The predication upon which these cuts have been suggested is that immigrants are, in fact, not coming to Ontario at the rate they have in years gone by.

I would like to point out that the number of new immigrants coming to live in Ontario actually increased in the last census period by 109,000 to 580,740 or 23%, and yet, as the member has pointed out, we are making cuts to organizations that are delivering skills upgrading, employment search tools and language training.

It is, in fact, taking away the capacity for those people to either re-enter the job force or to enter the job force for the first time. This is creating havoc.

I would like to ask the member a question. She has outlined that there were principles that the committee had agreed on. Was there any discussion, prior to these cuts being made, with the committee where the government took the committee recommendations into its consideration when looking at those principles saying, "Look, here are the objectives we have. We are going to apply the principles, and then we will make a policy directive in a rational and informed manner".

Did that happen? The impact is absolutely desperate in the Toronto area.

● (1025)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, there was no warning. There was no discussion or co-operation with any other levels of government.

With respect to this committee report, actually many service agencies came to Ottawa to talk about best practices. We learned a tremendous amount and that is why we have the report that was issued in March of last year.

One of the key things talked about in this report is co-operation and partnership. It talks about how the Canadian government is not alone in delivering services. Local municipalities, United Way agencies in Ontario and the provinces, and the territorial government also provide settlement services.

The best programs and the best services delivered on the ground are when all levels of government and all service providers come together and work together. That is when the best kinds of services are out in the community at the grassroots level.

Yet, with this service cut that happened just before Christmas, no other levels of government were given advance notice. The United Way of the greater Toronto area, Toronto, Mississauga, and the province of Ontario, none were given a heads up.

There was absolutely no transition plan in place. It was my way or the highway, which is really the way the Conservative government has been behaving, and that is unfortunate.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, in northern Ontario, in mining country, there are numerous issues with regard to bringing skilled immigrants to the north and integrating them into society. While we are aware of the importance of building our communities with people who want to become Canadian citizens, we see a backlash in general in society questioning whether multiculturalism works.

An element that makes multiculturalism work, a traditional stand on immigration, is integration within the larger society. When we bring immigrants to Canada, we need to ensure they become part of our communities. We see the Conservative government taking two approaches that are sending us in the wrong direction.

One is the cut of \$53 million to settlement and adaptation services, so that immigrant communities are left to themselves and are not able to integrate into the larger society. The other is to use labour programs to bring workers over on short-term work contracts and then send them back. Canadians do not benefit from this at all because sometimes it pushes down the labour market. Also, we are using cheap labour, sending workers back, and we do not get any benefit in our communities.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question. Why does she think the Conservative government is going on such a knowingly wrong-headed approach to deal with something as vitally important to Canadian society as immigration?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago the committee heard from service agencies in Thunder Bay in northern Ontario. A service provider described the kinds of very precious services that she provides to newcomers. She described how newcomers are able to settle, find housing, and that the children are happier because of her agency's services. By no means is she well paid. She uses many volunteers. Because of the services she provides to Thunder Bay, newcomers in the community are immensely richer because of it.

At the end of the day, there are two competing visions. One is to treat immigrants and their families as nation builders. We accept them and believe the faster they integrate, the better it is for our society, and the more productive we are. The other vision is seeing immigrants as economic units, that we should get them to work for us and then send them home, in which case we do not need to worry about how they settle. That is a very flawed vision. That is not how Canada is built and that is certainly not the New Democratic Party's vision for immigrants.

• (1030)

Mr. Alan Tonks: Madam Speaker, I received a press release put out by many of the organizations the member has spoken about. It is called "Fair Start—Let New Canadians Succeed". That press release pointed out that the number of staff that will be dislocated is almost 1,000 of the organizations that were not consulted and the number of people those organizations served is over 100,000.

My question is this. Does the member think there is some sort of a non-partisan way we can transcend the kind of rhetoric that often creeps into these kinds of issues and that perhaps the committee could look at the issue again? We have a bit of time because the province of Ontario has stepped in for a short period to provide some interim funding to these organizations.

Armed with that action by the provincial government, could we not assert our concern to the committee and have it review this decision?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, there really needs to be a transition plan. The Government of Canada should work with other service agencies in the province of Ontario, the city of Toronto, and other cities to find ways to ensure these 100,000 newcomers would not be negatively affected.

This kind of transition plan would take at least six months to a year to put together. I hope that there will be co-operation, that we would transcend partisan games and lines to find a way to come together to ensure that newcomers do not end up losing the services.

One group of newcomers are Afghan interpreters who have put their lives on the line for our Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. They are arriving in Canada just as the Afghan Association of Ontario is having its funding cut. These Afghan interpreters, coming to this country after serving us well, deserve a way to adapt, so they could

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words this morning to let those Canadians who may be watching know exactly what is occurring here today.

As members in this place know, today we were supposed to be debating Bill C-42, the strengthening aviation security act. However, only one party in this place is opposed to that piece of legislation, the party of my colleagues across the floor, the NDP.

What they are attempting to do by the use of a concurrence motion, which we see before us today, is to cut three hours out of parliamentary debate. They used the same tactic yesterday to delay debate on Bill C-42 by a further three hours. It is very ironic because, on the one hand, the members of the NDP are fond of saying publicly that they are here to make Parliament work, but in reality, what we see happening is that they do not want to make Parliament work. Bill C-42 is supported by all parties except the NDP—

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

On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I would not want the hon. member to misrepresent the facts to the people back home. Today we were supposed to be debating our opposition day motion to abolish the Senate. The government has interrupted that opposition day motion. That is what today was supposed to be about, and the member should at least be honest.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I think that is a matter of debate, not a point of order.

The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker—

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

Routine Proceedings

On the same point of order, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, we are here debating the funding cuts because there is an urgency to them. We are not talking about partisan games but about all of those agencies that are going to lose their funding by the end of the month. That is why we are here talking about this, instead of government orders.

I have a full right to demand three hours of debate and then a vote so that people in Ontario and across Canada know will how each member of Parliament feels about this brutal cut of \$53 million from settlement services for newcomers.

● (1035)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It seems to be a matter of debate.

The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, as I was saying before I was interrupted, we were supposed to be debating Bill C-42 both yesterday and today. The NDP has blocked that discussion. Members of the NDP are filibustering this bill, which is supported by every other party in this House, except for them. They are not trying to make Parliament work; they are trying to obstruct Parliament. They are filibustering Parliament.

Any time we or the general public hear the NDP prattle on about how it is trying to make Parliament work, I want them to remember that this is a common technique and practice of members of the NDP. When they see a bill they do not want to support, rather than engage in meaningful debate and have parliamentarians come to a vote on a bill, they will use parliamentary tricks, tactics, and procedures to delay debate on any bill. That is unconscionable. That is what the NDP stands for. It is not here for a legitimate debate.

Therefore, I move:

That the House proceed to the orders of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

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

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 188*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Baird
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Block
Boucher	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Généreux
Glover	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komamicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Reid	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea
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NAYS

Members

André	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dion
Donnelly	Dorion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gameau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guay	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Hyer
Ignatieff	Jennings
Kania	Kennedy
Laframboise	Lamoureux
Lavallée	Layton
Lee	Lemay
Leslie	Lessard
Lévesque	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathyssen	McCallum
McGuinty	McTeague
Ménard	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Neville
Oliphant	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rae
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Siksay
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Don Valley West.

● (1120)

[English]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue this debate and to add our concerns to the government's refusal to consider the newcomers to Canada and their need to be ensured of having adequate funding for the settlement services that they both need and deserve.

The fact is that this is not just about newcomers to Canada. It is about ensuring that they have a fair start and have the economic advantage they need to have to contribute to society, but it is also about all Canadians who have a vested interest in the economy, the social fabric of country and to ensure that social cohesion continues.

I want to take us back five or six years to the previous Liberal government which understood that we needed to develop new capacity to help newcomers to this country succeed. The reality is that as the previous government looked at the issue, it recognized that we needed to have new federal-provincial agreements, coast to coast to coast, to ensure that agencies could have the capacity to respond to increasing needs of newcomers to Canada.

We recognized that the numbers of newcomers were increasing but also the newcomers coming to Canada did not have all the language capacity or understand some of the social realities of Canada and needed services to be integrated into the country.

A number of agreements were established. I am obviously most familiar with the one that affects Ontario, the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, that established some very noble but also ambitious goals to ensure that settlement funding was increased.

That agreement was over a five-year period and it expanded broadly. We recognize that the government did see the legal responsibility and the contractual understanding that we had to make sure that those funds were adequately disbursed.

In Ontario though, as we have analyzed those funds, we do know that the government fell some \$207 million short in that agreement for funding that was promised. It said it fell short because it simply did not have the capacity in the agencies to actually spend the money well. We think part of that money should have been spent ensuring the capacity was there.

When the agreement came to an end, when the minister had the first chance, the first ability to actually strike out in new territory in a new and ambitious way, what we heard first was some \$53 million would be cut nationally. The minister has stated that this is a rebalancing, a reflecting of the geographic changes in immigration patterns, but that simply does not wash because the whole envelope has been decreased some \$53 million. The lion's share of that has been targeted in Ontario and the lion's share of the Ontario target has happened in the GTA. That is a concern.

It is \$53 million of the whole envelope that is being dropped and \$44 million of that is happening in Ontario. These funding cuts come on the heels of the government announcing the record number of newcomers coming to Canada. Of course we support the record number of newcomers coming to Canada.

Routine Proceedings

We have a situation in Canada with the changing demographics, with an impending labour shortage, and we know that we need the best and the brightest newcomers coming into this country. They also need a chance to ensure that they are going to succeed. That is what settlement funding is about.

The reality is settlement funding, integration, and language training are all key factors in ensuring that newcomers to Canada are integrated and can succeed. Recent statistics are showing that in fact there is a problem that newcomers are still earning less on the dollar than long-established Canadians. We are trying to ensure that does not happen, that people, no matter where they come from, are able to succeed. That is what those settlement programs are doing.

Over the last several months, and it was not new to me, I spent time visiting some of the agencies that are affected. They are often smaller agencies that have lost between 50% and 100% of their funding, targeted by the Conservative government, which is bothersome to us.

This includes the Ethiopian centre in Toronto. I was speaking with its members on Saturday, this past weekend. This whole community of Ethiopians are very concerned about being able to fulfill very niche market targeting that they are attempting to do to ensure that their newcomers, their sisters and brothers, cousins, friends and neighbours who are coming to Canada have adequate support.

• (1125)

I forgot to mention at the beginning of my speech that I will be splitting my time with the member for Parkdale—High Park. I apologize to the House. I also apologize to the hon. member who has taken great pains to be up on the numbers on this issue. He has presented some of his concerns statistically about how to ensure that Toronto, the GTA and all of Ontario are not left behind on this.

Earlier in the week the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, the member for Beaches—East York and I toured the main facility of COSTI in the west end of Toronto. We were impressed with the classes, the groups, the employment readiness functions that were being offered. It was extremely important that our leader and other caucus members saw the work that is being done on the ground to help newcomers not only survive but flourish.

This story is repeated across the GTA and around the province of Ontario. The reality is that newcomers need every chance they can get to be serviced in a way that will make them succeed.

We are talking about a cut of 10% to newcomer settlement organizations, which will reduce budgets by up to 70% in many cases. The organizations were concentrated in Ontario, but Nova Scotia and British Columbia also took a huge cut. Our concern is not just Ontario-centric, we are also concerned about people outside of the GTA.

I have concern not only about the absolute cuts, the programs that will not be funded and the newcomers who will suffer, but I also have concerns about the government's tendency to bully people in these agencies who might actually raise a concern about the cuts.

It was reported in the *Toronto Star* that one particular organization had received a recommendation, or perhaps advice, or perhaps

stronger words, to not raise this issue while it was in negotiations. Did it fear being critical of the government and having its services cut?

From the agency standpoint this is not criticism of the government. It is a positive expression of concern from the clients these agencies are attempting to serve and that means being critical of a government that is cutting funding, that is failing to respond to newcomers' needs in large and small cities alike.

This is not just about Toronto and Ontario. This is also about places like Guelph. At committee we heard of an agency in Guelph that is losing all its funding. These are smaller centres that do not necessarily have natural organic organizations that flow to help newcomers in Canada, to help people get acclimatized to Canada. That funding is intrinsic in making sure that people are linked up with others and with services.

The Flemingdon Neighbourhood Services and the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office are two significant agencies in my riding. FNS put in an application on this last round and received zero funding. It would have been a new agency responding to changing immigration patterns in that community. Flemingdon is a priority neighbourhood in Toronto.

Some 12 or 13 neighbourhoods in Toronto have been identified as having high poverty rates and relatively high crime rates. These neighbourhoods try to ensure that newcomers have a chance. Flemingdon Neighbourhood Services is a small but efficient organization that multiplies its dollars to help. Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, still in negotiations on this, is an equally large organization which responds to newcomers mainly from South Asia. It needs to expand its programs, not have them threatened.

The government needs to stop boasting about huge immigration numbers while cutting away at the edges. The Conservatives claim that newcomers are not coming to Ontario in the same numbers but that is not the case. Ontario is in fact still receiving a significant number of newcomers and Toronto is still particularly underfunded in doing this work.

• (1130)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, if the member opposite and his party believe so strongly in the importance of settlement services, could he explain to us why, after 13 years in office, after 5 governments under 2 prime ministers, the total amount of federal Liberal government funding for settlement services in Canada was \$200 million frozen over 13 years? It was barely over \$100 million for Ontario.

Does the member not think that the current budget for 2011-12 compares rather favourably to that, a budget of \$600 million federally and \$346.5 million in Ontario? Why is he criticizing a government that has tripled the settlement funding levels that were provided by his government?

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Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I want to take the minister back in history to 13 years of Liberal government when we inherited the largest deficit in Canadian history. Finance Minister Paul Martin and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien took 11 years first and two more years to clean up the mess the Conservatives left behind.

There were of course cuts that were made in that time that were significant and important, but there were also tax cuts that were made in that time to ready ourselves to do the work. At the end of that period of time, there was a rapid expanding of investment in people, whether it was the Kelowna accord for first nations or the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement to make sure that funding was in place.

We put our house in order. We did the work we had to do and we will have to do it again after a record \$56 billion deficit that these bandits will leave.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would urge all members to be judicious in their choice of words, if I heard correctly.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, yes, the immigrants services funding was frozen for 13 years and it has been increased since 2006, but there is no good reason in this year, in 2011, when we have a record number of immigrants coming into this country, to have the kind of meanspirited cuts we have seen of \$53 million.

Has the member seen a transition plan, so that the thousands and thousands of newcomers in Ontario who have now been thrown out on the street as of March 31, where newcomers would continue to find services, whether settlement, adaptation, language training, finding homes or finding jobs. I do not notice a transition plan, but perhaps the member has.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina both for her hard work on this issue and also for the question.

I see no transition plan in place. I see a scrambling at the end of the last calendar year, right at the end of December, where the government had to give three months' notice, but that does not allow people in agencies to actually have an effective transition.

What I am seeing is a government that makes a decision almost by accident, it appears, or perhaps not. Perhaps some of these cuts have been targeted in communities that have traditionally been less able to express their concerns or less able to be active, while they are finding their voice.

I notice in my constituency office that kind of work is happening more, that we are having to do settlement work that would normally be done, graciously funded by the taxpayers of Canada, to make sure that work is done in agencies that are specialists in this kind of work.

I see no transition plan. I see no assistance, except I do need to note that the minister in Ontario responsible for immigration has announced one-time funding of about \$500,000, I believe, to help ease some of that transition, so Ontario is stepping up to the plate. British Columbia is also attempting to step up to the plate. That is simply a downloading of services. It is an offloading on to the provinces, which is of equal concern to me.

● (1135)

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is perhaps one of the most callous, calculating acts the government has yet shown us, revealing its character, taking advantage of people who are, by definition, the most vulnerable, new Canadians who are not yet official Canadians, people who do not belong to the economic class to which the government wishes to talk.

Just before the holiday season, the government snuck in these cuts. It handed some agencies their walking papers after 25 years in business. It is effectively shutting down 33 agencies with no fair evaluation. None of the information has been released to justify the cuts. On one hand, the government brags that immigration is up. On the other hand, it quietly cuts the money to help new immigrants to become successful.

It is incredible that the minister opposite does not have the temerity, the class or the character to stand behind what he has done. He will not release the information to show how much money he has cut, what agencies will lose and what kind of replacement plan is in place to help people.

The 78,000 people, in the course of following the path that every family represented in the House has followed, require some level of support to go forward. These are not benefits or money in their pockets. This is language training, assistance to connect and be successful.

Suddenly the party in power, faced with the choice of wanting to look like phony good managers at the time of the budget, has decided to go after these people, to take away their language training and their chance to become successful in our country. There is no champion over there. No one over there will stand up for people's right to be part of our country. The same advantages that they, their families and earlier generations had are being denied these people. There are 78,000 people in the GTA alone who will lose services and no one in the government will stand up for them.

The government has come forward with cuts that are compounding an earlier bias it has had. The character of the government resonates through what it has put forward. It took away the money that was put forward by the previous government. The Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, a five-year agreement, forced the government to increase funding and the first chance it had, it cut that funding.

Even worse, when the Conservatives had the money, they decided to funnel it to their own ridings. They decided not to be fair with people, not to help people but to help themselves. In the analysis available, their own figures, we see that the dollars going to the city of Toronto are 40% less than the rest of Ontario because the electoral fortunes of the government always outweigh the interests of average Canadians, every time.

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There is 23% less money going to the city of Toronto than the rest of Canada. That is before these cuts. Then the Conservatives have the gall, the callousness to cut these agencies off, in summary fashion, just before Christmas. About 1,000 settlement workers were laid off, many of them representing communities, having earned the trust of people to help them pull themselves together and become self-supporting.

The unemployment rate in Toronto, because of new immigrants, is 19%. It has almost doubled in the last year. We can all understand that people who have recently arrived often get the new jobs, last hired and first fired. The government, the minister and that group of people, who will not take up any accountability or responsibility for their actions, are pulling the rug out from under these people. It is the most callous thing possible and it is utterly unfair. There is no way to justify taking money away, shuttering the doors of these agencies, firing 1,000 people and cutting off the routes for success for people. This hand up for people has been taken away.

Advanced language training so engineers can get out of cabs and start helping to build this country, doctors, nurses and other professionals receiving this help are going to be kicked out of classes on March 31, and every member opposite is going to sit there and do nothing about it. No government member will speak up for this ahead of the budget and will not speak up today for the very idea of Canada having an official welcome that stands up to scrutiny.

• (1140)

It is not generosity. It is not money from the dresser or the pockets of the people opposite. This is what we provide in our country. It is respect. It is to let people know they do not struggle by themselves. They can come to this country, even if they have a different language or need educational equivalency, and we will help them because it makes sense to do that.

There is a big divide opening up between the party that runs the government today and other people in the House, and certainly our party. We believe people, with a little help, can make it tremendously well on their own. The people opposite believe there are some people blessed and some people who are not. It is a fundamental issue.

There is an absence of sincerity. When the Conservatives come forward to say that they want to do something for new immigrants, they mean the new immigrants they will get to vote for them. However, the Ethiopians, Eritreans, South Asian women and other agencies are carefully selected by the government as the agencies to be defunded.

There are some 1,300 or 1,500 Afghan translators who supported our troops in pursuit of their mission. They will be coming to Canada because it is not safe for them in Afghanistan. They are supposed to be acclimatized to Canada largely by the Afghan Association of Ontario. On the one hand, this is what the government says it is going to be doing. On the other hand, it is cutting almost all of the funding to the Afghan Association of Ontario.

There is only one way out for the government and that is to cancel these cuts and follow the intent of this motion. If the Conservatives have strength of conviction, if they believe they can justify this, then postpone the cuts for three months. Let us see if the government can

justify ripping the heart out of immigrant services in the city of Toronto.

The message the government is sending is not just to the people who live in the 416 or 905 areas, where Conservatives put out press releases from candidates before the last election saying that they would put welcome programs into the Peel School Board. Now the government is ripping them out and has decided it is better to look like a big fiscal manager.

The government is taking away the language programs for parents and their kids. One of the smartest things is to expose children and their parents to the English language before they go to school. That was being done and the government is taking them away from people.

I challenge the minister and any member opposite to stand and show where those 80,000 people will go for their services. Do they just end up in confusion and get pushed onto other levels of government, social assistance and endure personal suffering simply because the government has its priorities wrong?

The Conservatives thought they could get away with it. They think new immigrants will be quiet and complacent. However, I have news for them. Those new immigrants are people who want to build Canada. They have a sense of themselves. They are the ones who set up a website at www.rewindthecuts.ca where everyone can see the damage that has been done to our communities. All people are asking for is a fair start for new immigrants to succeed. This has been widely supported. It has gone from the small immigrant groups to the larger immigrant groups and I think pretty soon it will go to the mainstream.

The government is showing its character. It is not something that is done in front of the cameras when people are watching. It is what it does when no one is watching. Just before Christmas the government showed its character by cutting funding to the groups that help some of the most vulnerable, and it cannot justify that. It took money from parts of the country where it was needed to fund its electoral fortunes in other parts of the country. The government will be exposed for that because there is no other answer.

I would be happy to table, for the benefit of all members of the House, the figures, the cuts, that are happening in the city of Toronto. Again, I challenge anyone opposite to table anything that contradicts this. Every figure comes from the government. Every fact is what the government put forward, and it is devastating to see.

The government had an opportunity to show if it stood for a fair start and a hand up for new immigrants, or just propaganda. Instead it made the choice against the success of the wide swath of people coming forward.

People chose Canada and we selected them to come. That is a contract. That is a trust. What is happening today is a breach of trust. It is taking away from that.

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There are perhaps two or three weeks left to the budget and we intend to make the government come to terms with the character it has shown in its reckless attack on people who it thinks cannot speak for themselves. It is the quiet noises that matter—

• (1145)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member's time has elapsed.

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for maintaining his consistent reputation in his demagogic tone.

He said that the first thing this government did was to undercut newcomers. In point of fact, the first thing this government did, with respect to newcomers, was to cut in half the \$1,000 right of landing fee that had been imposed upon all new permanent residents by the previous government, a decision which has subsequently saved newcomers more than \$340 million, cumulatively.

The second thing this government did, with respect to newcomers, was to more than triple the federal investment and settlement services so that next year we will be investing \$600 million nationally, as opposed to \$200 million under the previous Liberal government, and we will be funding \$345 million, as opposed to \$109 million under the previous Liberal government.

Did the member ever express this feigned indignation about a lack of settlement services five years ago when the funding levels were one-third their current level?

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Madam Speaker, I was very proud to be part of an Ontario cabinet that sat down with a federal Liberal government and arranged the very increases for which the member has the temerity to stand in the House and try to take credit. He had nothing to do with the extra money coming, and he knows it, yet still he stands there with that fake kind of responsibility taking.

I want the minister to take the responsibility for his decisions. Yes, I helped to negotiate that and, yes, we helped to bring that about, but there was a willing government that knew we should not have to pay for all the settlement services as we did in the past before the Mike Harris government cut them in Ontario. The Conservatives take away services for new immigrants. The first chance he had to make a difference is now, when that agreement with the Liberal government of Ontario and the Liberal government in Ottawa expired. What did he do? He cut the money and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments, The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know immigrants settle well when they go to services that are neighbourhood-based and that provide a comprehensive approach. It is not just about language training and about finding a job; it is also about establishing connections and putting roots into a community.

We know those kinds of services are the best kind and that a lot of them come about through the voluntary services of immigrant settlement workers. Of all the settlement service agencies that I

know, I do not know of one that does not use a large number of volunteers.

Could the member describe the kind of impact that has when an agency closes its door and lays off its staff? What happens to all the volunteers who have helped newcomers settle into their neighbourhoods?

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Madam Speaker, the consequences of the decision are a mess because it is not only volunteers, but it is expertise and trust relationships as well. For example, the South Asian women have a co-operative for sewing. They have managed to get all kinds of community volunteers to donate sewing machines. They have actually created an employability level among women, in particular, who are unable to be part of the workforce. That will all disappear.

The volunteers will try to fill the gap and the government will try to take advantage of that. The relatively small amounts of money work out to be \$250 to \$400. While the government talks about much larger numbers, it is really only for the first three years that people are here. Those things are going to disappear. It is truly a foolhardy decision from an economic standpoint.

• (1150)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has referred to the Canada-Ontario transfer agreement, which will expire. The provincial government has stepped in and has said that it will keep those groups going, because of need, while it renegotiates the Canada-Ontario agreement.

Would the member suggest that this is the opportunity to slow this thing down and to renegotiate that agreement and maintain the stability in the system? Would this not be the appropriate approach in the process of governance?

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, that is exactly what needs to happen if the government has any credibility at all.

In fact, it is otherwise not just showing its character in the cuts to come, but that it is prepared to wage a full-out attack on Ontario. It is abrogating the agreement unilaterally. It is not negotiating with Ontario in good faith. Most of all, it is hurting the very people for whom it was intended.

Again, this is the first chance the government has had to show what it will do for new immigrants but so far it has been unilateral cuts and unilateral changes to the policies and saying that Ontario no longer matters to it.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion moved by the member for Trinity—Spadina. The debate shows that this is primarily an Ontario issue. With the Canada-Quebec accord, the Government of Quebec already has an agreement that allows for the transfer of funds for integrating immigrants, and this money goes straight into its coffers. It makes sense for this to happen because the government is best able to help integrate immigrants. Why? Because the main drivers available to governments to help integrate immigrants fall under provincial and Quebec jurisdiction. Take, for example, education, which is no doubt a fundamental tool. The Government of Quebec is in charge of that. It is also in charge of workforce training and social services. It is natural, effective and smart for an immigrant integration policy to be implemented by the government that is best able to carry out that integration.

Since immigration is very important to Quebec's future, which hinges in part on whether the majority of these immigrants choose to live in French, we obviously want to remain in charge of immigration. Members will understand that Quebec wants to offer French courses to immigrants, to help them integrate into the Quebec community.

And so, even though this issue is primarily about Ontario, I would like to take a few minutes to share our opinion on the topic. And I would also like to speak about the issue of integration and about the negative effects that Canada's multiculturalism, among other things, has on the integration of immigrants.

Today's proposal is asking the government to reverse the cuts to integration services. And this is causing a lot of waves in Toronto because two simultaneous movements are causing a significant funding loss for organizations in Toronto.

First, the overall envelope is being cut compared to last year. I believe that this cut is unacceptable, inappropriate and ill-advised. Given the costs of not integrating immigrants, it is better to invest an extra few million dollars up front to facilitate their integration and save later on the cost of not having integrated them. The nature of federalism being what it is, the federal government gets the savings, but the extra costs—for social assistance or social services, for example—are borne by the provinces. The federal government seems to be washing its hands of this, as is often the case.

Cuts are being made. But if we look at the program in its entirety, it is clear that the cuts are not all that major, proportionately speaking. So why is this having such a dramatic impact? It is because the envelope will now be distributed in a completely different manner than it used to be. Now resources used to follow up with immigrants will be relocated.

We are told that more and more immigrants are settling on the outskirts of Toronto, in Saskatchewan, in Alberta and other places. Accordingly, funding must follow. I pretty much agree with the principle: resources must be allocated based on needs. I do have two major reservations, however. I am not certain that “major reservation” is the right expression, but while I reflect on that, I would like to continue. I have two hesitations, two major concerns.

The first has to do with the fact that, in committee, no one could clearly and adequately explain to me how the needs would be identified, how they would be quantified. We heard about “landed immigrants”. Do immigrants always live where they first land in Canada? It is not clear. Can immigrants arrive in one place and then move to another? Do we track them? Do we take into account their movements, which can be very sporadic and inconsistent?

• (1155)

I could not get a satisfactory explanation in that regard.

My second concern has to do with the fact that no one could quantify the need for resources. Is it strictly proportional to the number of immigrants? If a given city or town has twice as many immigrants, does it automatically need twice as many resources? I do not think that is the case, since not all immigrants will ask for the same amount of help with integration, depending on their country of origin and their cultural and professional background.

Officials from the department did, however, make a distinction between refugees, who come here to escape persecution, and immigrants who are selected to come to Canada. According to the officials, when it comes to support services needed in the integration process, basically, the needs of one refugee are about the same as the needs of two immigrants.

That is somewhat better than nothing, but it seems to be a rather unrefined measure of needs. It seems to me that it would have been better to stick to the reality in a given community. If there are a large number of organizations in a region, even if there are fewer immigrants, it may be because the immigrants experiencing greater difficulties are concentrated in this region. In my opinion, and I will talk more about this later, it is quite likely that where there is a concentration of immigrants, the phenomenon of ghettoization makes integration even more difficult. These are the deleterious effects of Canadian multiculturalism.

The second difficulty with transferring resources in light of needs or the number of immigrants who move from Toronto to York or a neighbouring city, for example, is the abruptness of this transition.

I asked departmental representatives if the same thing could be done with officials. If, tomorrow morning, we realized that immigration services were no longer needed in Montreal, but rather in Brossard or Sherbrooke, could we suddenly move 70 officials from one place to the other? Would it just be too bad for those who could not move; would new officials be hired and others fired in the other place? That is clearly not the case.

I believe that the government has a bad attitude towards community groups and organizations that support immigrants. Most of the time, they are non-profit organizations and, unfortunately, they are used as cheap labour even though they do a fantastic job. They are given no consideration, and changes are made that would never be implemented if the services were provided by the public sector.

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It would have been more respectful and wiser for the government to say that since the needs had shifted to such and such a place, it would establish a plan to transfer resources over three, four or five years. The government is saying that it has to be done immediately, abruptly, and right away, and there are two problems with that.

First of all, there is no indication that the resources are in place or that there are qualified workers and the necessary structures to provide these services where the government wants to move them. If this is done abruptly and quickly, it is likely that there will be difficulties or additional costs. That is often the case when things are done a little too quickly.

The other problem is that people who have devoted their lives and energy to setting up agencies suddenly end up out of work. We lose those resources. It is a general problem that happens over and over again when it comes to relations between government and community agencies and groups.

• (1200)

This goes well beyond what we do here in the House of Commons, and it is not exclusive to immigration. It is a constant issue for the agencies in my riding. It used to be possible to get funding for two or three years, but now funding is granted for one year and sometimes even for six months. Some agencies devote up to one-third of their resources to seeking funding. They always end up with short-term programs that they constantly have to adapt to the government's political will of the day. It is very exhausting for our agencies and very ineffective for society.

I want to take this opportunity to encourage governments to adopt a longer-term, more stable, better thought-out and better planned vision of the way these agencies that provide a service to the community interface with each other. The government's policy objective should be to give money to these agencies in exchange for a service that it considers useful and necessary.

This is a brutal cut at a time when integration problems persist around the world. This is not specific to Canada or Quebec. It is always a difficult challenge to leave one's country to settle in another. Unfortunately, there is increasing tension between immigrants and local populations. Sometimes immigrants who had status at home because they were engineers, lawyers, doctors or notaries have difficulties integrating when they arrive here and end up being taxi drivers. There is nothing wrong with being a taxi driver, but that job is not what they trained for or what they want to do when they come to Quebec or Canada.

These people can become bitter and disappointed. In local populations, there are signs of rejection, intolerance and exasperation. Locals are under the impression that immigrants who do not integrate cost society dearly in social services and so on. This type of comment keeps coming up on the Internet and in conversations in coffee shops and restaurants.

It is therefore of the utmost importance for society to put significant effort into integration. Societies have many integration models. For a long time now, Quebec has been choosing to use the interculturalism model, a proactive view of integration in which immigrants are asked to fully participate in and contribute to the development of their host society, but also adhere to a common

culture. Unfortunately, elsewhere in Canada, another model was chosen: multiculturalism. Multiculturalism divides society into a multitude of solitudes that share the same territory but have nothing in common but the law. The only thing immigrants are asked to do in the documents prepared by Citizenship and Immigration Canada is to respect our laws. They can otherwise continue to practice their customs and traditions. This is not just accepted; it is encouraged and differences are celebrated. The Canadian model of multiculturalism is similar to the one in England and has the same failings with respect to integration.

When this model was established by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the government was seeking to marginalize the Quebec nation by saying that it was simply one of many cultural groups. Thus, French Canadians, Quebecers, Ukrainian Canadians and Italian Canadians are all cultural groups. Quebec has always rejected this model.

• (1205)

This is not just some crazy sovereignist idea. When this all began, Robert Bourassa wrote to Pierre Elliott Trudeau to explain the way multiculturalism could be applied in Quebec. All governments of Quebec, sovereignist as well as federalist, have rejected the multicultural approach.

More recently, the Bouchard-Taylor commission, which cannot be accused of being anti-immigration—it is actually a model of moderation—also recognized that multiculturalism is not the way forward for Quebec's integration model. There are some voices on the far left, like that of Julius Grey, who is associated with the NDP; he has also recognized that multiculturalism is not a solution.

In fact, even though Quebec is not able to fully promote its integration model, the results are different and are beneficial to Quebec in terms of non-ghettoization. In fact, the immigrants who arrive here are given contradictory messages. They arrive in Quebec and are invited to become part of the shared culture of the Quebec nation. But when they arrive in Ottawa, they are told that multiculturalism prevails and that differences are celebrated. There also are differences in the acceptance of immigration.

For example, in a Gallup poll not very long ago, people were asked if they had a positive perception of immigration, if it is a good thing for society. Along with British Columbia, Quebec had the best perception of immigration. Elsewhere in Canada, the perception of immigration was not as positive. I think that people in the rest of Canada are more closed to the idea of immigration and have more concerns than their Quebec counterparts because Canada's multicultural model—segregating individuals and promoting their differences as opposed to emphasizing their inclusion in a shared culture—produces more tension and friction.

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In an area like Toronto, where there is a great deal of immigration, there is less social acceptance than in Montreal, where, even though there are lots of immigrants, the numbers are still much lower than Toronto. I know the minister will agree with me on that, because he is very concerned about anti-Semitic acts around the country and violence against Jews. According to statistics, fewer anti-Semitic acts are committed in Montreal than in Toronto, even taking into account the fact that Toronto is larger than Montreal. So, fewer anti-Semitic acts are committed in Quebec and people say they are more open to immigration than in the rest of Canada. I think that says something.

Although Canada does not want to abandon its multiculturalism model, it should at least allow Quebec to continue promoting and developing its own model without getting in the way. Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois has already proposed a bill in the House to amend the Canadian act. Canada can choose multiculturalism if it wants, but Quebec has made a different, unanimous choice that transcends political lines. We want Quebec to be allowed to opt out of Canadian multiculturalism. Unfortunately, the three federalist parties in the House have rejected that, which is too bad. This penalizes Quebec and, even more so, immigrants. A model like Quebec's illustrates that there is a better way to live together, thanks to an active integration policy whereby people integrate into the common culture and enrich it, without giving up who they are.

• (1210)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleague made a speech that touched on all kinds of topics. That said, the motion for concurrence has to do with federal funding for integration. I have to say that since this government took power, federal investments in settlement services for newcomers have tripled, including in Quebec.

As the hon. member said, the situation in Quebec is special because of the Canada-Quebec accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens, which was signed in 1991. In this accord there is a formula for increases in the financial compensation paid to Quebec by the federal government for these services. This year, we will pay approximately \$240 million to Quebec for settlement services, which include language training. However, certain cultural communities and immigrants in Quebec have raised some concerns, as have I, regarding the fact that the Government of Quebec is not held accountable for the way it distributes the funding from the federal government for immigration services and is not transparent.

I would like to hear what my colleague thinks. Does he have the same concerns that this federal funding to the Government of Quebec is spent on other priorities? How can we ensure that all of this funding earmarked for services for immigrants is, in fact, spent on these services and not elsewhere?

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, there is certainly a debate to be had on this subject in Quebec and criticism to be made of Quebec's Liberal government about the way it spends the funding for immigrant integration services.

I am glad that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism mentioned this concern, which was raised by

Pauline Marois and the Parti Québécois when the Liberal Party of Quebec came to power.

The first thing the Liberal government did with regard to immigration was to cut the budgets for the francization of immigrants. Like the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois are extremely concerned about these decisions.

These decisions were made by the Government of Quebec. We have to respect the fact that once an agreement has been reached, it is that government that makes the decisions. These agencies have to take up their fight with the Government of Quebec. I get the feeling that as soon as that government's current term ends, or perhaps even sooner, we hope, there will be an election in Quebec, and we will have a government that truly has a proactive vision for integrating immigrants into Quebec society. That being said, it is not up to Ottawa to patronizingly tell Quebec how to spend money on immigration matters.

I indicated at the beginning of my speech that this is a Toronto-centric issue and that I would have a hard time talking about it for 20 minutes. What I wanted to illustrate is the importance, whether in Ontario or Quebec, of investing in integration services for immigrants because integration can produce major results with regard to the acceptance of immigration. I have illustrated how Quebec's policies make us more open to immigration than the rest of Canada.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. I have to reflect on my experience as an accountant and auditor prior to becoming a member of Parliament, where a couple of my clients were in fact settlement services. One of them actually went out of business because a union came in and decided to unionize the staff. The member and the minister well know that the funding for human resources from either level of government is fixed and cannot change. They could not afford to stay open because they could not afford to pay the salary demands of the union that was set up.

It is not a matter of the fact that there were cuts but whether the cuts were done in a way which was transparent. It would seem to me that if there is a requirement to save money in that area of settlement services, it really takes an approach which is basically to close down those that are not providing efficient services, as opposed to chipping away at the foundational funding of some of these settlement services. I believe the government has not been transparent in that regard. I wonder if the member would care to comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, it is true that, at the very beginning of my speech, I spoke about the fact that the government was unable to satisfactorily answer my question about the effects of these cuts and the abrupt transfer of reduced funds from Toronto to other parts of Ontario or Canada. It seems to me that there has been no consideration or concern for the human resources, for the people and individuals who work in these organizations and who provide services to the public. This issue has not been adequately addressed.

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During their presentations, senior departmental officials told us that they wanted to ensure that the transition went smoothly. Unfortunately, when I asked for specific examples, they were unable to provide me with any. For example, none of the organizations will be given any money to help them to continue to operate during the transition period.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2011-12 estimates just came out and the immigration and citizenship department sees a decrease of \$30.6 million to the interim federal health program, global case management. The interim federal health program assists new immigrants in finding good jobs in the health field, for example, by assisting them to get internships in hospitals so they can practise as doctors, which Canada needs.

The minister tells me that maybe that cut will not have a drastic impact on immigrant settlement services. Perhaps the member could comment on that.

It also has a decrease of \$7.5 million in funding related to managing the immigration program backlog. There is a good increase to the Canada-Quebec transfer accord of \$259 million, which will help Quebec immigrants. I just wish that this were extended across the country, so there would be a 2% increase across the board. Instead, we see that there is a decrease outside Quebec. I just want some comments from the member.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I did not have the opportunity to thoroughly review the estimates to which the hon. member is referring. However, unless I am mistaken, I believe that the interim federal health program has more to do with medicine for refugees. This is a subject that we discussed today in committee. We are concerned about the fact that the federal government is still refusing to sign a formal agreement with the Association québécoise des pharmaciens propriétaires to ensure that services are provided to refugees in Quebec, no matter which pharmacy they go to.

The government's refusal to sign such an agreement is even harder to understand since it has signed similar agreements respecting four of its other jurisdictions: National Defence, the RCMP, Veterans Affairs and Indian Affairs. It is much simpler to sign one agreement with the AQPP because the 1,800 members would be required to comply with the agreement and provide services to refugees, whether in Montreal, Dolbeau or the Gaspé. Unfortunately, the government seems to oppose this pharmacists' association and the idea of a special measure for Quebec.

[*English*]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to point out that my friends from the New Democratic Party say that they would like to make Parliament work, yet despite the House being scheduled to debate an important bill to improve airline security and to help us all work together against terrorism, we have another concurrence motion brought forward by the New Democratic Party.

For those members of the public who may be watching this debate with interest, a concurrence motion is essentially used as a tactic to delay debate on a government bill. That is certainly the case here.

I would invite my colleagues in the opposition to let Parliament work and to focus on important legislative business, in this case combatting terrorism and keeping our air passengers safe.

Having said that, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the government's massive investments in success for newcomers to Canada. Let me back up a little bit, as it is important to recall the situation that faced newcomers under the previous Liberal government.

When the previous Liberal government took office in October 1993, Canada received 276,000 new permanent residents in that year, the largest number of immigrants since about World War II.

The first thing the Liberals did was to begin cutting the budget of Citizenship and Immigration Canada quite steeply and reducing the number of newcomers arriving in the country, so that by 1995, their second year in office, the number of permanent residents being received in Canada plummeted down to 176,000. They reduced by about one third the number of newcomers allowed to enter the country.

The second thing the Liberals did was to look at immigrants as a source of revenue to pay for their other spending priorities. So they imposed a \$1,000 fee, what they called a right of permanent residence fee, on all new immigrants to Canada.

That was essentially a tax, and some would call it a head tax, on all new permanent residents arriving in the country. We think that was a bad choice, because those individuals were arriving with scarce or little savings and were struggling to make down payments on their initial apartments and getting their kids enrolled in school. They needed every dollar they could find to get settled in Canada, yet the previous government saw those immigrants as a source of revenue and imposed a \$1,000 right of landing fee on them.

The third thing the previous government did was that it decided to cut and then freeze for 13 years federal support for integration and settlement services. As other members have described, those include such things as free language training, job search skills and other integration support for newcomers. Thus for 13 years the Liberals froze and cut the levels of funding, such that when our government arrived in office in February 2006, we found that the total federal budget for settlement services across Canada was \$200 million after 13 years of Liberal government.

The first thing our government did was to cut in half the Liberal right of landing fee on newcomers, thereby saving, cumulatively, over \$340 million for newcomers to Canada since that time, and over \$140 million for newcomers to Ontario in particular. That is money now in the pockets of immigrants to help them make that first down payment on their apartment or perhaps on a new home. That is a \$340 million boost to newcomers that was introduced by our government.

Routine Proceedings

The second thing Conservatives did was to triple the federal investment in settlement services. The Liberal members here say “Oh, we almost, or just about, got around to that” like so many other things, that “if they had given us another 13 years, we would have got around to investing in the success of new Canadians.” But they did not. They made choices.

It is fine to make choices. There were some difficult fiscal times. However, when choices are made, one has to stand up and take responsibility for them, which we saw the Liberals refusing to do through their decision to underfund settlement services for newcomers.

• (1225)

Now they have the temerity to stand up in this place and criticize a government that has more than tripled investment in the success of the newcomers they refused to invest in. In particular, when I hear the histrionics and demagoguery of the member for Parkdale—High Park, it really causes me to wonder about what kind of cognitive dissonance it requires to criticize \$600 million of investment in settlement services when there was not a word of criticism about a government that had frozen it for 13 years at \$200 million a year. How bizarre.

I should also point out that for 13 long years, the previous Liberal government did nothing on one of the top priorities of newcomers, the issue of foreign credential recognition for foreign-trained professionals. This is a tough issue. It is largely provincial responsibility and jurisdiction, and there is a very limited role the federal government can play. However, between 1993 and 2005, the previous Liberal government chose to play no role in accelerating and streamlining the process of credential recognition so that foreign-trained professionals could get licensed and work in their professions of interest.

By contrast, our government has introduced the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, through which we are providing pre-arrival orientation sessions, free two-day seminars and personalized counselling for new economic immigrants to Canada while they are still in their countries of origin, so that they can apply for jobs and begin the process of applying for credential recognition and get a much better appreciation of some of the initial integration challenges they will face. According to our data, this has actually improved the situation with respect to pre-arranged employment for the economic immigrants who have gone through this new integration project introduced by our government as part of our broader efforts on foreign credential recognition.

I should also point out that we have invested \$50 million in Canada's economic action plan to put the meat on the bones of the pan-Canadian framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Basically, we are getting all 10 provinces and their respective 45 licensed professional associations around the table to hammer out a common, streamlined and expedited process for credential recognition. Basically that is a lot of technical jargon to say that the federal government is finally taking a vital, real leadership role, backed up with real dollars and cents, to speed up the process for credential recognition for foreign-trained professionals. That is good news. After 13 years of neglect, finally there is federal leadership for foreign-trained professionals.

However, on the issue before us of investment in settlement services, some of the Liberal members are squawking about this Canada-Ontario immigration thing through which they supposedly brought in a large increase in funding. In fact, we can look at the books. It is publicly available, black on white, in the estimates and the budget. The last year the Liberal government was in office, in fiscal year 2005-06, the federal investment in total settlement services across Canada was \$200 million, with \$111.5 million of that in the province of Ontario. That was the same, for all intents and purposes, as it had been 13 years earlier.

It is just like the Kelowna accord. Do we remember that? The parliamentary secretary for INAC, Indian and Northern Affairs, who is here, will tell the House that the Liberals had a Kelowna accord. It was a press release. They call press releases, “investments”. Yes, they sent out a press release about a Canada-Ontario immigration accord, but there was no money, no real transfers, no increased services, nothing practical, concrete or real, just a fantasy. They said nothing about the other provinces.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Quebec is following its own path. With the Canada-Quebec agreement on immigration, the province applies a formula—which I talked about—for immigrant settlement services.

[*English*]

The Liberals said they would have an agreement with Ontario. What about the other provinces? There was nothing, nada, zilch, no proposed increased investment for settlement services for newcomers in western or Atlantic Canada.

The principle that we took very clearly is reflected in the decision before us today. I know it is a radical idea, perhaps, for my Liberal friends, but our principle was this: that just as all Canadians are equal under the law, so too should all newcomers be treated with equity by the Government of Canada, and that every newcomer, whether they decide to settle in Labrador City or Long Island, British Columbia, should all have roughly the same level of settlement services available to them. It is about equity.

In 2005 we therefore tripled the federal investment in settlement services. The truth is that we increased that funding more quickly than people were enrolling in the programs. Thus while we tripled the funding, we in fact only saw about a 34% increase in enrolment in federally funded programs such as language instruction for newcomers to Canada. For example, between 2005 and 2009, we saw the number of people enrolled in LINC classes across Canada go from about 48,000 to 53,000, a very small increase in actual clients enrolling in the services, and to this day, only about 25% of eligible permanent residents enrol in the settlement services we offer them freely.

Routine Proceedings

That is a challenge. We need to make sure people are aware of these programs that we offer freely, and that is why we have done such innovative things as our pilot project for vouchers for free language training, which we are now mailing on a pilot basis to newcomers in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta. We have seen an increase in the uptake, more people enrolling, because they understand there is a monetary value to the free language courses we are offering. That is very concrete. It is not just a press release, but a real service. We are trying to increase enrollment.

Fundamentally, we have a responsibility to ensure that money is being spent accountably. When we have this huge increase in funding, a tripling of funding, and only a 34% increase in the number of people enrolling in those services, we have to ask whether that money is being spent with maximum efficiency. We also need to ensure that we treat everyone with equity.

Over the course of the past five years, one of the great untrumpeted achievements of this government's immigration reforms has been a much better distribution of newcomers across Canada. It used to be that 90% of newcomers settled in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, even if the best jobs were in other parts of the country. Many of my predecessors, including the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, I am sure all reflected on the need to get a better distribution of newcomers in other parts of the country so that all parts of Canada could enjoy the benefits of immigrants' work ethic.

We succeeded with that, in part through the provincial nominee program and its expansion, and so we have now seen a very significant increase in the number of newcomers settling in the prairie and the Atlantic provinces. For example, over the past five years Manitoba has seen the number of immigrants settling there nearly triple. That is phenomenal. That is one of the reasons the Manitoba economy has been leading the country, as I am sure my colleague from Winnipeg would agree. I do not know where he is. He lives in here. He is normally here all the time, but—

• (1235)

The Deputy Speaker: A few members have made mentioned of the fact that it is inappropriate to point out the absence or presence of a member.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I meant to compliment the member who is always here.

We ended up in a situation where, because of the increases in funding, they were based on 2005 levels of where people were settling. In 2005, nearly 145,000 newcomers were choosing to settle in the province of Ontario. However, as a result of the changes we made, more people were choosing to settle in the Atlantic provinces and western Canada.

When we fast-forward to 2009-10, we found that only 105,000 newcomers were settling in Ontario with the balance going typically to the western and Atlantic provinces. That is a good problem to have because it meant that the 25% reduction in immigration to Ontario was a proportionate increase in immigration to provinces with a lot of labour market shortages. Those provinces are now benefiting from immigration. Now there is a much closer share of newcomers being distributed across the country.

However, the settlement dollars were not following the immigrants because it was all based on a 2005 formula that is now out of date. This has ended up with a peculiar situation whereby Ontario newcomers are receiving about \$3,400 in federally funded services per immigrant but those living in the western and Atlantic provinces are only receiving about \$2,900 per immigrant.

Do my friends in the opposition think it is fair that a newcomer in Calgary Northeast or a newcomer in North Battleford, Saskatchewan is receiving about \$600 less in federal settlement services than a newcomer here in Ottawa? I do not think one Canadian would agree that is fair or reasonable.

We had to rebalance the funding of settlement services. We worked with the provinces and came up with a new settlement formula based on the number of primary immigrants; an estimate of secondary migration of where people choose to move sometimes, and that is typically to Alberta and Saskatchewan; the number of refugees; and a number of other criteria.

We came up with a new formula, collaboratively with the provinces that will now, hopefully, ensure that in the future newcomers will receive roughly the same level of services across the country. Quebec is a special case here because of the Canada-Quebec immigration accord.

As a consequence of this new formula, in fiscal year 2011-12 we will have a rebalancing of federal settlement services across the country. That will result in an increase in our federal settlement service budget for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Ten of the 13 jurisdictions in Canada will be receiving yet another increase in settlement services under this government. This is good news for newcomers to Canada.

However, that must come from somewhere. The offset will come from those areas that have been over-funded, such as Ontario and, to some extent, Nova Scotia and British Columbia. I note that the Government of British Columbia has not fully spent the money that we transferred to it for settlement services for the very problem that I explained before, which is that the funding increases were so significant under our government that the uptake was not there from the clients to justify all that spending. We do not just spend for the sake of spending. We in the Conservative government believe that we spend for results. Even the Government of British Columbia said that it was not concerned about the slight offset in funding because it was not spending all that money anyway.

Even within Ontario there have been changes in patterns of migration. For example, between 2005 and 2009 fewer people were settling in the city of Toronto proper than was the case before. However, there was a huge increase in settlement in the region of York, which is part of the greater Toronto area just to the north. Consequently, there will be a slight reduction in settlement funding in the city of Toronto but a large increase in the region of York in the range of 43%.

Routine Proceedings

•(1240)

One of the members opposite suggested that this was calculated for some political or partisan reason. I have to say as strongly and clearly as I can that that is outrageous and completely ridiculous. The formula is based on federal and provincial consultation and all of these decisions have been developed by officials in Citizenship and Immigration Canada simply to ensure that the services go where the newcomers are going.

I would point out that settlement services in Toronto will still be funded by more than double what they were when the previous Liberal government was in office. We invited 36 settlement service agencies out of the roughly 200 agencies in Ontario, through a process of requests for proposals, to make submissions for future contribution agreements. We assessed those submissions on an objective basis. We scored their historic performance and looked at the quality of the proposals. The officials made an assessment based on a point system and decided that 36 associations that had been receiving funding would not receive funding over the next two year period but that 30 new associations would receive funding. I do not see what the problem is with that. If an organization receives money from the federal government, it does not mean that it has a permanent entitlement to that money. It means that it needs to prove that it is spending it efficiently.

What we are doing is we are protecting the interests of taxpayers through efficiency and ensuring equity in funding right across the country. We are proud of our decision in the investment in the success of newcomers to Canada.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of constituents have approached me with a great deal of concern. Some constituents are facing the fact that their sponsorship of family reunification has gone from three to four years under the previous Liberal government to almost six to seven years. With the new changes announced, it is expected to reach almost 13 years of wait times.

The African Community Services of Peel, the Canadian Hate Prevention Network, the Social Planning Council of Peel and the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel are all agencies that have been subjected to the funding cuts by the Conservative government. Thousands of Bramptonians and constituents have been left without the necessary services to ensure that new Canadians can integrate, can get the skills they need to ensure their success and can obtain resources not only for themselves but their families to ensure their success and prosperity as families. With the \$53 million of cuts that have been faced by these organizations, there has been a great impact because they will no longer be able to provide those services.

Brampton is also home to the largest number of immigrants throughout Canada. As the minister knows. Brampton has the We Welcome the World Centre, which operates within the Peel District School Board, to help parents and small children integrate into the school system. In its first year alone, We Welcome the World Centre helped over 1,800 families in its first year but it has itself lost half of its operating budget, which will leave not only the agencies that I have mentioned but many of the new Canadians accessing these agencies out in the cold.

When the minister says that a newcomer should be treated with equity, how will these Brampton families be treated with equity when they have faced and been subjected to these cuts of over \$53 million and the impact it will have on many Canadians who are facing long wait times for family reunification?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the processing time for family reunification, family class immigration applications are being processed on average two months earlier than was the case in 2005 under the previous government. Last year, we welcomed 281,000 immigrants, the largest number in 57 years, including 181,000 family members if we include the dependents of primary economic immigrants. Next year, we will be increasing our targets for family class immigration to a maximum, in the planning range, of 65,500.

Finally, we have accepted more family class immigrants in the past five years than was the case under the previous Liberal government. Therefore, I will not take any lessons from that member on family class immigration.

With respect to settlement services in Peel, our ministry, for some reason, counts the Peel and Halton regions together for management purposes. When the member's party was in government in 2005-06, her government was transferring \$15 million in settlement services to Peel-Halton. Next year, even after the rebalancing, we will be funding \$65 million in settlement services for Peel and Halton. From \$15 million, under her watch, to \$65 million for Peel families, including those in Brampton, under our government, is an increase of 329%. Yes, there will be a slight offset from this year of \$7 million, which is a \$7 million transfer into other parts of the country that are now being underfunded, but that amount is half the total federal Liberal contribution to settlement services in the Peel and Halton regions in 2005.

We need to have some perspective here. Where is that \$7 million going? I will tell members where it is going. It is going to the increased number of newcomers settling in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and the north because they deserve settlement services too.

•(1245)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for sticking around for the debate. It is something that he does regularly when these issues are debated in the House and I do appreciate that he takes the time to participate.

I do want to say that flies a bit in his assertion that somehow debating a concurrence motion is just a time-wasting dilatory thing in this House. It is not. This is the chance for the House to look at the work of committees and to express our support for initiatives taken in committee. It is absolutely not a time-wasting exercise. The minister's presence here, I hope, speaks to that as well.

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The minister talked about the right of landing fee. I have to say that I agree with his analysis. The right of landing fee was hurting immigrants to Canada. It was taxing immigrants to Canada at a time when they can least afford to pay. A tax on landing of \$1,000 was very harmful to people coming to Canada to settle here. Although the minister's analysis of that is correct, a \$500 landing fee is equally offensive to the goal of integrating new immigrants into Canadian society.

I wonder why the government is taking hundreds of millions of dollars, as the minister pointed out, out of the pockets of new immigrants when, at the same time, it is now cutting services that many new immigrants need in key places like Toronto, Ontario, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. Why is the right of landing fee there at all? Why are we putting that burden on new immigrants to Canada?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to underscore again that the right of landing fee was introduced by the previous Liberal government in 1995. We did meet a platform commitment to cut it in half in 2006 immediately upon taking office.

We, as a government, would like to reduce all sorts of taxes as the fiscal situation permits. I register his point. As the member knows, we all need to exercise fiscal discipline. I would hope that in due course a future government can look at future reductions in that area. However, we need to manage all of these things in a way that is affordable in terms of the federal fiscal framework.

I would also point out that the funds we collected in the past from that fee were just spent on general revenues. Now we are investing \$600 million in services to newcomers, far more than is collected in the fee. Finally, newcomers are getting something back for the fee that they are paying, which was not the case under the previous government.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the minister. He has given the appearance that the various provincial-federal contracts that are multi-year in nature, in fact have been evidence-based, and those changes have been negotiated through those agreements, and the impact is the cuts that have been effected on, for example, Ontario and the greater Toronto area. It gives the appearance that it is, in fact, an empirical process that is based on the evidence he has suggested.

If that is the case, how come the province of Ontario, within the transfer agreement that has existed for the past five years and is in the process of renegotiation, has had a truncation of that process with a cut of over \$200 million that has impacted further on the transfer arrangement that was negotiated as part of that five-year agreement?

If the minister is accurate in the manner in which he has characterized this negotiation, then why is the province of Ontario saying that there has been a breach of that contract and it is very difficult to get on with a new negotiation, when it was entered into in bad faith in the first place? That is the question we would like to have answered.

• (1250)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question from a very thoughtful and respected colleague. I would point out that in 2005, when the funding levels were established in the Canada-Ontario immigration accord, the number was picked arbitrarily. It

was not based on any kind of evidence-based assessment of what the actual needs for settlement services were in Ontario. Rather, it was based simply on the peg mark of what Quebec received, itself based on a mathematical formula established in 1991. It was really an arbitrary figure.

Having said that, we respected the levels that were foreseen in the COIA accord in 2005 and increased the settlement funding in Ontario from \$111.5 million to roughly \$365 million. However, we found that there was not an adequate number of services to fund. We did these requests for proposals from the non-governmental organizations that provide the services and we simply did not get enough eligible proposals.

Unlike, perhaps, other governments, we were not going to just blow the money. We were not going to write cheques to organizations ineligible to receive them. Since then, in 2007, in consultation with Ontario and the other provinces, we did come up with a new settlement funding allocation formula based on the number of immigrants, the number of refugees—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, I will have to stop the minister as his time has expired.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Papineau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be in the House today to discuss immigration. This is a very important issue for Canada and for Parliament, but also for the future of the families and people who have come to Canada to build their lives and to contribute to this country.

Our country was built on immigration. People came from all over the world to build lives for themselves and to create a rich country, not just from an economic standpoint, but also in terms of social justice and freedom. What we are seeing today is that the immigration sector is facing new challenges, and the fact is that adjustments must be made.

[*English*]

The reality is, the waves of immigration that we have gone through in past decades allowed people to come over with modest levels of language and marketable job skills, and build their success. They were able to do this whether it be in the post-war years, when the construction industry in my riding of Papineau was booming, or in earlier waves of migration when the Prairies were settled. Families came and built their lives, and were able to succeed economically without a tremendous level of integration support.

The reality is, now things have changed. Those migrating to Canada cannot simply arrive and hope to find a good-paying job, enough to care for their children, pay the rent, and build a future for their family unless they also develop skills. We are living in a service and knowledge economy where language skills, job skills, and social skills are essential to succeed when 20 to 50 years ago they were not.

Routine Proceedings

It is not so much to encourage people to come to Canada, which is extremely important, as we see from the aging population and low birth rates. We need to draw the best and the brightest from around the world to continue to create a prosperous country and economy. Just as important as it is to welcome people, it is how we welcome them and the tools we give them to succeed.

Last year 281,000 people were welcomed into this country; a record high. It seems illogical and unconscionable that at a time when we are allowing more people in than we have in decades, we are also cutting integration services.

The minister makes a good point in that there is a reallocation because people are arriving and settling in different places. However, the fact is that there is a \$53 million cut for settlement services for new arrivals.

It is easy to say we are cutting their budgets.

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

However, simply cutting integration services is not in the interests of Canada or of newcomers. We are asking a great deal of our social security system and our economic system, which support these people when they are unemployed. In fact, providing social assistance ends up costing much more than providing education, support and training for these people so they can contribute to society.

It does not make sense. Unfortunately, we see this lack of logic fairly regularly in this government's decisions. It prefers to make cuts here and there and leave us more impoverished in the long term. It is evident in their crime agenda: the government wants to build prisons that will not make us safer. It is evident in this matter: it is making cuts that will hurt the most vulnerable.

[*English*]

People arriving in this country only want to contribute, to feel relevant, to build their lives and care for their families, and to help shape this great country. The fact that at a time when more are arriving than ever before and we are cutting settlement services is a mistake.

The minister enjoys talking about the fact that we are funding more now than we were in 2005. The agreements signed in November 2005 were five-year agreements that led to these increases in funding. It was a Liberal government that looked at the amount we were spending on settlement services and said that we really needed to invest more in language services, integration and job training, and signed five-year agreements that would double and triple the funding for settlement agencies.

Five years forward from 2005, those agreements are starting to run out. Here is the first opportunity for this Conservative government to start cutting in those programs. It is the first chance it has had after funding was increased over the years with the understanding of how important it was. The first chance the Conservatives get to cut those Liberal increases in funding, they do it on the backs of vulnerable people who want nothing more than to contribute to our society.

Here we have the paradox of the government. On the one hand it is welcoming people and on the other hand it is not allowing them opportunities to contribute and learn.

We also see that when we want people to succeed and draw in the best possible quality of immigrants, we need to encourage them to be successful. We need to train them and offer language training, but as an incentive to come over, we need to offer them family reunification, understanding that bringing over parents and grandparents is not just a social issue but an economic issue as well for their capacity to contribute in child care. The government has left child care woefully underfunded with fewer spaces.

We need to offer family reunification as a motivation to draw in the best and the brightest from around the world who wish to come build their families in Canada because they know they are going to be able to bring over their own parents and grandparents, their support system.

The undercutting of our immigration system, the undercutting of our capacity to bring over the best and the brightest from around the world and have them build this nation, is what is truly at stake right now.

The minister is very good at pointing out that we funded less in 2005 during the last Liberal government, but we set in motion the funding increases that the government has benefited from. If we want to go back to the past, previous Liberal governments funded immigration to greater levels than previous Conservative governments, and before that the Conservative government funded immigration to greater levels than the Liberal government before it.

We have been increasing our funding throughout time. It is time that the government stopped defining itself by what it is, in its words, doing differently or better than previous governments and started looking at genuine need. The government needs to understand that people are in need of aid and support, not to receive charity but to contribute economically to this country.

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

Our small country will not be successful in the global economy unless we give everyone the opportunity to develop their full potential. The fact that engineers are driving taxis and that people with a PhD cannot find a job because they do not receive enough encouragement and assistance to take the necessary training means that we are not building the country that we need.

Basically, the minister and the government are saying that this is a reallocation. Naturally, funds are being reallocated. I am very pleased that British Columbia, Newfoundland and all the other provinces will have more funding, but making a \$53 million cut is not investing in the this country's prosperity, which we need.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments. I would first like to make a minor correction.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

The member said that the previous Liberal government had signed agreements that led to these increases in funding that we have seen in the past five years. It is true that the previous government in 2005 signed the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, which foresaw a certain increase in funding for settlement services in Ontario.

I want to point out that there was no similar agreement with the western or Atlantic provinces and this was one of the problems we had when we came to office in 2006. We saw the quite generous funding levels implied by the Canada-Quebec Immigration Agreement, this year one-quarter of a billion dollars, and the unfulfilled commitment at that point under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. Had we implemented that without increases in funding for the four Atlantic and four western provinces, we would have had a massive lack of equity across the country.

That is why we decided of our discretion without separate agreements to massively increase the funding levels for British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. It is in that same spirit that this year we are increasing the funding to seven of the provinces and the three territories. I wanted to correct that point.

I agree with the member's general point that we need to invest in the success of newcomers. In particular, and quite commendably, he raised the importance of foreign credential recognition for foreign-trained professionals.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, when the agreements were signed in the fall of 2005 with Ontario, they were based on a range of studies and analyses looking into where the needs were. In 2005, the immigration focus was much more on Ontario than it is right now. It is wonderful to see that immigration is now increasing across the country, but if it is increasing in Alberta and the west, where it often does as newcomers arrive and move out west, all too often it is because, and rightly so, there are jobs and economic opportunities out west that do not necessarily exist in Ontario at the same time.

When we look at numbers of migration, there is a legitimate allocation of funding but when we look at needs, in many cases people who have newly arrived and are moving out west for jobs do not have the same level of need as the ones who remain in Ontario and having difficulty finding jobs. I am wary about simply applying a numbers game when we are talking about human beings' lives and needs.

● (1305)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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 tomorrow at the end of the time provided for government orders.

* * *

PETITIONS

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens of Canadians calling for an end to Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with agreement from the Liberal Party, broke his oft-repeated promise to honour the parliamentary motion and furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in the House.

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

* * *

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 Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

● (1310)

*[English]***STRENGTHENING AVIATION SECURITY ACT**

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak once again on this topic, a topic that has certainly had quite a number of speakers and promises to have many more before we resolve the question.

The government introduced this legislation last June with the announcement that we would have to have it approved by December 31. If that were not to happen by the end of December 2010, the overflights of the United States would come to a halt which would certainly lead to chaos and trouble for the Canadian flying public and the aviation industry in this country. That was the story at that time.

We are now long past the supposed deadline, the flights are continuing unabated and there is no sign that the Americans will prevent our flights from overflying the United States. What we have seen is that an exemption has been offered for flights that originate in one city in Canada and end in another city in Canada that overfly part of American territory.

The fact that the Americans would allow this exemption is somehow an argument that the bill will now be more palatable to Canadians, but it in some ways cuts part of the heart out of the intention, because the flights that overfly the United States right now that start in, say, Toronto and fly to Winnipeg, in many instances they fly over very sensitive American military installations, landmarks, cities and populated areas. So if anyone wanted to do something bad, they could still do that by getting on a plane that was simply flying between two Canadian points and going over American airspace. Clearly there is something else at play here.

Another issue we have to look at is that there is a Canadian no-fly list. The member for Winnipeg Centre is on the Canadian no-fly list. A person who is on a no-fly list would not be on the plane in the first place. Whether a person is on an American no-fly list or a Canadian no-fly list, he or she will not be allowed to get on an airplane in the first place. I am not really certain what problem we are trying to solve with this particular legislation and what the absolute importance is of getting the bill passed in very short order.

Whenever we look at issues like this, we want to question how the legislation increases the safety of the flying public. Right now we have other issues that have been identified as being very serious.

I believe the American Airlines' Allied Pilots Association has identified the trusted shipper program, which consists of over 1,000 companies that have the clearance to send parcels and mail. These parcels and mail are simply routinely loaded onto the planes. Just below where passengers are sitting on the plane are great quantities of mail and parcels that have not been checked at all. I would like to know what the sensibilities are to have the screening process we have, all of the very expensive airport scanning systems we have in place, and we are doing all of these procedures to our passengers.

While all of this is happening, mail and parcels are being trucked onto the plane. That is where the real exposure is. Just recently there was a case where toner cartridges in Africa were the source of explosive devices attempting to be shipped through the mail that would have found their way onto planes within the systems. We have a lot of evidence out there. The American Airlines' Allied Pilots Association has a very big issue here. We could have potentially had a big explosion just recently with those toner cartridge packages that nearly made it onto planes.

Evidently, the problem is much closer to home because every day in this country we have packages and mail getting on these planes.

Let us look at whether or not the no-fly lists that we have in this country have in fact added to our safety. We have the member for Winnipeg Centre on a no-fly list. When he was still alive, Senator Ted Kennedy was denied boarding on American planes. We have had other examples of Congress representatives and senators finding themselves unable to board planes because they are on lists. Therefore, when we look at a system like this we wonder if we should be making an attempt to clean up some of the problems we have in the current system rather than trying to inadvertently create more. If we look at how we can correct the records, we have found that it is almost impossible. The member for Winnipeg Centre has tried to get off the list. He has been unable to do so.

One example is six-year old Alyssa Thomas from Ohio. It was reported that she was on her way to her first communion. She was stopped at the airport in the United States, I believe it was a Cleveland to Minneapolis flight. She was denied boarding because she was on the no-fly list. The problem was solved with a lot of paperwork and she was able to board the plane. However, when the family realized that this was an issue that might follow her for the rest of her life they sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security in an attempt to get the issue cleared up on a long-term basis. The department would not confirm nor deny her presence on the no-fly list and stated there would be no further communication regarding the matter. Now, at six years old, she will go through her life being on the no-fly list without any possibility of ever getting off it.

These are the questions that the Liberals, the Bloc and the members of the opposition should be asking in the House. They made a big issue of the long form census a few months ago over privacy issues there. The Conservative base was quite upset that the state would be asking census information about how many bedrooms in the house and so on. Yet it somehow does not seem to have any problem whatsoever giving over PNR information that could be sent to other countries' security systems with no guarantees and no information as to how it will be used.

Government Orders

I have indicated in previous speeches that there are better ways of dealing with PNR issues that Canada actually supports. Through the Canada-U.S. agreement on PNR matters we have been praised for the high standards that we have promoted and upheld in PNR matters. In the agreement we have with Canada-E.U., there are limitations on the disposal of data, how much time the PNR information can be kept, and the individualization of the particulars of the data so that the information is rendered anonymously. That allows security services to build up their profiles, which is what they want, without attaching it to any one individual. That is the—

• (1315)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has taken an active interest in airline passengers since he arrived in the House of Commons. All airline passengers in Canada want to thank him for that.

He was getting to an important point at the end of his speech when he talked about the accumulation of data about airline passengers by foreign security agencies, particularly by American security agencies. Some critics of this legislation have said that it would aid and abet data mining by American security agencies at the expense of the privacy of Canadians. He talked about the building of profiles that these security agencies would do with the information they would collect from airlines.

Could he expand on that point and let us know what he really thinks of the criticism that the bill would aid and abet data mining by American security agencies?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. That is exactly what it is. The interesting thing about it is if both the American and Canadian no-fly lists are accurate and up-to-date, then any people on those lists would not and should not be on planes in the first place. The people we are concerned about will not be on the plane so their PNR information will not be transferred to any foreign government or, in this case, the American government. We will be giving all of the data on people who are not on the no-fly list and are on the plane in the first place.

When I asked about reciprocity, the government indicated to me that the Americans were prepared for us to keep our own data. We have negotiated one exemption already for point to point flights over U.S. territory between two cities in Canada. Therefore, why would we not negotiate reciprocity? One hundred flights a day fly over the United States and two thousand American flights fly over Canada. Why did the government not say to the Americans that if it gave them our information, then they would have to give Canada their information? The government says that it will cost too much to develop a computer system to deal with all that information. The government just rolled over and signed on to the deal the way the Americans wanted it.

• (1320)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment on the kind of data that would be required? Would this be useless data or would this be data that could be used by any one of the 16 American agencies that might have access to the information?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the information is not something that one would want to have sent to security agencies unless it is done on the basis that it would be rendered anonymous.

That is how we deal with PNR information under an agreement, for example, between Canada and the EU. When our negotiators negotiated with the Americans, why did they not say that Canada had already signed on with the EU and supported the practice of proper PNR information handling? Why did the government not suggest that the clause in the agreement with the EU be used?

The PNR information under the Canada-EU data protection system allows for time periods for the data to be kept. The data has to be disposed after a certain number of days. There are limits on the individualization of the data so the data is rendered anonymous. The security services build up the profiles they are looking for, but the information is not attached to any one individual.

This is the global standard for international treaties on PNR agreements. Canada signed on to this agreement with the EU. Countries right around the world have signed on to this. Why would we give up a gold standard that we have supported for many years on the use of PNRs? When it came to the Americans and security, the government disregarded all of that.

Canada is going to send whatever information is in the PNR, and that information can vary. There is different information on each PNR. The member for St. John's East asked what was in the PNR. It depends on what the travel agent typed in when the booking was made. Each person is different. People have different medical problems that might be indicated in there, or they might have different meal preferences. All sorts of different information could be in the PNR that would be dealt with here.

This is not the way to deal with the issue. The government should take the legislation back to the drawing board.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the important matter of Bill C-42, concerning the personal information of Canadians on flights over the U.S.

Although we will support the legislation, I will speak to the history of the bill, how we got to that point and why we can now support the bill.

First, it should be noted the way in which the government went about introducing the bill. As is the practice of the government, which we have become all too familiar with, it either tables legislation that it has no plans on following through with or it introduces legislation that it is not serious in following through with in such a way that it limits serious debate.

The government waited until the last sitting day before the summer recess to introduce this bill, a move to avoid parliamentary scrutiny over these measures by leaving little time for debate.

Government Orders

As it stands right now, the Aeronautics Act already allows for the disclosure of personal information by airlines to foreign states if the flight lands within the foreign state. The act also provides a legislative authority to create the no-fly list intended to identify potential terrorists in airline passenger lists and block them from boarding domestic or international flights.

The no-fly list, however, has proven seriously problematic. Further, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has expressed concerns with the measures enabled under the Aeronautics Act.

The Privacy Commissioner has testified before committee that the Canadian government should ask the United States to quickly destroy the information it will be collecting on airline passengers flying over the U.S. because there is nothing to prevent that information from being shared on a wide scale basis both in the U.S. and abroad.

The Privacy Commissioner has also noted that there is nothing in the new secure flight policy that precludes the Department of Homeland Security from sharing passenger names, birthdates and genders, passport information and travel itineraries with immigration and law enforcement authorities at home and abroad.

This assessment of the policy contradicts the assertions of the public safety minister, who told the transport committee that the information collected on Canadian passengers was intended to be used solely to protect aviation security.

No wonder there are some serious concerns when we have conflicting views from the minister and the Privacy Commissioner.

By further changing the act to force Canadian airlines to disclose personal information of Canadian passengers who are simply flying over the United States, Bill C-42 would further endanger the privacy rights of Canadians.

Maintaining public security, however, is important and a balance must be achieved. Liberal Party members expressed this concern when the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Liberal members have amended the bill in three specific ways: first, the House of Commons will be required to conduct a review of these measures two years from the date they come into force and every five years thereafter; second, this data transfer will be limited to the U.S. in legislation, as the original version of the bill allowed the Canadian government to add other countries by order-in-council; and, third, airlines and travel agents will be required by Canadian law to inform passengers of this impending data transfer before their ticket is purchased.

This may only be a one paragraph bill that would make a minor change to the wording of one section of the Aeronautics Act, however, these changes would be significant in practice. The bill could effectively be used as legal justification for airlines and travel agents to supply foreign governments with personal information about passengers when a plane they are on flies through a country's airspace. Currently, the act allows for this transmission of information only when a Canadian plane lands in that country.

Let me take a moment to go over the history of these provisions in the Aeronautics Act.

At question is subsection 4.83 (1). This allows for the cabinet to make regulations regarding the transmission of certain information to foreign governments. Subsection 4.83 essentially creates legislative exemption to the Privacy Act and the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

• (1325)

The supporting regulations remain the critical component of this piece of the framework.

Schedule 1 of the regulations lists the category of information that may be automatically provided to an authorized foreign government. This includes basic information such as name, gender and passport number.

Schedule 2 of the regulations provides what detailed information may be provided to a foreign government. These details include the passenger's address, phone number, class of ticket, for example, business or economy, method of payment for the ticket and whether the passenger in question actually paid for the ticket.

The final schedule in these regulations, Schedule 3, lists the governments and agencies that are authorized to request or receive any of the information listed in either of the first two schedules. There is only one country and agency on the list: the United States and its commissioner of customs.

The regulations in question were introduced in 2001 during the 37th Parliament. Bill C-44 amended the Aeronautics Act to allow the transmission of this information to foreign governments. This was in response to new U.S. requirements for any plane landing inside that country.

Subsequent U.S. legislation requires other countries to provide the U.S. government with details of any passenger in a plane flying over the U.S., not landing, but actually flying over the U.S.

The Liberal Party has very strong concerns about the erosion of Canadian sovereignty expressed in the bill. We also have very real concerns about the privacy of Canadians and about the ability of the government to conduct foreign affairs in a way that benefits Canadians.

The balance between national security and personal freedom is a crucial balance for any government. I, as well as my Liberal colleagues in the official opposition, am very concerned that Bill C-42 goes too far. Hence, the need for our amendments.

For starters, the bill was not designed to protect the national security of Canadians. It was designed to transmit information to other countries for flights outside Canadian airspace. Once this information is in the hands of a foreign government, we cannot control what they do with it.

Government Orders

In May of last year, assistant privacy commissioner, Chantal Bernier, spoke to the transport committee. She said that the U.S. government, the only government currently authorized to receive this data, could keep the personal information of Canadians anywhere from seven days to 99 years. She also stated that the U.S. could use that information for any purpose, even those not related to air-land security, such as law enforcement.

When the United States passed the patriot act in the aftermath of September 11, it caused concern to many nations around the world. The patriot act allows the U.S. government unfettered access to and control of information about citizens from all over the world. It is no small matter to put private information of citizens into the hands of the U.S. government, where it will be subject to the wider net of the patriot act.

We must be concerned about any law that allows information about Canadians not accused of any crime to be put in the U.S. intelligence machine. We could be creating a situation where the government helps to provide a foreign government information that is used to prosecute Canadians without any formal judicial process.

It should be clarified that these are not information-gathering agreements. Rather the legislation would create a one-way flow of information out of Canada and into the hands of foreign governments.

In passing the legislation, we are creating a legal framework that will require diligent monitoring. It is important that we exercise our right to ensure that Canadians are protected. Hopefully, we can do that with the amendments that we put forward, which are now a part of this. As well, we must ensure that we stay on top of this and monitor very closely what is done over the course of the time.

We must understand that in creating this legislation we are opening the door for other countries to ask the same things. We are saying publicly that we are willing to provide personal and private information about our citizens to other countries. This is a troubling development that we must be willing to abandon if it proves to be more sinister than good.

• (1330)

Just because a Liberal amendment has been adopted to limit this information sharing with the U.S., it does not prevent other countries from now wanting to negotiate similar information transfers. Therefore, we need to be very vigilant in terms of what the government will do once this bill has been passed and can move forward with it.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I share the same concern about how to protect the overall security of our country and recognize some of the challenges faced in bringing forward this kind of legislation.

Would the hon. member expand a bit more on the amendments that she was referring to that the Liberal Party put forward to ensure we have a better balance in this bill?

• (1335)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, when we put forward these amendments, the idea was to work with the government and the other parties in the House of Commons to ensure that Parliament works.

First, we talk about the need to conduct a review of the measures two years from now and every five years thereafter so that two years from now we will be able to see if these amendments are as effective as they can be; second, with regard to the data transfer to the U.S., the original version of the bill would have allowed the Canadian government to add other countries by order in council; and, third, airline and travel agents would be instructed to ensure that passengers travelling are well aware that their information will be shared with the U.S. It is very important, first and foremost, that passengers have a good appreciation and understanding of what the result would be of Bill C-42.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the amendment that deals with the review. She talked about the two-year review and then the subsequent five-year review. Reviewing legislation is good. We have seen that happen in a number of cases, although sometimes when the time comes to do the review it does not get done.

How will this review happen? This is a process where information would be given to the Americans. What exactly will we be reviewing in two years? Will we be reviewing how much information we sent the Americans? We certainly will not be able to review what they did with the information.

Surely the member does not expect the Americans to send us a report card, although maybe she does. After two years, we will ask the Americans to please send us a report on how they dealt with the information we sent them. Clearly, we will want to know what happened to the information that we sent them. We will not get any information from the Americans about that no matter how many times we ask.

All a review would tell us, in my opinion, is what we already know or should know, which is how much information we are sending to the U.S. but not what the final result is of having provided the information. That is what I am having some trouble getting my head around in this case, but maybe the member could give me some further information on that amendment and the others.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, clearly there will be an onus on the U.S. government to work with the Canadian government. Canada will acknowledge that it is prepared to share the information with it but recognizing as well that Canadians have some concerns. Yes, we expect that the government will be able to do a review of the information that has been shared, how that information has been handled and the impact of sharing that information on Canadians.

We expect to be able to do that in the first two years. If it is not working, if we find there has been an abuse of that sharing of information and if the U.S. has not lived up to its end of the bargain, then obviously that is an issue that we will have to deal with. However, at the end of the first two years we will know whether we need to make further adjustments to a bill like Bill C-42.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-42 and to review some of the concerns that we have raised time and time again.

Government Orders

I am afraid I do not share the optimism of the member for Random—Burin—St. George's in terms of the expectations she has for U.S. participation in making changes to this and in reviewing its procedures. There have been no discussions about these procedures, no safeguards have been put in place and no limitations whatsoever on the kind of information that the American government, its agencies or the foreign governments to which it will be passed on, would obtain from this process.

The legislation is very simple. It is an agreement to release information. It causes us very grave concerns. We have not seen the agreement itself but we have seen other agreements. The European Union has an agreement on this. The United States and the European Union have agreed that all this information, called PNR, the passenger name record, that the travel agencies or airlines have will be passed on to the American homeland security.

The information that is collected can be retained for up to 40 years and it may be forwarded to the security services of a third party nation without the consent or notification to the other signatory, and that includes the individual who is the subject of this. People may know what information about them is being held by the United States and may not correct that information. In the case of the EU agreement with the United States, the Americans can amend that agreement unilaterally any time they wish by themselves without the consent of the other party.

That is a pretty devastating amount of invasion of privacy of Canadians who, in this case, are not even going to the United States. They may be travelling to Cuba, Mexico or on an international flight from one part of Canada to Europe or South America which happens to over-fly U.S. airspace.

This is rather disturbing. In fact, the Canadian Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, told the committee that Bill C-42 raises important sovereignty issues. She said that she was not questioning the American government's authority to implement its own program. International law is clear that a state's sovereignty extends to its own airspace.

However, the Privacy Commissioner said that the Canadian government had a duty to protect the privacy and civil rights of its citizens. That is not what is happening here at all. There are, in fact, very few or no limitations on the protection of privacy here.

Nathalie Des Rosiers, general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, spoke to the committee as well. She said that the bill did not really meet the protection of privacy in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because it had no limitations.

This is a mystery bill. There is no requirement in either Bill C-42 or in the regulations for the United States to safeguard and protect the information from other people. There is no safeguard that the TSA will not pass information on to other government agencies. In fact, it has been suggested that the information will be available to some 16 United States government agencies.

There is no safeguard that the U.S. will not pass the information on to third countries, and, in fact, it has the right to do that. As we know, this has been a particularly difficult issue for some Canadians given what happened to some Canadian citizens, such as Maher Arar

who was tortured as a result of information being passed on by the Americans which they had obtained in part from Canada.

This whole no-fly list, as has been mentioned here, is part of the issue. One of the issues around the United States homeland security no-fly list is that it is under constitutional challenge in the United States.

● (1340)

The concerns the Americans have are similar to the concerns we have. In the United States, for example, Americans are not allowed to know whether they are on the no-fly list, how to get off the list or what evidence their presence on the list is based. This is a concern we are having here.

We need to understand how this process works. If a passenger will be overflying the United States, the airline must advise the American homeland security as to what information it has on its passenger record. The Americans will then do data mining of their own and they will issue a result to the travel agency. The instructions will be one of the following: issue a boarding pass, deny permission to travel or issue an enhanced screening requirement. This regulation will give the United States access to a whole subset of information on air passengers who are not even entering the United States.

This information can be shared with at least 16 United States agencies and foreign governments and the government of a foreign country, in this case the United States, has a de facto right to decide who gets to travel to and from Canada since the vast majority of Canadian flights to and from Europe, the Caribbean and South America overfly American airspace. That is not true for all overseas flights, obviously, but for the majority it is.

We have a serious concern about the bill, so much so that we are voting against it. I am surprised to hear similar concerns to ours being raised by members of the Liberal Party, including the previous speaker. Again and again the Liberals raise the same issues and say that they are concerned about them and yet they seem to be quite happy to support this legislation. I do not understand that.

There are a lot of concerns. People have mentioned the success in getting the exemption on the issue of overflight when airlines fly from one Canadian city to another. If an airline is flying from Vancouver to Toronto and is overflying the U.S., there is an exemption. I wonder why the Americans were so happy to grant that exemption in this arrangement. I suspect it has something to do with the perimeter security agreement. I suspect that Canada in the perimeter security agreement has already given up the right to information on who is flying on any plane in Canada. Even the information on someone flying from Toronto to Ottawa may already be available under the perimeter security agreement. Therefore, it may be that this exemption is merely just a sop to public opinion.

Government Orders

The reality of this legislation is that we are now entering into a world of mystery. I am not normally into conspiracy theories but we are entering into a world of mystery that the homeland security no-fly list, for example, has been called Kafkaesque in reference to a very famous author who wrote about a mystery world where one does not know what is going on, one does not know why one is being charged with something, one does not know why one is being held, one does not know why one is being treated in a certain way by authorities. That is the essence of the Kafkaesque world.

We are getting there with this kind of agreement because, if this legislation passes, information on us will be available to the American authorities, some 16 agencies and whatever government they want to give them to. They can make decisions on our future or our situation based on whatever they think of the information that happens to be there and we may have consequences.

I do not really have time to go into the story, but I was in Russia one time, and maybe one of my colleagues will ask me to tell a bit more, but one never knows what happens to this information. One never knows whether there are consequences or not. One never knows whether one is the subject of some kind of oppression because of information that has been made available. That is the essence, the difficulty and the problem I have with this legislation.

• (1345)

I believe my time is nearing an end and in my 10 minutes I would be happy to respond to any questions or comments that my colleagues on both sides of the House may have.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was completely enthralled by the speech of the hon. member for St. John's East. Instead of asking a direct question, I would like him to elaborate a bit more on his thesis of why this bill is so bad for Canadians.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, that will give me a chance to tell the story of my visit to Russia in 1981.

I met an individual who that very day had been interviewed by the KGB because she had been seen in a place where foreigners would visit. I asked her what the consequences of being interviewed by the KGB were. Her answer was very interesting. She said, "One never knows".

What we do know is that they wrote down the fact that there was a meeting, why there was an interview, everything that was said, and they put it in a file somewhere. That information could affect one's future when applying for a job, or trying to travel to a foreign country. This was 1981, before the wall came down.

Her answer stuck with me ever since, "One never knows". One never knows what the consequences are of information that a secret agency might have on a person. That is why people like me and other Canadians value our privacy, freedom, and our own security. We consider it wrong that foreign government agencies have information that they have no need for without any protection, safeguard, or any ability to correct that information.

That's the essential reason why this legislation ought to be opposed. The agreements are not transparent, the information is not protected, and there are no safeguards as to what the information

may be used for. These are the concerns we have and continue to have. This is why we oppose this bill.

• (1350)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has bamboozled the Bloc and the Liberals into supporting this bill on the basis that it was needed for security and that the Americans demanded it by December 31 or the 100 flights a day from Canada would stop.

I always thought that the reason for the Canadian and the American no-fly lists was to keep the people who were a potential security risk off the planes. With all the security and screening processes we have at the airports, and the fact that we have a no-fly list, which is supposed to keep all the bad guys off, this would mean that we are giving information about the good guys. That is what we are doing here. We are providing information about the good guys.

The fact that this was so important that we were going to shut down Canadian aviation if we did not pass this bill has all proved to be nothing but an apparition. Today is March 1 and nobody is talking about shutting down flights.

It is time the Canadian government went back to the Americans to say, "If we are going to give you information on 100 flights a day, then we want reciprocity with information on your 2,000 flights a day that are flying over Canada", and then see what they have to say about that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that we had passed the high-water mark of paranoia. Understandably, the Americans were concerned about what happened September 11, 2001, but that was not a result of problems that this agreement is designed to solve. The people who did this nasty business in the United States in 2001 at the World Trade Centre did not fly from other countries, they were inside America. They were not coming from foreign states to do this nor over-flying the country. I think an awful lot of work has been done since then to be more vigilant, there is no question about that.

I hope that we are at the high-water mark and that the invasion of privacy envisaged by both this agreement and by the perimeter agreement are not going to be implemented. We oppose them. We think they are going too far and we will vote accordingly when the time comes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our party, proud to speak against Bill C-42 and what it would mean to Canadians right across this country.

I may or may not be the only member of Parliament who worked 18.5 years in the airline industry, but I can assure members that if they think for a second, with regard to flights from Canada down south, to Mexico, the Caribbean, or elsewhere, that fly over American airspace or American waters, that those flights would have been cancelled if we did not give the United States credit card numbers, health records, or what hotels we were staying at, they are delusional.

Would tit for tat mean that we are going to stop all those flights from the U.S. to Europe that fly over Canadian airspace as of December 31? That would be utter nonsense. It would hurt both economies. It is something both countries do not want to do.

It is nonsense for the Liberals and the Bloc to fall into this delusional state that if we do not give them all this information, it is going to hurt our airline industry. It is false; it is a great big lie. I would hope that the Liberals, the Bloc, and the Conservative Party of Canada would use their ten percenters or householders in their individual ridings to let Canadians, their constituents, know what they are about to do with the Bill C-42.

I was recently on vacation in a place where I met many Americans. I spoke with many Americans about this, over dinner and over a few drinks. They were surprised that the United States government is actually asking the Canadian government for this type of information. These folks were from Iowa, Kentucky, L.A., Florida, and New York.

Not one of them, whether they be admitted Republicans or Democrats, or have no interest in politics at all, wanted to know if I flew from Halifax to, say, Cuba or Jamaica. Not one of them wanted to know what hotel I was staying at. Not one of them wanted to know my health records. Not one of them wanted to know my credit card information. Not one of them wanted to know anything else. They could not care less. What they care about is people getting into their country who want to do bad things to them. That is what they care about. And we would agree with them.

Bill C-42 is the capitulation to our friends, the Americans. Friends should tell friends when they are doing something wrong. Instead of capitulating and agreeing, and fast-tracking Bill C-42, we should take a step back, go back to the negotiation table and tell the Americans they are wrong. We would be wrong in this country if we accepted the parameters of this particular negotiation.

Once Canadians find out, if this goes through the way that the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Bloc want it to go through, many Canadians may wake up the next day and find themselves on no-fly lists. They may find themselves on all kinds of lists somewhere that they know nothing about. They will show up at an airport and be told they cannot go somewhere because somebody, somewhere, in the United States, either through error or through deliberate action, may have put them on the list and made sure that they could not fly, for whatever reason, even if they have no intention of going anywhere near the United States.

I know that the United States these days, in some circles, is called the excited states. There is a reason for that. The U.S. is very nervous about a variety of things. But when a country is nervous or when it makes laws without really thinking about the clear decisions of what

it is about to do, it is up to its closest friends to advise that country to sit down and tell it what it is doing is wrong.

There are ways of protecting the United States and Canada and, for that matter, the entire North American continent, without intruding into the private lives of Canadian citizens and, for that matter, American citizens as well. I worked in the airline industry for over 18.5 years and I can tell members that many of our customers came from the United States and points beyond. Without them, many of the airlines that we worked for back in those days probably could not have survived. The same applies to the United States.

Can members imagine all those winter vacationers from Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia, for example, who go to Florida on a regular basis? If we did not succumb to this and we just told the Americans, "We're not going to do what you want us to do", are they telling me that the State of Florida is going to accept the fact that thousands upon thousands of Canadians would no longer be able to visit the State of Florida during snowbird season? Is that what the Government of Canada is telling us? Of course not. The reality is, it is simply wrong.

• (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: I will stop the member there. He will have five minutes left to conclude his remarks after question period. Right now we will move on to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board is staggering through another wretched season of grain marketing. It set the initial prices of durum so low that farmers laughed, although they wanted to cry. It played in the barley market until malt barley was being sold for feed. Spring wheat sits in farmers' bins while bills go unpaid. Its latest prediction is that western Canadian farmers will once again reduce their wheat acres next year.

What is the Canadian Wheat Board's response? Let us go boating. It now wants to take \$70 million of farmers' money to purchase two Chinese freighters and launch a new shipping empire. If it cannot market grain, how can it handle boats? While it may fancy itself as a new Canada grain ship lines, it is more likely we will see a version of the *Titanic* running aground on Gilligan's Island.

The "Pirate of the Prairies" has already done enough damage. Farmers are tired of being pillaged.

The answer is not more CWB, but more freedom for western Canadian producers.

Statements by Members

●(1400)

*[Translation]***ÉCOLE VERSANT-NORD IN ATHOLVILLE**

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 22, I had the opportunity to meet with a group of students from the École Versant-Nord in Atholville to talk about my role here and the role of the government within our country. These encounters are always a great joy for me because they allow me to discuss issues that are of interest to youth and share my parliamentary experience.

These grade six students asked extremely relevant questions, and I have no doubt that these types of exchanges should happen more often in order to make our youth more interested in politics. These students are the leaders of tomorrow. That is why I feel it is crucial to take the time to meet with them and discuss our great country's governance structure.

Here in this House, I would like to thank teachers Jody Esrigar and Debby Duguay, as well as their 32 students, for inviting me to their class. I hope the experience was as rewarding for them as it was for me.

I am pleased to represent you as the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

* * *

WULFTEC

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, certain companies contribute to the economic prosperity of a region and make it proud. One such company is Wulftec, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in December 2010. Over the years, Wulftec has become a true pillar of development in Ayer's Cliff. With its innovative processes, Wulftec stands out as a global leader in the manufacture of stretch wrappers, strapping machinery and conveyors.

Wulftec's 175 employees can attest to the respect they receive from their employer, for Wulftec's personnel retention rate is 96%. Few companies in the industrial sector can boast such a rate.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I am very honoured and proud to sincerely congratulate Wulftec in Ayer's Cliff.

* * *

*[English]***CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA**

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought I had heard it all from the Conservative Party of Canada when last November 11, the party's fundraising arm called veterans in this country to ask for money.

I thought that was the lowest of the low until just recently, when a constituent of mine called me and said that a member of the Conservative Party had called him looking for money, because “We are the only party that stands up for the Jewish people of Canada and Israel”. I thought I had heard it all from a political party that uses religion and wedge politics, but this is the lowest of the low.

It is bad enough to call veterans on Remembrance Day looking for money for a political party, but using wedge religious politics, in this case with the Jewish people of Canada, to raise funds for a party is despicable and low.

The Conservative Party of Canada and the Prime Minister of Canada should apologize to all people in Canada—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Delta—Richmond East.

* * *

EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend the sympathies of my constituents to the people of Christchurch.

The destruction in New Zealand is a reminder of the tragic loss of life that can result from earthquakes.

On February 15, an earthquake shook Richmond and Delta. It was very mild compared with the one that hit Christchurch, but it is a reminder that we must ensure that our infrastructure is capable of withstanding a strong quake.

Last week at a meeting of the Ladner Business Association, Brian Hart and Mike Owen, local businessmen with significant knowledge of the lower Fraser River, pointed out that Ladner and Richmond, like Christchurch, are built on an alluvial plane and located on a fault zone.

Furthermore, they are below sea level and protected by dikes. That means for our two communities, merely having specially strengthened buildings and bridges is not enough. Our dikes must be maintained at a level to withstand a serious quake.

We must be prepared. Being prepared means we must all work together. There is no reward for complacency.

* * *

●(1405)

CANADIAN PERES CENTER FOR PEACE FOUNDATION

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Peres Center for Peace Foundation offers a glimmer of hope for those who yearn for lasting peace in the Middle East. Arming for security and preparing for war are still important, even though unconventional and high-tech weaponry make every country vulnerable and, as current events illustrate, popular awakenings can make even the mighty tremble.

Happily, there are those who also recognize the power of science, technology, information and education as borderless agents of change. Led by a veteran of war and statecraft, the Canadian Peres Center for Peace Foundation offers those who want to build for the future, and those who want to construct an architecture to house human and civil society values based on compassion and service to others, the mechanisms to reach out to the marginalized and the vulnerable.

Statements by Members

The center's comprehensive strategy of "medicine in the service of peace" provides Palestinian children with the same high quality sustainable health services enjoyed by Israeli children, addressing some 1,500 cases each year.

Mazel tov. They need our help to succeed.

* * *

SYNCRUDE

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Syncrude Canada supports the aboriginal people of northern Alberta in many ways through its aboriginal relations program. Those of self-declared first nations, Métis or Inuit descent make up 8.6% of Syncrude's workforce. Syncrude is proud to be one of the largest employers of aboriginal people in Canada.

Syncrude invested over \$1.3 million in aboriginal community projects in 2009, and the total business of Syncrude with First Nations and Métis owned companies since 1992 is over \$1.4 billion.

Syncrude funds numerous scholarships and programs for research and development. It has received a variety of awards, including the Environmental Stewardship Award from *Alberta Venture* magazine, gold level certification for progressive aboriginal relations from the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Businesses, the Alberta Human Rights Commission's Diversity Leadership Award of Distinction, and the Alberta Emerald Foundation's award for research and innovation.

I commend the great Canadian company Syncrude for its advancement of our aboriginal people and for the great work it does for Canada in northern Alberta.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JACKIE ROBINSON

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month wrapped up yesterday in Montreal with a commemorative ceremony to honour Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to play baseball in the major leagues, as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. In order to pay tribute to this legend's time in Montreal, a plaque was unveiled at the home in Villeray where he and his family once lived.

In 1946, Robinson spent several months with the Montreal Royals, the Dodgers' top farm club, in order to mentally and physically prepare for what he might have to face in the major leagues, which had a strict segregation policy. Robinson's widow said that they received a warm welcome from Montrealers, who were always willing to lend a helping hand.

The Bloc Québécois would also like to pay tribute to the memory of this man who was more than a pioneer in his sport. Through his talent and his courage in the face of adversity, in his own way, Jackie Robinson helped to fight against racial discrimination. He is an inspiration to us all.

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Liberal international trade critic was dispatched to Brantford in a failed attempt to score cheap political points by exploiting industries hardest hit by the global recession. She claimed that the removal of a company's name from one plant's exterior was "sad" and "depressing".

Allow me to correct the record. What she actually witnessed was another example of how our government is making Canada the most attractive place for job creators to invest. The sign removal was in preparation for the new logo of Brant Screen Craft, an expanding local company that purchased the plant last year.

Outraged by her misleading comments, the company's vice-president responded by stating:

Ironically, we had looked into locating our finishing and distribution facility in Michigan. The corporate tax cuts and programs provided by the Conservative government were the deciding factor to expand in Canada. The 50-plus jobs in this facility have stayed in Brantford because of the Conservatives.

This is more evidence that Canada's economic action plan is delivering results for Brant.

* * *

B.C. PREMIER DESIGNATE

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to personally congratulate my dear friend, Christy Clark, for becoming British Columbia's premier designate this past Saturday.

I also want to congratulate the other leadership candidates, Michael de Jong, George Abbott and my close friend Kevin Falcon, who all ran with integrity, pride, honour and vision.

Having known and worked with Christy for many years, I have great confidence in and admiration for her intelligence, tenacity and the new brand of politics that she hopes to bring to the province of British Columbia.

Christy, as a working mother, knows first-hand the challenges Canadian families face in this economy, and what can and must be done so that British Columbia can remain one of the top five provinces in the world to live. I know she will be a fantastic leader and I am proud to call her my personal and close friend.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Christy.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

IRAN

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is deeply concerned at reports about the detention of two Iranian opposition leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. The two leaders have been under house arrest since February 14, 2011, when they called for a peaceful protest in support of the events in Egypt. Now we hear that these two leaders have been imprisoned by the Iranian authorities.

It is the height of hypocrisy for the Iranian regime to express its support for protests in Egypt and Libya but then violently suppress and ruthlessly intimidate similar protesters in its own country.

We, along with the rest of the international community, are closely monitoring events in Tehran as opposition leaders call for peaceful protests every Tuesday of this month. Our government calls upon the Iranian government to immediately respect the rights of its citizens and allow for these peaceful protests to take place.

* * *

[Translation]

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sustainable development refers to the government's obligation to think about the impact on future generations every time a decision is made. One of the basic principles of sustainable development is the precautionary principle, which involves looking at the long-term effects of what we are doing and not making a decision that could have a negative impact in the future.

Shale gas exploration and development is a concrete example of why the precautionary principle is necessary. Although natural resources fall under provincial jurisdiction, aspects of their development, such as the effect on navigable and floatable waters, must be examined by the federal government.

We need only look at what the Environmental Protection Agency recently did in the United States, when it warned the people of Wyoming to stop using their well water to do laundry because of a risk of explosion. The agency issued this warning in August 2010. Future generations will never forgive us if we do not take care of them.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in partisan pre-election ads, the Ottawa NDP is talking about taxes. Let us take a look at the NDP's real record on taxes.

NDP members have opposed tax cuts. NDP members are offside on gas prices. They think that gas prices have been artificially lowered and need to be raised. NDP members are against providing tax relief to hard-pressed Canadian families and businesses.

NDP members voted against reducing the GST from 7% to 6% in budget 2006 and were against cutting the GST from 6% to 5%. The NDP leader has even described tax relief as reckless. NDP members

support high taxes. They fought each cut of the GST and voted time and time again against reducing income taxes and the small business tax.

NDP members have done this many times before. If they get their way, they will do it again and Canada will pay.

* * *

[Translation]

GILLES DOSTALER

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Gilles Dostaler, who was an authority on economics as well as one of the original sovereignists and a great champion of social justice, recently passed away following a battle with cancer.

Gilles Dostaler had been a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal since 1975; his writings on the history of economic thought, specifically on John Maynard Keynes and neo-liberalism, are considered authoritative texts. This prolific writer produced many major works that have been translated into many languages. Known both in Quebec and abroad, this economist, whom I had the great privilege of knowing, developed an unquestionable expertise in state interventionism over the years.

I wish to pay tribute to this great humanitarian who has left us too soon. The Bloc Québécois offers its sincere condolences to his wife, stepdaughter and other loved ones.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

KAIROS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

Oral Questions

This KAIROS issue begs some excuse:
Like a Ministerial Statement from Dr. Seuss

I must have pulled some shifty scam
To end up in the jam I am

Staff first said 'Yes'—I cannot lie
But with one word I would deny

How it appeared, it's hard to say
But, does it matter anyway?

Top bureaucrats, they did, I think
Inscribe the 'NOT' in deep red ink

They wrote the 'NOT' above the margin
It was not I, as they are chargin'

I had no role, is what I said
I had no role to make it dead

I had no role to stop the cash
It's bureaucrats that you should trash

I do not like this KAIROS bunch
Nor does my boss, that's my best hunch

That's why he put me on the spot
That's why he made me add the 'NOT'

That's what he made me think, I thought
That's why my credibility is shot

Handwriting experts in the field
Provide the truth that should be yield

The hand that changed the 'Yes' to 'No'
Was on the arm of the PMO.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the government does not impose new taxes on Quebecers and does not undertake massive expenditures, the members of the Bloc, together with the Liberals, will force an unnecessary election.

The members of the Bloc are abandoning Quebecers who live in the regions and are thinking only of their buddies in Plateau Mont-Royal. Canada is leading the international economic recovery and our Conservative government is taking concrete action. While the Bloc Québécois was opposing our measures, Conservative members from Quebec were taking action for all regions. We support all sectors of the economy, including our forestry, agriculture and financial sectors, and we are creating economic opportunities for all Quebecers.

The choice is clear. Quebecers can choose between the Bloc Québécois, which abandons Quebecers, or the Conservatives, who are working to build a strong Quebec within a united Canada.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public prosecutor has charged four members of the Prime Minister's inner circle of serious violation of Canada's election

law. The public prosecutor says that evidence of illegal activity is voluminous. So this is not just some accounting dispute, we are talking about election fraud.

Given that the Prime Minister's party is facing a public prosecution for illegal activity, will he commit to this House today that at the next election there will not be another in and out scam?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an administrative dispute with Elections Canada that has been going on for five years.

Let us be clear, the dispute is whether certain expenses should be counted as local or national. We have a difference of opinion on this. We maintain that our people acted under the law as they understood it at the time.

When it was clear that Elections Canada had changed its interpretation of the law, this party had already adjusted its practices in the 2008 election campaign.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an administrative matter; it is a matter of illegal activity. Four members of the Prime Minister's inner circle have been charged with violating the Canada Elections Act. The public prosecutor clearly says that evidence of illegal activity is voluminous.

Can the Prime Minister assure us that, at the next election in Canada, there will not be another in and out scam?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an administrative dispute we have been having with Elections Canada since 2006. It is a matter of defining local and national expenses. We maintain that our people obeyed the rules in place at the time. When interpretations change, we adjust our practices, which is what we did in 2008. I hope the Liberal Party did the same.

● (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these replies are completely ridiculous. This is not an administrative question. This is not an accounting dispute. This is a matter of an abuse of power.

Let me read something that the Prime Minister said when he created the office of the public prosecutor. He said:

Bend the rules, you will be punished; break the law, you will be charged; abuse the public trust, you will go to prison.

These are the Prime Minister's own words. Does he not understand that these words apply to him? Does he think he is above the law? Who does he think he is?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are disputes over the interpretation of the rules. That is why we have courts. They will render their decisions as appropriate.

Our position is clear. We respected the rules as they were interpreted at the time. When those interpretations changed, the party has changed its position accordingly. It already did so in the 2008 election.

Oral Questions

Since these practices were used by all parties, and we have lots of evidence of that, I hope all parties have also changed their practices.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not getting any answers to clear questions and it is absolutely not true that we did the same thing. Only the Conservative Party is being accused of fraud, not us.

On another note, yesterday the House voted clearly to force the government to provide the necessary documents for assessing its upcoming budget.

Will the Prime Minister obey the House and produce these documents by Monday, or will he continue to show contempt for the House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a request for certain information was made a long time ago and the government has already given that information to the opposition.

I hope the Liberal Party and the other parties will read the budget before taking a position on it.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot judge the budget without the necessary documents. That is how we show respect for the House of Commons.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister withholds documents. He defends friends charged with illegal activity. He shuts down Parliament when it gets in his way. He keeps a minister in cabinet who does not tell the House the truth and will not even let her get up and defend herself in the House of Commons. All of this is an abuse of power. It is an abuse of democracy.

The Prime Minister goes around the world preaching democracy overseas. When will he defend and practice democracy—

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in all of that, the leader of the Liberal Party raised the question of the budget. It is the responsibility of all members of Parliament to read a budget before deciding on it. I know the Liberal Party leader seems to have made up his mind on the March budget back some time in September or August.

I would encourage him to take his responsibilities seriously, to look at the budget documents when they are tabled, read them and obviously do what is best for the Canadian economy, which is to continue to focus on that economy and not on an unnecessary and opportunistic election.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's refusal to freeze the assets of the

family of Ben Ali, the former Tunisian dictator, remains a complete mystery. We know that Ben Ali's family owns assets in Quebec, including a house in Westmount. The Prime Minister's attitude is rather strange. We want an explanation.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to freeze the assets of the former Tunisian dictator when he has frozen the assets of the Libyan dictator, Gadhafi?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have explained repeatedly, we are seeking justice for the people of Tunisia by freezing the assets of the members of the former regime.

To date, and under the law, we do not have the necessary information to do so. However, we are actively working on freezing the assets, as we have already done in the case of Libya.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Libya's case, they did so on 24 hours' notice. It was certainly not Gadhafi who forwarded the documents detailing the assets of the Gadhafi clan.

Why are they not doing the same for Tunisia? Ben Ali owns a house that we have seen on television. Why become an accomplice? Are there Conservative party members with ties to Ben Ali? Is that the bottom line? We want to know.

He should give us a straight answer and freeze their assets because we will never be able to do so if, in the meantime, the money has been hidden away in tax havens.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seriously, this government is not defending the Ben Ali regime. We lack information about the necessary international sanctions, like the information we had in Libya's case. I encourage the Bloc leader to ask for an explanation from our lawyers.

I can say that we are looking for means to increase our authority, and we will ask Parliament to give the government more authority to really freeze the assets of members of former regimes.

* * *

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by stating that the serious charges laid by Elections Canada against the Conservative Party are merely administrative issues, the government continues to deny the facts. According to the director of public prosecutions, we are talking about misleading statements and illegal activity.

Is the Prime Minister not just proving his guilt in this situation by hiding behind excuses?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an administrative issue. The Conservative candidates spent Conservative money on Conservative ads. The national party also transferred funds to its candidates, of course.

How did Elections Canada know about this? We told them. Why not? It is legal. It is ethical and all the parties do it. We will continue to defend our case before the courts.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are masters of hiding behind half-truths so that they do not have to take responsibility for their actions. That is what happened in the case of the misleading statements made by the Minister of International Cooperation on the KAIROS file and that is what is happening with the in and out scheme criticized by Elections Canada.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he violated the Canada Elections Act in the same way he is knowingly bending the truth?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to tell the truth. This is an administrative dispute that we are having with Elections Canada. The Conservative candidates spent Conservative money on Conservative ads. The national party also transferred funds to its candidates. How did Elections Canada know about this? We told them. Why not? It is legal. It is ethical and all the parties do it. We have a very solid case and we will defend it before the courts.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives can try to spin this as “administrivia” all they like, but the truth is they are being prosecuted on charges for illegal and unlawful election cheating. The Conservative senators are facing potential jail time. Conservatives are facing charges, not allegations.

The Prime Minister fired the member for Simcoe—Grey based on allegations. Why will he not take responsibility here and why will he not clean up his party when it comes to election financing laws?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, this is an administrative dispute for five years over the question of whether certain election expenses are defined as local or national. This is a difference of opinion.

We will continue to argue these matters before the courts, but we have been very clear that we have always respected the rules as they were understood at the time. When interpretations of those rules were changed later, we changed our practices, and already did so in the 2008 year.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, taking liberties with the electoral laws that govern our democracy is very serious. The Prime Minister could force an election in the coming weeks. He just promised not to reuse the in and out scheme to exceed spending limits during the next election.

In doing so, did he not admit that he made a mistake in 2006?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, we always followed the rules as they were interpreted at the time. When the interpretations changed, we changed our practices. Even during the 2008 election we did not use in and out financing, as Elections Canada determined after the 2006 election. We will always follow the rules in place. I hope that all of the parties that used in and out financing will also comply with the new interpretations.

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with Conservative senators and officials up on election charges and with a cabinet minister facing the scandal of doctoring documents before the House of Commons and misleading Parliament, no wonder so many Canadians feel that something is broken in Ottawa.

The Prime Minister could do something about this by supporting New Democrats' practical plan for making Parliament work better for Canadians. Let us finally ask Canadians about abolishing the Senate and about reforming our electoral system. Will he support our doable proposals on this front?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that we do not always associate a practical plan and the NDP in the same sentence, but what the leader of the NDP suggests is the abolition of the Senate. I know there is much sympathy in the country for that. The reality is that would involve reopening the Constitution and getting a unanimous resolution, which is unlikely.

We do have a practical plan to allow for Senate elections and the limitation of senators' terms. I would encourage the NDP and all those others with practical plans to support that practical plan.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is now obvious the Prime Minister never believed in the accountability he once preached. In 2008 he told his ministers that they must, “be present in Parliament to answer honestly and accurately about their areas of responsibility”. Yet day after day, question after question, the minister responsible for CIDA sits there, refusing to tell the House and Canadians who told her to cut funding for KAIROS.

How can she remain in her position as minister when, by her silence, she refuses to be accountable to Parliament?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has spoken to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, where, 11 times, she was very clear that she was the one who made the decision with respect to not giving the \$7 million grant. She also made it very clear just last month that it was her decision.

I would encourage the member opposite from Vancouver Centre to look at that.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what kind of lesson are Canadians to draw from this obfuscation, that if ministers do whatever the Prime Minister says, the consequences simply do not matter, that the Prime Minister can break his word on accountability of ministers with impunity?

Oral Questions

The Minister of International Cooperation sits behind the Prime Minister dutifully, day after day, and is not allowed to answer.

Is it the Prime Minister's position that women in his cabinet should only be seen and not heard?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member wants to talk about integrity. That specific member, who was a minister, wants to talk about misleading the House. That is the member who said, "As we speak, crosses are burning in Prince George". She has a lot of chutzpah.

•(1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that, at that point, this minister had the ministerial responsibility to resign.

The Minister of International Cooperation is so proud of her decision—which was very courageous as far as her colleague the House leader is concerned—that she continues to remain silent on the issue. She was so brave in making this decision that she wanted to have us believe that it was actually bureaucrats who made it.

Has the Minister of International Cooperation become a woman without a voice who does not have the right to respond to questions in this Parliament?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister said no such thing. What she did say last year before a standing committee of Parliament was that she was the one who made the decision not to provide a \$7 million grant to a particular non-governmental organization. This is something she repeated just last month in this place.

The minister has always made the right decisions. The member has always stood up for international causes around the world, whether it is in Haiti, or in Afghanistan or in Africa. She is doing a heck of a good job.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we would love to hear her speak in the House now. Day after day, the Minister of International Cooperation remains silent, sitting behind the Prime Minister, leaving the responsibility of defending her decisions to others.

Did she give up the extra \$70,000 that comes with her so-called ministerial responsibilities? Is she still part of cabinet? Did she turn in the keys to her limousine?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member what the Minister of International Cooperation works so hard at. She has worked tremendously hard at rebuilding earthquake-damaged Haiti. She has worked tremendously hard on dealing with the challenges that women in Afghanistan face. The minister has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, the minister has not just played an important role, but this minister has played an instrumental role in the maternal and child initiative brought forward at the last G8. This initiative will save literally millions of lives, and it is because of the great leadership of the Minister of International Cooperation.

* * *

[Translation]

ELECTRICITY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia have asked the federal government for a \$375 million loan guarantee in order to build a power line that would deliver electricity—energy—from the Lower Churchill to the United States. The Conservative government refuses to shut the door on that request, which is unfair to Quebec. I would remind the House that Hydro-Québec was developed without the help of the federal government.

Can the government clearly tell us that it does not intend to directly or indirectly fund this network, which was designed to bypass Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are two matters relating to the Lower Churchill. One is an application for a loan guarantee, and that is being discussed by officials in the federal government with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The other is a P3 application to PPP Canada Inc. with respect to a proposed transmission connection, and that is being dealt with in the normal way by PPP Canada Inc.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government cannot hide behind PPP Canada. PPP Canada is a creature of the Conservative government that is funded by Parliament. The federal government should not be using money that comes, in part, from Quebecers to pay for an underwater cable that will create competition for Hydro-Québec.

If Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia want a hydro-electric network, should they not do what Quebec did and pay for it themselves?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, PPP Canada Inc. deals with applications from all across the country. I am sure the member noticed the announcement the other day in Lachine, Quebec, with respect to the maintenance yard and for the commuter trains in the greater Montreal region: a P3 Canada application, approved by PPP Canada Inc. I did not hear any complaints elsewhere in Canada about that approval.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while Quebec has imposed a moratorium on oil and gas exploration and development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence until 2012, we learn that drilling on the Old Harry site in Newfoundland could begin as early as next year. Quebec is being exposed to risk, especially from an environmental perspective, by this hasty decision by Ottawa and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Will the federal government comply with the National Assembly motion calling for the suspension of existing permits until the results of the environmental assessments are known?

• (1440)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Old Harry site is regulated by the Canada-Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board, a regulator we trust.

The health of the workers and environmental protection are our top priorities. No project will be approved if the regulator thinks those priorities will be compromised.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec needs to have full jurisdiction over its territory in order to better protect its ecosystems and be master of its domain. The federal government signed an agreement with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador 25 years ago and should do the same with Quebec to allow it to express its own environmental and energy priorities.

Why is Ottawa refusing to give Quebec the same advantages it gave to Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, negotiations are under way between Quebec and our government. Things are going well. One thing is clear: no project will be approved if our regulators are not convinced that the health of the workers and environmental protection will be ensured. If the Bloc wants to make this a divisive issue, it is free to do so. We will make Canada a global clean energy superpower.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance committee is trying to investigate the cost of the Conservatives U.S.-style criminal justice agenda, but the Conservatives are taking a page right out of Richard Nixon's playbook and are obstructing that investigation every step of the way.

Last night the House ordered the Conservatives to stop the obstruction. Will the Conservatives respect last night's vote and stop breaking the rules? Will they finally tell Canadians the true cost of their U.S.-style criminal justice agenda?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform my friend from Kings—Hants that we tabled in the House last week the information the committee requested.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is bunk and the minister knows it. The Parliamentary Budget Officer

has said that just one of the Conservatives' 18 crime bills would cost the provinces more than \$1 billion every year.

Has the minister provided the provincial governments with a detailed breakdown of how much the Conservatives' U.S.-style crime agenda will cost the provinces, yes or no? If yes, will the government share that information with the House of Commons?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians find the Liberal position on funding prisons very confusing. On the same day that the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor was asking our government to spend more money on prisons, the member from Beauséjour was in Ottawa saying that our government was spending too much.

While the Liberals are busy saying one thing and doing another, we are making communities safer. Unlike the Liberal-led coalition, we think dangerous criminals need to be behind bars and not released into our communities early.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the height of the economic crisis, the Minister of Finance told us in all seriousness that there would be no deficit. Now, the Minister of Finance has handed us the worst deficit in the history of the country. We know that one of the Conservatives' priorities is to build megaprisons. How much will that cost? According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, it will cost approximately \$13 billion.

Where do the Conservatives plan to get this money? Do they plan to try to stick the provinces with the bill?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find this very interesting. I was in Newfoundland and Labrador last week and the members from Newfoundland advised me that they wanted more prisons built. At the same time, the Leader of the Opposition was saying we should not build more prisons. Perhaps we could get some clarification from the Liberals on their position in respect of that.

What we know is that the Liberals are soft on crime. They want criminals out on the street. They want ordinary Canadians at risk from those criminals.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are using imaginary figures. They have run up the largest deficit in Canadian history, and the debt continues to build. Common sense tells us that when you are in a hole and you want to get out, the best thing to do is to stop digging.

Oral Questions

Despite a red ink budget, the Conservatives want to borrow an additional \$6 billion to give to the richest companies.

Are middle-class families once again going to be the ones who have to pay the price for the Minister of Finance's mismanagement?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a low tax plan. We want to reduce taxes. This low tax plan was passed by Parliament with the support of the official opposition two or three years ago. If the hon. member were here, she would remember that her party voted in favour of this low tax plan.

Now the Liberals say they want a high tax plan. They say they want a law brought into the House of Commons, which I guess they would support, to increase taxes.

We are going to stay with our low tax plan.

* * *

LIBYA

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been following the dire situation in Libya with great concern.

Could the Prime Minister please update the House on the government's response to this crisis?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in light of the trouble and likely ongoing concerns in the region, the HMCS *Charlottetown* will depart Halifax tomorrow to take part in Canadian and international evacuation operations that are already under way in Libya.

[Translation]

I am proud that HMCS *Charlottetown* is being dispatched quickly to join the Canadian Forces and our allies to help our efforts in Libya.

[English]

The men and women of our naval forces and the men and women of all of our armed forces have been called upon time and time again to make a difference in difficult situations. We are once again pleased that they are answering the call.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the alarming shortage of doctors and nurses is adding significant costs to our health care system. Delays in diagnosis and treatment mean patients get sicker and require more care. These patients need help on the double.

So far the government's plan falls short of helping the five million Canadians without a doctor. New Democrats are proposing the training and hiring of 1,200 doctors and 6,000 new nurses. In the long run this would save us millions of dollars.

Will the Conservatives include this practical idea in their upcoming budget, yes or no?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government supports the efforts of the provinces and territories to effectively and efficiently manage their health care system providers in order to ensure an adequate supply to their residents.

While the supply of physicians and nurses is a provincial and territorial responsibility, our government has increased health care transfers by over 33% since forming government. This has provided predictable and growing resources to the provinces and territories to address their health care needs, including health human resources.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious the Conservatives just do not get it.

Yesterday, the lack of emergency resources took an absurd turn. Overcrowding in the Royal Columbian Hospital resulted in patients being treated at Tim Hortons. The Conservative government needs to order a double-double on the double and to wake up and smell the health care crisis in this country.

Will the Conservatives listen to New Democrats on public health care to ensure folks are not being treated in a donut shop?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to a universal publicly funded health care system and the Canada Health Act.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, our government will not cut health transfers. We continue to work with the provinces, territories, and health care professionals to look for ways to improve health care systems. That is why we have increased the health transfers to the provinces and the territories by 33%, which Liberals voted against. This significant funding increase allows the provinces and territories to continue to meet the health care needs of their residents.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the nutrition north Canada program was put in place hastily and haphazardly, without any impact studies. By abruptly changing the subsidy rates and the list of eligible food, the Conservative government caused a drastic hike in the cost of food distributed in the north.

Will the government suspend the introduction of nutrition north Canada long enough to modify the program so that it meets the basic needs of isolated communities?

Oral Questions

•(1450)

[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, this program was implemented after two and a half years of full consultation. Under this program our government will ensure that Canadians in isolated northern communities have access to nutritious quality foods. We are implementing changes to improve the effectiveness of the food subsidy program.

We are listening to Canadians and if changes to the program are needed, we will make them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government consulted suppliers, not the people who use the service. By acting too hastily, the Conservative government did not give northern communities the opportunity to get organized. They need to fund the purchase of large inventories, organize shipping and build storage facilities. The Conservative government has to stop being so stubborn and start co-operating with the people in the north.

Will the minister suspend nutrition north Canada long enough to examine its repercussions on the socio-economic situation of the communities in question?

[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, there were over 80 consultation sessions in the north with northerners. We listened to their concerns. That is what was built into the program. This is not a made in Ottawa program. This is a program based on two and a half years of consultation. We are implementing the program.

As I said, we are looking at the necessity for changes and we will implement any necessary changes, as required.

* * *

[Translation]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Hull—Aylmer, the Conservatives fraudulently billed \$44,573.55 in expenses that were incurred in Quebec City. That is almost 80% of the total expenses of the Conservative candidate in Hull—Aylmer. That is \$44,573.55 that the Conservatives want Elections Canada to take out of taxpayers' pockets to pay for their bogus and illegal expenses.

Now that they have been caught red-handed and with their pants down, will the Conservatives admit to their election fraud and pay back these ill-gotten gains?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. This is an administrative matter. The Conservative candidates spent

Conservative funds on Conservative advertisements. Obviously, there were transfers from the national party to local candidates. Elections Canada knew because we told them. Why not? All the parties do it. It is legal and ethical. We have a very strong case and we will be defending ourselves in court.

[English]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only the Conservatives believe that a \$25,000 fine and a year in jail is an administrative matter. They have engaged in a massive \$1 million electoral fraud. One would think their super cop in Vaughan would have none of it, but it turns out that very minister got elected thanks to a \$20,000 taxpayer refund on fictitious expenses. His riding association's coffers were padded by the Conservatives' fraudulent scheme.

Will the minister from Vaughan reimburse the taxpayers for these ill-gotten gains and will he commit not to repeat this scam?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is an administrative matter. The Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertisements. The national party obviously transferred money to local candidates, as all parties do all the time. Elections Canada found out because we told them. Why not? It is legal and ethical and all the parties do it. We have a solid case and we will be defending ourselves.

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AGENT ORANGE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that Agent orange was used near Hearst in the 1950s. Unwitting forestry workers, summer students and 17-year-old forest rangers were being sprayed with a dioxin that is responsible for all kinds of adverse health effects.

Ontario is calling on the federal government to contact other provinces and territories to determine if Agent Orange was used in their jurisdictions as well.

Will the Minister of Health agree to this request and begin this important work immediately?

•(1455)

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a provincial matter and a provincial responsibility. The federal government has already addressed its use of this chemical.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been speaking with families of hydro and forestry workers who have suffered from cancers, miscarriages, and birth defects from exposure to Agent Orange in northern Ontario.

Oral Questions

But we now learn that federal employees were exposed to large doses of Agent Orange while working at rural and regional airports between 1955 and 1974. In fact, Transport Canada employees were expected to mix large doses of 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D, and then spray it without protective clothing.

Would the Minister of Transport investigate this and release any and all documents pertaining to the use of Agent Orange at federal airports and other federal operations?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of any federal involvement 20 years ago by Transport Canada, but certainly, I will take this question under advisement. Any information that Transport Canada has about the use of Agent Orange, and its distribution and dispersion, I will make available as soon as I possibly can.

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GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the President of the Treasury Board tabled the 2011-12 main estimates.

These estimates demonstrate our commitment to reduce government spending. They also show that we are not balancing the budget on the backs of hard-working taxpayers like the Liberals did in the 1990s.

Would the President of the Treasury Board please explain how we are on track to balance the budget?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saint John for the input that he has had, in keeping us on track for a balanced budget.

Today, I tabled the main estimates for our spending in the year ahead, which indicate that spending for the year ahead will be \$10 billion less than we spent last year. It will be the first time in over a decade that a government has planned less spending in the present year than in the past year.

We intend to stay on track with that. This is not a time for increased taxes, not a time for reckless spending, and not a time for unwanted elections. It is time to stay on track.

* * *

[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CBC is responsible for reflecting the reality of all Canadians. That is its mission, and that means that regional differences must be taken into account, particularly in a country as big as ours.

We know that the Conservatives would prefer that the airwaves be dominated by propaganda networks, like Fox in the United States, so they are doing what they can to weaken the CBC.

They are now attacking the Matane radio station in eastern Quebec.

Will the minister protect this station? Will he stand up and protect the future of Radio-Canada in Matane?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are still working with the CBC to ensure that its mandate is protected by law and that the interests of Canadians are also protected.

We made promises during the 2004, 2006 and 2008 election campaigns, and we will certainly protect the CBC's mandate and honour our commitment to the CBC in our budget. We have done so in the past and will continue to do so.

* * *

QUEBEC CITY ARENA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the group J'ai ma place, another private partner has announced its contribution to the Quebec City multi-purpose arena. Quebecor Media has pledged to support Mayor Labeaume's project so that our national capital has a necessary tool for its economic development.

Rather than creating obstacles for the promoters of this important project, will the Conservative government finally commit to doing its fair share right now?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak to Mayor Labeaume at lunchtime. He told me about the agreement between Quebecor and the City of Quebec. That being said, public money remains the primary source of funding for the project.

It is very important to point out that the project includes an extremely important urban renewal component, as recommended in the Rousseau report. I have had the opportunity to talk about the infrastructure with my colleague, and if the federal government can contribute under existing programs, it will help with road infrastructure.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Assembly of First Nations is raising concerns that policing on reserve will get a 19% cut in this budget. Policing is already woefully underfunded. At the same time, first nations are trying to fight fires with outdated, inadequate equipment and no training. Too many of those fires end in tragedy.

When will the minister show some leadership and give on-reserve public safety the attention and funding that it deserves?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government looks forward to continuing our close relationship with police forces across the country, including first nations police forces.

We know that having a local police force, like a first nations police force, is very important for the safety and security of the community. I wish the NDP, however, saw security in the same way, that in fact police and others contribute to the well-being of community members.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservative government is focusing on the real priority of Quebecers, the economy, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and champion of the Plateau Mont-Royal wants to trigger an election before even reading the budget.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell this House what concrete action the Conservative government is taking for Quebecers?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making the economy a priority and helping Quebecers in every region of Quebec. On Sunday we announced an investment of nearly \$64 million for nationwide clean energy projects, including ethanol, which will result in economic activity in Quebec, in our businesses and in every region of Quebec.

Our Conservative government is constantly working to help all sectors of the economy and every region of Quebec.

* * *

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like us, people in the Matane region, have good reason to question what the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages is saying, especially about Radio-Canada. He can try to hide things from us, but the writing is on the wall and it worries us.

For example, the Radio-Canada/Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine station website was overhauled and, surprise, surprise, it is no longer the Radio-Canada/Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine website, but the Radio-Canada/Est du Québec website.

Will the minister do something about this? Will he stand up to help Radio-Canada in Matane?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will honour our campaign commitment to CBC/Radio-Canada in a way that the Liberals did not.

This was the Liberal record on the CBC. *The Globe and Mail* said, “The Liberal Party policy toward the CBC: gut it, kick it in the teeth, leave it hanging from a thread”.

The Montreal *Gazette* said this about the Liberals and the CBC, “The CBC has become a battered, unloved, friendless institution... under Heritage Minister Sheila Copps...”.

Privilege

This is what the *Toronto Star* said, “...the CBC has been treated shabbily...” by the Liberal government, “...downsized, underfunded, abandoned...”.

We have our policy. The Liberals have their record. I will live with our record.

* * *

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has come to light that many Canadian truckers are being forced by their employers to falsify their log books. The companies get away with this because there is insufficient enforcement of federal regulations. Ottawa should be working with the provinces to enforce these rules but this is not happening.

Will the government improve enforcement or will it continue to turn a blind eye to the dangers on Canadian roads?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member to the real world where we do work closely with both the provinces and the territories. In fact, we have a committee of senior level bureaucrats who work together under the direction of the ministers. After a meeting we had in Atlantic Canada earlier this fall, we again tasked our officials to work together on areas of concern, like trucking.

We should be very clear that truckers are expected to keep regular hours under regulatory supervision. They must keep log books under supervision. Failure to do so is a criminal offence, so I urge them to do that. The RCMP and other enforcement agencies have the power to enforce that because it is the law.

• (1505)

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has received a notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh and I will hear his submission now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MAIN ESTIMATES

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the letter I sent to you earlier today, I stand in this House to raise a question of privilege both for myself, as an individual member of Parliament, and for all other members of Parliament as well.

My question of privilege arises from the estimates tabled today in the House by the Treasury Board President. In an article by reporter, David Akin, who is part of the parliamentary bureau and the QMI Agency, that appeared on a web site earlier than the time the estimates were tabled in this House, it is clear that Mr. Akin had specific knowledge of what was in those estimates.

I would draw your attention specifically to the fact that in both the written article and in what was up on Mr. Akin's blog on his site as of 9 o'clock this morning, the estimates not being tabled in this House until after 10 o'clock this morning, Mr. Akin says:

Privilege

The government's spending plan, to be tabled today, shows that the [Prime Minister] plans to write cheques for at least \$250.8 billion in 2011-2012.

On page 7 of the main estimates that were tabled today, in the table titled "Comparison of Main Estimates", it says that the total net expenditures of the Government of Canada for 2011-12 is estimated to be \$250.8 billion, which is exactly the same figure that Mr. Akin had in his article before the estimates were tabled here.

Mr. Akin has a number of postings on Twitter, a social media network, and one was posted about an hour before 10 o'clock this morning, before the House was sitting and before the estimates were tabled. The posting reads, "Govt will table spending plan for FY 2010 today: Total \$250 billion, about \$10 billion less than this year".

With the facts I have provided in two different formats, there is no doubt that the journalist had knowledge of what was in the estimates before they were tabled in this House.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of our privileges as members of Parliament, you have ruled on a number of occasions that, both individually and collectively, we have an absolute right to expect the government of the day to provide information, whether it be on a bill or, as in this case, the estimates, to this House before they are provided any place else.

Just to headline this, Mr. Speaker, I will quote you on a couple of occasions when you have said this more explicitly. The basic concept is that if we are to do our jobs and we are to perform our responsibilities as members of Parliament, we need to be able to respond to inquiries based on the knowledge that is tabled in this House, whether those come from the media, from particular sectors of the economy, society or individual constituents. We need to be in a position to present responses but we cannot do that if material is getting out into the public, in this case in the form of a journalist, without us seeing that in advance. We have no ability to respond and in fact we cannot do our jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to at least two decisions that you made in the past on this topic. A question of privilege was raised on October 27, 2009 by the Bloc member for Joliette concerning the Minister of Public Safety giving out material in the form of a bill. It was clear that the information, once tabled in the House so that the rest of us could see it as members of Parliament, had gotten out to members of the media in advance by at least 24 hours and perhaps as much as 48 hours in that case. That involved the bill to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

• (1510)

After hearing arguments from a number of members of Parliament, other than on the government side, claiming that their privileges had been breached, you said this, Mr. Speaker, as you were drawing your conclusion and rendering your recommendation. You were talking about where the convention came from and why we have this privilege as members of Parliament and you said this near the end of your decision:

The purpose of the convention is also to ensure that members are not impeded in their work by being denied information that others have been given.

You were very clear and explicit, Mr. Speaker. The minister had argued that very little time had elapsed in terms of the bill being put

on notice and tabled in the House and you said you recognized that, but went on to say that was not the issue. The issue was the ability of members of Parliament having that information so that we could do our job. By not doing that and giving it out in advance to the media in that case, you were clearly making the determination that a prima facie case had been made for privilege.

Mr. Speaker, in that case your decision in that regard and the recommendation from the member who had moved the motion was to send it to the proper committee and you in fact ordered that. You went on to say:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House—

Which is the same that we have with the estimates:

—while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

When the committee reported, it said this:

The Committee believes that the protocol of the Department of Justice whereby no briefings or briefing materials should be provided with respect to a bill on notice until its introduction in the House of Commons should be adopted as a standard policy by all government departments. We believe that such a policy is respectful of the House of Commons and its members. It recognizes the legislative role of Parliament, and is consistent with parliamentary privilege and the conventions of Parliament.

That decision was in the spring of 2001.

One of the arguments will be, I will anticipate, that was about a bill and whether the convention also applies to the estimates. I want to draw to the House's attention in that regard and argue by analogy that it is the same as what we have here. This was a decision by Speaker Jerome on July 25, 1975, on page 7940 of *Hansard*.

The factual situation in that case was that a newspaper had printed an article alleging that there had been a leak of the budget, that a member of Parliament had given that information to a business person, presumably the concept being that the business person benefited financially. The issue that came before the House on a motion of privilege was that the member of Parliament first denied he had done that, claimed privilege on the basis that the article had, in effect, slandered him and asked that the matter be sent to committee so it could be investigated, in effect his mechanism for clearing his name.

Speaker Jerome in that case said yes, the leak in itself, which is what we have here with information being given, is in the form of a leak to Mr. Akin. The very fact of that is what creates the privilege.

• (1515)

Speaker Jerome said this, noting that the member stood in his place and denied the accuracy of the article:

Therefore, what is at issue is an alleged use of a national newspaper to accuse, falsely, a member of a misuse of his privileges as a member of this House.

He went on to say:

Privilege

Certainly there has been a disposition on all sides of the House to say that, if there is a suggestion that such a thing has taken place, it is a fundamental interference with the rights of every member of the House of Commons to operate freely and perform his functions freely. If that question exists in general terms—and in the circumstances which are before me I can scarcely decide otherwise—I cannot see in any way that the Chair ought to interpose itself, from a procedural point of view, and prevent the House having an opportunity to take a decision in respect of the matter. I do stress, that it is, in the final analysis, a decision of this House—

As it would be here.

—which will say whether or not the matter goes to the committee on privileges and elections where the matters that have been discussed and raised by almost all members who have participated can be dealt with.

I believe, by analogy, that is the situation we are faced with here. We have had a leak. We have had information, whether intentionally or unintentionally, given to a member of the media. That interferes with our ability to do our job, and in order to be able to respond in an intelligent, meaningful way to any enquiries about the estimates.

So, similar to what Speaker Jerome found, that there was a breach of privilege there, it did go on, as I am sure you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, to the committee for review and decision. I have not been able to find the outcome of that. The point being, in that situation which I argue is very analogous to the situation we have before us today, there was a finding of prima facie breach of privilege.

If you do so find in this case, Mr. Speaker, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion to have this matter referred to the appropriate committee.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh for his intervention. I apologize to my friend because I was absent for the first few moments of his intervention, but I think I caught the gist of what he was saying.

I would like to point out a couple of inconsistencies, and that is simply this. The analogy that the member was trying to draw between what happened with the estimates today and a government bill is really not relevant. As the member should know, the difference between a bill on notice and the main estimates is that the main estimates are a message from the government, delivered by the Governor General. There is quite a distinction between the two.

The other thing I would point out, quite frankly, is the media article that he is referring to does not give any details of the main estimates. That is what I think is the distinction that the Speaker needs to take into account, as does my hon. colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh. There were no details whatsoever given about the main estimates in the article mentioned.

Since the intervention was made just a few moments ago, even though I believe the two points that I have just given you, Mr. Speaker, are salient and relevant, I would ask you, in your consideration, to allow the government to make a more detailed response at our earliest opportunity.

• (1520)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary. I will certainly take the matter under advisement and will await comments from the hon. member before rendering a decision.

If the hon. member for Winnipeg North is rising on the same point, I will hear him now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the same question of privilege, I do believe that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has missed a very important point. It is important for us to make a very clear generalization.

It is indeed privileged information. It is part of the parliamentary tradition, I suspect, not only of this chamber but other chambers within the Commonwealth, that there is an anticipation that some documents will be kept in confidence. Then after being released to the legislative chamber or, in this case the House of Commons, they can be released to the public.

In previous Speaker's rulings in the Manitoba legislature often reference is made to decisions that Speakers in the House of Commons have made. I will suggest that this quite serious if it is proven to be true. When a member of the media is posting blogs saying, "Here is how much money, \$250 billion, that is to be spent", and then one hour later the government makes that announcement, that tells me that the government did release, if the allegation proves to be true, the information to one or possibly other individuals.

The releasing of budgetary numbers has a fairly significant ramification to Canada's economy. If people have knowledge in advance in terms of expenditures of government, that can have an impact on stock markets, not to mention other things. It is the responsibility of the Prime Minister and the government to ensure that they are keeping documents or numbers in confidence until they are brought forward in the proper fashion inside the House of Commons.

I would suggest that it would be advisable for us to look into what is being proposed or suggested as a very serious allegation from my New Democratic colleague, and if it is proven to be true that someone did have advance knowledge before the House knew about it, then there is a responsibility for the House to take some sort of action, because once again we will have seen a government being sloppy with what it is supposed to be doing in terms of respecting the importance of this chamber.

I take it very seriously. I applaud the member for bringing it forward. We appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to look into the matter with the blogger in particular and any other individuals who might have been involved in what appears to be the possibility of leaking information prior to it being tabled in the House, because that would ultimately be a privilege that has been denied to members to have that information before it is circulated through the media and the public as a whole. As I said, the long-term ramifications of leaking this kind of information is fairly significant.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was here just a few moments ago when our NDP colleague mentioned a possible leak. Like all the members of the House who are rising to speak, I have no reason not to believe the hon. member. The facts, if they prove to be true, are rather troubling. I have been a member of this House for only a short time, and during the last session, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar leaked, from her office over the Internet, some prebudget consultations we had had. We spoke out passionately against the situation.

I have been a member of another parliament, the Quebec National Assembly, and I have also worked in the public service, in the Quebec finance department. I know how careful a government or a minister must be when it comes to certain publications, particularly budget speeches and estimates. This is not a one-page document. It is a huge document that was allegedly released before it was even tabled in the House.

There was an instance when a Liberal Party finance minister in Quebec, Gérard D. Levesque, unexpectedly had to read out a version of the budget speech one evening. If my memory serves correctly, it was a Thursday evening, but the budget was supposed to be read the following week. Why? Because moments before, photos of photocopies had been accidentally lost. There was a possibility that the information could be made public the following morning. At the time, the minister took responsibility and read his budget speech a week early.

Today, a document containing all the Canadian government's spending information may have been leaked. That is significant. A member said that it could affect the budget, the stock market and the decisions of people who know things before others do. Parliamentarians must be given this information, in a transparent way, before or at the same time as the rest of the population.

We do not even know when the budget will be tabled. The Conservatives are being smart alecks and saying that it will be soon, maybe the 22nd or 24th of March, depending on the weather and the direction of the wind. This government should act responsibly and tell the people and parliamentarians when the budget will be tabled. When estimates are tabled, the government needs to make sure nothing is leaked. When there are leaks of this kind, the minister responsible should resign. When it comes to budget estimates or the budget itself, the question should then be whether or not a leak means that the government should resign.

• (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to add one additional point.

First, I very much respect the member from Windsor—Tecumseh for bringing this to the attention of the House. I subscribe to his argument and support his request.

I am concerned that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader somehow dismissed the matter simply because there was no reference to the estimates themselves, but just some numbers.

I apologize that I could not get to a copy of O'Brien and Bosc quick enough, but if you seek it, Mr. Speaker, I think you will find

that something as simple as a committee report tabled in the House is subject to the same rules. It cannot be disclosed. To look even further, you will find that even if the committee was not meeting in camera, if it was in public session and dealt with a report, the contents of that report cannot be disclosed prior to tabling in the House.

This is how careful Parliament has been over the years to protect the privileges of parliamentarians. Not even things that are obviously in the public domain should be used in a fashion which would preempt the matter of having to table in the House before it could be used.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has trivialized the matter. It is not a matter of the importance or whether it was used or not. The issue is the privileges and rights of parliamentarians must be protected to the greatest extent possible.

• (1530)

The Speaker: The parliamentary secretary said that he would be returning to the House in due course, so we will hear from him when he is ready to make submission on this point.

In the meantime, we will consider the matter closed for the time being.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

STRENGTHENING AVIATION SECURITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-42. This is an important bill. The member for Western Arctic has done a terrific job in bringing some of our issues and our concerns to the forefront.

I will spend a bit of my time talking about Canada-U.S. relations and what has happened in a general sense, because it is connected to the bill.

The bill would allow the private information of Canadians to be given to the Americans when they fly through U.S. airspace. We see this as an erosion of civil liberties. The use of this kind of information over the last several years has shown a lack of accountability.

The first case I witnessed was when I was in Washington, D.C. in 2003. The U.S. decided it would unilaterally bring in the NSEERS program, a program that tiered Canadian citizenship. Despite being a Canadian citizen, if an individual originally came from one of five destinations, that individual would be fingerprinted and photographed. This program later turned into U.S. visits.

Government Orders

I asked the Liberal government at that time if it was going to object to this tiering of Canadian citizens because it was going to create complications, like the ones we are now seeing at the border. The government did not even challenge that, which was very disappointing. We have not yet had a prime minister who will challenge that.

The U.S. patriot act jeopardizes the privacy of Canadians. I fought a campaign a number of years ago when the Paul Martin administration decided to outsource the census to Lockheed Martin, an arms manufacturer. Lo and behold its data assembly was in the United States, so under the U.S. patriot act all Canadian information was accessible.

Under the patriot act, a law enforcement agency in the United States, primarily the FBI or the CIA, can demand private information from any company about its employees. It is interesting to note that, under the act, the company is not allowed to inform the individual concerned or the other companies from which the agency gets the information.

All of our census information would have been exposed and at risk. Thankfully, after a good strong campaign, we were able to get the government to amend the contract to ensure that data assembly stayed in Canada. Lockheed Martin won the contract, but the data assembly and maintenance had to be done in Canada, and it was for that time period.

Why is this important? The private information that we give up, such as our credit card numbers, our phone numbers, a whole series of things that we give up when a trip is booked with a travel agent, will be exposed if Bill C-42 is passed.

The government has not pushed back on these issues. It has just rolled over for the Americans. The Conservatives assume that if we push back on this issue, that will affect trade and commerce at the border. The reality is, as we have succumbed to more of these elements, the problems at the border have become worse.

The Conservative government's policies have been atrocious when dealing with the image that Americans have about our Canadian system. The government's position on immigration and its cracking down on crime agenda, as well as a whole series of other things, hyperactivates those elements for its political stock base, basically the mediators in the Conservative Party. This blends in with the American rhetoric we have heard out of Washington from American politicians about the northern border not being safe and being more dangerous than the Mexican border.

We have fed into that negativity. Programs and greater barriers have not necessarily improved things. In my opinion, the data we will provide will create other administrative barriers.

The Conservatives tell us that they are working closely with the United States. We know they have been having private secret meetings. They have signed other protocols that have not worked and they have fed into the American way of thinking that our border is not safe.

I remember when we had the longest border in the world without a military presence. Now the Coast Guard is patrolling the Great Lakes in gun boats. Coast Guard members use the Browning machine gun

that fires hundreds of bullets per minute. This reinforces the image of hordes of Canadians scooting into the United States for illegal activities. We agreed to that program. I fought a campaign in the U.S. to raise awareness of the fact that we did not need those guns. Now they are sometimes stored.

• (1535)

Then we saw most recently, and this is a good example of how we feed into their system, how they try to spin these programs as being successes. The one that I am going to talk about a bit is the shiprider program. This is a program where an American pursuing a Canadian can enter Canadian waters and arrest that person; and, likewise, we can do the same.

Interestingly enough, when we signed this agreement, we allowed U.S. federal, state, municipal and coast guard persons to make that arrest in the U.S. However, on the Canadian side, we just have the RCMP. We have basically told the United States, and this is from the comments I get back from Americans, that because our CBSA officers cannot make similar arrests to its American counterparts, we have just admitted that we have a weaker system, that the weaker system needs more attention, and that weaker system has more problems than is being admitted.

Then we see these Americans, like the one from North Carolina, talking about how once again Canada's border is more dangerous than the Mexican border. Meanwhile on the Mexican border, they have lost control in certain jurisdictions because of the drug lords and they have a serious problem where thousands of people are entering and exiting per day. Now we have Canada being considered similar to that element. That is what is fundamentally wrong with not pushing back on these matters.

Not pushing back on this one is really critical, as well, because it gives up our privacy and it adds more barriers and more administrative problems than there have ever been before. That is going to lead to less trade, that is going to lead to more problems, and that is going to lead to a series of other administrative problems.

What is interesting is that when the Americans introduce legislation, and we agree to legislation like this, they will have the opportunity to change it for other data in the regulations. They will have the opportunity to open it up to other types of information. That is one of the reasons we oppose this. There is no set of based rules that people will know for sure.

As with the patriot act, we do not have any details. Is the information going to be shared further? Is it going to be scrubbed? When we have different information and it is wrong, how is it going to be used? One only has to bring up the case of Maher Arar where we saw the Canadian RCMP provide misinformation about a Canadian citizen who was in the United States, who was then sent abroad to Syria and tortured, and we then had to have a public inquiry.

Government Orders

So these things are real. They are not fantasy. These are actual cases that have taken place and are going to continue to be possible because we are giving up this type of a system without having the proper accountability. We have not even written in the measures to be able to change this. That is one of the things that gives us a disturbing sense of the government and its handling of U.S.-Canada relations and its secret meetings.

We do not have a playbook. All we hear from the government on the Canadian side is that our immigration system is problematic and our laws in this country are not tough enough on people. Then when we negotiate with the Americans, they know the type of rhetoric that has been used here and they fuel it for their own purpose.

When we are talking to the United States, are we looking at our immigration system being changed? It has often been said that some of the 9/11 terrorists came from Canada. We have heard those statements from Hillary Clinton. We have heard them from Janet Napolitano. Even if they were to retract them after much attention because they are not fact based, it still would not matter. The impression has been left that we are weak and that we do not stand up for ourselves.

When we have an issue like this bill, Bill C-42, that is not exact, it again proves and reinforces that we just roll over immediately. That is a real difficulty that we have with regard to our approach with the United States. It has to be tougher. We must have more expectations and measurables.

When we talk to industry and other types of organizations, they tell us the border is getting thicker, and it is getting thicker because of the government's policy. When we look at places like Windsor, Ontario, which is the busiest border and we are adding capacity, where the CBSA is being moved out of for crass political reasons, again, that shows the U.S. that we are going to be weak. This is going to lead to more problems, not solutions.

• (1540)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his presentation on Bill C-42.

We have not heard any representations from the government on this during the last couple of days. I would be very interested to see a government member stand and speak to this bill, so that we could actually ask some questions.

I believe it was the lone Liberal who spoke to the bill who spoke about how some amendments were made, and one of them was a two-year review. I had to ask her a question about what we were going to find out from a two-year review when we are the ones giving the information to the Americans. What we want to know is, if they are going to review it, what are they going to do with the information?

All our review is going to show is that we gave them X amount of data. However, we will have no idea what they did with that data. If members think for one moment that the Americans are going to answer the questions and tell us what they did with the data, and what the result was of turning it over, they have to be dreaming.

I think this review is basically dead in the water. It is just a way for the Liberals to roll over and support the government, and at least have some explanation for their support base as to why they did it.

I do not know why the Liberals are not asking more questions. I do not know why the Bloc is not asking more questions. There are a lot of questions that should be answered before we pass this legislation.

I wonder if the member has any further comments about this issue.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. It is like grabbing a cloud. It is just going to slip away from us.

A two-year review will be meaningless because we do not have the power in the act as it stands now and we do not have the capability to demand the answers about how that information will be used, when it was used, where it was dispersed, and all those things. It is not included in the act. We will have that problem.

It is unfortunate that there is not a greater debate in the House of Commons about this. Later on, if there are situations where citizens are going to be affected, potentially having an interruption of travel or of their lives, as with the extreme case with Maher Arar, there is not going to be any accountability. There will be no recourse and no expectation.

This is what is truly unfortunate about this debate, that we are not even putting that on the record. It is sad that nobody else is engaging on this. I think airline travellers across Canada should be alarmed that both the government and the Liberal Party are allowing this to pass through the House of Commons, basically without any type of oversight whatsoever. The oversight will come from those in the U.S. who want to use Canadians' personal information for whatever benefit they want. That will be the result.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his remarks.

The part of his speech that intrigued me most was the reference to American gunboats in the Great Lakes. It would seem to me that that very act would endanger Canadian citizens. The fact that our government seems to have put up no resistance, just simply rolled over and played dead, in light of this American decision leaves me amazed.

I wonder if the member would expand on that situation. I would be very interested to know the circumstances and the end result of his interventions.

• (1545)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question because it is an important aspect.

The government amended a treaty that went back to the War of 1812. When it did that, it shredded the great knowledge that our undefended border with the United States was well managed but was also a signal to the world about how that can actually be done in a modern age.

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What is interesting is that even though we lost that battle, the Americans wanted to create 40 gun ranges for these training exercises to take place. The bass fishermen are lower in the water, so the radar would not pick them up.

They were literally going to use lead casing bullets, by the thousands, and dump them into the Great Lakes. Only the New Democratic Party made a submission against that proposal in the United States and we were able to stop that. The U.S. decided not to do it.

The government actually made a submission two days late, so it was not even considered in the discovery and analysis. It did not make it on time for that. Allowing 40 gun ranges on the Great Lakes would have been a terrible idea for the environment and safety.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I deeply regret that the government has brought forward such a draconian piece of legislation as Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act.

As I indicated in previous remarks, Bill C-42 quite simply should be defeated. It is nothing more than data mining by foreign security services, primarily the United States, and is an unwarranted invasion of the privacy of Canadians.

Bill C-42 would amend the Aeronautics Act to allow for an exemption for airlines from the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, thereby permitting them to transmit to the United States department of homeland security personal information about airline passengers.

The U.S. department of airline security could then run this information through a number of databases to determine if the travellers should be prevented from entering U.S. airspace. If the U.S. department of homeland security determines a person may be allowed into the United States airspace, then the airline is given permission to issue a boarding pass.

This is a process set up under the United States secure flight program, and it mandates that only those the United States department of homeland security allows may enter into U.S. airspace, regardless if those individuals are landing in the United States or not.

While the Conservatives like to point to name, gender and birth date as the only items of information required, the secure flight final rules state that airlines must forward information that includes the passenger name record, which is a file that a travel agent creates when a customer books a vacation. It can include: credit card information, names of companions travelling with the individual, hotel and other booking information such as tours, rental cars, and any serious medical conditions of the passenger if the airline possess that information.

Unfortunately, it is sufficient information to allow the department of homeland security to data mine the travel reservation systems used by all airlines because these databases are physically located in the United States.

Previous to Bill C-42, this information was passed to the U.S. department of homeland security only for passengers travelling to the United States. There was an exemption for domestic Canadian

flights. However, almost all flights within and to and from Canada pass through United States airspace. Bill C-42 would essentially allow the United States department of homeland security to determine who may enter and leave Canada by air.

Bill C-42 would also allow airlines to send personal information of passengers to foreign security services. What information would be forwarded is determined by requirements laid out in secret agreements with other countries. Details of these agreements have not even been released. However, it is known that Canada has signed or is negotiating agreements with the European Union, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Panama, the Dominican Republic and the United States.

Details of the agreement between the European Union and the U.S., for the same information transfer, allows the information collected to be retained by the Americans for up to 40 years. As I have already indicated, this information may be forwarded to the security service of a third nation without the consent or even notification of the signatory, meaning the passenger.

The secure flight final rule also stipulates that no person may know what information is being held about them by the United States and may not correct that information if there are errors. In essence, the U.S. already has such an agreement with the EU that all such documents will not be publicly released for 10 years.

That means for an airline passenger seeking recourse in regard to a prohibition to travel, this would preclude any access to information requests. In essence, Bill C-42 gives the government agencies too much access to private information without protection for our citizens. It is also being spun by the government as necessary in our fight against terrorism.

There is no example of how this data mining has caught a single terrorist or any other criminal. Bill C-42 is an unacceptable invasion of privacy of Canadians by foreign security forces.

● (1550)

I have heard from many of my constituents who are most concerned that such an intrusion is an unacceptable invasion of their privacy and it undermines their personal security.

Maher Arar, who has already been mentioned, is an example of how this type of misinformation can be misused. In September 2006, in New York at the JFK Airport on his way home, Mr. Arar was detained by American officials. He was interrogated about alleged al-Qaeda links and 12 days later he was chained, shackled and flown to Syria. During his captivity he was beaten, tortured and forced to make false confessions. Despite a commission of inquiry, an apology and financial settlement from the Government of Canada, the United States authorities refuse to accept Mr. Arar's innocence and he remains on the American no-fly list. Clearly this is a terrifying example of how information can be skewed, misinterpreted and abused.

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Many people have commented on the agreement being considered by the Government of Canada in regard to the proposed amendments to the Aeronautics Act. In May 2010, Dr. Mark Salter, who is an associate professor in the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa, told the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that governments want this information so that they can build profiles not just of risky passengers, but safe passengers as well. Research clearly demonstrates that in the United States and the U.K. government agencies are trying to collect as much data about travellers as possible.

What worries the experts about this particular legislation, Bill C-42, is the widespread distribution of the data. Flights that use polar routes from Vancouver to Hong Kong would have to go over Russia and China. Are we suggesting that they are reasonable destinations for the passenger data of Canadian citizens? Is the Government of Canada confident that the destination for this data can provide adequate protection?

What worries many of us on this side of the House is that neither the government nor other agencies have put protection in place for data that will now go abroad. It is dangerous to sacrifice our privacy and freedoms for the dream of zero risk or perfect security. This particular measure does not provide additional security for the aviation sector and it places an additional burden on Canadian citizens who are flying.

Quite simply, this bill makes Canadians more vulnerable to the security services of other nations. Canadian data should never be hostage to any regime that an air company chooses to fly over. The proposed change to these data protection regulations to include overflight states dramatically increases the vulnerability of Canadians' data while offering no means of redress or appeal.

The proposed changes to the Aeronautics Act are dangerous and without any clear benefit to Canadians. Dr. Salter is not the only expert in Canada warning that Bill C-42 sets out a dangerous path, one that we should not follow. Over and over we have heard the warnings from reputable experts and indeed the voices of concerned Canadians. Surely the government will listen to these warnings.

We need to defeat Bill C-42. Canadians deserve better than questionable leadership and an absence of due diligence from the government. How can anyone trust a government, its ministers and a Prime Minister so willing to jeopardize their privacy and security?

In the words of our Privacy Commissioner: "However, the Canadian government has a duty to protect the privacy and civil rights of its citizens."

It is time the government understood that duty. It is time that it exercised due diligence for the sake of Canadians.

●(1555)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the member's speech and arguments were quite well presented, but we do have a situation. The U.S. government and Canada have an agreement that is already in place which is directly related to the sovereign right to control their own airspace in the U.S. As the member knows, the thrust of the bill is to permit the request of the U.S. government for certain information, which, she is quite right, is still being discussed. The alternative is that the U.S. can say that

flights would not be able to fly over U.S. airspace if they do not comply.

Given that the Privacy Commissioner before our committee on November 10 laid out some suggestions on how the security of the information could be safeguarded, she did not conclude it was an invasion of privacy and inappropriate disclosure. I wonder what the member's solution would be if Bill C-42 does not pass.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that there have been references made to previous agreements. I am not entirely sure that there was any wisdom in some of these agreements. It feels very much like the government is simply rolling over and playing dead.

What about the sovereign rights of Canadian citizens? What about our right to privacy and security?

This whole issue seems to revolve around threats from the United States. No matter how paranoid the Americans may be, it makes absolutely no sense to shut down the border or to preclude air flights from Canada. Yet that seems to be what is in Bill C-42. The American government is saying that even if we are not landing but simply flying over its airspace it has an issue with that.

In terms of safeguards, there has been a great deal of secrecy around these discussions. I have seen those safeguards and that is not acceptable.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on a very well-reasoned speech and one of profound importance to Canadians. I believe we need to get right down to the nub of the matter.

The bill would force Canadian airlines to send personal information to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on Canadian travellers who are not even touching U.S. soil, but fly over U.S. airspace.

We know that the passenger name record has very detailed information, such as credit card numbers, where one is staying, who one is flying with and potential health concerns. We also have no way of knowing what third countries will get that information because this agreement permits the United States to send that information to third countries.

I am wondering about the question of reciprocity. Canadians want their government to defend their interests. Did the Conservatives, at the same time that they were selling out information on Canadians' privacy rights to the Americans, get reciprocal treatment so that American passengers who are flying over Canadian airspace have to let our security personnel know the passenger name record information on American travellers? I wonder if the government ensured that we would get reciprocal treatment in this regard.

●(1600)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, it is my understanding that there is no reciprocity.

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I find it absolutely amazing that the Canadian government is willing to give over information about credit cards and personal data without any assurance that information is secure or even accurate. It comes back to the whole problem of misinformation. As was the case with Maher Arar, people being denied access and refused the right to fly within their own country based on misinformation that they cannot correct. There is a stranglehold on the retention of that information and that quite simply should never be.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak once again in the House on what I have called before, and will call again, one of the most ill-advised pieces of legislation that I have seen in my time here in the House of Commons.

Bill C-42 amends the Aeronautics Act to require airlines in Canada to send personal information on passengers to foreign security services. In particular, Canadian travellers who are travelling to destinations that may touch U.S. airspace, but do not land in the United States, would have the decision over whether or not they are issued a boarding pass in Canada determined by U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

There is so much wrong with the bill that it is hard to know where to start, so I will start at the beginning. The passenger name record that an airline creates on each passenger when they book a flight to fly from Canada to Mexico, Cuba, Latin America or Europe contains the following information: the file that a travel agent creates when a vacation is booked, the name of the travel agent, credit card information, who is travelling with the passenger, the hotel, booking information for tours or rental cars, and any serious medical condition of the passenger.

This information that would have to be turned over to U.S. Department of Homeland Security could be retained by the United States for up to 40 years. We know this because there are similar agreements that contain this information. This information may be forwarded to the security service of a third party nation without the consent or notification of the other signatory.

No person may know what information about them is being held by the United States and may not have a chance to correct that information if there are errors. The United States has signed similar agreements with other countries that may unilaterally amend the agreement as long as it simply advises the other party of those changes.

In essence, once the passenger name record is logged by the airline and is sent to officials of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, they will make the decision as to whether or not the Canadian citizen who is going to board an aircraft in our country will be allowed to board or not.

That is something so fundamentally wrong on the surface that it is hard to believe that anybody would proceed any further than that. Imagine having a Canadian citizen's right to fly to a country around the world determined by U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Is there anything more preposterous? Is there anything more undemocratic? Is there anything more offensive?

Imagine Canadian citizens who choose not to go to the United States. They may make the deliberate decision not to go there. They

have to have personal information about themselves transferred to security apparatus in the United States and decisions about whether they can fly or not determined by American authorities.

I have heard Conservatives in the House say "Well, what can we do? The Americans have asked for it. They will not let us fly over their airspace." Let us examine that. First of all, Canadian airlines have been flying over U.S. airspace for decades and decades without having to send this personal information to the United States. That is number one. What is the difference now?

Number two, why can Canadian authorities not retain control, authority and responsibility of the security of Canadian airlines? Canadian soldiers are good enough to fight in Afghanistan right now. They are good enough to fight right beside U.S. soldiers. They are good enough to work side-by-side in NATO and to be trusted with that. But the United States does not trust Canada to maintain adequate security over our own aircraft?

I might also add that Canadian airlines and Canadian security apparatus have an outstanding record of controlling security in our country. I would go so far as to say that it is superior to the security arrangements in the United States.

Moreover, and here is the kicker, Canada sought and obtained an exemption from having to send information on Canadian citizens to the United States for domestic flights that fly over U.S. airspace. Let us stop for a moment and look at the absurdity of that.

If in fact it is true that the Americans need this information about Canadian travellers to fight terror or to make sure that these flights are secure, why is it not needed on domestic flights that fly over American states? That is ridiculous.

•(1605)

As a matter of fact, security steps and methods for international travel are actually superior and more in depth than security checks for domestic flights. One could argue that if we actually needed these steps, then the one place we would absolutely insist on there being passenger name information would be on domestic flights, but that is the one thing that the Americans said was not necessary.

I want to talk about the lack of reciprocity. What kind of government negotiates with a foreign state and allows that state to demand the personal information of its own citizens and does not insist on the same for itself? That is not negotiation. That is abdication.

What about the violation of Canadians' privacy? Canadians may want to take their families to Mexico. Many families have done that in the past 10 years. Do they run the risk of having their decision turned down by the United States?

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What about Canadians travelling to Cuba? We all know that the United States has the Helms-Burton Act, which prohibits its businesses and citizens from having any kind of dealings with Cuba. Are we going to have the United States determine whether or not Canadian passengers can go to Cuba or Latin America? Canadians should know that it is not just Latin America. Of course, every flight to Latin America will fly over U.S. airspace. Many flights that go to Europe and other parts of the world also touch U.S. airspace.

This is also a profound violation of Canadian sovereignty. It has been pointed out by witnesses before both the transport and public safety committees that decisions over whether Canada can invite diplomats from certain countries, diplomats who would fly over U.S. airspace, could essentially be vetoed by the U.S. government.

Of course, the most profound violation of sovereignty is allowing a foreign government or institutions of a foreign government to determine where our own citizens can travel in the world.

We heard the government say when it abolished the long form census, a ridiculous move if there ever was one, that it thought it was not the state's business to know how many bedrooms people had in their houses, that it was offensive for the Government of Canada to know how many bedrooms a Canadian citizen had. At the same time, it signed an agreement with the United States that would sell out information on Canadian citizens, such as their credit card information or health status or where they were travelling, and give that information to a foreign government. That is ridiculous.

The government also likes to say that the primary duty of any government is to protect its citizens. That is not being done here. It is a sad day in Canada to see the Conservative government not protecting Canadian citizens, not protecting their freedom and their right to travel where they want to in the world. The government is failing completely in that regard.

I want to talk for a minute about the Liberals' shameful record. After speaking against this bill and sounding like they actually understood the privacy and sovereignty issues, the Liberals voted in favour of Bill C-42 at second reading. Every Canadian should know that when the Leader of the Opposition questions the government on why it is entering into security perimeter negotiations with the United States and selling out the privacy rights of Canadians, Liberals are voting for it. They are voting for this very bill that gives the U.S. Department of Homeland Security the right to determine where Canadians travel.

The New Democrats are going to stand against this kind of cynicism. We are going to stand up for Canadians, for privacy rights, for Canadian sovereignty, for fair dealing with Canadian citizens, and we are going to restore Canada's place in the world as a country of fairness, decency and democracy. We will stand up for our citizens to make sure their fundamental rights are respected.

• (1610)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are getting to the point where we have heard some of these arguments before.

The Privacy Commissioner was before committee and the member referred to what was going on in committee. He is probably aware

that the Privacy Commissioner raised some issues of concern from the point of view of how we can mitigate the risk of information getting out, such as in the retention agreement and how long information would be kept and with whom it could be shared with, et cetera. All of these things are still ongoing.

What she did not say but we would have expected from the Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, an experienced and excellent official on behalf of the Government of Canada, was that this was a gross violation of the privacy rights of Canadians. That was not her position.

Therefore, I ask the member, if the Privacy Commissioner does not think it is a gross violation, why does he?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I would like to tell my hon. colleague what his own colleague from the Liberal Party, the member for Willowdale, said:

The government seems far too interested in pleasing the Americans, listening to the Americans and adhering to American interests. I have nothing against the Americans, but in this situation we are sacrificing the interests of Canadians in order to please the interests of the United States. That is simply not acceptable.

That is what a Liberal MP will say in the House, and then the Liberals will vote for Bill C-42.

The Privacy Commissioner had serious concerns about the bill, but she was only one of about 11 witnesses whose testimony I have read, including Roch Tassé's. In fact, I will go over some of the testimony of the people who testified extensively on the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Perhaps the hon. member could bring forward some of that information in response to the next question.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, who had many of his facts absolutely correct. I just have to question, though, as I am not quite sure if he might have seen the whole context.

We know that the Conservative Party will sell out civil liberties on a dime. The Conservatives would do that before getting up in the morning. We know what they think of people's personal liberty, but I am surprised at the hon. member's surprise that the Liberals would also be willing to sell out Canada's civil liberties, because was is not the leader of the Liberal opposition who previously stood up during the worst, darkest days of Bush's torture regime and defended coercive investigation?

We know the Conservatives do not mind using the rubber hose. That is in their DNA, but it was the Liberal leader who supported coercive investigation and said it was necessary, and so why would we think that the Liberal Party would actually care about people's privacy rights, about people's—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would like to give the hon. member equal time. I understand that the hon. member has a minute to respond.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, Canadians have known one thing over the last 20 years, that the Liberal Party of Canada will say almost anything to get elected.

The Liberals said they wanted a national child care program in 1993, in 1997 and in 2001. They said they would bring in a national housing program in 1993, 1997 and 2001. They broke those promises every time. They said they would abrogate NAFTA. They did not do that. They said they would repeal the GST. They did not do that.

It does not surprise me that the Liberal Party of Canada will say one thing and do another. That is exactly what Canadians know the Liberals to be and that is why they have lost seats and the percentage of the popular vote in every single election since 2001, at least that I have seen. That is because Canadians do not trust them. The Liberals want to talk like New Democrats when they are out of power and then govern like Conservatives when they are in power, and Canadians have their number. Canadians know that.

However, to see the Liberal members stand up and vote in favour of Bill C-42, an absolutely unacceptable violation of Canadians' privacy rights and an absolutely appalling abdication of Canada's sovereignty, is really something that I hope every Canadian from coast to coast to coast gets to see. I say this because when Canadians want to travel to Mexico, the only place that decision should be made is in their family room or kitchen. They are the only people who should be deciding where they as Canadians travel.

When the Conservatives say they will let the U.S. Department of Homeland Security do it, that is not good enough.

• (1615)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, I cannot say I am pleased to have to stand here and speak on this bill on closure. This bill is one that I have had trouble with ever since it was introduced in Parliament and the whole time it was before the transport committee.

The Conservative government would like Canadians to believe that Bill C-42 is just about ensuring Canadians can fly to destinations in the sun, that we have to pinch our nose and vote in favour of this bill, which really sells out Canadians' freedoms and liberties.

It is surprising how the so-called standing-up-for-Canadians party is so quick to make a move like this.

However, the bill before us is just part of the sellout. The larger issue is the total sellout of Canadian sovereignty under the perimeter security deal, which, if this government has its way, we will likely not even see inside the House of Commons. It will never get debated here.

We know the reality is that this bill, which is a completely unnecessary invasion of Canadians' privacy, is just a stopgap until the government has instituted a perimeter security deal. My fear is that if the Conservatives have failed to stand up for Canadians when they negotiated this deal, just how supine will they be when it comes to selling out Canadian sovereignty as part of a perimeter security deal?

When the minister appeared before the committee on this bill, he said it had to be passed before the end of 2010 or the U.S. would

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close its airspace to Canadian flights. That did not happen. The minister allowed the Americans to bully him, or perhaps he was simply bluffing the committee. We called their bluff.

The Conservatives pointed out the exemption they obtained for domestic flights. It is laughable. The exemption is based on a non-binding diplomatic note, much as the rest of this is based on letters, not treaties. There is no clear indication of how any of this is set in the relationship between Canada and the U.S. What the exemption really shows is that this bill is not about security or fighting terrorism, but about allowing another country to determine who may come and go from Canada. It proves this bill is setting us up for the bigger perimeter sellout.

In researching this speech, I came up with some interesting statements. On privacy, I found the following quote from the website of the member for Langley on how Conservatives protect the privacy of Canadians:

One of the key duties of a government is to protect the rights and privacy of all of its nation's citizens.

Given the government's total failure to protect Canadian's privacy through Bill C-42 and how it will deal with privacy and other information issues through the perimeter security deal, the member for Langley may have to amend his website.

On the Conservative Party's website, it is said that:

Under the strong leadership of [the Prime Minister] Conservatives are taking action for Canada's sovereignty, safety and security—

Then there is this line from the Prime Minister's bio page:

As Prime Minister, he....stood up for Canada's sovereignty—

However, Webster's dictionary has the following as a part of its definition of sovereignty:

freedom from external control.

I have trouble thinking this is the case here. It seems that when it comes to protecting the rights of Canadians, the Conservatives have failed completely.

On February 9 of this year, the parliamentary secretary told this House:

—I will tell members what I do require, and what I think this government has required, from the United States. We have required that the Americans uphold and strengthen the vital cornerstones of our Canadian values, such as due process, the rule of law and the preservation of individuals' civil liberties, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and privacy rights.

My goodness, that is a long list. None of it appears in this bill. None of it is found anywhere within any treaty or any agreement between the United States and Canada that comes under this particular section.

What has the member done here?

When we start to talk about the perimeter security deal, most Canadians do not believe the Conservatives when they say they can be trusted to protect our rights.

Postmedia News reported on February 18, 2011, that:

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Two-thirds of Canadians fear [the] Prime Minister...will "compromise" by giving up too much power over immigration, privacy and security to get a deal with the United States on border controls, a new poll has found.

The national survey, conducted exclusively for Postmedia News and Global Television, also finds Canadians are split over whether they "trust"....[the Prime Minister] to craft a deal that maintains this country's independence.

The poll by Ipsos Reid reveals Canadians want [the Prime Minister] to adopt a much more transparent approach to the "perimeter security" negotiations that are being held in total secrecy.

That is what Canadians think about what the Conservatives are doing.

● (1620)

There was also an online poll last week in the *Globe and Mail*. Of the 67,000 respondents, 90% said that they did not think we should give up information in this relationship with the United States.

The day after the parliamentary secretary for transport made his claims about how the government was protecting the rights of Canadians, the leader of the Liberal Party wrote in the *Globe and Mail*:

The content of the proposal and the manner in which it came about raise serious questions about the government's commitment to defending our sovereignty, our privacy and our rights as Canadian citizens.

It is too bad for Canadians that MPs are supporting Bill C-42. I think Canadians should raise serious questions about the Liberal commitment to defending our sovereignty.

Then there is the line from the Liberal transport critic, which shows how much backbone the party has in protecting Canadians.

As I said in my speech, this is not a law that I particularly like because it does raise concerns about privacy and issues such as those raised by the hon. member. However, for practical purposes, I think we have little choice but to pass the bill. The Liberals had a choice. They could have protected Canadians but, no, they wanted to side with the Conservatives, and we can expect them to continue to work with the Conservatives on this particular issue.

Then there is the line from the member for Willowdale who said:

—we are now being held hostage. If a Liberal government had been asked to do this, we would have asked how we could work this out so we did not accede to this and sacrifice the privacy of Canadians.

It is not too late. If the Liberal Party would go against this bill, we would force the Conservatives back to the bargaining table with the United States to work out a better deal on this bill.

Then we have a line from the member for Eglinton—Lawrence who said, "This bill is a total abdication of our sovereignty responsibility".

Can anyone imagine letting a foreign authority, not the government but a competent authority within the government of another country, determine what it must know about whether passengers board a plane in Canada or go someplace else or another place in order to come to Canada?

Canadians will be watching the vote on this particular bill.

What about the Bloc? Surely, it must defend sovereignty. Its critic said:

As the Bloc Québécois transport critic, and with my colleagues who agree on this position, we had to take individual freedoms into account, but we also had to take into account feasibility and the viability of air carriers that have to use U.S. airspace.

Once again, we see that the choice being made is between freedom and liberty, the rights of Canadians and a supposed infringement upon the commercial movement of aircraft.

When it comes to protecting the rights of Canadians, there is one party in this House that puts Canadians ahead of profits. Which party is that?

● (1625)

Mr. Ed Fast: The Conservative Party.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I heard the hon. member across the way say "the Conservative Party", but quite clearly the only party in this House that is actually standing up on this bill over and over again is the New Democratic Party.

The reason we have taken such a strong opposition to this bill is that all through the process we saw the Conservatives fail to get a proper deal for Canadians. My colleagues have talked about all of the things they could have worked on to make a difference in this bill but they did not do that because their hearts were not in it. They chose to sell out Canada. They chose not to do the work to protect Canada. Why did they do that? They did it because they were looking at this larger perimeter security deal. In their minds they felt that by integrating further into the United States we could increase the profits of our companies and sell out our grandchildren.

Today, the choice is apparent. What we do not know and will not find out is what this complete perimeter security deal means to Canadian travellers, to Canadians and to the future of this great country of which I am very proud to be a representative.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on November 18, when the Privacy Commissioner appeared before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, she tried to clarify that the requirements under the no-fly list and that legislation did have some privacy concerns. She said:

However, C-42 differs from the measures listed above in that it will not result in the introduction of any new domestic aviation security programs nor will it involve the collection of additional personal information by Canadian government agencies.

Rather, it will allow American or other authorities to collect personal information about travellers on flights to and from Canada that fly through American airspace and this, in turn, will allow American authorities to prevent individuals from flying to or from Canada.

I think the Privacy Commissioner has added to the debate from the standpoint that the no-fly list issues, the Maher Arar issue, et cetera, are different cases from Bill C-42 and that there are no conclusions on behalf of the Privacy Commissioner that there are breaches of privacy rights of Canadians. I wonder if the member would want to comment.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Madam Speaker, quite clearly this bill would open the door for the U.S. to use the information that it is provided for any purpose. Even the U.S. ambassador in his letter stated that in most cases the information would be used for security purposes. The door was not closed on that one.

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The testimony we heard from one U.S. witness indicated that within the homeland security bill there is no protection for aliens on information. Therefore, when we turn information on Canadians over to the U.S., we are doing it with no protection at all.

I would like to see the Privacy Commissioner go through this again and understand the precise nature of what we are creating with this bill and the type of direction we are taking for the country. When we start to talk about a perimeter of security deal and the sharing of information from Canadian security services with the United States on an ongoing basis, what will that lead to?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the government messed up in the negotiations. It made a very poor deal. The government could have gone for reciprocity and caused the Americans to back off when demanding information on their 2,000 flights a day versus the 100 that we have to give them.

The government has admitted that the Americans were prepared to let it keep the information but the government was not prepared to spend \$500 million or so on the computer system that would need to be set up to keep the information.

The bottom line is that we should get our existing systems working better. We have a no-fly list that does not work. We have the member for Winnipeg Centre on the no-fly list. Former Senator Ted Kennedy is on the no-fly list. We need to clean up that list first.

We also need to get the trusted shipper program working. The American Pilots' Association says that we have 1,000 trusted shippers who are not so trusted because they are sending all sorts of packages and letters onto the airplanes that are not even checked. There is a huge exposure there but we are ignoring that while we are chasing stuff that really does not—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but I must give the hon. member for Western Arctic a chance to respond.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Madam Speaker, a witness who appeared before the transport committee this morning is one of the chief executive officers of a very large security firm from Europe that conducts most of the aviation security on the ground there. His comments about what has happened over the past decade is that after 9/11 we created an aura of paranoia and, in some cases, delusion about what was correct in terms of aviation security, the need for information and the use of the security apparatus that we have put in place. He said that we needed to review that.

What we have here is probably one of the last gasps of the American empire in its desire, through its paranoia, to carry forward this information gathering system in a way that is really not appropriate.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): 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 Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Poverty; the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, Canadian Heritage; the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, Harmonized Sales Tax.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to enter into the debate on Bill C-42 and to follow the lead of my colleague from Western Arctic who gave a very impassioned speech outlining not only some of the shortfalls of this bill but cautioning us about how this bill would compromise Canadians' right to privacy.

We should frame the argument on two basic points. First, the public has a right to know everything that its government is doing with its money and everything it is doing in terms of the administration of the programs and policies. That is an absolute fundamental right and it is enshrined in the Access to Information Act, which I call the freedom of information act. Freedom of information, I argue, is the oxygen democracy breathes. It underpins and forms the foundation of the western democracy that we enjoy.

Just as important and equal to and parallel with the public's right to know what its government is doing is the truism that the public also has the right to privacy and the government does not have any absolute right to know everything that citizens are doing. That would smack of big brother, an Orwellian nature of things. As Canadians we need to be ever vigilant to recognize and enshrine those two principles.

We in the House of Commons are charged with the responsibility to not only defend and uphold those fundamental rights and freedoms but we are also charged with the obligation to enhance, strengthen, reinforce and buttress those fundamental rights and freedoms. As elected members of Parliament and as the custodians of those rights, we should never entertain a bill that may undermine, erode, diminish, shrink or reduce in any way those very principles by which we define ourselves as Canadians.

When a bill like this comes along under the guise of national security, the other opposition parties blindly rush to it.

I began my remarks by recognizing and paying tribute to my colleague from Western Arctic for reading this bill and blowing the whistle on the predictable consequences of going forward in this direction. I am surprised there are no other champions of these fundamental rights and freedoms in the House of Commons who are willing to join us in the defence of these fundamental principles.

I want to point out as well perhaps the mother of all contradictions in terms of the Conservatives' views on privacy. They tie themselves in this Gordian Knot, this pretzel logic that they have because, on the one hand, they do away with the innocuous and necessary long form census, something that provinces, minority groups, organizations and institutions rely on, under the guise that it is an intrusion on the privacy of Canadians.

Any time one wants to amend a clause in a contract the first thing the party should ask is whether there has been a problem and, if so, what the nature of the problem is.

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A former minister of foreign affairs from Quebec spouted off that he had thousands of complaints regularly coming into his office about the long form census. When challenged to show some of those thousands of complaints, he modified his remarks by saying that he had many, often and frequent complaints. When challenged to show some of those complaints, he said that he had people contact his office complaining. When put again to the challenge, he could not produce a single complaint.

I believe there has been only one incident in the Canadian judicial system of a person being prosecuted and charged with the offence of not filling out the long form census because it was mandatory. One test case went all the way and it was found that the woman did not comply with the legislation.

• (1635)

In spite of the absence of any empirical evidence or any body of complaints, the government stripped away a necessary and innocuous long form census, but, again, in buying a pig in a poke, it seemed willing to strip away one of the most fundamental rights and freedoms that Canadians enjoyed, and that is the right to privacy. It traded that away at an international tribunal.

Nobody gave the Conservative government a mandate to go to Washington and trade away the fundamental constitutional rights of the people of Canada. In fact, I would argue that constitutional rights cannot be negotiated away. Rights are not assigned to people by virtue of some document. They are the inherent rights of Canadians. The right to privacy is one of those.

Yet in a very cavalier, sloppy and cowardly way, the Conservative government has entered into this agreement and it seeks to have the Parliament of Canada ratify it. I say “no”. It will not get the New Democratic Party members of Parliament ratifying this document.

I call it cowardly because the government clearly went into that set of negotiations on its knees. It was not standing on its hind legs. It was bargaining from a position of weakness and it was accepting whatever was handed to it, without taking any steps to defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians.

I want to point out that this document finds its origins and is an extension of and materially similar to in the atrocity of the American do not fly list, resonant in, maintained and operated by Washington. My colleague, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, pointed out that in fact I am on that stupid list and cannot get off it. So was the minister of defence, Bill Graham. The Canadian minister of defence was on an American do not fly list and was unable to board a domestic aircraft in his own country. That is how insane this do not fly list is.

This document will extrapolate, expand on and compound the ridiculous situation we see ourselves in with that do not fly list. I could not get my name off that list for love nor money. First, people could not find out where it was and then they could not find out who to talk to. Then after six weeks of trying, we finally got a phone number, a 1-800 number in the United States, which told us to send our birth certificates, our passports, our marriage licences, our driver's licences and in six weeks to three months, a message would be sent back us, telling us whether we could get off that list.

I am not going to send all my documents away to some black hole in some basement bunker in the Pentagon. That is not what a Canadian member of Parliament does when he wants to board an airplane in his own country to fly from home to work and back. That is the absurd nature of this.

Nobody took any steps to protect Canadians when the government entered into this agreement. I do not believe any third party foreign nation has a right to know my credit card information, who I am travelling with, my hotel, my medical condition, any tours or car rentals, or the names people I meet with while I am there, just because I get on an airplane to fly to Aruba for a holiday.

That is the privileged information the Government of Canada traded away and not just to one party but to all the parties to this agreement: Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Panama, the Dominican Republic, the United States and the European Union. We do not even know all the terms and conditions of this deal because they remain secret. We do know the terms and conditions of the deal between the European Union and the United States, and it is shocking.

This personal information can be held by the United States for 40 years, shared with other countries without the knowledge of the host country, us, or the individual. Passengers will have no idea if this information is being trade around like party favours at some kind of a confab between those member countries or countries that are stipulated to this treaty.

The United States can unilaterally amend the agreement as long as it advises us of the change. Who would negotiate a deal like that? That is not a deal between partners, when one side can unilaterally amend it at any time just by notifying the other side. That means the Americans can inform Canada tomorrow, or as soon as we ratify this, that they are going to change all the terms and conditions of it. I do not think the government was defending our best interests when it went to Washington and entered into this arrangement with the United States.

• (1640)

I do not know what forces were driving the government's reasoning to enter into this, but it certainly was not upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians, those freedoms by which we define ourselves as Canadians.

It is our job as elected members of Parliament to uphold, strengthen and enhance freedoms, not trade them away at the bargaining table for God knows what. In fact, the government is like *Jack and the Beanstalk*. It traded away our cow for three beans that will probably never sprout.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to focus for a moment on the question of democracy. One of the worst aspects of the bill is that a decision on a Canadian citizen's travel plans would be made by an institution in a foreign country, in this case the United States. My hon. colleague has already talked about how frustrating and impossible it is to get redress from that institution.

There is a concept in democracy of no taxation without representation. The idea is that those who made decisions over our lives should be democratically accountable to us.

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Could he comment on the failure of democracy in this case by having the rights of Canadians determined by a foreign body that has no democratic accountability to citizens? We have no ability to challenge the determination, to go to an elected official or to vote someone out of office who fails to take action on our behalf because those officials are all in a foreign country. I am interested in my hon. colleague's comments on that aspect.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, there are two points in law that I could point out today for the benefit of anyone listening.

First, it is a principle of natural justice that with any regulation that imposes a restriction on people or governs people in any way, there be an avenue of recourse, that there be a grievance procedure of some kind to allow people to file complaints or correct an error. It was clearly an error that got me on the do not fly list, but there is no avenue of recourse for me to file a grievance, correct the error and get myself off of it.

In this much more expansive and comprehensive treaty we are entering into, there are far more details we would want to study. First, people have a right to know if they are on that list. Second, they have a right to know how they got on that list and by what qualifications, et cetera. Third, in any sense of fairness and natural justice, they need to have an avenue of recourse.

The second point in law is that a person can be presumed to have intended the probable consequences of his or her actions. We have to be aware of that as we go forward with the bill. People could be presumed to have intended the probable consequences of their actions with this bill and that is the erosion of the right to privacy of Canadians. They are educated and know better.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member and I have worked together quite a bit on a few issues. One issue he has raised, and I have also raised it often, is the whole issue of legislation including a requirement to have regulations or subsequent information, which Parliament never sees after a bill has gone through the entire legislative process.

The point the member raises is that the disclosure requirements in this bill should have been fully negotiated, in my view, in advance. They are still in process and we will not know the final answer. It really makes it very difficult for parliamentarians to do a thorough job and make an informed assessment about whether there are in fact privacy breaches.

Based on what the Privacy Commissioner knows at this time, she has not concluded there are breaches. It does not mean that there may not be. The member has a point and I give him an opportunity to comment.

● (1645)

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, it is shocking. In most legislation it is true that the devil is in the details and they are often in regulations put into effect after we are finished debating a bill in the House of Commons. In this case, a worse situation exists.

Article 5 of the European Union-United States deal is that the United States may unilaterally amend the agreement as long as it advises the European Union of the change. This has happened once already. Not only would we be buying a pig in a poke and we are not satisfied with the current terms and conditions, but the U.S. can

unilaterally and arbitrarily amend the agreement just by notifying us. Yet the inverse is not true.

The other party to this so-called agreement may not unilaterally amend the agreement, only the United States can. What crack group of chimpanzees did we send there to negotiate this agreement. We should put a bag on—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise on behalf of not only the New Democratic Party but the people of Timmins—James Bay and speak to Bill C-42.

Under Bill C-42, the Conservative Party has decided to allow the private information of Canadian citizens who fly to the Dominican Republic or Cuba, not even entering the United States, to be given to U.S. Homeland Security. This information includes credit card information, personal information and who a person is flying with and it is without even telling the people about it. Homeland Security will then make the decision whether those Canadians will be allowed to board their flights.

This is a very disturbing bill, but it speaks to a deeper issue. When I go home to Timmins—James Bay, people tell me that Ottawa is broken. They tell me that the politics of Ottawa favours the insiders, the bagmen, the senators and the pals of the ruling party. They wonder how the government could be so out of touch with the needs of average Canadians.

So the people back home know, when they travel with family and friends to the Dominican Republic, their government has never bothered to tell them that it will take their private information and give it away.

If the Conservative government was an honest government, and we know “honest” and “Tory” does not really fit in the same sentence, it would go back to the Canadian people and tell them that part of the deal is to sell out their privacy because it thinks there is a greater good. That would be a discussion we could have at the Tim Hortons or with our church groups, but the Conservative government does not do that. It is trying to force this bill through, shouting about national security and the war on terror.

Government Orders

Let us go back to where the war on terror started. It was not hosers in flip-flops and tank tops with lobster-red skin coming home from Cuba in March who decided they would take a plane and fly it into the towers. It was not Canadians from Mississauga or Red Deer who decided they were going to attack our number one trading partner and the people of the United States. The Canadian people were there on 9-11 helping the American and international flights by allowing them to enter Canadian airspace so those people could be looked after. We were an ally, as we have always been.

Who started the so-called war on terror? They were people who were invited into the United States, who were vetted by the United States government, who bordered domestic flights and took control of those flights and caused that horrific day of tragedy.

Yet there is no attempt by Homeland Security to get the information of people on domestic flights in the United States where this terrible act of terror happened. It is asking the Canadian government, the Conservative Party, to do that. To be fair, I am sure our trading partners have sized those guys up from the get-go. They figure they will get what they ask for, because on the so-called war on terror, we are all supposed to give up something.

We have given up all manner of rights and privacy to stop this so-called war on terror. We have seen 85 year-old ladies at the airport getting manhandled or six year-old kids getting patted down and we have been told that this is important, that these basic rights have to be suspended.

The rule of law is based on the right of people to confront their accusers. It is based on the fundamental right of privacy of a person. These rights are given away in the bill.

We need to look at history and other places where there has been a war on terror. Think of England in the 1970s with the terrible bombing campaign by the IRA. It was considered okay to suspend massive civil liberties then. What happened? Poor Mrs. Maguire, her four children and their relatives were dragged off to prison for 113 years because the government of the day cowed the opposition into saying that civil rights, basic rights of privacy had no place in a so-called war on terror. We have to do better. We have to talk about this bill and we have to go to the public.

• (1650)

It brings me to the second point of my conversation today which is the hypocrisy of the government. The Conservatives said they would do things differently. They said they would clean up the Senate. What did they do with the Senate? They filled it with party hacks and fundraisers.

The Conservatives tell Canadians they are tough on crime and yet two of those senators, bagman Gerstein and campaign manager Finley, are now up on charges. Two senators whose basic job is to raise money and work for the Conservative Party on the public dime are now being charged. What is the government's position on criminal charges brought against two Tory bagmen senators is that it is an administrative error. It is the hypocrisy of this.

The old Reformers back home must be rolling over that the government which said when it came into power that it would clean things up is not only as cynical and rotten as the previous government, and that is saying something, but that it has filled the

Senate with people who are under criminal charges and it is letting them stay there and continue to work on the public dime.

We see the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party. This is the government that said it would stand up for Canada. What did it do? The Conservatives went to the U.S. and negotiated a bill. It is important for people to know what is in the bill, because it is a government that will run attack ads, smear people and trash their reputations and go on about fictitious iPod taxes, but it does not have the guts to run radio ads in anybody's riding saying, "We are taking your personal private information and we are giving it to the United States". That is what happens when people vote for a Conservative government. It does not tell people that. It is running with smoke and mirrors and all kinds of side issues, any hot button it can find to get people back at the Tim Hortons riled up.

It should rile people at Tim Hortons that the government goes to the U.S. and agrees that the information on the passenger name record set up with the travel agent, which includes people's credit card information, where they are staying, who they are travelling with and all the booking information, can be given to another country to keep, and it could be traded with any other country. People do not even have to go to a country. They could be just flying over it. The Conservatives would sell that information and not have the decency or the honesty to tell the people of Canada that this is what they are doing.

It is within this agreement that no person may know what information is being held by the United States and he or she is not in a position to correct that information. It is like Kafka gets caught up with the bullies and the fundamental issue of rule of law is the ability to challenge the accusations. We know from the war on terror that is not what happened. We saw what happened to Mr. Arar, how he was pulled out, thanks to our allies in the United States, sent overseas and tortured, and how hard it was to clear his name. Even with his name cleared, he cannot be taken off the so-called no-fly list, this black hole list, as my colleague from Winnipeg Centre said, that people are put on.

What do we need to do? Number one, we need to get rid of the Tories. That is a reasonable solution. We have to get rid of them because they do not represent Canadians. They do not represent what is good, so let us get rid of them.

Government Orders

Number two, we need to look at legislation and read the fine print. We see in bill after bill it is a government that stands up and shouts at opposition members and tries to bully them, and it is pretty successful usually with the Liberals. The Conservatives bully opposition members and tell them not to read the fine print, but just sign. If the opposition members do not sign, they are enemies of the state, they are soft on crime, they are some kind of pinko pervert. The Conservatives will throw whatever they can.

However, our fundamental job in the House is to read the fine print so we can go back to our constituents and tell them that in the bill, the government that told them it would stand up for them has taken their personal information, their basic right to privacy and given it away. They do not even have to ever travel to the United States, but they might be flying over it some day, maybe on a flight from Winnipeg to Toronto. They might be within their own country and that information could be traded away. It allows foreign countries access to Canadians' privacy for data mining. It is highly problematic.

What do we need to do in order to have a proper bill for safety? We need to work together to ensure that we have bills that protect the best interests of our citizens and not simply sell out to the lowest common bidder.

I will be more than pleased to take any questions or comments as this is a fundamentally important element to the democratic process

•(1655)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, as ever, my hon. colleague is cogent, down to earth and speaks the plain truth on behalf of the citizens that he represents so well. I consider it a privilege to share the House with him.

A number of members who have spoken to this bill today have raised the concern about the violation of our basic rights in this country. What needs to be stated even more strongly is that these are entrenched constitutional rights. They are in the Constitution. This is not just some kind of folksy platform idea that maybe we have basic rights and opportunities in this country, the right to mobility, the right of security of the person, the right to have the principle of fundamental justice and due process applied to citizens.

I wonder if the member would like to speak about what direction this bill is taking us in and whether it is an underhanded way of trying to undo our basic constitutional rights.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague has raised a very important point. We are talking about something fundamentally profound to a functioning democratic society, which is that the constitutional rights guaranteed to citizens cannot be arbitrarily taken away.

We have seen how the government will break whatever rule, rip up whatever agreement and break any law it can get away with, but the fundamental constitutional rights of individual citizens cannot be compromised. This bill has arbitrarily compromised it.

I am very concerned because the government refuses to even tell Canadians. It is trying to bully the opposition into allowing this. Once these fundamental constitutional rights of people are broken, then we can no longer say that those rights exist.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, there was some excellent testimony at committee about this bill and I want to make sure the voices are heard in this debate.

Dr. Mark Salter, a professor at the University of Ottawa, stated:

Governments want this information so that they can build profiles of not just risky passengers but safe passengers as well. Research clearly demonstrates that in the United States and the U.K., government agencies are trying to collect as much data about travellers as possible.

He went on to say:

—I think it is dangerous to sacrifice our privacy and our freedoms for the dream of zero risk or perfect security. This particular measure—

Speaking about Bill C-42:

—does not provide additional security for the aviation sector, and it places an additional burden on Canadian citizens who are flying...

Canadians' data should not be hostage to the most paranoid regime that an air company chooses to fly over. The proposed change to these data protection regulations to include overflight states dramatically increases the vulnerability of Canadians' data while offering no means of redress or appeal.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague can comment on the situation where experts testify before the transport and public safety committees that roundly condemn this bill from stem to stern and yet the government does not pay any attention to that expert evidence and plows ahead.

•(1700)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, it is fairly straightforward. When we talk about data being held hostage by a paranoid regime, we are describing the Conservative Party. It attacked the long form census first claiming it had thousands of emails and then it was hundreds. Then it said there are a few people somewhere who think there are black helicopters in the sky spying on us, which might be the Conservative base, and that as long as one person in Canada has any kind of privacy concern, it will strip away an internationally recognized census and planning bureau, which it did. Yet with this bill, it trades away all Canadians' right of privacy and basic constitutional rights for a dime. In fact, not even a dime, it will do it for free.

When we talk about paranoid regimes playing hostage with our data, voila, the Conservative Party of Canada.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I must admit that I rise with some concern having to follow the eloquence and passion of the member for Winnipeg Centre and now the member for Timmins—James Bay. They are always a little intimidating to follow because of their eloquence and oratorical skills, quite frankly.

The member for Timmins—James Bay is suggesting intelligence, and I am going to take issue with him on that, not with regard to the member for Winnipeg Centre but for the member for Timmins—James Bay. The eloquence and oratorical skills are clearly there, which are skills that are sorely lacking in the House in many ways.

Government Orders

This is the second time this week I have spoken to this bill. I spoke yesterday on the same bill, but at that time I was specifically speaking to the contents of the bill. I will come back to that in a few minutes, but I want to address some comments on the reason I am allowed to speak the second time, as have so many of my caucus members, which we would not have been allowed to do according to the rules of the House but for a typical bullying manoeuvre by the government. What it did was this. Late yesterday afternoon it brought a motion to the House, which certainly is within its rights to do, which had in effect the purpose of shortening debate on the bill. That was moved yesterday by the House leader, but what that did was re-open the debate.

We are allowed not only to speak against why debate should be continued. We are also allowed to explain the significance and importance of Bill C-42 to the Canadian people and their basic rights which are fundamental to the democracy that is Canada. Quite frankly, it is ironic. Had the Conservatives not brought that motion, the debate probably would have ended sooner simply because we would have run out of time in terms of the number of speakers we had who wanted to speak to this.

I want to make the point very clearly that our caucus is utterly opposed to this bill because of the breaches of privacy and also because of fundamental rights that will be affected very negatively by this law if previous patterns in the United States follow. Our caucus is absolutely opposed to the bill. A large number of caucus members have insisted on being given their opportunity to speak to the bill to express the reasons why they and their constituents are opposed to it.

To some extent, I have to thank the Conservatives for giving us this opportunity to speak more. Yesterday I was limited to 10 minutes, with five minutes of questions and comments. I am getting a second chance because our time for the 20 minute speeches had lapsed.

This is a criticism of both the government and the Liberal official opposition. Both parties have stood in the House at various times, both at second reading and again at third reading, and argued that we had to pass this because it was being demanded by the United States. This is particularly true of the Liberals but also of the Conservatives, that they have tried to somehow rationalize their support for the bill on the basis that we know there is potential for problems. Both sides of the House, the government party and the official opposition, have, in their more honest moments, admitted that. There is real potential for abuse to the Canadian citizenry. We hear repeatedly the line, "We will take care of that down the road". That is grossly irresponsible on the part of any parliamentarian. We are talking about basic privacy rights and also the high risk to other fundamental rights, human rights and civil liberties.

● (1705)

There is no reason to believe that it will not happen given the history of the U.S. no-fly list and the way the Americans have abused both their own citizenry and some of ours in the past. There is no reason to believe that it will not occur again.

What is happening here, if this bill goes ahead, is we are exposing many more thousands of Canadian citizens and residents to their

names ending up on that no-fly list and the process being used against them.

One of the real problems with this legislation is the regime in the United States that deals with the no-fly list. We know, and this came up at committee repeatedly, that the no-fly list in the United States is full of errors. We always hear of the reality of the now deceased Ted Kennedy's name being on it. The former interim leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, Bill Graham, was on the no-fly list. We have heard from my colleague from Winnipeg Centre that he is on the list.

The point being is that it is obvious that those people do not pose, in any way, a threat to the United States, and certainly are not a terrorist threat. In many other ways they may pose a threat to some of the policies of the United States, but that is okay in a democracy. People are allowed to have that voice.

The problem is people like that, and many more, get their names on the no-fly list and there is essentially no way of getting their name off. There is no way for it to happen. For the average person, the process does not exist. If those names came off the list, if Mr. Graham's name came off, or if Mr. Kennedy's came off, it was because there was some political person somewhere who said that it was really dumb and that maybe those names should be taken off, and then some official somewhere was directed to get their names off the list. We have no idea how that happens.

As I said in my speech yesterday, I have been working for the better part of a year on behalf of a prominent citizen in the Windsor area. It is going to be extremely damaging if it ever comes out that his name is on that list. I can say with absolute honesty and frankness that I have tried every single angle, including political routes, and have had no luck in getting his name off the list. We cannot even figure out who is ultimately going to be able to do that.

We have had other cases. The member for Vancouver East had one three, four or five years ago. It was for someone who was from Ontario, but who was on the west coast. It dealt with flying into the United States on business and then flying home. When this person gets to the airport in Vancouver, he is told, "Sorry, you're not allowed on the plane. Your name is on the list". There was no explanation as to which list it was at that time. We subsequently learned, quite frankly from information from one of the clerks at the desk, that it was the U.S. no-fly list.

He has not been able to get his name off this list. So any flights that he takes now in Canada, he has to be sure that he is not in any way going through U.S. airspace because he will not be allowed on the plane.

It is a system that is rife with abuse. It is a system that is also grossly inefficient. It does not work. That is the bottom line. Yet, we are being told here, both by the Conservatives and the Liberals, "You have to vote for this because our American neighbours who we all know are great negotiators are saying that is the only way we are going to allow you to fly through our airspace".

It is interesting in that regard. That threat has been outstanding. It was supposed to be in effect at the end of December, if this bill did not go through, and all flights flying through U.S. airspace would be cut off. Here we are at March 1 and our planes are still flying.

Government Orders

We have to continue to call the Americans' bluff and say that we are not going to do this, that if they clean up their list and implement some meaningful protections within that system, so that people whose names get on the list erroneously can get them off in an efficient, quick way, then we will negotiate with them as to whether we are going to allow this information. But before that, this bill should be voted down.

● (1710)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his presentation today on the bill.

We have been listening for at least two days now to speeches and presentations on this bill and we have yet to hear from any government members. If we were able to hear from government members, we could at least ask questions of members of the government who have negotiated this deal and who are bringing it in. However, we are left asking questions basically of ourselves. We are not getting any answers from any of the Liberals or the Bloc members, who have simply rolled over and followed the Conservatives on this issue.

Speaker after speaker for our party have listed all the problems with this negotiation. There is no reciprocity. There is no attempt to even get reciprocity on the issue. That would have slowed down the process a lot. It would have got us probably a better deal. We got an exemption, but in a way the exemption simply defeats the purpose of the bill. We are flying point to point in Canada, for example, Toronto to Winnipeg or Toronto to Vancouver, and we are flying over American airspace, we are flying right over all those sensitive installations, buildings and big cities that they are worried about, and it does not seem to be a problem. It is only if we are flying to another country over U.S. airspace that we have to give this information. So, there are a lot of questions here that are really unanswered.

In terms of PNR issues, we have best practices with agreements with other countries that we follow. They could have taken that wording and used it in this deal. They did not do that. Hence, the very poor approach at negotiating here.

This is a really bad deal. I think the Liberals should smarten up; the Bloc should smarten up. They should pull back a bit and start asking more questions. We should renegotiate the whole thing because the flights that were supposed to stop on December 31 have not.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, one of the other questions, if I can add to the list, is, why do we not have a clear, in writing, binding agreement that says if this information is going to be shared, it is not to be shared with anybody other than the United States?

At committee, we saw some of the examples of the abuse. We have situations where we are passing on information as to where we are travelling, what hotels we are staying at, what tours we are taking. There are all sorts of information where corrupt or anti-democratic governments are quite prepared to use violence against their citizenry to use that information to track if we are having meetings. Let me use Colombia as an example. If I am going to Colombia to meet with some of the labour movements there who are generally targeted by that government and by the paramilitaries, and that information is passed on to the government, it certainly can be leaked and often is leaked to the paramilitaries. So, the people I am

meeting with are now in danger. I could go on with any number of other examples.

So that, again, is a pre-condition. If we are going to share this information with our closest ally, our closest ally has to absolutely guarantee, with no exemptions, that this information stays in this country, within its services, and is not passed on to other countries.

● (1715)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Roch Tassé, from the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, described it this way:

After running a risk assessment for each passenger using data mining technology, Homeland Security in turn issues a boarding pass result back to the airline. The result instructs the airline to issue a boarding pass, deny permission to travel, or issue an enhanced screening requirement. These regulations give the U.S. access to a whole subset of information on air passengers who are not entering the U.S. but merely overflying its airspace. Furthermore, this information can be shared among at least 16 U.S. agencies and with foreign governments. The program gives the government of a foreign country a de facto right to decide who gets to travel to and from Canada,—

Now, I ask my hon. colleague to tell us, is this really what Canadians want? Do they want, when they decide to fly to Mexico or Latin America, a foreign government determining whether or not they get issued a boarding pass and determining whether they can fly?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has less than 30 seconds.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I will answer quickly.

No, that is not what Canadians expect. They expect their rights to be protected, their privacy to be protected, and their ability to move around the globe in a safe fashion to also be protected; none of which is guaranteed in this legislation at all.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleagues in opposition to Bill C-42. It is clearly an important bill when we look at what is at stake.

There used to be a solid core of supporters and even members within the Conservative Party who prided themselves on the issue of privacy protection. That seems to have been lost recently. It has been pawed off at times, and I give the example of the bizarre and unusual case of the census conundrum.

The government has said that it wants to make sure that the privacy of citizens is protected. It has said that citizens should not feel obligated to tell the government how many bathrooms they have in their domain and other personal information. When asked how many people had actually complained about this, the government said one was enough. We are still not sure who that one person is. Some people think it might have been someone in the minister's backyard.

Government Orders

The point is this is not about the census and people know that. We in this Parliament are bound by the provisions for protection. We have the oversight. The problem with this bill is that we would be handing over Canadians' right to privacy to another government.

The government has talked about not being able to pony up the money for the database for the collection of this information. Not only will information be handed over to another government but that information will be held by that government and we will not be able to get to it.

I really want to underline the importance of the intervention made by my colleague from Windsor. I have had case after case right here in the nation's capital involving people who have been denied entry into the United States. When our government is asked what can be done, we are pointed to homeland security in the United States.

I do not know if the same situation exists in Saskatchewan, but I do know that people right across this country have been faced with it. If a constituent is on a no-fly list, his or her member of Parliament will probably talk to the minister or someone in his department. They are told that this is something that the department cannot handle. This is under the oversight of homeland security in the United States. After a very long route through voice mail, we can bring forward the case but that is the end of it. We will not be heard again.

Right now we have problems with regard to Canadians being able to freely travel abroad, particularly south of the border, and we have not figured that out yet. The government has been very silent on this during this debate. The government is going to oblige the United States when asked for this information, but we have not even figured out how to get someone's name off a no-fly list.

Constituents are scratching their heads and wondering why they cannot cross the border into the United States. They cannot figure out a way to get their name off the no-fly list. The government is about to open this up even further by sharing data through Bill C-42. It does not make sense.

Where is the consistency within the Conservative Party that used to stand up for privacy? This is not about the census. This is not about how many bathrooms there are in somebody's house. This is about a person's ability to travel abroad without the fear of being put on a no-fly list or without the sharing of personal information. That is what we are talking about here. We are talking about providing credit card information. We are talking about providing the date of birth of a Canadian citizen.

● (1720)

This reminds me of the debate in the House on Bill C-31 to reform the Canada Elections Act, when Liberals and the Bloc wanted to support an amendment to that bill and to streamline electoral practices by putting birth dates on the list.

Members may remember this. There was a strong debate in committee. I asked Ms. Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner, to come before committee to get her opinion on whether she thought having birth date information on an electoral list was a good idea. At the time I was not supported by the Liberals, Conservatives and the Bloc, who said that we had already heard from Ms. Stoddart. The problem was we had heard from Ms. Stoddart before the amendment was put forward.

I wrote to Ms. Stoddart and asked her opinion, as Privacy Commissioner, about having one's birth date on the electoral list.

Mr. Speaker, you will know, having been in a couple of campaigns, that the electoral list is shared widely. To have that kind of private information, with people's dates of birth, on a list that is circulated so widely is asking for trouble. Allowing others to take people's information from the electoral list to apply for a credit card or to do the other things that data miners do opens up many doors.

At the time, Ms. Stoddart got back to me and the House and said she had grave concerns about this compromising Canadians' privacy. Eventually, thankfully, that bill was dropped, but it was about to go through the House. It is the NDP Party that stood against that flagrant abuse of Canadians' privacy.

Again, I go back to the Conservatives and ask what happened. They used to be the ones who talked about protecting privacy. Now it is only about whether people have to say how many bathrooms they have in their homes. That is the line in the sand now.

What about when someone travels abroad? What about when someone's data is collected and captured by another country? Does that not matter any more to the Conservatives? Is it simply a matter of shrugging and saying this is the way we do things now? I want to underline that because this is a government bill.

To my friends in the Bloc and the Liberal Party, reviewing things after five years is not going to do what is needed, or even within two years or a year. If it is bad legislation now, do not pass it. When they vote for this bill, they are blessing this process. It is too late a year later, when a constituent asks how his or her information got into a database in the United States, to say we were told that it would not happen, that we trusted this would be a process our officials would keep their eye on. That is not good enough.

Today opposition members have an opportunity to say no to this bill. It is not about saying we do not want to negotiate with our friends south of the border. It is in fact saying that we should negotiate with our friends south of the border, which we did not do.

I am surprised that both the Liberals and the Bloc have decided this bill is okay. I say this because I know many of them and know that their constituents will be concerned about privacy. I am sure many of their constituents have been on the no-fly list and have not been able to get their names off it. I am sure many members have had to deal with those cases.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

●(1730)

[English]

NATIONAL TREE DAY

The House resumed from November 24 consideration of the motion and the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has five minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today in response to the motion by the member for Ottawa—Orléans.

I listened to the member's last go-round on November 24 last year. I know the mover of the motion, the member for Ottawa—Orléans, has done a lot of work on this motion. He made a very impassioned speech last go-round about his involvement in the issue.

He pointed out correctly that the forest products industry is a major generator of employment in Canada, that it is responsible, both directly and indirectly, for over 600,000 jobs in Canada. It has annual revenues of over \$50 billion. It actually represents 2% of the GDP of the country. The member points out that Canada is the largest, most successful forest products exporting nation in the world.

Over the course of his remarks, the member also talked about his involvement in planting trees, his family's history of planting, and that of his son.

I talked about the situation we have in Manitoba right now with our boreal forest and the argument about whether the Bipole III power lines should go down the east side of the Manitoba lakes or not. I pointed out that it was his provincial party, the opposition in Manitoba, that was favouring this move to run the power line down the east side of the area. The Manitoba government is trying to turn the area into a preserve.

The member said he would check with Dorothy Dobbie, whom we both know. I have known Dorothy for many years. I actually know her husband and her kids. She, too, is quite involved in forestry and gardening issues in Manitoba, and certainly on a national stage as well.

I do applaud him because for many years we have had a very poor attitude towards natural resources in this country, but I am not going to say all over the world, because we have much evidence of the Europeans and Scandinavian countries back in the 1970s having a very positive attitude toward reforestation. People could not clear-cut over there. Trees had to be replaced as they were harvested. Every tree harvested had to be replaced.

We were not doing that here. As a matter of fact, we were just finding out this last week that the Ontario government and other governments were spraying Agent Orange through the forests of northern Ontario. Now the young workers who are were standing there getting the spray on them when they were teenagers are in their 50s and developing cancers and other health problems tied to this Agent Orange problem.

At the end of the day, I return to the issue of whether this is a good deal for Canadians. I say it is not: it puts our privacy in peril. If that is the case, then we as New Democrats say no to this bill. We need a better deal and we say no to Bill C-42.

●(1725)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to read something that was said by the leader of the official opposition earlier this month. He stated:

Mr. Speaker, a perimeter security deal that has harmonization of entry and exit standards will confer on the U.S. government unprecedented amounts of information about Canadians. I do not think the Prime Minister is being straight with Canadians about this issue. The deal would impose U.S. homeland security standards on this side of the border.

Why is the Prime Minister even contemplating the surrender of Canadian privacy rights to U.S. homeland security?

The leader of the official opposition appeared to suggest to Canadians that he cared about their privacy rights and stood against the surrender of Canadian privacy rights to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and yet we see the spectre of the Liberal Party of Canada preparing to vote in favour of this bill that would do exactly that.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague can comment on that horrendous act of hypocrisy.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I would join the Leader of the Opposition in my concern about the perimeter talks. One of the concerns we have is about the SPP. We have not seen anything come before Parliament. He is quite right to underline the concerns that Canadians have about that. We and other members of the opposition, the Bloc, share the same concerns.

The thing that is hard to understand is what we do know.

We do not know the details of the perimeter talks because the government has not brought forward details of what is being discussed and what is at stake. We hear things. We hear about energy being shipped south, about supplies that we have not been told about and at what cost. We hear about standards for border security, products, food, etc.

However, we do know about this bill. Hopefully, the Leader of the Opposition has read this bill or had someone advise him about it. Unlike the perimeter security deal, we know about this one, and this one is going to compromise Canadians' privacy. This is not abstract, but concrete. This will give up Canadians' privacy to our friends south of the border.

Therefore, I would tell my colleague from Vancouver that we really do want to encourage the Liberals to look at this. In all sincerity, if they are concerned about privacy and sovereignty, there is an easy choice: vote no to Bill C-42.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's business as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

That is certainly the attitude we had during those years. The forest companies had their tracts of land, and their attitude was that they were going to spray the trees. They would load up airplanes with Agent Orange, mix it all up and spray it to kill what they considered to be trees of inferior quality. I would hope that we would not do things like that today and not try to harvest the best trees in the forest at the lowest possible cost. That is the way we used to look at things.

I am really pleased that we are changing our minds, little by little. We owe it to the environmental movement that has pushed us along. I am really pleased to see there are Conservative MPs who are taking a real interest in this, because the Conservative Party has not historically been overly concerned about the environment relative to our party over here. They have been known as pro-development and in favour of mowing the forest down and worrying about it later.

Even Conservatives can change. I am not suggesting that the member opposite has made any changes, because I think he has been solid from day one on this particular issue. However, it has not been normal for me to see a lot of Conservatives really actively concerned. Maybe they were concerned, but they were not actively promoting these kinds of issues—

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. There being no further members rising, I will go to the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his five minute right of reply.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to conclude the debate on my motion to establish a National Tree Day.

[*English*]

For the people of Ottawa—Orléans, I thank them for the opportunity to serve them and to represent them in the Parliament of Canada. It is with their support that I am able to stand in this place, in their place, today to speak to this important motion.

The residents of Ottawa—Orléans are the beneficiaries of a rich natural history. Orléans was, and to a great degree remains, a deep farmland with old trees and a great natural presence. Though continued growth has made new development a recurring pattern, one can always witness vibrant urban forests, parks lands and, of course, trees.

It is such a pleasure to take the journey that brought us here today with Michael Rosen and the professional staff and dedicated volunteers of Tree Canada.

[*Translation*]

In the first hour of debate, I alluded to the support of Mr. Rosen's organization for Motion M-575. Tree Canada has continued to be most helpful, and I understand they have even sent letters—on recycled paper, of course—to each member of this House seeking their support also. I once again thank them for their work.

[*English*]

Every member of the House knows, and it is henceforth recorded in the history of this place, that Tree Canada provides a vital service to our country and to its people. They have had a role in planting and maintaining over 76 million trees.

[*Translation*]

This motion comes as a product of a vision. As I previously told the House, I plant a tree each year during National Forest Week. I have done that since my days as a Boy Scout. I have also planted some 52,000 trees outside this celebratory week, and my children have planted 23,000 trees so far.

[*English*]

We do not just talk about the environment. We actually look after our own carbon footprint, and we have done it for generations.

[*Translation*]

It is my hope that this motion will create a day where others will be inspired to acknowledge the importance of the tree and take the time to plant one, or many, of their own.

[*English*]

Tree day will be the only exclusive day to recognize one of Canada's greatest assets: its trees. As I mentioned before, the tree is a symbol of Canada's historic, economic and environmental success. Our friends to the south celebrate their Arbor Day and soon we will celebrate Canada's own national tree day.

[*Translation*]

By passing this motion, the House will ask Canadians to spend just one day reflecting on the link between their lives and that of the tree. Canadians will dedicate trees, plant trees, learn about trees and appreciate the historical impact the tree has had on Canada's economic success as a nation.

[*English*]

I understand that all parties in the House are fully aware of the importance of this motion and have extended their support. I thank them. It is then fruitless to continue encouraging them to support this motion when it seems that I have already laid a convincing case.

[*Translation*]

So, I will take just a few moments to thank some people who have helped this motion become a reality.

[*English*]

I thank the hon. members who have participated in this debate, my friend, the jovial member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, and the learned member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank the fiery member for Honoré-Mercier and the member for Trois-Rivières.

[*English*]

As well, I thank the member for Windsor West and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

I thank Craig Huff, the late manager of the city of Ottawa Forestry Services, his successor, David Barkley, the students of Good Shepherd Catholic School, the 1st Blackburn Scouts, 3rd Orléans, 4th Orléans, 8th Orléans and the 14th Gloucester.

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• (1740)

[*Translation*]

And the Scouts of 25th St. Gabriel, 31st St. Joseph, and 55th St. Marie.

Finally, I thank my own staff, Lynne Bernard, Amanda Iaruso, Rebecca Lee, Andrej Sakic, Gina Vilsaint, Amanda Weir and Colette Yelle.

[*English*]

I also thank my senior assistant, Kyle Simunovic, who keeps the trains running on time.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: The next question is on the main motion, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, as amended?

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 recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 2 at the beginning of private member's member.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask that you seek consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year we will be noting an incredible anniversary, the 120th year since the first arrival of Ukrainian Canadian pioneers on the shores of this great nation of ours, Canada.

As they arrived, they got on to trains and headed west to Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. In fact, Saskatchewan and Alberta

were not provinces at that time. They transformed what was the bush of the Northwest Territories and of Manitoba into the golden wheat fields of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

It is an incredible history of perseverance and nation building. In fact, I have said this in meetings out in western Canada. When we talk about the tremendous contribution those pioneers made in building Canada, the Ukrainian Canadian community, those hearty pioneers that began arriving in waves 120 years ago, are in fact one of the founding peoples of our great country.

There was a labour of love that was worked on and built in Edmonton. It is called the Ukrainian Canadian Archives & Museum of Alberta. It was first open to the public in 1974. It includes over 2,000 artifacts, 40,000 books, 5,000 photographs, 400 pieces of art, 300 maps and a collection of 320 newspaper titles from 17 countries, archival documents that tell a story of those pioneers.

I have had the incredible opportunity to look at some of those documents. I have read letters written by young women who arrived and had to basically burrow in crates to get through the harsh prairie winter that first year. They wrote back home and talked of how they had lost their children during that first winter and the hardships that they went through in those first years.

We have a beautiful outdoor architectural museum in Alberta, where we see those original thatched huts and some of the churches those pioneers built after establishing themselves. However, there is nothing that actually has wide public access which talks about and documents the story of what took place.

This is the role of the archives museum in Edmonton. People there have been waiting for years for the federal government to step forward. The municipal government of Edmonton and the provincial government each came forward with \$3 million. The community came forward with large amounts. The Chwyl Family Foundation put in \$750,000. They were looking for a contribution of \$6 million from the federal government to match the funds. In the fall, the government announced \$6.25 million in a press announcement, which everyone took at face value. That meant this archival museum would finally open and the documents would not be lost. It turns out that this included the provincial funding of \$3 million.

Why has the government not come forward with the funding required for this museum?

• (1745)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that museums have an important role to play in communities across the country, and that is why we have taken a number of steps that will strengthen our museums.

As was noted in the House last week, we created not one but two national museums during our mandate: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg and the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax. These are the first new national museums to be created in Canada in 40 years.

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Our support for museums does not end with the creation of these two new crown corporations. It has taken many forms and has been demonstrated through our actions. For instance, we have taken steps to stimulate more individual and corporate investment in our cultural institutions. In budgets 2006 and 2007, the government eliminated the capital gains tax for listed securities donated to charities, including museums. Museums report that these measures have stimulated new donations.

In budget 2007, we announced \$5 million in new funding for summer internships specifically targeted at small and medium museums. Budget 2009 committed an additional \$60 million in a two year fund through the Canada cultural spaces fund to support infrastructure related costs for local and community cultural and heritage institutions.

In April 2010, the government announced \$15 million in additional funding for this fiscal year to assist four national museums in meeting their operational costs during a difficult financial period.

Taken together, these measures represent a significant investment in museums across the country, and our support continues.

I would like to turn the House's attention specifically to the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum, the organization on which our hon. colleague's question is based. The federal government is a partner in this museum project. Recently, the Minister of State for Transport announced joint federal-provincial funding of \$6.25 million toward the relocation of the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum.

The Government of Canada is proud to support this important cultural infrastructure initiative that showcases the unique contributions of Ukrainian culture in our country's history. With this support, the museum will relocate to a new home that will allow for the improved display of its artifacts, permanent interpretive exhibit space and a library and archives as well.

Through sound investments in our museums, we are ensuring that Canadians will have access to our rich heritage today and in the future.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, the announcement was not enough.

The reason that this is so important was illustrated in literature put out by the member for Edmonton East which said that the present UCAM building does not provide the proper environment to house the extensive ethnographic or tribal and library collections of the museum. Without such an environment, there is a risk of damage to many unique artifacts that are an important part of Canadian cultural history. In fact, this past summer many documents were water damaged because they are improperly housed.

Why has the government shortchanged the commitment it made as far back as two years ago? Why is it not providing the full amount necessary to move this museum into the new facility that is there and waiting to be opened up to the public?

• (1750)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, national museums, including the new Canadian Museum for Human

Rights and Pier 21, are federal crown corporations established under the Museums Act.

Our government has created two new national museums in the term of our mandate, representing a significant capital and operational investment.

Major investments in non-federal museum building projects are made through the building Canada infrastructure program. There is no designation of status associated with such support, which is an important distinction to keep in mind.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow up on a question that I asked in the House some time ago. The question came about on the day that the food banks of Canada released their hunger count for 2010 showing that food bank usage in Canada was up 9%, which meant that over two years food bank usage was up by 28% overall. We are closing in on a million Canadians who use the food bank on a regular basis.

When I asked the question, I used a comparison because governments make choices. The comparison I used was that the government had very little interest or motivation to help those most in need. For example, it spent \$8,704 on a power cord for the G8 summit, as part of the billion dollar boondoggle for the meeting that happened in June of last year. Those are the kind of choices that offend and insult Canadians.

Poverty has been increasing. This was evidenced not only by the hunger count that came out last November, and which comes out ever year, but also by a report from the Citizens for Public Justice and their partners, World Vision, which showed that in the last two years poverty in Canada has been on a steady increase. In fact, poverty has gone up from around 9.5% to 12% and child poverty has gone up from 9.7% to 12%. These are startling figures. This means that many Canadians, our neighbours, people that we see, are not making it and they are not enjoying the wealth that is Canada. The tragedy is that they received no benefit from the stimulus package.

It is a double whammy for the poorest people, for those who are in poverty and for those who are near poverty because not only did they get no benefit from the stimulus, but we can be sure as shootin' guaranteed that they will be the ones who will be victimized by the cuts to pay for the Conservative mismanagement of the economy.

I will give another comparison and a particularly startling one. Yesterday we had a report about some 80 members of the government caucus doing a blitz on Canada's economic action plan. This was a \$6.5 million media campaign, paid for by the taxpayer, to promote the action plan on radio and TV. This was \$6.5 million in a very short period of time to promote an action plan that was totally out of action but it could not find \$7 million to fund KAIROS over five years. These are the kinds of things that offend Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

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KAIROS is made up of Canada's leading church organizations, supported by radicals like Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Mennonites and Evangelical Fellowship. It is ridiculous that the Conservatives make these choices and do nothing for those most in need but can at the same time spend money on those things that benefit them. That is not a good deal for Canadians and it does nothing for those who are the poorest. I would suggest that it is unconscionable and offensive.

My colleague who will answer this question is on the human resources committee. We have just completed a major study on poverty. We know the things we need to do to reduce poverty. We need to invest in early learning and child care in order to give every child an opportunity to learn. We need to invest in programs that will give people the opportunity to go on to post-secondary education.

However, whenever we raise these questions, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development insults Canadians by suggesting that any plan that calls for early learning and child care forces Canadians to have other people raise their children, ignoring the fact that some 70% of Canadians are two income families. She insults Canadians on the issue of employment insurance as well.

There is a growing movement in this country of people who are interested in fighting poverty. It includes everybody from faith groups to business organizations to labour organizations to provincial governments, six of which already have anti-poverty plans. What it does not include is the federal Government of Canada which has refused to have an anti-poverty plan and which told the United Nations, when it told Canada specifically that it should have an anti-poverty plan, no, that it was not its problem.

There are people who are falling behind, people who are way behind and people who need help. I think Canadians, by and large, want to help those who need assistance, and instead the government turns a blind eye. We need to have some assistance for those living in poverty and the government is standing by and doing nothing.

• (1755)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this important issue.

I hear some of the things the member has been saying with respect to poverty and that is why we have taken a significant number of steps to address this issue. There are a number of projects across the country, over 22,000, creating jobs. Our Conservative government believes that the best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working and, thanks to the actions we have taken, that is exactly what is happening. In fact, since July 2009 we have created over 460,000 new jobs. In fact, 260,000 initial jobs were saved through job sharing. If the member and his party had their way, there would be a loss of 400,000 jobs.

We have made unprecedented investments in skills training which last year alone helped over 1.2 million Canadians transition to new jobs. We have introduced the working income tax benefit to make work pay for Canadians. We are trying to get over the welfare wall. In the first year alone, one million low-income Canadians benefited. In fact, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour himself praised the government for introducing the working income tax benefit. We

have introduced historic registered disability savings plans to help Canadians save for the long term financial security of a child with a disability. We continue to pursue our low tax plans so that Canadians have more money in their pockets to spend on what is important to them and their families. We have improved social transfers to the provinces so they now have access to predictable and growing funding.

Those are just a few examples. Time does not permit going through the long list of initiatives we have taken and introduced to help low-income Canadians and their families.

Our record is one of action, whereas the Liberals' record is one of empty talk and failure. They had 13 years to do it and failed to do anything or address any of the issues that the member raises. They are best known for their decision to slash social transfers to the provinces by a whopping \$25 billion. That meant drastically less funding for health care, post-secondary education and programs to help low-income Canadians. What does the member have to say to that?

The Liberal member for Markham—Unionville admitted that these cuts had a devastating impact. He said:

I think, in hindsight, the Chretien government—even though I'm a Liberal—cut perhaps too deeply, too much offloading, with the benefit of hindsight. And there were some negative effects

Of course there were.

The Liberal finance critic, the member for Kings—Hants, echoed the sentiment when he said that the Liberal government made the wrong choices and slashed transfers to provinces. He went on to say, “The provinces are still scrambling to catch up on the lost Martin years of inadequate funding”.

Now the self-proclaimed tax-and-spend Liberal leader is pursuing a campaign to raise taxes on Canadians and job creators. Independent experts have stated that the Liberal plan will kill an estimated 400,000 jobs. This is not the way to proceed.

I will quote the Liberal member for Kings—Hants, who very nicely summed up the devastating impact the Liberal tax hike plan would have on low-income Canadians. He stated:

—we cannot increase corporate taxes without losing corporate investment. If we lose corporate investment, we have a less productive economy. That means lower paying jobs. That means fewer jobs. That means more poverty.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour should listen to his finance critic and abandon the Liberal plan to raise taxes. He should speak to his leader. He should instead support our government's plans that are getting Canadians working and putting more money into the pockets of Canadians so they can address the issue of poverty. He should get behind these plans and convince his leader to drop his plan to hike taxes that would cost an estimated 400,000 jobs.

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Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, the hallmark of Liberal governments is that we clean up Conservative messes and turn them around. In fact, it was under the Liberals that poverty was reduced very significantly from the mid to late 1990s to the point that it had gone down to 9.5% both for child poverty and for poverty. Now it is back up to 12%. That is the legacy of this government so far. It has absolutely no concern for those Canadians most in need.

Every organization that has looked at this knows this. We can name them: Campaign 2000, Citizens for Public Justice, Make Poverty History, Canada Without Poverty. In my own area there are the Faces of Poverty, the housing coalitions, the people who are working at the ground level on poverty. They know what we need. Not one of them would say that what we need to do is further reduce corporate taxes when corporate taxes are already 25% below the United States. They would say that we should invest in people, in families, in early learning and in helping our parents when they are aging. They would say that, for heaven's sake, we should at the very least stand up as a responsible government in a country as traditionally generous as Canada and accept that as the federal government we have a responsibility to help those most in need.

People just need help. We will figure out those details. There are all kinds of things the government can do but it needs to stand up and do something for the people in Canada who need help. That is what they deserve.

• (1800)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine the hon. member saying that when he knows the record is that in the 1990s the Liberals slashed \$25 billion in provincial transfers that affected health care, education and programs for low income Canadians. They took \$50 billion from the EI fund and used it for their own pet political projects.

He says that we should be doing something for those who find themselves with low incomes. In fact, we have invested funds in that. We have made sure that transfers are not cut to the provinces. It is interesting that the Liberals had 13 years to do something about that and they did not.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour himself admitted the Liberals failed to help low income Canadians. He stated, “We didn't get to where we need to get”. His Liberal colleague from York Centre agreed, and when speaking about the Liberal record on poverty stated, “We didn't do as well as we would have wanted to do”. In fact, they did not get it done in 13 years. It was always if they might have done it, had they had another term. The fact is they did not do it.

The provinces are just now starting to recover from the infrastructure losses they experienced because of the cut in transfer payments.

HARMONIZED SALES TAX

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to raise a question put to the Minister of Finance. The question was put on November 1, 2 and 4. Why did I raise this question three times? I raised it three times and am raising it again today because I have been hearing complaints from my

constituents that the government has chosen to impose the HST on the citizens of Alberta. That is taxation without representation.

The government claims that it is the party of the people, that of grassroots democracy. Yet not one single member of Parliament in the Conservative Party across the way has stood to defend Albertans against the imposition of this unfair tax on which they have not even been consulted.

I took the time today to again contact the office of the former minister of finance of Alberta. Why is that? I did it because apparently the former minister of finance of Alberta, a Conservative member of the Alberta legislature, had continually written to the government, demanding an answer to why the HST was being imposed on the residents of Alberta. His office advised me that just before he stepped down from that position, there had still been no reply from the government as to why it had allowed the imposition of the HST on the citizens of Alberta when there has not been one iota of consultation with them.

I previously raised examples in the House of where this tax was being imposed. I heard from Greenwoods' Bookshoppe in my riding, which was absolutely outraged to discover that it was being forced to pay HST when shipping unsold books back to Ontario. The Minister of Finance suggested to me that nothing had changed. Yet in going through its invoices, it was very clear that previously the company only paid the GST and is now having to pay a greater fee because it is paying the HST. Essentially, the federal government is being a broker in allowing Ontario to tax Albertans when there is no specific benefit to Albertans from the imposition of this tax.

This was a huge issue in British Columbia. The premier of British Columbia fell from his position because of the imposition of the HST. There was great consternation. People spoke against it. In Alberta it did not occur to anybody to speak against the HST because there was no thought that the tax was going to be imposed there. Albertans are very proud of the fact that they do not have a sales tax. A lot of Albertans have woken up to realize that the federal government has nefariously worked out a deal with Ontario to impose the HST on Albertans.

I want to share with the House an email that I received yesterday from a constituent who said: “I hope you folks can continue the pressure for a change of application of the HST. It really upsets those of us in non-HST provinces, particularly Alberta, to find we are paying HST on some of the most expensive items in our family budget, investments and insurance”.

I might add that the government, in its wisdom, has now backtracked on its undertaking that it would consider increases in the CPP and, instead, wants to invent yet another private investment scheme. Albertans can look forward to paying HST on that plan as well.

This person further said: “I know there are other retailers who charge HST simply because they are headquartered in Toronto. Is it not asking too much that the federal tax laws be changed so that tax be applied to anything of the province of residence, not the province of the headquarters? In the age of computers, this is so simple. Why has this not been changed by now? What was an oversight is now a ripoff benefiting Ontario primarily”.

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I stand in the House again to raise this question on behalf of the people of Alberta. Why on earth is the Government of Canada allowing the imposition of the HST in Alberta?

• (1805)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate having the opportunity to respond to the NDP on this question.

First, we need to be clear, very clear, that provincial taxes are a provincial responsibility. That includes decisions about harmonized sales taxes. As former premier of Ontario and the current Liberal MP for Toronto Centre recently remarked, “It’s up to the provinces to decide whether they want to proceed with a harmonized tax. It’s a decision for them, not us”.

Provinces have full independence to make decisions on sales tax matters. These are exclusive decisions of provincial governments, not the federal government. Recently, certain provincial governments made changes to their provincial tax system. A couple of them decided to replace their sales tax system with another.

The recently elected NDP Nova Scotia government decided to increase its sales tax. As the *Chronicle Herald* reported last year: “Nova Scotia sales tax is going up to 15% in July. The increase of two percentage points in the harmonized sales tax in the NDP’s first full year budget breaks Premier Darrell Dexter’s campaign promise that the NDP wouldn’t raise taxes”.

I would add the NDP tax hike in Nova Scotia is an important lesson for any Canadian looking at the NDP here in Ottawa.

Again, these were all provincial decisions, not federal decisions. There was no revenue impact at the federal level.

Nevertheless, as a result of recent provincial decisions, questions have come up in provinces, like Alberta, about changes in cost on mail and courier services. Again, nothing has changed at the federal level. For mail and courier services, sales tax has always been applied on the basis of where the consumption takes place.

If the NDP members have an issue with a provincial tax decision, they need to talk to a provincial government to have that debate not a previous provincial representative but the provincial government.

This is a federal Parliament, so let us talk about federal taxes, specifically lowering them. Unlike the NDP, our Conservative government believes leaving more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians is the right thing to do. Unlike the NDP, we have the record to prove it.

Since coming to office in 2006 we cut over 100 taxes, reducing taxes in every way government collects them. We removed over one million low income Canadians completely from the tax roll. We reduced the overall tax burden to its lowest level in nearly 50 years. We cut taxes for all Canadians, even those who do not earn enough to pay personal income tax. That is when we cut the GST to 5%.

Shockingly, the NDP has voted against every tax cut we introduced. I ask the NDP a very simple question, why did it oppose lowering the GST for Canadian families and why does it continue to oppose every incentive to lower taxes for Canadians, including Albertans?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see the parliamentary secretary standing up and saying that the provinces of Ontario and Nova Scotia and everybody else should speak for taxation of Albertans.

I am standing up on behalf of Albertans. I am the only one in the House standing up on behalf of Albertans who were not consulted in HST initiatives, initiated by the government.

Yes, some provinces bought in to the proposal, but this whole harmonized sales tax was initiated by the government. Alberta has not opted into this process and Albertans have to pay the tax. It is completely unfair. Albertans should have been informed of the implications of the negotiation of these terms with other provinces.

That concern has been raised repeatedly by ministers of finance in Alberta. I am simply repeating that concern through this House.

Yes, I am proud to stand up and say that I voted—

• (1810)

The Deputy Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member. The time allotted has expired. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am going to make this very clear for Canadians who might be watching.

When the member from the NDP, who is from Alberta, stands in this place and misleads Albertans as to how she represents them, it must be corrected. I am going to do that very quickly.

This member comes from a party that has said very clearly that it intends to raise taxes, it intends to side with the Liberals and side with the Bloc Québécois to ensure that corporate taxes are in fact raised. It intends to raise the GST. It intends to look at an iPod tax. It intends to carbon tax our Canadians.

That is not what Albertans are calling for. I do not know who she purports to be representing here in this House today, but it certainly is not the Albertans who have spoken very clearly to our government, saying that they appreciate those tax measures. They appreciate the cuts that they have seen, over 120 of them, to ensure that their families have more money in their pockets.

I think she ought to talk to them—

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:12 p.m.)

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