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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act.

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

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two reports of the government operations committee.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in relation to its study on Supplementary Estimates (C).

[*English*]

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in relation to its study on the financing of renewable energy projects by the government. By this report, the committee wants to draw to the attention of the House a potential breach of its

privilege and/or a possible case of contempt of Parliament and recommends it takes the measures it deems appropriate.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

CONTAMINATED WATER IN SHANNON

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with empathy that I present a second round of petitions regarding the contaminated water in Shannon. Over 1,000 people are adding their names to those of the 23,000 people who signed the document I presented in June 2009.

It is clear this morning that this issue continues to affect people. We know that a trial is currently underway in the class-action lawsuit by people from the municipality of Shannon, who drank contaminated water for 22 years. The government knew that, but did not tell the public.

Therefore, I once again urge the government to do everything it can to contact as many people as possible who lived in Shannon and Valcartier. It must also be proactive, stop making attempts to obstruct this file and it must comply with the orders of this House and give access to the documents requested. We have asked the government to present these documents and it has not yet done so.

Lastly, if the government is truly acting in good faith, it must acknowledge its responsibility, compensate those who were contaminated and decontaminate the areas affected. It is clear that the government is waiting for the trial to end. However, it could have been proactive, which is what the public is asking for.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition from folks in the Kelowna and Victoria area. This is yet another petition, with which our office has absolutely been flooded, from Canadians expressing serious and dire concern of the government's plans to allow an 1,100 kilometre pipeline for raw bitumen coming from Alberta to the port in Kitimat and then the supertankers that would carry that raw bitumen through the north coast in some of the most treacherous waters in the world. Some members in the House will be aware of the concerns expressed by people all along B.C.'s coast and into the interior.

Points of Order

The petitioners are calling on the government to finally enact in legislation the ban on supertankers on B.C.'s north coast, no longer providing the uncertainty both to industry and to communities.

The petitioners recognize the important and fragile nature of the north coast ecosystem, as even the Conservative government does from time to time.

The petitioners number in the many dozens.

AFGHANISTAN

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

Ever since May 2008, when Parliament passed its resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces in 2011, the Prime Minister stayed on track until the Liberals approached him and offered to support him to continue with an involvement in Afghanistan.

Committing 1,000 soldiers to this supposed training mission still presents a great danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when we are looking at a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost us over \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions in this country.

In fact, polls show that a clear majority of Canadians want the military mission to end on schedule in July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

OPPOSITION MOTION

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to the motion presented by the Liberal Party and the Liberal member for Beauséjour. Specifically, I would ask that you consider whether this motion is acceptable in light of the sub judice convention.

Today's motion passes judgment on a political entity and on four private individuals. It asks the House to serve as a judge and jury over a private civil matter that is before the courts. Specifically, it makes a finding of fraud. It asks the Prime Minister to direct the financial affairs of a political party, it asks the Government of Canada to remove individuals from employment and, similarly, it asks the Conservative Party of Canada to do the same.

I find these proposals contrary to the principles and values of a mature democracy. In Canada, we respect the rule of law, which includes due process.

For those reasons, the motion is at odds with long-standing parliamentary conventions and practices. Let me explain further.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the House has significant powers derived from its privileges and immunities. Perhaps the most important privilege is freedom of speech in parliamentary proceedings. While this privilege is normally associated with the right of individual members, it also applies to motions adopted by the House.

As O'Brien and Bosc state at page 91:

Generally considered to be an individual privilege, the courts have confirmed that freedom of speech is also a collective privilege of the House. Motions carried by the House are expressed collectively by its Members and therefore cannot be challenged in a court of law.

However, motions, such as the one being debated today, can have a direct, real and personal effect on an individual and his or her reputation. Given the broad powers accorded to the House in this regard, the House has established practices and conventions to ensure that its powers are exercised judiciously and that due process is respected. As O'Brien and Bosc note at page 97:

The privilege of freedom of speech is an extremely powerful immunity and on occasion Speakers have had to caution Members about its misuse.

O'Brien and Bosc go on to cite Speaker Fraser's 1987 ruling where he stated:

Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the Hon. Members of this place. The consequences of its abuse can be terrible. Innocent people could be slandered with no redress available to them. Reputations could be destroyed on the basis of false rumour. All Hon. Members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of their absolute privilege of freedom of speech. That is why there are long-standing practices and traditions observed in this House to counter the potential for abuse.

One practice observed by the House to protect the interests of individuals is the sub judice convention. As O'Brien and Bosc state at page 99:

It is accepted practice that, in the interests of justice and fair play, certain restrictions should be placed on the freedom of Members of Parliament to make reference in the course of debate to matters awaiting judicial decisions, and that such matters should not be the subject of motions or questions in the House.

O'Brien and Bosc go on to state:

The acceptance of a restriction is a voluntary restraint on the part of the House to protect an accused person or other party to a court action or judicial inquiry from suffering any prejudicial effect from public discussion of the issue.

As O'Brien and Bosc note at page 100:

The *sub judice* convention is important in the conduct of business in the House. It protects the rights of interested parties before the courts, and preserves and maintains the separation and mutual respect between the legislature and the judiciary. The convention ensures that a balance is created between the need for a separate, impartial judiciary and free speech.

The sub judice convention is well recognized by other procedural authorities as well. For example, citation 505 in the sixth edition of Beauchesne's states:

Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals, which are courts of record. The purpose of this *sub judice* convention is to protect the parties in a case awaiting or undergoing trial and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of a judicial inquiry. It is a voluntary restraint imposed by the House upon itself in the interest of justice and fair play.

Points of Order

•(1010)

The sub judice convention is not unique to this House. It is a recognized principle in Westminster.

As the 23rd edition of Erskine May states at page 436:

Subject to the discretion of the Chair and to the right of the House to legislate on any matter or to discuss any matters of delegated legislation, matters awaiting the adjudication of a court of law should not be brought forward in debate.

The British Parliament has gone further than Canada by articulating the sub judice convention through resolution. The latest resolution was adopted in 2001. Similarly, the sub judice convention has been codified in other jurisdictions, including Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, India and New Zealand.

In Canada, at the federal level, we have not had a need to articulate how the sub judice convention should be applied. Up until now, we have been able to rely on the common sense of members to ensure that we do not abuse our privileges. My fear, however, is that this will no longer be the case if today's motion should be adopted.

It is quite evident that the motion by the Liberal member for Beauséjour is contrary to the principle and practices of the House. It assumes there is a presumption of guilt and the House can pass judgment on individuals without any respect for due process.

As O'Brien and Bosc note at page 100:

—it is the Speaker who decides what jurisdiction the Chair has over matters *sub judice*.

In a ruling of March 14, 2008, Mr. Speaker, you quoted Bourinot and how he described the first principles of our parliamentary tradition as:

To protect the minority and restrain the improvidence and tyranny of the majority, to secure the transaction of public business in a decent and orderly manner—

At that time, committees were ignoring the usual practices and procedures of this House and you described the situation as verging on anarchy. The opposition was being reckless with their majority status back then and it has continued that irresponsible behaviour in its original demands for documents relating to Afghan detainees that could have jeopardized national security.

The tyranny of the opposition majority has been reckless and irresponsible in its demands for the production of documents that would breach cabinet confidence, and now the tyranny of the majority is being reckless and irresponsible with the long-standing practice and principle of parliamentary democracy, the sub judice convention, by passing judgment on individuals without any respect for due process.

I submit that the motion, as it is drafted, infringes on the sub judice convention and should be ruled out of order on that basis.

I realize that since the motion is before the House today and we may in fact have a vote tonight or, at the latest, tomorrow, it is imperative for you, sir, in all your wisdom, to rule on this matter as quickly as possible.

•(1015)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to that submission.

It is of no merit whatsoever and there is no Canadian authority that supports the notion that once a matter is before the court, this assembly in the House of Commons does not have jurisdiction to deal with the matter. That would be a total and absolute violation of our privileges as members of Parliament and this assembly.

In Canada we have a separation of the judicial branch, the legislative branch and the parliamentary branch. There is no authority and the parliamentary secretary did not cite any Speaker's ruling that would support the proposition that once a matter is brought before the court, this assembly is not allowed to discuss it.

Just think this through. In any situation that comes up, all a person would have to do is issue a writ in a court, originate a notice, and all of a sudden this House would be silent. The Canadian people would be silent. Parliament would be silent. There is no justification for that.

I have two points on this issue. First, the motion has been on the notice paper since last Friday. That is about 72 hours. Why was this point of order not raised before? Second, I do not know how many times questions on the issue in the motion have been asked in the House of Commons, but you would know, Mr. Speaker.

If the premise that has been advanced here today had any weight to it at all, then of course all those questions would also be out of order. Any issue that went before the courts would be out of order in this assembly. We have dealt with this situation many times before. We dealt with it in the Barbara George case; I dealt with that in committee. Even when we went through the sponsorship issue and the sides were reversed, that matter was in court. It was in court every day. We knew that. However, questions were asked and committee meetings were going on. The committee of inquiry tried to get hold of the proceedings before the committee but it could not because it would have been a breach of parliamentary privileges.

There is no authority for what the parliamentary secretary has stated. He cited some sentences of *sub judice*. I do not know what goes on in the other provinces, but he did not at any point in time refer to any instance in the 143 years this assembly has been in existence that we would change course, that we would become silent if somehow a matter were raised in court.

Mr. Speaker, I would therefore ask you to not allow this point of order.

•(1020)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my comments follow on those of my Liberal colleague who has properly argued the case against the parliamentary secretary in terms of what is disallowed, whether it is in front of the courts or not.

The members of the Conservative Party know that well because they themselves brought forward motions of a similar nature when issues were before the court. When in opposition, the Conservative Party also argued for a wide latitude in the use of supply day opposition motions, because they are an opportunity for opposition members to raise questions of the government.

Business of Supply

Mr. Speaker, the central point I wish to raise is one which I am sure you will be looking at. O'Brien and Bosc on page 854 requires that:

The Standing Orders give Members a very wide scope in proposing opposition motions on supply days and, unless the motion is clearly and undoubtedly irregular (i.e., where the procedural aspect is not open to reasonable argument), the Chair does not intervene.

The government, in preparing its submission today to try to subvert the debate on the so-called in and out scheme, has attempted to curtail the ability of the opposition to have a fulsome debate as to what exactly happened. The implication is there are members sitting within the Conservative caucus who are implicated directly by the public prosecutor in this very matter.

The issue that is being raised is an integral one for all of us, which is that when we have elections in this country, they are fought fairly and within the limits of the rules. Spending limits, for example, are not exceeded. We have very clear and strict laws on this. The Conservative Party used a procedure, a scheme, in which money went in and money went out of bank accounts, sometimes within 12 hours. We know the Conservatives knew it was wrong but they did it anyway. Now we wish to have a debate about the integrity of the election that was fought under those types of misdeeds.

It seems to us that in testing the government on supply days, which is why we are here today, a wide scope and latitude is required. We need to have that. I am sure when the Conservatives return to opposition they will be arguing the same thing. It is not for the Chair to intervene on the scope of that, again except where procedural aspects are not open to reasonable argument. That is what our directive is in this place. That is how we craft ourselves. The Conservatives had all weekend to think about this. They are only bringing the argument forward at the eleventh hour with the hope to yet again subvert debate in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, we ask for your careful consideration of this, but obviously New Democrats are in favour of this debate going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take up too much time because I want to ensure that the Liberal Party has enough time for its opposition day.

I would simply like to add that, in addition to the quotation from page 854 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, as cited by my NDP colleague, there is the following quote from page 100: "The practice has evolved so that it is the Speaker who decides what jurisdiction the Chair has over matters *sub judice*."

For weeks now the opposition has been raising the issue of the in and out scheme.

Mr. Speaker, you have never found that to be a problem during question period, even though part of this issue is before the courts.

And by extension, I believe that the motion presented by the Liberal Party is entirely in order. My reasoning is supported by the quotation on page 854 as well as the fact that over the past weeks you have not intervened during question period to say that our questions about the in and out scheme were out of order.

I urge you to accept the Liberal motion so that we can move on to the debate.

• (1025)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I do not want to re-argue the case and the submission I already have made. I think it speaks for itself. I will just speak specifically to a couple of points brought forward by my hon. colleague in the official opposition.

He mentioned that there is no example of other jurisdictions that have adopted a *sub judice* convention. That is completely wrong. There are three jurisdictions in Canada. Provincially, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec have all adopted the *sub judice* convention which would prevent this type of motion from coming forward.

Similarly, as I pointed out in my intervention, there are other jurisdictions throughout the world that have adopted this provision and even stronger provisions against motions similar to this being brought forward.

Last, my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party asked why we did not bring forward this point of order earlier. He is quite correct that the motion being debated today was put on the notice paper last Friday. However, as an experienced parliamentarian, he should know that it is not until 5 p.m. the day before an opposition day that a motion is confirmed for debate. There was an opportunity for the Liberal Party to bring forward a different motion for debate today. We did not know that until late yesterday afternoon. Therefore, this morning was the first opportunity for our government to present this argument.

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their submissions on this point.

[Translation]

I will consider whether the motion should be subject to a vote at the end of the day. But for now, I believe I will put the motion for today's debate before the House.

[English]

I do not think the motion on its face, to me, is out of order. I will examine the arguments the parliamentary secretary has put forward with respect to the statements in the motion and their possible determination of issues. I will look into that during the course of the day and come back to the House later.

If I find that the motion oversteps certain boundaries relating to the *sub judice* convention, which has not been applied rigidly in this House at any time, then I can always say that the motion will not be votable at the end of the day. In the meantime, I believe the debate can proceed on the matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTORAL FINANCING

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.) moved:

Business of Supply

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conservative Party of Canada's "in and out" electoral financing scheme was an act of electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based, and that, further, the House calls upon the Prime Minister to: (a) order the immediate repayment of any and all illegally obtained electoral rebates that were paid out to candidates for the Conservative Party of Canada as a result of the "in and out" fraud; and (b) remove all individuals facing charges for this fraud from any position of responsibility within Government or the Conservative Party of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from St. Paul's, who will be giving a very important speech on the character of the government and what the election spending scandal reveals about the character of the Prime Minister and other Conservative Party leaders.

[*English*]

The motion today does something very important. It allows the House to express itself on a matter which has been known as the in and out election scandal, but it goes further than that.

The motion invites the House to form an opinion that the totality of the evidence around this scheme and this scandal constitute electoral fraud. It calls on the Prime Minister, as head of the government, to order that any taxpayers' moneys obtained illegally as a result of this in and out election scandal be immediately reimbursed to the Receiver General. It calls for any taxpayers' money that was obtained illegally as a result of this scheme be reimbursed to the Canadian people. The motion calls on the Prime Minister to remove the individuals who are facing quasi-criminal charges as a result of a decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions to remove these individuals from positions of authority within the Conservative Party and within the campaign apparatus of the Prime Minister's party.

Many observers and many commentators have noted that the whole nature of the in and out election scheme is difficult for many Canadians to understand. It is largely a dispute around election spending legislation and the desire of the Conservative Party in the 2006 election to get around those spending limits. I am hoping in the few minutes I have that I might simplify for members of the House the basic essence of this scheme.

In 2006 the Conservative Party decided that it was going to hit the limit for national advertising and campaign spending, the limit set by legislation passed by the House, so it needed to develop a scheme to circumvent that spending limit and therefore attempt to get an unfair advantage over other parties that were following the election spending limits at the time. In essence, the Conservative Party decided at that point to break the law.

The Conservative Party transferred money from the national Conservative Party to 67 Conservative riding associations, the 67 that we know about and that Elections Canada has identified. The party transferred money. That in and out of itself is not the problem. Part of the government's great effort to confuse the public is to say the issue is about the transfers. The issue is not about the transfers. The Conservative Party can legitimately transfer money to those 67 ridings. What was illegal and illegitimate is what then followed.

Those ridings had to immediately transfer the money back to the national party. They had to sign a transfer order before they received the money. The party probably did not have enough confidence in its

local riding associations not to try to keep the money. The party wanted it transferred back to the national campaign committee, and that group in Ottawa then had all of the decision-making authority over how that money would be spent. It was spent on advertising in different regional or national markets.

The party tried to pretend that somehow this was a decision of a particular Conservative candidate. For example, the riding of Lac-Saint-Louis in Quebec was one that had received some of this money, transferred it back to the national party, and then effectively lost any decision-making authority over how the money was spent.

After the 2006 election the Chief Electoral Officer refused to approve the use of taxpayers' money for the reimbursement of these expenses. He made this determination after a careful audit and after careful interviews with candidates and official agents of the Conservative Party who admitted they had no idea where the advertising money was going to be spent. They had no say on how that money should be allocated. Based on those interviews and an extensive investigation, the Chief Electoral Officer determined that the Conservative Party should not be allowed to milk \$800,000 of taxpayers' money as part of the electoral refund process for expenses which he determined were not legitimate.

• (1030)

The matter was then brought to the court by the Conservatives. In a desperate attempt to delay a finding of guilt, in an attempt to confuse the issue and probably in an attempt to desperately milk that \$800,000 that they had promised to their local riding associations, the Conservatives said, "Do not panic. We will go to court". That was a desperate act to try to cover up a very thorough and extensive investigation and decision by an independent authority of the House with the responsibility to administer the election system.

[*Translation*]

This is an important point, because the court has ruled that the Conservatives did not have the right to claim—since the election commissioner conducted an investigation—that what they did was legal.

However, last week, a panel of three Federal Court of Appeal judges unequivocally ruled that the Conservatives acted illegally. The only people who believe that the Conservatives did nothing wrong are the Conservatives themselves.

In the meantime, we have seen the Conservatives' true colours. They have repeatedly insulted Elections Canada and that agency's employees whose mandate, which comes from this House under the legislation, is to ensure fair election practices in Canada. Often when people are wrong regarding arguments of substance, they tend to insult others. That is what the Conservatives are doing.

The Conservatives had refused to hand over documents to Elections Canada. That is why the RCMP needed a search warrant, issued by a judge, to go into the Conservative Party headquarters to get the documents.

Business of Supply

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister rises in this House and says that the Conservatives have disclosed everything to Elections Canada and that the reason Elections Canada is aware of this practice is because the Conservatives came forward. It is odd that Elections Canada needed to ask a judge for a signed search warrant after evidence submitted under oath to that same judge established that the Conservatives had not disclosed certain things. What was found in that search? They found a series of falsified documents that the Conservatives had tried to hide. That is what convinced the Director of Public Prosecutions to lay these quasi-criminal charges against the Conservatives.

●(1035)

[English]

The result of this scheme is that the Conservatives tried to cheat in a national election by spending over the legal limit. They attempted to milk almost \$1 million from taxpayers by refunds to which they were not entitled. This is not a decision only of Elections Canada, it is a decision of a unanimous three judge panel of the Federal Court of Appeal.

Four top Conservatives are now facing quasi-criminal charges, including the possibility of landing in jail or facing massive fines and the Conservative Party itself is also facing these charges.

The Conservatives pretended to campaign on accountability. It was a joke. In that very election they were engaging in an elaborate scheme to get around the limits.

[Translation]

In closing, the Conservatives inexcusably claim that this is an administrative dispute, an accounting misunderstanding. We could use that same argument to say that the likes of Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones were caught up in an accounting disagreement. The whole Enron affair in the United States was nothing more than an accounting dispute, a financial glitch.

There is no administrative prison. When someone faces quasi-criminal charges, it is because the Director of Public Prosecutions has determined that there is a great deal of evidence. That is the case for the Conservatives. There is a great deal of evidence suggesting that there was a strategy to get around the Canada Elections Act and steal an election.

One day, the government's lame excuses will be heard in court and these people will be judged.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to expand further on the point of order I raised that the motion is completely out of order and should be ruled accordingly. I find it curious that the Liberal Party of Canada, which has among its several members one from the riding of Papineau, whose father was, frankly, the architect of what we know as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, would actually have the temerity to stand in the House and bring forward this motion. Section 11 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms speaks of the rights of individuals to have their day in court and the presumption of innocence before the courts. Yet the motion before us today basically encourages the House, through a vote in this place, to

find guilty those who have not yet been through due process in the court of law. In other words, the Liberal Party is purporting that this place has more authority than the court of law in this country.

There are many lawyers in the House. I wonder how they feel about the motion. Does my colleague, who is a lawyer, agree that Parliament should have the authority over a court of law when determining guilt or innocence?

●(1040)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, it is always a bit rich to see Conservatives, former members of the Reform Party and the Alliance, talk about their respect for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Those of us on this side of the House for a long time have thought that those members simply find the Charter of Rights and Freedoms an inconvenience. We saw that when the member for Vaughan in his byelection campaign admitted that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was a nuisance when he was a senior police officer in Ontario. The irony never seeks to escape me.

My colleague pointed out to the House that I am a lawyer by training. Am I uncomfortable with the House pronouncing itself on something as fundamental as the ethical standards of the government? The answer is no. Am I uncomfortable with this motion that somehow the House should substitute its opinion for the decision of the courts? Of course that is not the case. No one other than the parliamentary secretary has suggested something so ridiculous.

We are saying that the House has an obligation to hold the Conservative Party and the Conservative government to account for a massive electoral fraud. At the end of the day, members will also be held to account in a court of law and may face jail time as a result of their behaviour.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government continuously pronounces its innocence based on the fact that, according to the government, everybody does this, that what is going on is just ordinary politics, the usual way campaigns are run. Government members think there is some personal vendetta against them. I am not quite sure where they get the argument that there is motivation to single them out, because any government agency that would be stupid enough to attack the sitting government of the day on anything but a rock solid legal case would be crazy, especially with that crowd.

Could the hon. member help members in the House and the public who are watching understand the difference between what the Conservatives are charged with and the regular things that parties do during campaigns?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre is absolutely right. One of the great big falsehoods the government has been propagating is that every other party does it. Its members have repeated it over and over again, as if by repeating the falsehood that somehow it becomes true.

The Conservative Party is the only party facing quasi-criminal charges. Four senior Conservative operators, including two who sit in the other place, are facing quasi-criminal charges. No other party has that proud record.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives' headquarters was the only party's headquarters raided by the police following a court signed mandate, a search warrant. Again, no other party has that ignominy.

The Conservative Party is the only one that has been found by the Director of Public Prosecutions to have voluminous evidence of wrongdoing and a paper trail of fake invoices. That is its record, nobody else's.

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague provided a good explanation of the in and out financing scandal. I will show that this is a perfect example of the abuse of power by the Prime Minister, who believes he is above the law.

● (1045)

[English]

Government expects citizens to obey the law. Citizens should be able to expect government to obey the law as well. They should also expect political parties who want to form the government to obey the law, particularly in an election based on the need to increase transparency and accountability. I believe this goes right to the character and integrity of the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party of Canada.

Integrity means that one acts with principles. Accountability means that somebody is watching and that one will try to do one's best. However, this comes to an almost sociopathic or psychopathic end in that what is right is regarded as what one gets away with and what is wrong is what one is caught doing, and that when one gets caught doing something wrong, one says that everyone else is doing it.

Spending limits matter in the democracy in our country. The restrictions on party spending were put in place to limit the influence of money on the outcome of elections and to level the playing field. It was viewed as undemocratic that a party with the most money would win because of the money it was able to spend.

We are also concerned that throughout the Conservative's defence, the truth has been a serious victim. Even the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister had said that the Conservatives alerted Elections Canada to the in and out scheme. That is not true. An Elections Canada auditor noticed the unusual pattern of wire transfers and then a Conservative candidate and several campaign workers explained how the national party had instructed them in the in and out scheme. One of them called the transactions, "in and out", and that is where this scandal got its name.

It is also extraordinary that when they were caught doing this, the Conservatives had the audacity to go to court to get their ill-gotten dollars back in spite of what we now understand. For example, in the books of the riding of Hull—Aylmer, it had \$12,000 in its account at the beginning of the election, but after a transfer from the national party of \$50,000 or so, it ended up with \$36,000 at the end of the campaign. Clearly it was \$24,000 better off with taxpayer dollars from a falsely obtained rebate.

It is also not true that other parties did the same thing. As my colleague said, there is only one party being charged with this. There was only one headquarters raided. There is a very big difference

between this and the legitimate transfers to or from a riding association to central headquarters. That is fundamentally different from what happened here, where a party ended up being able to exceed a spending limit and ended up with taxpayer dollars in Conservative riding associations.

This is a party and Prime Minister for whom the end always justifies the means. If you or I were asked by the Canada Revenue Agency to show our books, then we would show our books. This party had to have its headquarters raided, from which sloppily forged invoices were found. The company in question, Retail Media, was able to say that those were not their invoices and that they were indeed forged.

I would like to set the context. This is a Prime Minister who never liked election spending limits and actually went as far as the Supreme Court as the president of the National Citizens Coalition to try to fight against limits on third party advertising in an election. I think this Prime Minister never really liked Elections Canada and saw them as a certain irritant in the way. Of course, he comes from a province where there are no spending limits.

Let us go back in time to November 28, 2005 when there was a vote of non-confidence in the House. From November 25 to January 23, there was a writ of 55 days long. That is 20 days longer than most writs. It seems that at that time the Liberals had a five to ten point lead in the polls and were in strong minority territory.

In mid-December, someone in Conservative Party noticed that they were actually close to the spending limit and thought, "Oh my word, what are we going to do?" Here, I want to take members to some dimly lit office here on the Hill with a Blofeld-like character, the evil genius and arch enemy of goodness, fairness and democratic principles, who came up with a big idea.

● (1050)

The idea was that the campaign would use an in and out scheme. Moreover, what if there were a big bonus of an extraordinary media buy and another big bonus of money actually ending up in poor riding associations? That was is in a campaign whose platform talked about standing up for accountability and banning secret donations to political candidates.

As the *Ottawa Citizen* said in its editorial on March 4:

Campaign spending rules are in place for a reason: to ensure a reasonably level "playing field" during a campaign. Because one candidate may not reach his or her limit doesn't mean the party should be able to overspend on the national campaign as a result.

...the Appeal Court ruled that "the Respondents' interpretation could weaken compliance with the limits set by Parliament on the amount of money that candidates can spend on their election and can recover by way of reimbursement of public funds. Abuses could well proliferate, and the statutory objective of promoting a healthy democracy through levelling the electoral playing field undermined."

We know that the party and the Prime Minister must have known that not everyone thought this was in the rules. In fact, its previous candidate, David Marler, a lawyer who ran for the party in 2006, turned party officials down when asked to deposit money in his campaign account and almost immediately remove it for national advertising. About 66 other candidates agreed to the request, but not David Marler. As he stated:

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It always seemed to me that the in-and-out was irregular and illegal.... It is gratifying to note that the Federal Court (of Appeal) has come to the same opinion, which always seemed to me to be obvious. I think they're doing the right thing by prosecuting the alleged offenders.

Tom Flanagan has talked about the alleged ad laundering scheme, and many have indeed called this money laundering. In the *Brandon Sun*, Mia Rabson reported that:

Former Manitoba Conservative MP Inky Mark said his party was wrong to claim \$1.3 million in national advertising expenses paid for by its local candidates in the 2006 election.

Mark spoke out immediately afterwards and said that "It smelled". He recalled:

I asked what was the point.... It just didn't make any sense.

Mark said that he believes they asked him to accept about \$8,000 but that:

From my point of view, if I took the money and pretended I spent it and then made a claim for it with Elections Canada, that's wrong.

I guess Conservatives thought it was a brilliant scheme and that Elections Canada was stupid, but they had the audacity to ask for the rebates back, which is evident when we see the books of the Conservative riding association in Hull—Aylmer.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives would like Canadians to believe that it is just an accounting dispute. That is not true. Accountants are not usually accused of forging invoices or fleecing taxpayers of \$800,000 by having Conservative ridings apply for rebates of inflated election expenses.

The Conservatives would like us to believe that this is a standard practice. That is not true. The Conservative Party is the only party facing such charges, the only party whose headquarters was searched by the RCMP, and the only party that left a trail of forged invoices that it must now explain.

[*English*]

What is also very telling in terms of character is to see the intimidation that took place, with the leadership calling people who had refused "idiots" and "turds". There were emails between these riding associations, particularly the one in Oxford, where the campaign manager, a former police officer, felt uncomfortable doing this.

Liberals think that is an extraordinary testimony to the lack of character and it seems a little suspicious that one of the accused was tweeting last week that:

Anyone who thinks PMSH was that deeply involved in campaign is an idiot. Campaigns make millions of decisions in 35 days.

I think there are at least two "not"s missing in that. To go around calling people idiots just seems part of the game.

Parties—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. member's time has elapsed. Perhaps she will have an opportunity to complete her comments in questions and comments.

The hon. member for Oshawa.

● (1055)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do want to thank my colleague for her speech. I know she was speaking quite passionately. I have worked with her in the past and I know she does hold herself in the highest ethical regard, as well as this entire House.

The member wanted to go back in time, and I was wondering if I could remind her of an historical fact. There was something called adscam or *scandale des commandites* and something called the Gomery inquiry. It was an ongoing inquiry into the misappropriation of funds. There were some results that came about after that inquiry. I believe the Liberal Party had to return \$1 million to the Canadian taxpayers.

My question to the member is, can she outline in detail what the Liberal Party has done to recover the other \$40 million? Has she done anything personally to encourage her leader to recover this money that was lost to Canadian taxpayers because of a scandal that occurred under a previous government's watch?

I think we would just like to have an update to see how that is coming along.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that Justice Gomery had a number of recommendations that the Conservative Party put into its platform but has pretty well carried out none. It was very important that the appointments commission do a number of things that Gomery said must be done. However, the Conservative Party was more than happy to pick that up and put it into their platform and then carry forward.

This is the most secretive government in the history of Canada. We have gone from being first under the Liberals to last under the government in terms of secrecy and redacted documents. Frankly, no sitting Liberal in either chamber has ever had these kinds of charges laid against them.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from St. Paul's for her remarks.

I find it passing strange that the government members, in their first response to the co-lead off speech of the official opposition on the day of the latter's motion, slam the Conservative scandal with a Liberal scandal. The best argument they have to defend their own scandal is to raise the previous scandal.

My question directly for the member, however, is about her saying that the government had the "audacity" to ask for dollars back and her reference to "forged invoices". I would like to ask the member if she would expand a little bit on the linkage between the alleged forged invoices and the audacity of the government not only to overspend by \$1 million but to claim the rebates too.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, it seems that the Conservative Party had one invoice for the big media buy that election.

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What seems to have happened is that they took that one invoice and in order to back up the in and out scheme, they forged the invoice and made, I would assume, 66 copies of it, or however many copies, in which they could not even spell “invoice” correctly. They left the “i” out of invoice and made the same mistake in all 66 of them. Then there was a little handwriting about the GST.

This was the sloppiest job. However, the idea that after that had been done and the invoices had been falsified that they would then go to court and ask for the money back without waiting for due process and whether they would be charged by the director of public prosecutions in the courts was audacious. In fact, the director of public prosecutions was instituted by the government so that there would not be any frivolous or vexatious suits by the Government of Canada. That director knew of the voluminous evidence, including these falsified invoices, and has now taken the matter to court.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the welcome extended to me by my honourable Liberal colleague.

[English]

I rise today and am going to begin my remarks by addressing the issues that matter to Canadians. It is unfortunate that the Liberal motion fails to do that.

The motion says nothing about jobs. Why is that? It is because the government, through its economic action plan, has created 460,000 new jobs since the valley of the recession.

It says nothing about unemployment, and that is because our unemployment rate is two—

• (1100)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This morning I had an opportunity to review the minutes of the procedure and House affairs committee from January 31 through March 28, all of which led to a filibuster. The filibuster dealt with totally irrelevant information.

I want to stop it right at the beginning. If the member will not address the motion before the floor, then he should yield the floor. Talking about jobs and the economy is outside the scope of the motion now before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I think all members realize that their comments must be pertinent to the motion and I am sure the hon. member will tie his comments to the motion.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has just made a very honest admission, that his party's motion has absolutely nothing to do with jobs and the economy. That is precisely my point. The measure of a motion is not just what it says, but what it fails to say.

The motion fails to address the issue of jobs. Why? Because we have created 460,000 of them through our economic action plan.

It fails to address unemployment. Why? Because under this government and the Prime Minister, unemployment is two percentage points lower in our country than in the United States, for the first time in a generation.

It fails to address savings for middle-class families that want to prepare for the future. Why? Because this government has created a tax-free savings account that five million Canadians have taken advantage of in the very first year of its existence and three million Canadians have already maximized their contributions to that savings account.

It fails to address the issue of deficits. Why? Because we have the smallest deficit in the G7 and it will be gone by 2015, before any of our competitors.

It fails to address the issue of prices in our country and that is because we reduced the GST.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a prima facie case the member is making. All motions do not deal with all issues. They have to address something. The member continues on the economy and other issues that the motion does not address. He has admitted it in his statements. We have to remain relevant to the motion now before the House.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant on the same point of order.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I would like to point out once again that my distinguished colleague, with whom I sit on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, is completely off topic today because he is discussing the economy instead of clearly addressing today's motion. He is in the habit of going off on tangents, dodging the issues and leading us in all directions. However, I would like us to discuss this motion that deals specifically with the election fraud committed by the Conservative Party in 2006.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to thank the hon. members for their comments. I will note the arguments that have been presented and I will specifically ask the hon. member to get back to the issue. However, I think that everyone will agree that arguments against a motion can be presented.

I would just ask the hon. member not to elaborate too fully on those arguments.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. members of the coalition have just explained the argument that I have been trying to make. They said it better than I ever could have. They showed their lack of interest in the economy and jobs for Canadians. They accidentally admitted that they have nothing to say about the issue that is of interest to Canadians—the economy. Finally, they indirectly admitted that our government is currently running an admirable and supportable economic program. The opposition has admitted that such is the case by disregarding this issue and leaving it to the Conservative government to deal with, because we keep our promises in this regard.

Let us talk about the false allegations that the opposition is making regarding the issue—

Business of Supply

• (1105)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on this point of order for the third time. When members of his party start giggling about how he is wasting the time of the House, which is their intent, we have to take this seriously at this time. We will have the entire day filled with these matters, which have nothing to do with the motion.

The Chair will have to take a stand on this and ensure that the time of the House is used debating a motion properly before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Again, I thank the hon. member. I do not think I have to insist again. I sensed, from listening to the hon. member, he was about to come back to the point of the motion and I will give him the floor to do that.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the reality is Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. It is true that the national party transferred funds to those local candidates and that those local candidates purchased services from the national party. This is not only legal and ethical, it is common practice.

In the 2006 election, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred \$1.7 million to its local candidates and in that same election those local candidates transferred \$1.3 million back to the Liberal Party. This means Liberal riding associations moved \$6.6 million in monetary and non-monetary transfers to Liberal candidates and invoiced \$1.4 million in goods and services for those candidates to pay back. Not only does these transfer in happen from national parties, but it is in fact the case that the Liberal Party engaged in transfers out.

I do not say that to throw mud or besmirch reputations. The Liberal Party officials who made these transfers to local riding associations and the local riding associations that transferred the money right back, oftentimes the exact same amount on the exact same day, engaged in a legal and ethical practice for which I would not condemn them. They were fully within the law and clearly within the balance of ethics to which we all ought to adhere. That was the 2006 election.

In 2004 the Liberal Party made monetary transfers of \$1.6 million to local candidates and its local candidates transferred \$1.3 million back to the national party. In that election, the national party gave money to riding associations that probably did not have means of their own and those riding associations then purchased services from the central party, which is entirely a legal practice. As we can see from the enormity of the transfer, \$1.6 million in and then \$1.3 million out was not an exception, but it would be more accurately called the rule. It was widely practised over at least two elections by the Liberal Party. Those elections I refer to are 2004 and 2006.

The Liberal Party was not unique in engaging in the in and out transfers. The NDP transferred \$884,000 to local candidates and those local candidates transferred back \$545,000 to the central party. Roughly three-quarters of a million dollars went in and \$500,000 went out with respect to the NDP in the 2006 election campaign.

In the 2004 campaign, just to show this was not a one-time practice for the NDP, the party transferred roughly half a million dollars to local candidates and those local candidates transferred

back \$385,000, about half a million dollars in and about \$400,000 out. Again, this was not an isolated case, not an unusual practise, not an anomaly, but a systematic in and out effort exercised by the New Democratic Party.

May I emphasize for my colleagues in the NDP, for many of whom I have a great deal of respect, that when they made these in and out transfers on such a large scale, they did absolutely nothing wrong. There was nothing illegal, nothing unethical, just like the Conservative Party did absolutely nothing wrong when it made similar transactions.

The NDP and the Liberal Party did not engage in criminal activity when they made those in and out transfers. Their only crime is hypocrisy, and they are committing it today, not then.

That leaves the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois national party transferred \$732,000 to its local candidates and local candidates transferred back \$820,000 in that election. This is not only a practice that the party engaged in but one that it engaged in systematically, as we can tell by the enormity of the size of the transfers. It is impossible that this would have been just a on-off practice for the Bloc Québécois because those kinds of numbers would not be exercised through a single riding association. It would need to have involved at least dozens.

• (1110)

I have example after example of where members of literally every central party represented in this House of Commons transferred exact amounts to riding associations and those riding associations transferred those same exact amounts back to the central party, often on the very same day. This was widely practised, systematically undertaken by every political party in the House of Commons. I have a whole binder full of examples that I can share of where those in and out transfers occurred in other political parties.

Let us break down this debate into its component parts. Is it legal and ethical for a party to transfer funds to local candidates? Yes. That has never been a matter of dispute. Are local candidates allowed to purchase services from a central campaign? Yes. It happens literally every day. I imagine it probably has happened during the time that has transpired since I began my speech only moments ago, although I suspect it seems like a longer time to my friends on the other side.

Is it legal for local candidates to include national messages, national leaders, national party logos and names in their advertisements? Yes. That is not only common practice, it would be considered extremely unusual if a local candidate did not mention the party leader name and national message in his or her advertisements.

Business of Supply

Therefore, if we take those three component parts of this controversy, and we all agree that they are completely legal, ethical and common practice, then we must conclude by those three steps that the ensemble of those three steps is also legal, ethical and commonplace. That is why we have taken Elections Canada to court. In one case, one court sided with the Conservative Party. In another case it was otherwise. However, we will continue to defend our position because it is legal, ethical and common practice among all political parties.

Given that the party followed all of the rules and conducted itself with the highest standard of ethics, I think what we are witnessing here, unfortunately, is the politics of personal destruction undertaken by the Liberal Party in this case. I think the Liberal Party can do better than that. All of us should be focused on the issues that matter to Canadians.

When I travel through the constituency of Nepean—Carleton and I ask my constituents what issues are on their mind, they tell me that it is jobs, saving for the future, a plan to get rid of the deficit and efforts to keep prices reasonable for Canadian consumers. I say to my friends on the opposition benches that never did one of their slurs create a job, reduce unemployment, give a middle-class family the chance to save for its future, help reduce the deficit or keep prices reasonable for Canadian families.

What will do those things is our economic action plan, which has created 460,000 jobs. What will help families save is our tax free savings account, which has allowed five million Canadians to put aside money for their futures. What will help us lead the world out of deficit is the plan that we have that will balance our budget by 2015 and has so far kept our deficit to roughly a quarter or a third of the size of our American neighbours on a per capita basis. What will help with the global concern of rising prices is this government's and Prime Minister's decision to lower the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

On those issues, we are getting the job done for everyday Canadians, which is why the Canadian people support this government.

•(1115)

I would encourage my distinguished colleagues on all sides of this House to work with us in order to advance the cause of our economic action plan. We need to put aside small differences and focus on the big picture, the big picture being the jobs that Canadians need so that the 460,000 people who got the jobs can be met by hundreds of thousands more, which is our goal. These people will be able to come home at the end of the day, open the door proudly and tell their spouse or their children that they got the job and that they will be able to pay the bills. Their hopes and dreams will be possible. They will be able to afford to send their daughter or son to post-secondary education because they are working again. They will be able to have the retirement they dreamed about and worked for their entire lives because they will be able to put aside money and take advantage of the new tax free savings accounts. The mother of three children will be able to shop and provide food for the family because the prices are reasonable.

Those should be the goals of this House. We should be working with all parties, as we have through five successful budgets that we have managed to pass in a minority Parliament, to advance the kind

of economic agenda that brings prosperity to the families that form the backbone of this country. That is the centre of this government's undertaking. We are committed to provide the stable and prosperous future that the Canadian people sent us here to deliver. We are leading in the world. We have unemployment lower than our competitors, hundreds of thousands of jobs being created and money being saved by families for their future. That is what we are elected to do and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope the member will offer to table his binder. I think it would be helpful.

The member has always said that this was just an administrative disagreement. However, the Federal Court of Appeal did not see it that way and, in fact, unanimously ruled that the Conservatives had broken the Canada Elections law.

To further show their lack of good faith, between January and March 2008, the Conservatives filibustered an effort to look into this matter at the procedure and House affairs committee, to the point where the chair was shown non-confidence and thrown out, the committee never met for the remainder of the time and then they called an election to shut it down. The matter went to the ethics committee. The ethics committee subpoenaed 30 witnesses. What did the Conservatives do? They told the witnesses not to appear, to ignore the subpoenas.

If this is just an administrative disagreement, why can the government not be open, transparent and accountable on all of the facts related to this matter?

•(1120)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, we have been. In fact, I would remind the hon. member that this party wanted to have an investigation at a committee level into the very questions he just raised.

There was just one small amendment that we raised when his committee wanted to investigate the question of transfers in and transfers out. We just asked that all parties be brought before the same committee to be asked the same questions.

When we introduced that motion, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP fought tooth and nail against proceeding with hearings in that committee. We were the only party actually putting forward a motion to investigate and study the question because we had nothing to hide. We turned everything over to Elections Canada almost five years ago. The only reason that Elections Canada is aware of any of our practices is precisely because we voluntarily told it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question. I moved a motion in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to study the Conservative government's in and out scheme, but there was an election. The committee, which was chaired by my distinguished colleague across the way, was therefore unable to thoroughly review this motion.

Business of Supply

Each time he goes on about how this was common practice among all the parties, including the Bloc Québécois, I have to wonder why the Chief Electoral Officer did not then investigate the other parties but, rather, only yours. Why did the investigation target only your party? Does the hon. member feel that his party is being singled out? Let me finish my question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I ask all members to address their comments and questions to the Chair and not directly to the person speaking.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, I would like the member to respond to the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer directed his investigation and the fact that the results of this investigation prove that the Conservatives committed offences. I would like to hear what he has to say about that.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I was going to say that the Bloc Québécois made in and out transfers, but that would not be right because it was that party that invented these practices.

I can provide examples. On July 15, 2004, the Bloc Québécois transferred \$17,071.20 to the Québec riding. Then, on July 16, 2004, the following day, the Québec riding transferred \$17,071.20 to the Bloc Québécois. The amounts transferred by the Bloc to the riding and from the riding to the Bloc were exactly the same. The two transactions carried out in that two-day period were for the exact same amount. That is one example, but I have more. This all shows that the Bloc Québécois is directly involved with in and out transfers.

We know all about it and we know that the leader of the Bloc is the real inventor of in and out transfers.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member was kind enough to state that all the other parties are innocent of anything and everything they have done is perfectly legitimate.

If that is the case and what the other parties have done was straightforward, and the member acknowledges there was nothing wrong there, then what on earth does he and his government believe is the motivation of the federal prosecutor and Elections Canada if not other than following the facts and doing their job?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the hon. member will have to ask Elections Canada that.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary said, the discussion today is really about how the Conservatives spend Conservative funds and whether those certain expenses should be Canada's, either local or national. I can state that it is certainly not like the previous Liberal government. Some people might take offence when I mention the \$40 million missing scandal, but the fact is that it is still missing.

I have three quick questions for the hon. member. Where would the opposition get that kind of cash? Why would Elections Canada not investigate the use of the \$40 million in the Liberals' previous election campaign? Why are Canadians still paying off that debt? We have written off close to \$16 million which was directly paid by the taxpayers of Canada, not the Liberal Party.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I will not relive before the House the horror that was the sponsorship scandal. I think Canadians know very well what happened.

However, what they do not know and what they have never understood is why, with a criminal conspiracy of that nature and the amount of cash that was flowing around during that era in the Liberal Party from taxpayers, all of it unreported during the election campaign, why did Elections Canada never open an investigation? It seemed like an obvious thing for an electoral agency to consider given that it was an electoral, in addition to financial, fraud.

I think there is still time for Elections Canada to open an investigation and find out what happened to all that money and to find out if it was used in excess of the spending limits of the elections during which that cash was circulating.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the parliamentary secretary's speech. What is worrying is that he seems to sincerely believe it when he says that they obeyed the law, that everything is fine, and that the Chief Electoral Officer and others are ultimately to blame. He accepts absolutely no responsibility for what is going on.

Does he believe in the Chief Electoral Officer's authority? Does he believe in our democratic rules if he is calling into question the work of the Chief Electoral Officer and his investigation process? Does he believe in this democratic institution?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I believe that the Conservative candidates spent Conservative money on Conservative ads. All of the practices of the Conservative Party in every election have followed the rules. The Conservatives got results ethically, legally and in the same way as all of the other parties.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, you have no idea how pleased I am to be speaking during today's opposition day. It will allow me to put the spotlight on some of the lines that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has been feeding us during question period for the past two weeks. I believe, as does my party, that the Prime Minister, through the parliamentary secretary, is completely misleading the House, and that is serious.

The Conservatives are trying to make the public and members here believe that the case involving the CEOC and the Conservative Party is simply an administrative dispute. They seem to be saying that they are disliked by the CEOC, that all of the other parties did the same thing and that, really, it is unfair that the CEOC is picking on the Conservative Party. They would even have us believe that the CEOC's actions are politically motivated.

Today's issue is very important. The topic that we are discussing today, the topic that the Liberal Party chose to raise on its opposition day, is the final outcome of the case that is currently before the courts. The Conservative Party will launch an appeal. It is a question of guaranteeing independence and following the established rules when running for election.

Business of Supply

This is what the Conservatives did. It is clearly laid out in the ruling, which I took the time to read. The Conservatives deliberately transferred funds—in order to pay for a national ad—to ridings and candidates that had not reached their spending limits, as set out in the Canada Elections Act, or to candidates who were not likely to reach their limit. The member for Beauce, who had nearly reached his spending limit, received an invoice that differed from the others, to ensure that he would not exceed his limit.

Listening to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, we are left with the impression that he is completely shocked and that all these insinuations are futile. However, before proceeding with the investigation, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections already had their suspicions about the documents they had received to justify those expenses.

For the benefit of people watching, I would like to give a little background and explain what happened, so everyone understands. They took some money. They identified which ridings still had some spending room, namely, ridings in which the Conservative Party was unlikely to win, where less money was being spent. The campaign was almost over, they wanted to win and they did not have enough money to complete the national advertising campaign, so they took \$1.5 million from 67 ridings. So those 67 Conservative candidates signed an agreement with their party, whereby the money would be given to the candidates, who would then turn around and give it back in order to pay the company that had been hired to create media placements and national advertising.

This is called cheating. The Conservative Party knowingly cheated in order to win. They knew what they were doing. That is serious. We do not encourage the Conservative Party to appeal this case, because it should respect the Federal Court of Appeal decision, acknowledge its offence and pay back what needs to be paid back.

When one is a candidate in a riding with little chance of winning, one might sign a letter because we tend to listen to our parties. It appears that these candidates signed a letter of agreement, but one person refused to sign it: the candidate in Brome—Missisquoi. He sensed that something was not right.

● (1130)

It must be said that this candidate was a knowledgeable lawyer capable of analyzing what he was asked to sign. He refused to sign. He even gave an account that was published in the papers last week, in which he stated that he knew it was a way to circumvent the Elections Act for improper purposes, and to win by cheating.

What is even more alarming is that there are ministers in the House who signed this letter and who went along with the in and out scheme. Today, they are caught up in the scandal. Conservative senators and organizers have also been charged by Elections Canada for breaking the law.

If we find ourselves debating the issue here, it is because, in question period, we are repeatedly given answers that make no sense and, above all, that mislead the House. It is often said the Conservative Party gets bad press abroad. I was really surprised to read what was published in France in *Le Figaro* about the matter we are examining today. It is worthwhile reading an excerpt to make our audience at home aware of the fact that this article is solely about the

Conservative Party and the illegal acts carried out during the 2006 election campaign.

On March 2, 2011, *Le Figaro*, a major French newspaper, published an article that truly shows the negative image of Canada abroad.

Today the Canadian electoral authority formally charged the Prime Minister's Conservative Party and two senators from the governing party with fraud for allegedly concealing cost overruns during the 2006 election. The charges, laid at a time when many observers expect a spring election to be held, revolve around "a false or misleading statement" about the budget for the campaign that brought [the Conservatives] to power, writes Elections Canada in a press release.

According to this independent agency, the Conservative Party deliberately exceeded election spending limits—set at \$18 million—by \$1 million through an accounting scheme involving the right-wing party's local committees. The 2006 election is the one that put an end to the Liberal Party's reign and propelled [the Conservatives] into power.

That is what is being written in a newspaper in France. I will stop here because that is enough to see that the opposition parties understand that a scheme was used involving illegal activities. Analysts in France understand that as well. The Chief Electoral Officer understood that, as did the judge of the Federal Court of Appeal. There is only one party that does not understand the seriousness of its actions: the party being accused, in other words, the Conservative Party.

There were a number of indications. The Chief Electoral Officer heads an independent agency. He was selected by the current Prime Minister. The CEOC is serious and recognized for his expertise. This gives Quebecers and Canadians the assurance that federal elections obey the rules, and it gives people the assurance that our democratic rules are valid and are being followed.

When the Chief Electoral Officer received documents from the Conservative candidates, he began to have his doubts. In the ruling we can see that the local media buys by the candidates were actually made by the national party and the costs transferred to the ridings.

● (1135)

However, he had a nagging suspicion that the interests of the party and those of the candidates engaging in the in and out transfers largely overlapped. Everything was calculated so that no candidate and no riding would exceed their spending limit. Adjustments were even made to ensure that the limits would not be exceeded, and they were such that the Chief Electoral Officer could prove it when he read all of the documents that were handed over.

I say that because the documents were handed over. However, I must point out that, in order for the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to investigate, the RCMP had to search Conservative Party offices and seize documents that the Chief Electoral Officer deemed necessary to carry out his investigation. He had reasonable grounds to suspect that he did not have everything he needed to continue with his investigation. Therefore, he used legal means since the Conservative Party refused to co-operate and answer his questions.

It seems that it was easy to prove from the documents that some very precise adjustments had been made to ensure that candidates were under their spending limit and transferred \$1.5 million to pay an invoice for national advertisements.

Business of Supply

It was also clear that there was a small problem with the transmission of the invoice. The Chief Electoral Officer asked a number of questions about the invoices, particularly those from the advertising company, because these invoices did not look like standard advertising invoices. So he asked questions and analyzed the invoices. During his investigation he questioned someone whose name escapes me, who was managing media placement for the company. This person said—I read it—that the invoices had been altered and that his company had not decided what to put in or how to present the invoices. Throughout the process, a number of witnesses indicated that the Conservatives knew that what they were doing was not entirely above board and that they had even made an effort to hide their illegal activities. Various witnesses corroborated that point.

When the Prime Minister appointed the Chief Electoral Officer, he surely had good reason to do so and he recognized his abilities. Today, they seem to be saying that the Chief Electoral Officer is not doing such a good job. Furthermore, they are even questioning the amount of taxpayers' money being spent on prosecuting the Conservative Party. That is what bothers me the most. They are challenging the fact that the head of an independent organization—which has the important mandate of guaranteeing that the process is democratic—is conducting an investigation and going to court to ensure compliance with the Canada Elections Act. That is being questioned and it is very dangerous. They are beginning to criticize the person who has a very important position. They are insinuating that he has a political bias and that he targeted the Conservative Party outright while leaving the other parties alone. It is a very serious matter to plant such seeds of doubt in the minds of Canadians, and especially to call into question the money spent to prosecute the Conservative Party. The fact remains that a ruling has been handed down and it cannot be refuted. Illegal activities took place. The Conservatives should face the facts and agree to repay the amounts received by candidates.

● (1140)

They should admit that they made a mistake rather than continuing to fight the Chief Electoral Officer.

In our opinion, the Liberal Party of Canada set up some government programs to buy votes. There was the sponsorship program and the HRSDC transitional jobs fund, which allowed the Liberals to spend money in ridings held by political opponents and to sway voter sympathies. As we saw in Justice Gomery's report, which brought to light a complex system of kickbacks, the sponsorship program allowed the Liberals to add hundreds of thousands of dollars to its election spending.

The Conservatives have been caught at a different game. They decided to use what is known as the in and out scheme in order to circumvent the Election Act and spend more than the limit, in other words, to buy votes by cheating.

It is not difficult to see why Canadians do not understand why the Conservative Party is challenging the latest ruling and even trying to make us believe that the Chief Electoral Officer and the judge were off the mark and do not understand what transpired.

I would like to add that they went over their legal national campaign limit by \$1.5 million. After two rulings, especially the last

one, the Conservatives need to realize that the message could not be clearer. They should not take their appeal all the way to the Supreme Court. It is their right to do so, but the evidence is so clear that I truly hope they do not take that route.

To conclude, I would like to read an excerpt from an article by Ms. Cornellier of *Le Devoir*:

Phew, that was close! A Conservative victory would have meant a free-for-all in election campaigns. And perhaps as soon as this spring. All the parties could have assigned some of their national expenses to ridings where they already know they will not win and that spend far less than the legal limit. That would allow a party to offload some of its expenses and would give it the flexibility, on a national scale, to basically spend more than the legal limit. The only limit would be the party's bank account. National spending limits would become a joke, which would only hurt parties with less funding. And we all know which is the rich party these days.

We are clearly very happy with the Federal Court of Appeal's ruling. If a different ruling had been handed down, we would have had to question both the strength of our Elections Act and the idea that elections follow the rules and respect the institution.

The Bloc Québécois will support the motion that has been moved in the House today.

● (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to give the member an opportunity to affirm her position.

The Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada do a rigorous review of all elections. With regard to the situation that occurred in 2006, the Conservative Party put money in and immediately took it out, and then transferred its own expenses into a campaign so it could spend more on its national advertising campaign. It was a scheme. The Chief Electoral Officer said that no other parties or candidates were found to have violated the elections law in that regard. I would ask the member if that is her understanding.

Also, with regard to the Conservative member who said that one court was for and another was against, in fact it was a unanimous decision of the appeal court that said the Conservative Party broke the rules and was in breach of the Canadian Elections Act.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. I completely agree with him. Given the Federal Court of Appeal's ruling, it seems perfectly clear that the Conservative Party violated the Canada Elections Act and was involved in illegal activities. It is clear to everyone, both here in the House and outside the House, except the Conservative Party.

I also agree with the hon. member's statement that the Chief Electoral Officer conducts thorough investigations; the same is true of his commissioner. In order for a complaint to be filed regarding the violation of a regulation, there must be proof, doubt and suspicions. I hope that I will have the opportunity to point out a few of these. Here is one example.

Business of Supply

On December 6, 2006, an employee of Retail Media Group, the marketing company with which the Conservatives were working, raised doubts about the transfers that were being made to Conservative Party members. When he requested permission to learn more about the situation from the Elections Canada broadcasting arbitrator, he was told to wait because it was possible that the party would not want to speak to Elections Canada about it.

The CEOC had reasonable doubt as to whether the Conservative Party was abiding by the law. All sorts of evidence was circulating, which was gathered and submitted to the courts. This led to the Federal Court of Appeal's recent ruling that the Conservative Party did in fact violate the Canada Elections Act and was involved in illegal activities.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Bloc Québécois member on her speech.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister clearly stated that Elections Canada has exonerated the opposition parties in the in and out scandal.

I would like the member to explain why Elections Canada and the RCMP accused the Conservatives, and explain the difference between the opposition parties and the Conservatives.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult to answer that question in so little time, but I can say that Elections Canada found that their national advertising expenses had been deliberately spread out among ridings that had not reached their election spending limits. Thus, they passed on the bill for national advertising, which had absolutely nothing to do with local advertising or local issues. The ads promoted national themes.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada saw this and began asking questions, and very quickly realized that further investigation was needed. This is what we have read. So he wanted to consult other documents, which the Conservative Party refused to hand over. For a party that advocates transparency—so much for that idea. This party refused to co-operate with the Chief Electoral Officer, who simply wanted more information and answers to some questions.

So a search warrant was needed to seize documents from the Conservative Party headquarters. The parliamentary secretary said that we should not get so worked up, that the judge is completely “out to lunch” and that we are all wrong because all the parties use the in and out system, but that is completely false. Are the NDP, the Liberal Party or the Bloc Québécois in court right now, answering to the Chief Electoral Officer? Is the Chief Electoral Officer questioning our practices? Did he find us in violation of the Canada Elections Act during the 2006 election? No; only one party in this House is on trial—the Conservative Party, the governing party.

I must add that this is not the first time the Conservatives have tried to cheat. As we know, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism used departmental letterhead, his parliamentary office letterhead, for promotional purposes and to solicit funds. It seems that the Conservatives are getting in the habit of cheating and trying to get around the rules.

● (1155)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, when the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics held hearings on this matter in the summer of 2008, the committee had subpoenaed 31 witnesses who were Conservative candidates and had participated in the in and out scandal. It came out that the Conservative Party instructed them to disregard the subpoenas and not appear. Then the government called an election just to shut it down.

If this were an administrative disagreement, why has the government failed to show openness, accountability and transparency on this matter? If this is just an administrative disagreement, why not fully co-operate?

The reason, and I hope the member will have an opinion, is that the Conservatives were caught just like they were in all of the other incidents where the government has been accused. It is not simply about this one particular event, but the motion is about the character, honesty, credibility and accountability of the government which it has failed on all counts.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

I think we agree since we share the same opinion on the Conservatives' attitude since coming to power. We all agree on their contempt for democratic institutions.

We can see a parallel with their refusal to have departmental staff appear to answer questions by members of the standing committees. We also saw what happened with the Minister of International Cooperation and her refusal to give funding to KAIROS; we also saw what the Minister of Natural Resources did to obstruct the Access to Information Act in his own department and what the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism did with regard to electoral financing.

The Conservatives are receiving a lot of criticism these days and are getting caught in their own game of cheating the law and not wanting to co-operate to clarify entirely justifiable debates.

In the “in and out” situation before us today, I believe that the claim that this was just an administrative error is intended to mislead the public and the House. Saying that the Chief Electoral Officer is attacking their party is an attempt to discredit the democratic institution that guarantees the legitimacy of our federal elections in Quebec and Canada.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is our intent to support the motion before us today. I say that because some may think it is rather obvious, but I also would be more comfortable with different wording. There were points of order made at the beginning about continuing to ensure that Canadians are innocent until found guilty, the presumption of innocence and so on.

Business of Supply

Some of the wording says it was an act of electoral fraud. I am not a lawyer but that is a serious word to use and has implications for legal processes in courts. The motion would order the government to repay, although this is not a binding motion. Because I have spent many years in parliament and have the greatest respect for the place and all members, I want to put on the record that I am not 100% comfortable with the way the motion reads. However, at the end of the day it is an opposition motion. We need to ensure there is as much latitude as possible for opposition. It is the only opportunity for us to put matters before the House and command the time of the House, so we want to keep it very broad. It is a matter of accountability. The primary function of opposition members is to hold the government to account.

The motion is not legally binding. It is our opinion. If the government votes against it and all opposition members vote for it, we will have expressed our opinion on the matter. Since it goes no further than that, I can live with the language and certainly live with the intent. I love the intent, but I can live with the language given the reasons I have mentioned.

Having been in politics for so long, my heart goes out to and I have some sympathy for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I served on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with him for a number of years when I first came here and know him well. He is a very intelligent member of Parliament, very feisty and ready to do battle at the drop of a hat, yet he is still a backbench member, although clearly someone who is “18 with a bullet” as was said in the radio business.

He reminds me very much of the current government House leader who in the Ontario legislature was the parliamentary assistant to the minister of labour under the Mike Harris government. Provincially we call them parliamentary assistants and here they are parliamentary secretaries. The first thing the government did and continued to do for the eight years it was in power was go after the labour movement. There was the poor parliamentary assistant, a rookie MPP, having to stand and defend the draconian attack on the labour movement. I remember similar feelings watching the current government House leader perform. I thought he was a sharp, smart fellow who clearly was going somewhere in politics, but was given the impossible job of trying to defend the Harris agenda of attacking the labour movement.

He was the poor MPP who had to go to the labour conventions. I remember one in Windsor where he had to have a police escort to get him into the convention, to get him to the podium so he could speak. As a courtesy at conventions the labour movement traditionally gives the guest speakers one of the convention bags. The government House leader carried that bag around for years because as far as he was concerned he earned it with blood and rightly so. That was a tough moment and a tough gig.

● (1200)

I say that for the member for Nepean—Carleton. Having to defend what is alleged to be illegal criminal activity on the part of a government, whose *raison d'être* is to go after the bad guys, is not an easy road to walk down no matter who one is. I offer up that sympathy.

On a personal level, if things continue to go that way, this is earning one's spurs, putting in one's time. If the example of the current government House leader is any example, then the member for Nepean—Carleton hopefully will get many more opportunities to reflect on matters that have a lot more positiveness to them than this.

Along the way, the government has been scrambling to grapple with the message box and massaging it as things have changed along the way. I find it interesting that the parliamentary secretary said that all of, what he termed, the in and out transactions on the part of the three opposition parties were entirely legal, that there was no problem. The parliamentary secretary said that the only thing the opposition parties were guilty of was hypocrisy.

If I have been following the bouncing ball correctly, the government has maintained it did nothing different than the rest of us. In other words, the Conservatives have done nothing different than what the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP did. Yet the parliamentary secretary now says that what they did, and he is trying to say they did not do anything, is leave this one little gap, which is incredible thinking.

The gap is this. Elections Canada has an absolutely stellar reputation, not only with Canadians but all of us involved in politics and, quite frankly, internationally. The way we hold our elections, the rules we have, the non-partisan, professional arm's-length nature of Elections Canada is something we should be very proud of because we are lucky to have that. Ironically, if I understand correctly, the federal prosecutor was a creation of the current government.

What we are left with is Elections Canada, an internationally respected arm's-length parliamentary agency, and the federal prosecutor, who is too new to have that reputation. One would think the government at least believes it is a good idea to have one since it created the position. One would assume it supports the person and the work being done. The gap requires that, at best, Elections Canada and the federal prosecutor are wrong and, at worst, there is a conspiracy going on. There are a bunch of government bureaucrats running around trying to attack the government and bring it down.

The way they will do that is by manipulating the interpretation of the election laws and make it look like the sitting government defrauded the Canadian people. What a stupid plan that would be in this era of “H's” Canada. It goes after bureaucrats who are only doing their jobs. However, if a senior bureaucrat, who has been appointed by the government through and order-in-council, happens to damage the government, or its reputation or suggests it has done wrong, the government will chop off his or her head. That is what it does to bureaucrats who, in its mind, cross it.

● (1205)

Therefore, with all that, does any reasonable Canadian believe Elections Canada and the federal prosecutor have conspired together to create a false charge in the hope that, after all the court proceedings years down the road, would somehow be the undoing of the sitting government because the people at Elections Canada and at the federal prosecutor's office did not like the government? It makes no sense.

Business of Supply

What does make sense is that all the transactions of the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP were legal, appropriate, accounted for and signed off by Elections Canada. When Elections Canada looked at the Conservative transactions, they were different.

One of my Liberal colleagues, the member for St. Paul's, spoke about the allegations of forged invoices. Some of this money was in bank accounts in less than an hour.

The truth, it would seem, is the Conservatives are in a lot of serious trouble. That is why I opened my remarks by commenting on the member for Nepean—Carleton, who has this impossible task in question period and here today to try to defend this. If members will notice, there really was not much defence. There were a lot of points of order to try to get the member to speak to the motion, because he wanted to talk about everything but. Why? They do not have an excuse. They do not have a good defence. They got caught.

The other part of the motion speaks to senators, two of whom have been charged, stepping down while the charges are in place.

It is interesting. I think most of us would accept that if there were cabinet ministers, or even parliamentary secretaries, with this kind of cloud hanging over them, there would be pressure and I suspect they would step down. Every instance I have ever experienced, whether here or in the Ontario legislature, when a minister was charged with anything that was at all deemed serious, not a parking ticketing but a very serious charge, he or she immediately stepped down to preserve his or her dignity. I have seen where the minister has never come back and I have seen where the minister has been exonerated and brought back to exactly the same position.

Senators, and it hurts me to say this, are members of the upper house. They are all honourable. They all get that title, which only cabinet ministers get. They have incredible power over there. It is highly appropriate that the majority of the House would call on senators, appointed or otherwise, to do the right thing, to do the honourable parliamentary thing, and at least step aside. We are not saying to give up the pay or anything else at this stage, but show the respect that not only the House and that place deserve but the respect that Canadian people deserve.

It speaks to how frustrating it is when we cannot hold senators to account. When we take a look at who is there, let us remember that the two senators who have been charged are both full-time senators, getting all the benefits, the pay and everything else. They have all but full-time jobs as Conservative Party operatives, which are nicely paid for by the Canadian people.

I want to take a moment to also remind members in this debate, and any Canadians who might be watching, just how partisan the Prime Minister and the government are in everything they do, especially when it comes to the supposed independent senators in that other place. I will not name names because that is not my issue. However, I will give the dates and give a little description of some of the people who the Prime Minister has put into what is supposed to be a non-partisan, independent sober second thought chamber.

● (1210)

On February 27, 2006, a Tory organizer was appointed to sit in cabinet as a Quebec representative. We all remember that. Do

members remember when nobody would be appointed to the Senate who had not been elected? That was the first.

On January 2, 2009, a red letter day for a lot of lucky Canadians, a former director of the Progressive Conservative Fund, who chaired Tory leadership and policy conventions, was appointed.

On January 2, 2009, and this is one of the people charged, the Conservative national campaign director for the 2006 and 2008 elections was appointed to the Senate.

On January 2, 2009, a fundraiser and former chair of the Conservative Party fund, another person who has been charged, was appointed.

I want to mention a quote that senator said on the floor of the Senate on November 27, 2010. He said, "I want to tell you that I do not admit to being a bagman; I proclaim it". He also said, "I love politics but never had the time to become a candidate".

How many people watching this also love politics, but life gets in the way, the job, the kids, taking care of parents, earning money, all those little things that we little people in Canada have to think about? I am sure they would love a chance to be in that other place if all they had to do was show their love of politics but did not have the time to be a candidate. What arrogance.

I will give more on that big red letter day of January 2, 2009. These folks had a great 2009.

A former Conservative MP, who was defeated in the 2008 election, was appointed to the Senate. That MP was elected to this place, the people did not like the job the member did, was fired, but is now back in a law-making seat, having been put in through an appointment. That is independent, sober second thought all right.

On January 2, 2009, another unsuccessful Conservative in the 2008 election was appointed. It appears that an individual gets two shots when a Conservative candidate, one through the legitimate way, through that door, and then the other way, through the back door down the hall.

More were appointed on January 2, 2009. That was a record-setting day. Never have so many senators been appointed on one day. I stand to be corrected, but I do think that was the date. The current Prime Minister has the title. Another individual appointed on that date was a former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister from New Brunswick.

● (1215)

On January 2, 2009, another unsuccessful Conservative candidate in the 2006 election became a senator and won the greatest lottery in the world, where it is not only cash for life but the individual can make the laws of the country. What a deal. All people have to do is know the Prime Minister really well.

I will mention just a couple more because I like to do it.

On January 8, an unsuccessful Canadian Alliance candidate in 2000 made it to the gilded cage.

On January 14, 2009, another former Progressive Conservative MP was appointed.

Business of Supply

August 27, 2009, another unsuccessful Conservative in the 2008 election was appointed to the other place. The former president of the Conservative Party was appointed on that day as were the Quebec co-chair of the Prime Minister's leadership campaign and the Prime Minister's former press secretary. The list goes on. It is so depressing.

Let me turn now to this whole issue of—

• (1220)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member is out of time. We will move on to questions and comments. The hon. member for Calgary East.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just first want to tell my hon. friend that he does not have to scream and talk so loudly. It is bad for his health. He should cool down and take it easy. He is a good debater, but he has been screaming and shouting and that is not good for his health.

Coming back to the issue of senators, he was talking about the perks and all these things that senators have. I am simply amazed at how the NDP members think with their heads in the sand. They introduced a motion the other day to abolish the Senate, which they very well know is not going to happen. They want a referendum and other things. Yet when it comes to a practical solution which was put forward by the government to reform the Senate, the hon. member's party rejected it. Then he turns up in the House and screams about how the Senate is unresponsive.

Why do NDP members not use practical ways to get things done? Why do they always have to scream at the top of their lungs about how the sky is falling for something that is unattainable?

Perhaps the hon. member would like to reflect on that and support the government so that at least the reform of the Senate could go ahead so he does not need to lose his temper.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for listening and commenting. I assure him my health is 100%, which I am sure brings great warmth to his heart and the hearts of all those on that side of the House.

I might also say that I was not angry. When I am loud, it is because the people of Hamilton have sent me here to deliver a message. Most of the messages are about things that outrage my constituents and therefore should outrage me.

Quite frankly, the hon. member did not spend one minute talking about anything to do with a defence. There is no defence over there at all for the alleged charges that have been made here in the House and outside this place. It is everything but the issues that are at hand. As long as the government continues to act in an undemocratic fashion, as long as it continues to act in a way that does not benefit my constituents in Hamilton, does not benefit my home community, members can count on two things: one, we will always stand up and oppose that kind of agenda; and two, as long as I am in this place, those members will always hear me.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us is self-evident. It has to do with a particular case. The reason it is before us also has to do with the fact that it is reflective of other cases.

Let me remind the House that Marty Cheliak, the RCMP chief superintendent who supported the long gun registry was canned. Linda Keen, nuclear safety, was canned. Adrian Measner, the Wheat Board president, was canned. Pat Stogran, the veterans ombudsman, was canned. Sheridan Scott, Competition Bureau, was canned. Steve Sullivan, victims of crime ombudsman, was canned. Paul Kennedy was canned. Bernard Shapiro, ethics commissioner, was canned. Munir Sheikh, chief statistician at StatsCan, was canned. I have about seven or eight more, but I think members get the point.

The government has demonstrated by its actions or inaction that the Prime Minister is now at a point where he is abusing the power of being in government. He has decided that he is above the rules and above the law.

In this regard, the Federal Court of Appeal in a unanimous decision has found that the Conservatives have broken the law, the national party candidates, and indeed has charged four people.

I wonder if the member has any further examples of the abuse of power by the Conservative government.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. I will approach it a little differently. The member made excellent points.

I would underscore that given what has happened to all the senior bureaucrats who dared cross the Prime Minister and the government, Canadians who are not part of the political debate but are weighing this and trying to decide whether or not there is something here should ask themselves if any senior bureaucrat in the federal prosecutor's office or in Elections Canada would dare to make up, manufacture or go on some kind of a wild goose chase against the sitting government in that context. The answer is clear that no reasonable person would be that foolish.

I would say, and one would expect me to me say this but I will try to rise above it for a nanosecond, that it says an awful lot about our system and those individuals that, even in this kind of assassination climate of senior bureaucrats, when something is wrong it is wrong and they are prepared to say so and take appropriate action. That to me speaks well of the sustainability of our democracy.

• (1225)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the voters of Hamilton Centre are very proud having heard their elected MP.

Sixty-five Conservative candidates claimed 60% of the rebate from the government for the phantom ad money that simply passed through their bank accounts. This means that local riding associations involved in this scheme received thousands in rebates for these phantom expenses. They received the rebate from Canadian taxpayers.

I ask the hon. member for Hamilton Centre, should this money be paid back? After all, this money came from ordinary Canadians. It is my tax money, the member's tax money, the money of all taxpayers. Should the candidates repay this money?

Business of Supply

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. At the end of the day, if the courts determine there was fraudulent activity, any money that was received under those circumstances needs to be paid back.

I am glad the member raised the point. Again, I am not a lawyer, but there are two main aspects. One is that this in and out scheme allowed the Conservatives to spend over \$1 million more than the limit would allow. Remember that election finance control is one of the main foundations of our democracy.

The second aspect is that by the exercise of the money going in and out, technically it allowed the individual ridings that the money went into, albeit for less than an hour, to claim that amount of money that went out as an expense and to get the rebate. There is some question that some of the invoices that were used to justify that may be forged.

While the whole relationship between the funding of a national campaign and a local campaign may be inside baseball to a lot of Canadians, when it comes to the idea of falsifying and forging invoices to get money one is not entitled to, Canadians get that one.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has made reference to the Conservative message more generally in the past. A lot of people recognize that it was the party that talked about transparency and accountability and accused the Liberals of scandals in the past. Yet what we see and hear and are debating today is a different story.

I would like to hear not just about the hypocrisy but the shame in the governing party exercising the very actions that it spoke against so strongly.

• (1230)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important aspects is the member for Churchill is asking an important question. I want to use the fact of her being here at all as my response to her. The member was elected to this place, the same way we all were, but she cannot be a Canadian senator because she is not yet 30. That is how archaic and out of touch the Senate is. That is why the fact that senators are involved in this alleged crime makes it even worse.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Ajax—Pickering.

A worrying trend has emerged in Ottawa. There is a gradual and unprecedented undermining of our electoral and parliamentary processes. The current Conservative government's slow, insidious assault on our democracy is lowering the bar on the time-honoured way that politics is done in Canada. This is being accomplished by overriding and circumventing the rules of fair play and accountability, and slowly, bit by bit, changing the standards and expectations of our democracy.

This process is not unlike the cautionary tale of the frog placed in a pot of water sitting on the stove top. The hapless frog does not notice the slow incremental rise in temperature of the water until it is much too late. The result is inevitable. The frog gets cooked.

Canada's very identity is tied to our democratic form of electing representatives, our form of government and the role of Parliament

in representing citizens. This has been the result of a centuries long and determined struggle by many people.

Our democratic principles of openness and accountability, of civility and fair play have made us who and what we are as a country. Over time these have made Canada the envy of the world, an inclusive, prosperous and peaceful nation where we recognize the fairness of basic rights and equality of all Canadians regardless of their worldwide origins.

The Conservative government's pattern of deceit gnaws at democracy's edges. A minister wrongly blamed bureaucrats for her decision to cut funding to the church-backed charity KAIROS, doctoring documents and misleading the House of Commons. The Prime Minister prorogued Parliament to hide information on Afghan detainee torture. Cabinet ministers have refused to reveal how many billions of taxpayer dollars will be needed to pay for their crime bills and their prison expansion plans. Civil servants are muzzled. Independent officers of Parliament are fired when they disagree with government ideology. NGOs are punished. Now, top Conservative officials are facing criminal charges for election fraud in the 2006 campaign.

Each of those examples is important, but the pattern as a whole of the undermining of democracy is what I am most concerned about.

The members of this institution over time have a long history of fighting for what is right. That is what I was elected by the citizens of Vancouver Quadra to do. I hope that is what the members opposite were elected to do, to fight for what is right, to protect others, to protect the environment. I think of: David Anderson and the Species at Risk Act; Judy LaMarsh, the first Liberal woman cabinet minister, who fought for women's equality; MPs who fought for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, health care, pensions, seniors, children, poverty.

What we have here, and what is so egregious, is Conservative members and ministers are fighting to defend what is wrong. They are fighting to defend their abuse of power day after day after day. This in and out election fraud is wrong. It may be proven to be illegal. If the Director of Public Prosecutions is filing charges, that means there is a substantial chance of conviction.

What is being alleged? I would say it is \$2 million in pure electoral fraud: \$1.2 million in spending over the legal limit, that is \$1.2 million in illegal advertising by the Conservative Party in the 2006 election; forging fake invoices to cover the tracks; and then another fraudulent acquisition of \$800,000 in ill-gotten gains by bilking taxpayers.

Business of Supply

For me the term “money laundering”, another dirty, illegal activity, comes to mind. What is money laundering? One, it is placement, cash introduced into a financial system, illicit cash. That would be the \$1.2 million. Two, it is layering, such as, complex transactions to camouflage the illegal source. That would be the doctored invoices and the ridings being asked to be complicit in this. Three, it is integration, acquiring wealth generated by the transaction of the illicit funds. That would be the \$800,000 to be paid by taxpayers back to those ridings. This sure smells a lot like money laundering.

In British Columbia there are a number of MPs and executive council who are implicit in this, including the President of the Treasury Board and the former government whip. Seventy ridings were implicated, a dozen in British Columbia alone. This is a critical issue at the heart of our democracy.

● (1235)

I want to talk about what may seem like a sidetrack and that is Darwin's theory of evolution. It is no longer a theory. There is no scientific refuting of this understanding of species evolution. One of the understandings is that individuals in a species co-operate and they also compete. They compete within their group, but if they do not co-operate enough, then their group will lose in the competition to another group. Whether it is dictyostelium amoebae, ants, wolves or humans, we all compete and co-operate.

What stops us from competing or undermining those in our own group to the detriment of the group and our evolutionary survival? It could be called a “cheater detection system”, which is exactly what we are talking about with all of these abuses of power of the Conservative government. It is cheating and undermining the cheater detection systems of our parliamentary and electoral processes. The direction in which Canada is going under the government is bad for Canadians. I will give a few examples.

Not only are the Conservatives systematically cheating and breaking the law, we have a Prime Minister who is alleged to have bribed a dying MP or had been implicit in bribing a dying MP for his vote. The immigration minister was recently caught having developed a strategy on fundraising for targeting ethnic Canadians through his ministry, through public funds. We have ministers who have signed-off on multi-million dollar—

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could you clarify the rules about decorum in the House of Commons? Is it in the Standing Orders that it is okay for a member of Parliament to falsely accuse other people of committing crimes in the House of Commons, which the member opposite just did? She directly accused the Prime Minister of this country of committing a crime. Does she think that is appropriate decorum in the House of Commons?

Mr. Speaker, can you clarify the rules as to whether members of Parliament can actually accuse people of committing crimes in the House of Commons with no evidence whatsoever and just smear people's reputations, which is what the member for Vancouver Quadra seems to be doing in a very classless typical way?

The Deputy Speaker: Calling into question the integrity of hon. members is out of order. I would urge the member from Vancouver Quadra to keep that in mind as she concludes her remarks.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, with regard to that point of order, I clearly used the word “alleged”. There were allegations and they are in print.

Not only is the government systematically cheating, or alleged to be cheating, it is also undermining the cheater detector systems that have been built into our democracy that are part of the fabric and character of Canada.

There is a list of examples and I will give just a few.

Peter Tinsley, the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, had his tenure ended over the Afghan detainee controversy. His office is a cheater detector system and he was calling out the government.

Robert Marleau, Information Commissioner, eventually resigned because of government blockage of relevant documents regarding the public interest. The government's systematic secrecy around documents is also undermining an important cheater detection system, which is the transparency of information.

Dr. Arthur Carty, National Science Advisor to the Prime Minister, was dismissed after advocating for an evidentiary science policy. A scientific basis for decision-making is a good cheater detection and the government does not like it.

As the official opposition, we use every parliamentary tool available to stop these abuses of power, these offences, and to raise the alarm. The Conservatives' secrecy, deceit and excessive control will only breed cynicism and apathy in the public, corroding Canada's national sense of civility and civil engagement.

An eight-year-old constituent came to Parliament to meet me and he was in awe of Parliament and our institutions. We need to protect and maintain them for his generation.

Like the hapless frog sitting in the pot of ever-hotter water, the results of inattention or passivity toward the health of Canada's democracy and the government's abuses will be very hard to undo. Fortunately, Canadians are beginning to notice: prorogation, cut to the census, information secrecy, KAIROS and now the in-and-out scam, alleged election fraud.

Thankfully, Canadians are feeling the heat and that is important because the very character of Canada is at stake.

● (1240)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member's conclusion is the one that I hope and I know many members of this place hope we would focus on. The matter before us is just one example of where an abuse of power has led to acts that appear to be illegal when the Federal Court of appeal says that the laws were breached.

Business of Supply

The member is also well aware that it is not just that the Conservative Party in the 2006 election overspent by \$1.2 million. It is also that the candidates who had these expenses improperly transferred down to them received rebates on them. Some of those ridings actually received the rebate before the audits were complete and the breach of the elections law was discovered. The government has refused to co-operate with Elections Canada. This is just another example of the Conservatives not wanting to get to the bottom of it. They think it is an administrative difficulty but there is no evidence that they have taken any action whatsoever to help the House clean up this mess, because they cannot do it.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct in his observations. The Conservative government's pattern is not one of mistakes nor of well-intentioned ministers with staff who are doing the wrong thing. This is actually the pattern of a government and a party that believes that the end justifies any means and will undertake any means if it thinks it can get away with them. Now, some of these means that are unethical and possibly illegal are being uncovered and light is being shed on this approach, this very undermining of democracy that I have been describing.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech and, unfortunately, the partisan smears and attacks, and they were beneath the member who I have worked with in the past. I am surprised at this partisan motion that has been brought forward when Canadians are faced with some of the toughest economic challenges they have had this century. We could be spending our time talking about how we could be improving the economy and yet the Liberals bring forward this motion.

Since she has decided to raise this issue, I have a question for her. Historically, not too long ago we had something called the Gomery inquiry. Out of that inquiry, we found that there was something called the "ad scam" and the Liberal Party was forced to pay \$1 million back to the Canadian people. However, we are still waiting to find out what happened to the other \$40 million.

I was hopeful today that the member could update the House on what the Liberal Party is actually doing to find that \$40 million that is still missing and what she has done personally to encourage her leader to bring it forward so Canadians can know where their tax dollars have gone.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that partisan attack. In fact, the Gomery inquiry, after extensive investigation, exonerated all members and all parliamentarians of the Liberal Party from any involvement in that situation. That is the opposite of what we have here when we have a minister of immigration whose own department appears to be complicit in partisan electoral analysis and fundraising, and when we have a party that has perpetrated partisan attacks through potential electoral fraud to gain more funds for its ridings and to overspend the budget in order to buy more partisan attack ads and steal the 2006 election.

• (1245)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing is more fundamental to democracy than the independence of parliamentary institutions, having oversight and ensuring that our system has rules that are followed and adhered to.

In the time I have allotted I will talk about the in and out scandal and why it is such a concern, but moreover, why we as parliamentarians have to be deeply concerned about the trajectory, not just of this issue but of others, and its implications on democracy.

The in and out scandal is, at its base, an attempt to break election laws, laws that were put in place to ensure during a campaign every party was on equal footing, every party had limits and every party was allowed to spend a certain amount.

For one party to be able to break those rules to the tune of \$1.2 million and to be able to go out and buy all kinds of additional ads and have resources that other parties are not afforded is not just wrong but, frankly, it amounts to electoral fraud, which means that the electoral process we had was uneven because one party was conferred an unfair advantage.

If we were to allow that to stand, if we accept the Conservative argument that this is just an administrative issue and we should not worry about it, what precedent would that establish? What message does that send?

If the people who make the laws flaunt the laws and if the people who make the laws say that no one really needs to follow the laws if they can find clever ways around them, how can we possibly have a strong democracy?

The Conservatives say that this is an issue faced by everybody. Only one party had its national campaign headquarters raided by the RCMP. Only one party had charges brought against senior organizers and senators in its party. Only one party has a paper trail of doctored documents to try break election laws. That party is the Conservative Party of Canada. Therefore, to suggest that everybody does it does not pass as anything more than empty rhetoric.

More than that, even after being caught, charged, taken to court by Elections Canada and the court tossing out the Conservatives' arguments saying that they were bogus and ridiculous, the Conservatives still stand in defiance. They still refuse to own up to what they have done or to acknowledge that what they did in the past was wrong. They refuse to own up to their error and to say that they never should have done it. Instead, they try to brush it off as unimportant.

I think it sends a terrible message and establishes an awful precedent. However, it is part of a bigger trend.

Recently a minister was charged with allegedly doctoring documents to make it look as though department officials were the ones who made the decision to cut funding to KAIROS when, in fact, those bureaucrats had done exactly the opposite. That minister was in committee and in the House and made comments that she did not know who altered the documents. She clearly misled Parliament because later she came back and said that she did know. For that, we are told that the minister is courageous and that the minister is a strong minister who we should all applaud for the work she is doing, even though the Prime Minister will not even allow her to respond to the questions that we pose.

Business of Supply

Much bigger than that, though, is the trend that the government has of going after independent voices, voices that speak out and demand change. It started with Linda Keen. Linda Keen was the president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission who stood and said that the government was wrong in how it was handling radioactive isotopes that are critical in diagnosing cancer. However, because she spoke out and took an opinion, she was fired.

It continued with Paul Kennedy, the RCMP Public Complaints Commissioner who said that what was happening in the RCMP was wrong, that it needed to change, that there were important recommendations, from Iacobucci to O'Connor to the public safety committee, that were left unimplemented and that, without those changes, we would have other problems, either with tasers or with people who suffered like Maher Arar and Mr. El Maati, Mr. Nureddin or Mr. Almalki.

• (1250)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate since it began and note that the member for Mississauga South has risen three times on a point of order complaining about the relevance of speeches. I could say the same thing about the Liberal speeches at the present time. This is a soap box that the Liberals have set up for themselves to talk about every issue and, I appeal to you to ensure that they stick to the issue at hand, which they are not doing.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention.

I would urge the member for Ajax—Pickering that while he may stray into other areas, the bulk of his remarks should address the substance of the motion before the House.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I would argue that what I am talking about is fundamental to the motion we are dealing with today. Let us consider the fact that this is not an isolated, one-off instance. If it were to be held out as a mistake, a one-off occasion that could easily be explained as one error, that would be one thing. However, it is part of a broader trend.

At stake in the House are the very institutions that ensure that our democracy is kept viable and strong, that we have strong independent oversight, that agencies like Elections Canada are able to set and enforce rules to make sure that fairness is maintained and that our system of democracy is kept healthy. There could be nothing more germane than going over examples of the government attacking those institutions as part of a broader pattern.

Mr. Kennedy, for talking about the changes needed at the RCMP, was let go. He did not want to go but was let go. We have not heard a word from his replacement in over a year, someone who has disappeared into the ether, a former Conservative fundraiser with no experience with the national police force and who is doing his job by not saying a thing or demanding changes.

Munir Sheikh, the head of Statistics Canada, who refused to have words put into his mouth to the effect that he supported the idea of ending the long form census when he had thought no such thing, was effectively forced out of his job because he would not buy the government's talking lines.

And the following were fired as well: Colonel Pat Stogran, the Veterans Ombudsman; Peter Tinsley, the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission; Richard Colvin; and Steve Sullivan, who said that the government's plan for victims was unbalanced and would not work. Marty Cheliak, head of the Canadian firearms program, was also fired. And there is Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Consider the pattern. When looking at Elections Canada and the way the rules are being flaunted, not followed and essentially waived off as insignificant, we see that it is part of a trend and pattern that must be arrested and expunged.

Here are the fundamental questions. What if we let this stand? What if we allowed these attacks on the independent institutions that oversee Parliament to stand? What if we put a stamp of approval on them? What if Canadians do not stand up and challenge them? What is to stop a future prime minister from going the next steps and eliminating all of the lights that shine in dark corners and give us insight into what is happening, that ensure that when Canadians are making decisions in elections they are doing so with facts, and that when Parliament is making a decision in the House, it is doing so with accurate and viable information?

If we do not fight to protect the laws that are put in place by agencies like Elections Canada, then we will watch everything fall like a row of dominos. When we stand in the House and are forced to vote on bills that have no costing and no information provided, we are already seeing those dominos falling. When we see the independent officers of Parliament, one after the other, being knocked out and replaced with people who refuse to speak out, who refuse to do anything but carry the government talking points, we are walking into a situation that we cannot get back from.

This motion is about the in and out scandal, but it is about much more. It is about protecting the institutions that maintain strong and healthy democracies, and we have to take a stand.

• (1255)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the theme is expanding a little but I know that members are not going to waste the House's time.

Speaking about wasting the House's time, from January 2008 until March 2008, this matter was before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which is supposed to look at electoral issues; it is in its purview. That committee was filibustered by the Conservatives, who did not want to deal with the issue. In fact, that committee did not meet after March. For six months it did no work because the government did not want an examination done of what actually happened.

The issue then went to the ethics committee and witnesses were called. The Conservatives told witnesses not to appear. Witnesses were subpoenaed and the Conservatives told them to ignore the subpoenas.

Business of Supply

The question for the member is this: If the Conservative Party believes this is just an administrative dispute, why has it not co-operated fully with Parliament, with its committees, with Elections Canada and the prosecutor to make sure that all of the facts are there so that we can resolve this issue and get on with the business of the House? That is what we should be doing.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an excellent point. If this is such a minor issue and the Conservatives have nothing to hide, why are they blocking all of the processes that would provide us with the answers that we need to get to the bottom of it?

I would also point out that people do not get charged and do not get threatened with jail time on administrative issues. It is no longer an administrative issue when someone faces the possibility of going to jail.

The Conservatives have talked about this as just an accounting issue. Similarly, accountants are not in the practice of falsifying documents to break rules; and when they are, they are charged. We would no more accept an accountant who tries to cook the books to get a particular outcome to deceive shareholders than we would a political party trying to break the rules and move around the numbers to try to garner an unfair, illicit advantage in a campaign.

I think the following is an extremely important point and it blows me away that the government will not acknowledge it: the idea that we have fair, balanced and equal elections should be a fundamental precept of our democracy.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today in this discussion the parliamentary secretary stood up and gave a lengthy list of activities that have taken place on the part of all parties in this House, similar and/or identical activities to those alleged by the opposition right now.

I am not sure if the public is aware that committees are controlled by the opposition. It has the numbers in committee, so it can basically dictate what it wishes to do. A suggestion was put forward by the government to have the committee evaluate each party identically so that members could judge the way to go to deal with the issue. The opposition parties said no. They just wanted the Conservative approach to be investigated, but as far as their activities were concerned, no, they did not want an investigation.

I just say that what is right is right, what is wrong is wrong, and what is fair is fair. We are all in this together. We are all parliamentarians and we should be subject to the same rules and obligations. I do agree with that.

However, why would we be afraid to have an open book policy for each and every party in this place? It is a bit hypocritical to condemn one particular party for doing the same thing that another does itself, and for that other party not to admit this or to open its books.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, it is not me who is making these accusations. It is the RCMP that raided the Conservative Party headquarters. It is the law enforcement officials who laid charges against senior Conservative organizers and senators. There is also the fact that only one party has a demonstrated paper trail of doing this. Therefore, the notion that we should investigate everyone and

use committee time to go after them when there is no evidence that anyone but the Conservative Party did this is to distract Parliament and to waste time.

We need to look at the independent agencies that are responsible for overseeing these matters, which have determined that the Conservatives have broken the rules. For having done so, the Conservatives are now facing charges and potential jail time. And because they have done so, we need to investigate this matter.

However, the Conservative Party would like to waste as much time as possible, searching out every possible corner so that it delays this matter for as long as possible.

• (1300)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

Hon. colleagues of mine on this side of the House have spoken previously about the fact this motion is regrettable in several important ways. It is clearly a partisan attempt to play politics and games and to mislead with mistruths. It prejudices the outcome of a long-standing dispute and honest difference of opinion between the Conservative Party and Elections Canada officials. I would like to speak to the actions of those officials and to the strong laws that govern election financing in this country.

The Canada Elections Act outlines the clear rules of the game, so to speak. These are the envy of other countries, as they help protect the integrity of our system.

When our government took office in 2006, we introduced the Federal Accountability Act, which further strengthened the rules surrounding the financing of political entities. These changes took big money out of federal politics. They are what Canadians expect and deserve.

What is at issue in the matter currently before us, and soon, we hope, back in court, is whether certain expenses should be counted as local or national. On this point there is an honest difference of opinion. The Canada Elections Act restricts the sources of money that political parties and candidates can use. The main source of revenue of registered parties and candidates is usually the contributions they receive from their supporters. Other sources of revenue include the partial reimbursement of electoral expenses that political parties and candidates receive following an election; the quarterly allowances that are given to political parties, which are calculated on the basis of the number of votes the parties received in the last election; and strictly regulated transfers received from entities of the same political family.

Since the coming into force of the Federal Accountability Act, unions and corporations have not been allowed to contribute to political parties and candidates any more. And certainly, someone cannot make contributions in any calendar year in excess of \$1,100 to a registered political party. The same amount can be given in any calendar year to a registered association or to a candidate supported by a registered party.

Business of Supply

Elections Canada publishes on its website all of the returns it receives from registered parties and candidates. This is a bid to make the system transparent and fair. We support that. We have said so repeatedly, and our actions in that regard speak volumes, which make the actions of certain Elections Canada officials in their treatment of this matter all the more curious.

It would appear that Elections Canada told the media details of the investigation into this matter, something that is highly unusual for any federal agency. Emails obtained under access to information showed that Elections Canada officials were totally preoccupied with the leak.

However, at committee, Mr. Marc Mayrand of Elections Canada was less than forthcoming about who conducted the internal review into this alleged leak. He later admitted that he had been mainly responsible for conducting the review, and he had to correct the record when he was asked how many people knew in advance that the police investigation was entering a new phase. At first he said three. Later he said five. The fact is that Elections Canada conducted an investigation of itself in connection with this alleged leak.

Elections Canada has been very vigorous in investigating our party. Elections Canada certainly should not let the Conservative Party investigate itself, but why would Elections Canada and Mr. Mayrand think that it is appropriate that they personally investigate themselves? In the interests of time, I will leave that question before the House, except to say there are questions in parliamentarians' purview that have never been answered clearly to this day.

To quote the *Ottawa Citizen* columnist, John Robson:

The more I watch this stuff...the more convinced I am that if there's a scandal here, it doesn't involve the Tories.

• (1305)

Canada is a country where the rule of law prevails and where the presumption of innocence is guaranteed. People have the right to fair and equitable processes and will make the appropriate representations before the court, not before the House. It would not be appropriate to discuss the facts of this case further. The House cannot substitute itself for the judicial system in making the determination the motion seeks to make.

I therefore urge all hon. members of the House to oppose the motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Conservatives around precedents.

There was a member of the cabinet in the House of Commons who was alleged to have done something wrong. She now sits as an independent. The Prime Minister removed her from cabinet and then quickly thereafter removed her from the party. Conservative senators who will be in the Conservative caucus meeting tomorrow had the public prosecutor and the RCMP banging on their door. They have been charged. Of course they have to go before a court and the charges have to be proved. Does it not seem to my hon. colleague somewhat strange, if not hypocritical, for the Conservatives to kick out some people who were under allegations and were never charged with anything, as in the case of the member who is now an independent, whereas they are comfortable having in the caucus other folks who have been charged by the public prosecutor who is

an arm's-length non-partisan public official? They are being charged with defrauding the Canadian people in the midst of an election. That is pretty serious for those of us who are concerned with democracy.

Is my friend not concerned with his party's seemingly hypocritical stance on one person being alleged to have done something wrong and tossed out of caucus but two Conservative senators, who are bagmen, are being allowed to stay and advise the Prime Minister?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently said in the House that the Conservative Party acted under the law as it saw it and understood it at the time. When it was clear that Elections Canada had changed the interpretation of the law, the Conservative Party adjusted its practices in the 2008 election. We have followed practices since that time to ensure that our party maintains the law of the land. We respect the law and we will continue to respect the law of the land.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member has indicated his party wants to respect the law and will fully co-operate with the police agencies which have charged four people in this regard.

During the hearings before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Marc Mayrand, appeared before us and he was asked if anyone in the Conservative Party, in its fundraising wing, in its electoral campaign offices, ever contacted Elections Canada to ask whether the party's proposed scheme was legal under the Canada Elections Act. His response was "no". All communications, voice as well as written, were checked, but there was no evidence whatsoever that the Conservative Party had even asked whether or not its scheme was going to be within the law of the land.

• (1310)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the Liberal Party at the time of the ad scam asked for permission to take the funds and redirect that money to the party. We know that the Liberal Party had to pay back \$1 million. Canadians know that there are still \$40 million missing that the Liberal Party funnelled into the party. It was Canadian taxpayers' money. I do not understand why the Liberal Party thinks it has the audacious right to be the most righteous party in the land when in fact it is the only party that actually stole money from Canadian taxpayers who want their \$40 million back.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's debate.

First and foremost, when discussing and debating this motion, we have to address the overarching issue which is that the motion is in direct contravention of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Business of Supply

Earlier today I asked to have a ruling made before the vote on the motion takes place because it is serious. The Liberal opposition day motion calls upon Parliament to rule on a finding of innocence or guilt on an issue that is currently before the courts. That is not only inappropriate and unprecedented but it is extremely troubling.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms details in its doctrines the presumption of innocence for all Canadian citizens and that presumption of innocence is being violated today by the very motion that we are debating.

The opposition motion, if approved, would in effect be casting judgment on four individuals and a political party currently before the courts of this land in a dispute with Elections Canada. What right does this chamber have to act as judge and jury in a case that is before the courts of our land? What has become of democracy?

What has become of the respect for the rule of law if Parliament can now usurp the rights of individuals who wish to argue their case, to prove their innocence in a court of law? Why does the House now, apparently, have the right to discuss whether or not these individuals should be found innocent or guilty?

If the House votes in favour of the motion, and if the Speaker rules that the motion is in order, I have grave concerns that the decision today will have major ramifications on Canadians for generations to come. I am not overstating when I say that because how can we allow parliamentarians, who are law-makers, to act as judge and jury in any dispute? It is absolutely critical that the motion be defeated based on that reason.

If the opposition had chosen to rephrase its motion and either chastise the government, or condemn the government, or even bring forward a motion of non-confidence in the government for actions which it felt were inappropriate or perhaps even against the law, that would be acceptable. I would certainly argue against the motion, but I would not take issue with the fact that the opposition had a perfect right to bring forward that material and the motion before this place. But, that is not what the opposition has chosen to do. It is implicit in the motion that four individuals will be found guilty of an offence and that the Conservative Party of Canada will be found guilty of the offence based on the opposition's interpretation.

• (1315)

Regardless of what the courts of this land have to say in the matter, the Liberal opposition suggests that it and Parliament have the right to determine guilt or innocence instead of the courts. We simply cannot allow that to happen under any circumstances.

I mentioned earlier today that we have many lawyers in this place and if they were being honest with themselves and honest to all parliamentarians, they would be the first ones to admit that today's motion may be the start of a very slippery slope when it comes to the interference of parliamentarians with the courts. That is why we have courts of law. That is why we have judges whose job it is to examine evidence, rule on evidence and to ultimately be the arbiters of guilt or innocence in any dispute. It is not the role nor the right of Parliament to make those decisions. We create laws. That is what we are charged with doing. We are not there to interpret or administer the law. That is the role of the courts.

For years the Liberals consistently purported themselves to be the champions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. One of the current members of this place, the hon. member for Papineau, has a long family history with the charter because it was his father who introduced the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Parliament many years ago. Since that time, I can recall in debate after debate the members of the Liberal Party standing in their places and saying they are the defenders of the charter, that it is the only party in Canada that defends the charter vigorously.

Earlier today we heard comments from the member for Beauséjour referring to Conservative members as former Reform and Alliance members who have a complete disregard for the charter. Who has disregard for the charter now? Who has disregard for it when we see a motion from the Liberal opposition that, in effect, suggests we should ignore the charter and the presumption of innocence and simply make a decision based on partisan interests to determine the innocence or guilt of individuals and entities? It is completely unacceptable.

In debate today we have heard members opposite suggest that the Conservative Party was acting independently of Elections Canada and was the only party that has been in contravention of election laws. That is absolutely not true. In fact, there is documented evidence that every party in this place, every member whose party represents constituents and taxpayers, engaged in similar actions for two consecutive elections until Elections Canada came up with a new interpretation of the law. To suggest that the Conservative Party was the only party engaged in this activity is absolutely wrong and misleading.

However, that is not the primary issue. The primary issue is that the motion today is an affront to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of this land. It should be dismissed and should be defeated. Anything less would be a total affront to democracy.

• (1320)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment as opposed to a question.

One issue the member did not address was the constitutional element embedded in our country, which is we have the separation of the parliamentary branch of government versus the judicial branch. What is said in the House or a committee of the House cannot be used in any judicial body or other evidence-taking body in our country. The reason for that is because of the separation.

If we accept the member's premise, then Parliament would become not a separate branch of government, but would be subservient to the courts of our land. Any issue, question or challenge raised in the House, within hours, could be brought before the courts. If we accepted the member's premise, then the House would go silent for three, four, eight years until the judicial proceedings and appeals were heard.

That it is embedded in our Constitution. It is part of our constitutional framework and it should not be changed by the assembly today.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I simply point out that the words spoken in the chamber have parliamentary privilege. They also can quite dramatically influence opinions of others, including courts of this land.

If Parliament, the elected body that makes laws, approves a motion which, in effect, says that individuals before the courts of the land are guilty in the eyes of Parliament and we the lawmakers find these individuals guilty, that is highly inappropriate. The member should know and respect that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the disease is starting to spread. This morning in the transport committee a similar type of attempt was made to stifle debate on the basis that the subject matter was not before the courts but before a quasi-judicial board, a taxi board in Toronto. On that basis, the chair ruled that the committee should not hear evidence.

Where do we draw the line? Will the government make this argument in every committee, as it is now in the House?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am glad I was asked a question by the NDP. I want to quote something. This is a direct quote from an email from a political party. It says:

Hi Phyllis,

We are told by communications folks in BC that these were radio ads with the Candidate's personal tag on the end—therefore a local expense to be reported under the Candidate's expense ceiling, regardless of who pays. For rebate purposes, we were asked to bill each campaign—in the case of VanEast, \$2,612.00. The good news is that the Federal Party will transfer \$2,600 to the Federal Riding Association as we agreed to pay for the ads. We hope that you are able to squeeze this in under the ceiling. Some expenses are not considered election expenses subject to spending limits, such as fundraising costs. Please have a look at the totals and get back to us if you think we have a problem.

This was signed by the federal party bookkeeper. This was an NDP email. The NDP was engaging in the same practices. Now it has the temerity to stand in the House and criticize and condemn the Conservative Party.

As I mentioned earlier, every registered party in Canada in the 2004 and 2006 elections engaged in similar practices because that was allowed under the law of the day.

There is no doubt that the only reason there is some question about the legality of this is because Elections Canada changed its interpretation. It did not change the law or the rules; it changed the interpretation without informing political parties of the change during the election in question.

• (1325)

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for LaSalle—Emard.

We all remember those ubiquitous Conservative commercials when the then leader of the opposition, now the Prime Minister, was shown in a mock interview. It is remarkable because it is one of the last times he would ever speak openly to the media, but also because of what was said. In the commercial, a scripted actress questioned the Prime Minister. She said, "It's like you get to Ottawa and no one can touch you. How will you change that?" The reply, "You change the people in charge, but you also change the system. The first thing I will do is pass the Federal Accountability Act. It is a real plan to clean up government". We know how that turned out.

Those commercials seemed to run day in and day out. There they were, they played over and over again, blasting away at the government of the day, much like we see the commercials blasting today, a misuse of public money, may I add. The Conservatives told Canadians, "We're the good guys. We're whistle clean. We ooze honesty. Vote us in and not a single penny of public money will go offside". We know how that turned out too.

There is a reason why those commercials ran day in and day out. It is because the Conservatives cheated. They spent \$1 million more than they were legally permitted to do. There is no other way of looking at it than calling it what it is; it is cheating.

The Conservatives do not see it that way. They call it an administrative disagreement. That may have held water if the Federal Court of Appeal had not unanimously ruled against their argument. Their excuses may be believable if the Office of the Federal Director of Public Prosecution had not charged the architects of the plot and called their actions illegal activity.

While the Conservatives were cheating the system, they ran on a message and on a platform of accountability, transparency, all those great words they use. From the Conservative election platform book called "Stand up for Canada", the Prime Minister stated, "Only one party can deliver the change of government that is needed to bring political accountability to Ottawa".

At the very same time that document was being printed, Conservative officials in Ottawa were shaking down candidates and their official agents all across the country.

Liberato Martelli, a 2006 Conservative candidate for Bourassa, stated, "I was told it would be deposited and quickly withdrawn". It sounds like in and out to me. He said:

I was told there would be invoices but I never saw them...When I joined that party, I believed its vision at the time...I came to the realization they don't have as much integrity as they claim".

Joe Goudie, a 2006 Conservative candidate for Labrador was one of those called. He stated:

It most certainly did smell to me... for a national party, or any kind of a political party to benefit in what I perceived to be an underhanded manner, using not just my campaign but many others across the country, left me with a feeling of being used.

Now let us not lose sight of the timeline. This scheme to overspend and effectively cheat is going on at the precise time that the Conservatives are running a campaign on the theme of accountability, transparency and integrity. How incredulous is that?

This is important, not just for its perfect irony, but for the fact that their entire argument for power was a sham. It was a scam and a scandal, and it is a scandal today.

Remember the Prime Minister's own words, "The first thing I will do is pass the Federal Accountability Act. It is a real plan to clean up government". Here we are, five years later, scandal after scandal with the Conservatives.

Business of Supply

Ministers have refused to provide Parliament and its officers with documents and information needed to perform our jobs properly, to function within our jobs. An international cooperation minister admitted to altering documents, but refused to stand and be accountable to Parliament and to answer questions in Parliament.

•(1330)

An integrity commissioner sat on her hands. She colluded with the Prime Minister's Office and then was given a half-million dollar golden parachute, a golden handshake. She was then called out after reviewing only seven cases. Now there is a gag order on her as well.

Also, the Prime Minister's Office has exercised unprecedented control over the non-partisan and professional bureaucracy.

The Prime Minister believes he is the modern-day Sun King, declaring that the Government of Canada must be referenced in his name, "the Harper government".

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on government advertising—

•(1335)

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the hon. member that we cannot use proper names when referring to members. We can use their riding or title.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on government advertising used for partisan promotion. Appointments of Conservative cronies have been made to boards, agencies, commissions and especially the Senate.

We have had the smearing and the sacking of agency heads, ombudsmen, whistleblowers, or anyone who would shed some light on Conservative wrongdoing. The Conservatives silence dissent.

It has been one scandal after another and it has to be as exhausting for the Conservatives as it is for us. It is no wonder the government's legislative agenda is so light. It is constantly fighting new scandals and cannot concentrate on the demands of governing.

We are over here begging for accountability, begging for the truth and all we get are silenced ministers, staffers being thrown under the bus, or excuses being made for their behaviour.

We have heard Conservatives say today, and they would want us to believe this, that, "everybody does this". That is false. Conservatives are the only party facing charges. It is the only party that had its headquarters raided by the RCMP. It is the only party with a paper trail of fake invoices to be explained. The Conservatives could not even spell the word "invoice" correctly for goodness sake.

We did not cheat and overspend in an election campaign. We did not forge documents to claim unqualified expenses. The Conservatives did. They are the ones who need to answer for these actions.

Conservatives are desperately trying to downplay this as an administrative issue, which would be laughable if it were not so absurd, or that Elections Canada is targeting them for some sort of vendetta. We all know that no one holds a grudge like Elections Canada for goodness sake. Earlier today, the Conservatives tried an

arcane procedural argument to argue that Parliament did not have the right to debate this issue at all.

As today is International Women's Day, I am reminded of a famous message that mothers around the world use day in and day out to their children, "It's easier to tell the truth and take responsibility than continue to hide. The truth will always come out in the end".

The motion we are debating today provides the opportunity for the House to declare, after five years since this scheme was committed, with all the evidence and testimony that has been delivered, that the scheme was electoral fraud. It calls for the Conservatives to order all tax money obtained illegally to be returned immediately to the people of Canada. It calls on the individuals charged in this crime to be fired.

These demands are simple and reasonable and they are what Canadians expect. They should not be forced by the House to be executed.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the statement by the hon. member from the other side of the House. I find it totally amazing that the member could talk about partisan appointments to the Senate when we know the Liberal Party has been the forebearer of any appointments to the Senate, and always very partisan.

However, what will the hon. member's party do with respect to the ad scam? We know there was some funnelling of funds through the ad scam process into the Liberal Party. We know it only paid back \$1 million. However, there are still \$40 million missing that the Liberal Party stole from Canadians.

Is the member prepared to show the way to help the Liberal Party return the \$40 million to Canadians?

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I am not even sure where to begin with the fantasy that member has woven.

The truth is this. When the Conservatives reached the \$18 million spending limit, they then found a way to transfer another \$1.3 million to 67 ridings that had not spent their \$80,000 limit. Then those riding associations were to receive a rebate.

Let me make this very simple for people to understand. At this time of year, people are filling out their tax returns to the Canada Revenue Agency. Would any Canadian earning a salary of say \$40,000, \$50,000, or \$60,000 believe that it would be right and ethical to receive a tax rebate, a tax credit, for more than they earned that year? No they would not. They would know it would be unethical, and that is exactly what this is equivalent to.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the Liberal Party for this discussion today.

As we know, 65 Conservative candidates claimed 60% of their rebate from the government for phantom money that passed through their accounts. This means they collected taxpayer money to pay for their campaigns.

The previous speaker from the Conservative Party said that the opposition members were going down a slippery slope. I think that slippery slope is on the other side of the House.

Business of Supply

I would like the hon. member to comment on the slippery slope that is occurring on the other side of the House.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, there are many things that could be commented on, and quite rightly so.

Four members of the Prime Minister's inner circle, two of them senators and one of them his chief bagman, have been charged in this scheme. We absolutely need to get to the bottom of this.

I would like to add something about exceeding the legal spending limits. Spending limits are put in place to ensure there is a level playing field, that massive amounts of money, that massive and uncontrolled election spending as we see in the United States cannot occur here, so that it is equal and level for everyone.

In short, they cheated. They cheated in the 2006 election. Those Conservative riding associations were claiming hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars that they were not entitled to claim because they were based on funds that were essentially illegally laundered. This is laundered money, money that was laundered through their accounts.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue is there seems to be a pattern of abuse of power and somehow a belief that the Conservative Party is above the laws of Canada. A simple example is when witnesses were asked to come before committee and the government actually told them to ignore the subpoenas. It is a right and a privilege of parliamentary committees to call for witnesses, to subpoena them. The government decided to put itself above the law and told them to ignore the law.

I wonder if the member has any comment on that.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the neighbouring riding of Mississauga South for the question. In fact, that is exactly where I wanted to go. I want to highlight a list of abuses the government has undertaken, abuses of power, abuses of democracy.

First is the Minister of International Cooperation and the forging of a document. Second is the former public sector integrity commissioner, who had over 200 cases to analyze and review, who received a half a million dollar severance package after receiving only—

• (1340)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hasten to support the hon. member for Beauséjour because, indeed, the electoral financing transfer scheme used by the Conservative Party of Canada constitutes electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based. At the end of February, the Commissioner of Canada Elections filed four electoral fraud charges against the Conservative Party and four of the senior directors of its electoral fund, Conservative Fund Canada, including two senators. All were charged with knowingly violating the Canada Elections Act during the 2006 election.

The first charge is against Conservative Fund Canada, Senator Finley, Senator Gerstein, Michael Donison and Susan J. Kehoe and reads:

Between November 1st, 2005 and January 23rd, 2006, in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, did wilfully incur election expenses in relation to the 39th federal general election that exceeded the maximum of \$18,278,278.64 for the Conservative Party of Canada, contrary to Section 423 (1) of the Canada Elections Act and did thereby commit an offence punishable on summary conviction contrary to Sections 497 (3) (g) and 500 (5) (a) of the said Act.

The second charge is against the Conservative Party of Canada and reads:

Between November 1st, 2005 and January 23rd, 2006, in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, being a registered party whose chief agent, the Conservative Fund Canada, did wilfully incur election expenses in relation to the 39th federal general election that exceeded the maximum of \$18,278,278.64 for the Conservative Party of Canada, contrary to Sections 423(1) and 497(3)(g) of the Canada Elections Act is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction contrary to Section 507 of the said Act.

The third charge is against Conservative Fund Canada and Irving Gerstein and reads:

Between January 23rd, 2006 and December 18th, 2006, in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, did provide the Chief Electoral Officer with a return on the general election expenses of the Conservative Party of Canada, in relation to the 39th federal general election, that they knew or ought reasonably to have known contained a materially false or misleading statement, namely that all election expenses in respect of the 39th federal general election had been properly recorded, contrary to Section 431(a) of the Canada Elections Act and did thereby commit an offence punishable on summary conviction contrary to Sections 497(3)(m)(ii) and 500(5)(a) of the said Act.

I want to point out that the party being named in these charges is the same party that claimed, in 2006, that it wanted to amend the Canada Elections Act in order to improve the integrity of the electoral process and instill complete confidence in the Canadian public. That is not what I call leading by example.

The fourth charge is against the Conservative Party of Canada:

Between January 23rd, 2006 and December 18th, 2006, in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, being a registered party whose chief agent, the Conservative Fund Canada, did provide the Chief Electoral Officer with a return on its general election expenses, in relation to the 39th federal general election, that the Conservative Fund Canada knew or ought reasonably to have known contained a materially false or misleading statement, namely that all election expenses in respect of the 39th federal general election had been properly recorded, contrary to sections 431(a) and 497(3)(m)(ii) of the Canada Elections Act is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction contrary to section 507 of the said Act.

• (1345)

How can the Prime Minister claim that this is a difference of opinion? These charges clearly indicate that it is a question of bogus invoices, misleading statements made to Elections Canada and deliberate overspending. These offences could result in a \$5,000 fine, five years in prison, or both.

This in and out scheme shows the Conservatives for what they truly are. They can talk all they like about an administrative dispute between their party and Elections Canada, but the Federal Court of Appeal unanimously sided with Elections Canada, which alleges that the Conservative Party deliberately spent more than the national campaign limit by having 67 candidates pay some of the party's advertising costs, to the tune of \$1.3 million.

Business of Supply

This is how the Conservative scheme worked. After the Conservative Party reached its \$18.3 million spending limit, it decided to transfer \$1.3 million to 67 ridings that had not reached their \$80,000 limit. The ridings returned the same amount, claiming that the money had been used for local ads. The ads, however, were exactly the same as the national ones. The riding associations had no control over these transfers.

[English]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister can try to dismiss the facts and maintain that the matter is an administrative dispute, but it will be hard to fight the charges when so many candidates are now coming forward to tell their stories.

Inky Mark, who resigned his Manitoba seat last year, said that his staff was contacted by party officials during the 2006 election campaign. He said that Conservative Party officials asked if they could deposit several thousand dollars into his campaign account and withdraw it later to buy advertising. It did not make sense to him, so he refused.

Mark's former campaign manager said she recalls being asked to receive money and then have the funds withdrawn quickly afterward. She remembers the issue because it sounded similar to a case involving a Conservative cabinet minister from Manitoba who had to plead guilty and was convicted of electoral overspending.

Also, the independent Conservative MP for Simcoe—Grey, who was turfed from the Conservative caucus last year, said her campaign was approached and she rejected the plan.

[Translation]

There is also David Marler, a candidate in the Brome—Missisquoi riding in the Eastern Townships. In an interview with *La Presse*, he explained why he refused to sign a form in December 2006: the document would have authorized Conservative Party officials to transfer money to his account and then take it right back out again. David Marler declined the offer when an organizer was unable to explain to him the reason and purpose of this transaction. As a lawyer, he understood right away that this scheme was illegal.

The Conservative Party's behaviour during the 2005-06 election campaign, when it claimed to be the champion of public ethics, does not fall into the category of an administrative dispute but, rather, that of hypocrisy and abuse of power. The Conservative Party used a shell game to give the impression that it had complied with the national spending limit. The national organization distributed some \$1.3 million to 67 candidates who were below their campaign spending limits.

The Conservatives can try to downplay what they did, but Canadians are well aware of their fraudulent tactics. The Canada Elections Act applies to all political parties. Creating a level playing field for everyone serves to promote a healthy democracy. There is no point in imposing a spending limit on political parties if they can circumvent that limit by moving money around to their local organizations.

The Prime Minister must order the immediate repayment of any and all illegally obtained electoral rebates that were paid out to candidates for the Conservative Party of Canada as a result of the in

and out fraud and must remove all individuals facing charges for this fraud from any position of responsibility within government or the Conservative Party of Canada. The issue here is the integrity of the electoral process and thus of Canadian democracy.

• (1350)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. Her speech was excellent and comprehensive. I have a question for her. Normally, when someone is innocent and is accused of something, he wants to know what he is accused of and then wonders what the problem is. But when the Conservatives were accused, they did not wonder what the problem was. The RCMP had to be sent into their offices to find the problem.

This is not about the legislation or Elections Canada. What does everything going on today tell us about the character of the Conservative Party?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. It tells us that the Conservative Party is still abusing its power and is still trying to circumvent the law. It still refuses to take responsibility for its actions. It even wants to appeal the court's decision. That shows that the party thinks it is above the law.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is quite simple.

It is quite scandalous that we are spending a full day talking about why the Liberals lost the 2006 election. The reality is the Liberals lost the 2006 election because they were a corrupt government that the people turned their backs on.

The only in and out we have here is that we were brought in to clean up the mess of the Liberals who were actually thrown out of government after stealing \$40 million of taxpayers money and using it to help them win elections. That is the only scandal here.

When will the Liberals focus on what Canadians want us to focus on? Canadians want us to focus on jobs, the economy, getting people back to work, the investments we have made across the country with respect to infrastructure, all of the great things the government has done to make sure the economy is moving in the right direction. Canada is recognized internationally as one of the best places in which to live, work, invest and raise a family because of the decisions made by the government and this party.

When will the Liberals stop focusing on why they lost the 2006 election and start focusing on the needs of Canadians, and in looking forward help us to build a bigger, better and stronger Canada?

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter of who won or lost the election; it is a matter of election fraud. We are well off in Canada, and the Conservatives can thank the Liberal government that left them a huge surplus. That is why they are managing quite well. But despite all that, the deficit has reached \$56 billion.

Statements by Members

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's motion deals with electoral fraud. It deals with the issue of a moral compass, that the government has lost its moral compass. It does not have economic competency. It has lost its moral compass.

The government keeps saying that this is an administrative matter. There are no administrative jails, unless the Conservatives are preparing to build one.

Those forged invoices resulted in the headquarters of the Conservative Party being raided. Could the member explain why the Conservatives are so scared of admitting the truth and returning the ill-gotten, dirty money back to Canadians?

● (1355)

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question. The Conservative government would not dare admit that it was caught red-handed. That is the problem. It cheated and violated the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois about the motion before us. I would like to read several lines:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conservative Party of Canada's "in and out" electoral financing scheme was an act of electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based, and that, further, the House calls upon the Prime Minister...

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion. I would like to quote an article published by Agence France-Presse that was reprinted by *Le Figaro* on March 2, 2011. It states:

Today the Canadian electoral authority formally charged the Prime Minister's Conservative Party and two senators from the governing party with fraud for allegedly concealing cost overruns during the 2006 election. The charges, laid at a time when many observers expect a spring election to be held, revolve around a "false or misleading statement" about the budget for the campaign that brought [the Conservatives] to power, writes Elections Canada in a news release.

These charges of fraud, which were reported by Agence France-Presse and by *Le Figaro* on March 2, are very serious and constitute an attack on democracy. It is important that the House take a stand on the Conservative Party's fraud.

In the 2006 election campaign, when a certain opportunity presented itself to the Conservative Party and the cash was beginning to pour into its coffers, it lacked resources for its national campaign. Given that the Conservatives had a national spending limit of \$18 million, they transferred national party money to the ridings, which then returned the money to the national party to run national ads.

That is clearly against the law. A riding can collect donations from people and then run a campaign. The Conservatives did the opposite, thus contravening the Canada Elections Act. It is not surprising that they were charged. What is surprising is that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister told the House that they provided all the documents. That is false. The RCMP had to search the Conservative headquarters to obtain the evidence.

Day after day in the House of Commons, they have tried to cover up this scandal. It is becoming an international scandal given that an

article in the March 2, 2011 edition of *Le Figaro* discussed the modus operandi of the right-wing party.

After question period, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

Getting back to the article in *Le Figaro*, the second paragraph states:

According to this independent [Canadian] agency, the Conservative Party deliberately exceeded election spending limits...by \$1 million through an accounting scheme involving the right-wing party's local committees.

The right-wing Conservatives do not hesitate to circumvent the law and commit fraud to achieve their ends.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have seven minutes to finish his speech after question period. It is now time for statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CAROL WILLIAMS

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Carol Williams, a resident of Coldstream in my riding of Okanagan—Shuswap, passed away on February 26 of this year.

Carol's life was one of dedication to her career as a nurse, her family and her community.

Her love of life was always evident not just by what she did for the community but also how she did it. Carol served as a Coldstream councillor and director of the Vernon winter carnival and was an active organizer and volunteer in the Vernon region.

When I met Carol she was the chair of the Okanagan Regional Library. At that time she was in her 70s. I was so impressed by her energy level and dedication to her position and those that she served. She was a great example to me.

Carol will be missed by her husband Verne, three children, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Carol's smiles, hugs and service will be missed by the community she loved.

* * *

● (1400)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the centenary of International Women's Day. What began as a struggle to achieve equality rights has become a celebration of the trail-blazing women who made our society more equal.

Today is no different. It is remarkable to see so many women pursuing non-traditional occupations, and to live in a time when young girls do not see barriers but only opportunities.

*Statements by Members***FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

While we celebrate, let us also remember that the struggle for equality is not yet over. Over the past five years the fundamental human right to equal pay for work of equal value has been undermined. Federal support for advocacy and research into the status of women in Canada has been eliminated and the gender wage gap remains significant. The lack of access to quality, affordable early learning and child care services is a barrier to full equality.

I join my colleagues in the House in celebrating this anniversary but remain mindful of the challenges that remain.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MARIE-ANDRÉE BERTRAND

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 6, we lost one of our pioneering feminists and criminologists, Marie-Andrée Bertrand.

She was the first female Quebecker—the first woman, actually—to earn a Ph.D. in criminology from the University of California's Berkeley campus. A leader of the anti-prohibition movement, she did not believe that criminal legislation was the way to fight illegal substance abuse. She believed in reconciling the confusion between harm reduction and drug prohibition policies.

Her work and research on women and criminal law and her critiques on gender, class and ethnic inequality were well written.

She fought and remained active to the end, and in 2007 she said that a retired feminist cannot easily relax and does not want to.

The Bloc Québécois pays tribute to this woman who was both ahead of her time and inspirational. We offer our deepest sympathies to her family and loved ones.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, a day when we celebrate the profound and divine feminine power that graces our world.

There is no way we can truly express all that we owe to the women of our communities, our country and our planet. The givers of life, powerful voices of understanding, compassion and peace, women make our society a nobler and more civilized place. To every woman in our lives we owe everything.

International Women's Day is to celebrate women but also to highlight the struggles that remain. Women want and deserve: reproductive health and choice; equal pay for work of equal value; to be free from the use, threat or fear of violence; and to be free from all barriers and forms of discrimination.

Women want and deserve equality, respect and full participation in all aspects of society.

Today we renew our commitment to work with the women and men in this House, in our communities and throughout the world to pursue and achieve true equality for all women.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report some good news in my riding. Many of our local lumber producers are going back to full operations, recording profits and making major upgrades. This in turn is helping communities, local forestry workers and their families.

West Fraser's mill in 100 Mile House as well as Aspen Planers in Savona have reported they will be back to full production. As a result, they are now hiring new workers and training is under way.

The Ainsworth mill in 100 Mile House has completed a major project to enhance the mill's ability to process trees infected by pine beetles and has returned to profitability.

On February 28, it was reported that Canfor plans to reopen its Vavenby sawmill operations, while at the Kamloops Domtar mill, significant environmental upgrades have been made .

There have been 24 sawmills reopened in B.C. in the last 24 months. Along with new international trade deals and support from Canada's economic action plan, the forestry industry is solidly rebounding.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, March 8, marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. It is only fitting that we should take a moment to think of the many pioneers who paved the way for this important annual celebration.

At the beginning of the 20th century, women began to rise up, demanding better working conditions and the right to vote. This social action undertaken by these courageous women is still paying off today in 2011.

Unfortunately, the reality here in Canada is quite sad. The Conservative government is not only ignoring the interests of Canadian women, but it has systematically and deliberately made choices that have reversed at least a decade of progress in terms of gender equality.

Furthermore, this government axed the Kelowna accord, which would have provided much-needed health and education funding for aboriginal women. It treats aboriginal women like second-class citizens, first by cutting the generous social programs that were included in the Kelowna accord, and then by refusing to launch a thorough investigation into the disappearance of young aboriginal women.

Statements by Members

Unlike the Conservative Party, our party is convinced that Canada's federal government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brant.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected in 2008, the global economic recession had taken hold in my riding of Brant. It was a time of uncertainty for workers and their families.

Today, I am proud to report that the economic climate is changing, thanks to the hard work and determination of the good people of Brant. Our downtown core is being revitalized. We are attracting investments in green energy and technology. Our post-secondary institutions are flourishing and driving the renewal of the economy. Nipissing University, Mohawk College and Laurier Brantford are expanding their curricula, drawing in students and creating new opportunities.

Our government has been there every step of the way. We have supported efforts to build a new academic centre and install state of the art equipment at Laurier Brantford, and have supported the development of plans for a new athletic complex.

There are signs everywhere that Brant is moving toward a new era of growth, innovation and prosperity, and we are excited.

* * *

[Translation]

JEANNE MANCE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, I would like to speak about the City of Montreal's decision to recognize Jeanne Mance as the co-founder of Montreal, Quebec's metropolis, alongside Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve.

Arriving in Montreal at the same time as Maisonneuve, on May 17, 1642, this amazing woman founded the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, which still exists today. She was also the driving force behind the colonization effort known as the “great recruitment,” which brought about 100 new colonists to the area when New France's survival was in jeopardy.

Very few cities founded during that time can say that they were founded by a woman. The City of Montreal hopes to correct this historical inaccuracy in time for its 375th anniversary in 2017.

The Bloc Québécois would like to honour the great contribution this pioneer made to founding the “city of 100 steeples.”

* * *

[English]

FRAUD PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, March is Fraud Prevention Month and I would like to remind Canadians to take precautions in order to safeguard themselves and their personal information against financial abuse and fraud.

The most common forms of fraud are telemarketing scams, the cloning or skimming of debit or credit cards and identity theft. While anyone can be a victim of fraud, this type of abuse is the number one crime against older Canadians.

Our government has demonstrated its strong commitment to seniors and we believe that all forms of elder abuse, including fraud and financial abuse, are unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

Next week, in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo, I will be hosting an information session for seniors and will be raising awareness of this issue among my constituents. The more people know about financial abuse and fraud, the more protected they will be.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, the world celebrates the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

Today, more women than ever before are getting an education, whether a university degree or learning a skilled trade. I recently toured an operating engineers training centre where one-third of those in the course were women learning to operate cranes and other heavy machinery. A single mom with two kids was doing her part to learn a skilled trade that is in high demand and would provide her with a well-paying job. However, without child care she will be unable to take that job. She is not looking for a handout; she is looking for her government to invest in her future.

Women are achieving great success in the workforce and excelling in leadership positions. However, there is still much more we can do to help women succeed. Families need early learning and child care spaces to help them get back to work but the Conservative government cancelled the program.

We do not want handouts. We want equality.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Canadians to celebrate International Women's Week, which includes the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day on March 8, 2011. Canada's theme this year, “Girls' Rights Matter / *Les droits des filles comptent*”, highlights the importance of human rights, equality and access for girls and women of all ages.

In many countries, girls are subject to injustice and violence. We will never accept such treatment for our own girls and we must not accept such treatment for others.

Statements by Members

Canada continues to work on changing the situation by introducing stricter legislation and strengthening awareness and victims' support programs. We recently announced the very first federal strategy to combat the problem of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

I hope that this celebration, which—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Victoria.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we mark 100 years of International Women's Day.

I was overwhelmed with hope this weekend when my annual IWD event filled the Belfry Theatre to capacity with women from across our community. Five of these women spoke about the issues that drive them and their experience in making change on literacy inequalities, clean energy, the environment and getting life-saving drugs to the world's poor.

These women are among countless others who are taking action where our governments and corporations have failed. As a society, we will do better when more women take a rightful place at the tables of decision-making.

Today, in honour of those who broke down the doors before us, we re-commit to breaking down many more doors for our daughters and granddaughters in the next 100 years.

* * *

100TH BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many coincidences in life. Today, March 8, is the 100th anniversary of the first International Women's Day, as well as the 100th birthday of a very special woman, Florence Rice, née Belliveau, of Edmundston, New Brunswick.

Florence was born in Scoudouc and, at the age of 17, travelled to Montreal for nurse's training. After working in private home care in Montreal and New York City, she returned to Moncton during World War II. As doctors were few, Florence delivered many local babies. In the late 1940s, she moved to Edmundston where she was head nurse of surgery, lived with her husband Martin and raised three children.

Nearly 70 years later, she is still referred to as "Garde Rice" by former colleagues and patients.

On the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, this House joins with her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to wish Florence a happy birthday.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while International Women's Day offers us an opportunity to celebrate our

achievements, I would like to draw the attention of the members to a more sobering topic: violence against women.

Since 2002, an estimated 12 young women in Canada have lost their lives in so-called honour killings. They were killed for supposedly having brought disgrace upon their families.

In 2007, spousal violence represented 94% of Canada's crime.

In 61% of cases reported to police, more than one violent incident had occurred.

In addition to being more likely to experience spousal violence, 54% of aboriginal women will be victims of the most severe forms of violence compared with 37% of non-aboriginal women.

Let us also recall that more than 600 aboriginal women have been declared missing, and the Conservatives refuse to launch an inquiry.

We need to put an end to this scourge.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. I would like to congratulate the women of my riding, Laval—Les Îles, the women of Canada and women around the world who fight for equality, peace and liberty. The world has witnessed the strength of their vision and their tenacity. Women are standing up, side by side, against authoritarian governments in places like Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and now Libya.

The message is clear: one century later, women are fed up. They are demanding that governments meet their millennium development goals immediately.

Here in Canada, a century later, this is what women are telling the Conservative government: stop cutting funding to NGOs that provide assistance to women and children; advance the rights of women and girls by approving safe reproductive rights; protect women and enable them to retain their dignity by supporting safe abortion practices, especially in cases of violence and rape.

Equality means dignity.

* * *

● (1415)

[*English*]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our Conservative government is focused on keeping taxes low for families and businesses, the Liberal leader and Liberal MPs want to raise taxes to pay for bigger governments and bigger government bureaucracies.

Oral Questions

In recent years, Liberal MPs have constantly complained that Canadians are not paying enough taxes and are looking at new ways to increase our tax bill. The Liberals have talked about increasing the GST, imposing a new carbon tax on energy and even a tax on iPods. Now the Liberals are targeting job-creating businesses. As businesses try to rebuild and recover from the recession, Liberal MPs want to slap a huge \$6 billion tax hike on them and are threatening to drag Canada into a costly election if we do not immediately hike taxes.

Our Conservative government will not stand for higher taxes. We do not think families and businesses should be forced to send more of their hard-earned money to Ottawa, especially as they try to recover from the global recession. We know that higher taxes mean less money in our pockets, less economic growth for business and even fewer jobs for Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is facing a litany of scandals: misleading the House, committing electoral fraud and many more.

Yesterday, the government ignored a clear order from the House to produce important documents. The government's refusal demonstrates its disdain for democracy.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he is once again in contempt of Parliament?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priorities are the economy and the well-being of Canadians.

The information requested by the opposition has already been provided to the House of Commons.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not up to the Prime Minister to decide whether his response was sufficient. It is up to us to decide whether such was the case.

[English]

Last week the House ordered the government to produce important documents relating to the F-35 and relating to megaprisons. These involve the expenditure of billions of dollars of public money. A decent government would have complied, but the Conservative government is not a decent government. It is a government with contempt for democracy and a flagrant abuse of power. When is this pattern going to stop?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition requested certain financial information regarding these decisions. That information has been provided.

I would suggest to the opposition that it accept yes for an answer.

POLITICAL FINANCING

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not how the system works. The Prime Minister does not make the rules. The House makes the rules.

[Translation]

Today the House is discussing a case of electoral fraud involving many members of the government's inner circle.

Those responsible for this fraud still hold positions within the government; but they have been charged with fraud, for heaven's sake!

Why are they still in office?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, the information requested was provided to the House of Commons.

[English]

The real difficulty here is that the Liberal Party requested certain financial data and when that data did not match the numbers those members have been publicly making up, they cried foul.

The reality is the Liberals are just going to have to accept that the numbers are the numbers and they have to do with budgets of the House passed long ago.

• (1420)

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not get an answer to the question. There are serious accusations of electoral fraud levelled against the closest members of the Conservative government. This is not just an accounting dispute because it involves the fraud of \$800,000 of taxpayers' money. It is not an administrative matter, because it involves jail time.

The Prime Minister says he will not fire these people. The Prime Minister says he will not hand the money back. Will he at least assure the House that no member of the Prime Minister's Office was ever implicated in this scam?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member already knows that to be a fact.

The fact of the matter is that this involves a dispute with Elections Canada as to whether expenses are classified as local or national. We will continue to defend our position on that before the courts.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an administrative dispute. Four Conservatives are charged with election fraud but a fifth person has been named in a sworn affidavit as the secretary of the Conservative fund when this election scam was concocted. His name is Nigel Wright. He is the chief of staff of the Prime Minister. Four of his accomplices face jail time.

Can the Prime Minister explain why Nigel Wright is still in the Prime Minister's Office?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the individual in question has not been accused of anything.

Oral Questions

The fact of the matter, as I said, is that this is a dispute about whether certain election expenses that were fully reported are national or local. We will continue to defend our position before the courts.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is shocking about the scandal involving the minister of immigration is that not only did one of his staff members, during office hours, use parliamentary letterhead to solicit funds for his party, but, furthermore, it was the minister himself who told the employee to do it.

Will the minister of immigration admit that he told his employee to do political work, with public money to boot, and, therefore, he alone is solely responsible for this mess and must resign?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, there are procedures that my office must follow to ensure that we do not use government resources for partisan purposes. In this case, the procedures were not followed and, for that reason, the assistant in question submitted his resignation when I was travelling abroad, which I accepted. Naturally, political and parliamentary staff of all parties can work on political matters on their own time.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the minister's office hours. As he said yesterday, the work was done during office hours. That is the second contradiction. If no mistake was made, why is the minister apologizing? What is he apologizing for? If he is apologizing for a mistake, then he is responsible. Otherwise, he should not apologize. As the minister, he has no choice but to resign if he is responsible. That is what ministerial responsibility looks like.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my instructions were not followed by a member of my staff. He tendered his resignation and I accepted. The rules of my office to ensure that public resources are not used for partisan purposes were not followed. That is why we took corrective action. I must point out that we respect the principle of not using public resources for partisan purposes. That being said, we are proud of our government's record with new Canadians.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only did the office of the minister of immigration solicit money for the Conservative Party using House of Commons resources and was involved in a pre-electoral communication plan targeting certain ethnocultural groups, but we also learn that his office is resorting to partisan attacks against the Bloc Québécois. A letter issued by the minister's office uses, word for word, the Conservative Party's partisan ads.

Will the minister of immigration be relieved of his duties since he does not seem to know the difference between his role as minister and the partisan interests of the Conservative Party?

• (1425)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am guilty of criticizing the Bloc Québécois. I know that for the Bloc, that is unacceptable. I sent

an email from my parliamentary office—and I would do it again—in which I criticized the fact that the Bloc was against imposing visas on Mexicans. The imposition of such visas resulted in almost \$260 million in savings for Quebec's taxpayers. I am proud that this government is acting in the interest of Quebecers. However, the Bloc Québécois is acting for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Québec.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the director of the TCRI, an umbrella group for agencies that assist refugees and immigrants, said he does not remember ever seeing such a partisan and electioneering speech in the communications of an immigration minister. It is not right for letters about financing, communication plans for the Conservative Party and emails smearing opposition parties to come from the office of the Minister of Immigration.

Will the Prime Minister stop condoning his Minister of Immigration's racial profiling and partisanship and dismiss him?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not going to stop shedding light on the irresponsibility of the Bloc Québécois' policies. If we had followed the Bloc's advice and not imposed visas on Mexicans, Quebec's taxpayers would have spent an additional \$260 million. That would have been an irresponsible policy that goes against the interests of Quebec's taxpayers. As a minister, a member of Parliament and a Conservative, I am proud to shed light on the irresponsibility of the Bloc Québécois' policies.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing administrative about breaking the rules and using parliamentary resources to raise funds.

This was not a small technical program. The immigration minister used the weight of his office to target people he is supposed to serve. The minister abused his power and used his office to exploit immigrant communities. Which organizations did the minister personally hit up for funds? How many more letters were sent?

When will the Conservatives step up, fess up and clean up their act?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very proud on Sunday night to stand up at an event in front of 800 almost entirely new Canadians from a diversity of cultural communities. Each one voluntarily and enthusiastically contributed \$100 to the Conservative Party's outreach efforts because they are so pleased they finally have a government that reflects and respects their values, their aspirations, their belief in entrepreneurship and their respect for family. They want to give resources to the Conservative Party so that we can convey our message of respect for new Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are defending themselves by accusing the other parties of doing the same thing.

Yet only the Conservatives have been charged. Only the Conservatives transferred national advertising expenses to the ridings. Only the Conservatives set up a scheme to get around election spending limits and only Conservative strategists are facing jail time.

Why were the other parties not prosecuted? Because only the Conservatives cheated.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to hear a question just seconds ago from the hon. member for Vancouver East. Now that I rise, I have a question for her.

On January 31, 2006, the national New Democratic Party transferred \$7,003.64 to the local NDP riding association in Vancouver East. Then on March 1, 2006, just a short time later, the local NDP sent \$7,003.64.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1430)

The Speaker: Order please. The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the parliamentary secretary is trying to change the channel. We challenge the government to produce any documents—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order please. We will have some order.

The hon. member for Vancouver East has the floor. I cannot hear a word she is saying with all this racket.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, let us challenge the government to produce any document or evidence that shows that any party systematically moved millions of dollars in and out of a riding in order to circumvent the rules. The only evidence it would find are Conservative documents. Only Conservatives schemed to break the law. Only Conservatives were raided by the RCMP. Only Conservatives are potentially facing jail time.

How can they pretend to be tough on crime when they have so clearly made a mockery of the rule of law?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a document in my hand which shows the scheme that the NDP member for Edmonton—Strathcona is using out of her riding office. She is running the NDP re-election campaign right out of her NDP office with Erica Bullwinkle. She is using her parliamentary email and running the campaign out of the NDP constituency office. When will Erica Bullwinkle do the right thing and follow the high ethical standards of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the in and out election fraud scheme was widespread. The 67 ridings involved included a dozen in British Columbia alone. The former government whip's riding funnelled \$15,000 in and out. The President of the Treasury Board's riding did the same, laundering almost \$10,000. Not only was it Canada-wide, it also reached deep into the Prime Minister's inner circle, including his current chief of staff. Nigel Wright was the secretary for Conservative fundraising during the 2006 election. What did he know about this scam?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, elections filing show that in the 2006 election, the Liberal Party transferred \$1.7 million to local riding associations, who then transferred \$1.3 million back.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: In one such example, in Oak Ridges—Markham the Liberal Party of Canada transferred \$5,000 on July 21, 2004 and then on August 16, 2004, that same riding association transferred the same \$5,000 right back. Five thousand dollars in; five thousand dollars out. In and out.

Let the hon. member explain.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is only one party that has been charged.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville has the floor. We will have some order, please.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Mr. Speaker, during the 2006 election, Nigel Wright was working elbow to elbow with the scammers charged and the schemers accused of overspending their electoral limits.

It is impossible to believe that as the secretary and a director of the Conservative Fund Canada that Nigel Wright would not have been aware of this plot.

Was the Prime Minister's chief of staff involved in the scheme? Does his ethical wall include electoral fraud?

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): On July 9, 2004, the Liberal Party transferred \$5,000 to the Liberal riding association of Don Valley West. On July 15, 2004, one week later, the local Liberal riding association of Don Valley West transferred back \$5,000. Five thousand dollars in; five thousand dollars out. In and out.

Where is Elections Canada?

* * *

• (1435)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an immigration minister wields an enormous amount of power over new Canadians. He gets to decide if they get to stay and become Canadians or whether they will be reunited with their loved ones.

Yet this minister also operates as the Conservatives' recruiter-in-chief among cultural communities and gets to use confidential government data to target those very ethnic voters for partisan gains.

The irony is that many immigrants are fleeing regimes where these egregious conflicts of interest are far too common. Why can this minister not see that he is undermining the fairness of this great country?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Liberal member for Papineau put out a press release written in his parliamentary office.

When I went to the website, right above his press release about Elections Canada was an invitation to donate to the Liberal Party.

When will he do the right thing and stop fundraising out of his own office?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Papineau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my website is paid for by the federal Liberal riding association of Papineau.

[*Translation*]

We are also seeing a very harmful confusion of roles. On the one hand, the minister wields an enormous amount of power, but on the other hand, he is also the Conservative Party's main recruiter among cultural communities. He is confusing his two roles. He put the blame on his assistant, but back in 2009, he handed out some minister's excellence awards that he himself signed and that displayed a huge Conservative logo.

When will he stop using departmental resources for partisan purposes?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a party that took new Canadians for granted far too long. More and more, the Liberals are losing the support of new Canadians, who now realize that the Conservative Party reflects their values and aspirations.

[*English*]

I have a question for the member for Papineau. Speaking of using public resources for partisan ends, how about private ends? Has that member ever taken money from private organizations for speaking events when he should have been in the House of Commons or appearing at committee? I would like to know.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have no respect for the Canada Elections Act or the Chief Electoral Officer, whom they dragged through the mud when he appeared before a parliamentary committee.

Furthermore, two Conservative organizers who came up with the scheme to circumvent the election spending limits were rewarded with Senate appointments. This shows how little respect the Prime Minister has for the Canada Elections Act.

When will the Prime Minister acknowledge that he authorized the violation of the act and that his party must repay the dirty money it tried to swindle out of taxpayers after the 2005-06 election?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on July 15, 2004, the Bloc Québécois transferred \$17,071.20 to the candidate in Québec. On July 16, the following day, the candidate transferred \$17,071.20 to the Bloc Québécois. The money went in and the money went out.

[*English*]

Where is Elections Canada?

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to spending \$1 million over and above the limits allowed by the Canada Elections Act in 2005-06, the Conservatives tried to use a lobby group as a front to attack the Liberal government.

During that same election campaign, a law firm with ties to the Conservatives approached the organization Lost Canadians about financing an advertising campaign developed by Conservative strategists.

Do these tricks not prove that the Conservatives were prepared to do anything to gain power, including violating the Canada Elections Act and using fronts?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, on July 15, the Bloc Québécois transferred \$17,071.20 to the candidate in Québec. On July 16, the following day, the candidate transferred \$17,071.20. That is the exact same amount, the same candidate and it happened the same week. The money went in and the money went out. Where is Elections Canada?

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to a memo from the Library of Parliament, a number of Canadian laws, particularly the Criminal Code of Canada, already allow assets to be frozen, seized or confiscated in Canada. Library of Parliament experts are therefore confirming what the Bloc Québécois has been saying: the government already has all the tools it needs to freeze the Ben Ali family's assets.

Is the Minister of Foreign Affairs aware that, the way things are going, by the time the government tries to seize the assets of Ben Ali and his family, there will be nothing left?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member has missed the testimony at the committee.

We have introduced legislation to freeze the assets of corrupt regimes in our efforts to continue to help countries in turmoil. We are sending out the right message in this area: If one steals money or assets from one's homeland and tries to move them to Canada, Canada will be the wrong place to put those assets.

This should have the Bloc's support.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is using the lack of a decision by the United Nations Security Council to justify its refusal to freeze the Ben Ali family's assets, contrary to what happened with Gadhafi. This does not make sense.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs expect us to believe that, if a member of the Security Council had exercised its veto power, the Canadian government would not have frozen Gadhafi's assets? He cannot be serious.

Who is he trying to protect by sparing the Ben Ali family?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what all of us would want this House to believe is that the Bloc does not know what it is talking about.

There are rules and laws on the books now. What we are doing is we are supplementing those to make sure that any individual who moves money from their homeland to Canada will face the consequences.

Why does the member not just read the legislation? It will just take a couple of minutes, and she will be able to figure it out.

* * *

FORMER PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former integrity commissioner ignored all 228 whistleblowers. All complaints were swept under the rug.

Fact: the office is supposed to be independent, yet there was a close relationship with the PMO. Fact: the Prime Minister's Office

paid her half a million dollars to quit and disappear. Fact: the departure agreement requires that she:

—not engage in any conduct or make any statements...which may be otherwise detrimental to...the Government of Canada.

What could possibly compel the Prime Minister to pay so much hush money?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this matter the government sought legal advice and received that advice.

The government, following the Auditor General's report, immediately put in place an interim commissioner, who is quite rightly following up on all of those complaints from public servants. Also, the whole question of recoverability of funds is being looked into as a result of that report.

Our concern and priority remains with the whistleblowers, the hard-working public servants who bring their concerns forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are starting to understand why the Prime Minister was prepared to pay half a million dollars to buy Ms. Ouimet's silence.

Emails show that Ms. Ouimet contacted the office of the President of the Treasury Board to organize a meeting to discuss certain files. The President of the Treasury Board continues to hide the truth regarding the commissioner's independence from the House even though we have evidence to the contrary.

When will the Prime Minister admit that his accountability agenda is a farce?

● (1445)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question like that, it is very important to state the truth, the whole truth. Yes, the person in question sent me a letter requesting a meeting, but we did not meet.

There is something more important here: the government sought legal advice and followed it. There is a new commissioner in place now, and he is looking at all the cases.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the immigration minister tries and fails to take responsibility for his recent conflict of interest activities, one must ask, why is he permitted to explain his misdeeds but the CIDA minister is not?

First, the PM kept her behind him, seen and not heard. Now that she is allowed to speak, she answers imaginary questions and never why she doctored the KAIROS document. She continues to show contempt for the House and Canadians.

Why will she not fess up and say who told her to cut funding?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is International Women's Day. What an opportunity to talk about the accomplishments of the Minister of International Cooperation.

Whether it is young girls in Afghanistan who are finally being able to realize the dream of going to school or the millions of women and children in Africa who will benefit from the maternal and newborn initiative brought forward by this government, the Minister of International Cooperation has always stood up for women around the world. She has done an outstanding job and we should celebrate her success today on International Women's Day.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): How impressive, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of International Cooperation does not even have the right to defend herself on International Women's Day, yet the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism can stand up and try, in vain, to defend his conflicts of interest.

How can it be that on International Women's Day, the Minister of International Cooperation is not allowed to stand up and tell us why she doctored a document and why she cut funding to KAIROS without any justification? She is not allowed to defend herself, but the male minister—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International Cooperation.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that gives me the opportunity when people are worried about our economic recovery to tell Canadians how their development dollars are delivering results, particularly for women.

In fact, in Sudan where we have seen a referendum and a new country, we have delivered water for 744,000 people and ensured the enrolment of 4,000 girls in schools. We have established 30 women's community-based organizations so that woman can speak up for themselves and be part of a new nation in south Sudan.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for the Status of Women

Today, Canadian women and men are celebrating the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, and there is much to celebrate. Women and girls have overcome great obstacles to the advancement of their equality.

This year, Canada's theme for International Women's Day is "Girls' Rights Matter". Would the minister tell the House why Canada chose this theme to mark the 100th anniversary?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year's theme for International Women's Day is "Girls' Rights Matter". It was chosen because girls across the globe face serious obstacles that must be overcome. A girl who enjoys equality has a greater likelihood of being self-confident and aware of her own potential and being empowered to access education and job opportunities that will contribute to her success.

At Status of Women, we have doubled our funding in support of community organizations that want to empower Canadian women and girls.

I urge all members today, on International Women's Day, to reflect on the incredible progress that we have made and, more importantly, on the potential for our girls to reach even greater heights.

* * *

● (1450)

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day today. While we have much to celebrate, too many women in Canada still face an uphill battle.

After a lifetime of building our country, almost one-quarter of senior women live in poverty. Canadian women deserve to retire with dignity and security.

Will the government ensure that senior women do not have to choose between paying for food, medicine or even home heating? Will the government enhance the Canada pension plan and give women the respect they have earned?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has gone to great lengths to help seniors and women, particularly senior women who face financial challenges. We have brought in pension income splitting. We have lowered the tax rates. We have increased the age credit, not once but twice.

There are so many things we have done just to help those people she is talking about. It is a darned shame the hon. member and her party have not supported a single one of those efforts.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, constituents tell me they face significant delays in receiving GIS payments. For new applicants, the wait can be 20 weeks. For the recently widowed, the wait is four months or more. For those with changes in income, it is five to six months. It has been suggested that the delay is due to a lack of resources. The majority of low income seniors seeking GIS are women.

On International Women's Day, will the government commit the resources to clear the backlog and help our seniors?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that seniors do receive the benefits to which they are entitled on time. That is why we have done things like the automatic renewal of the guaranteed income supplement as long as the senior files a tax return. In fact, over 95% are now having their GIS automatically renewed.

Oral Questions

As to the rest, many times people apply for GIS and old age security long before they are eligible, many months before. That is why they get delayed. We wait until they are eligible to pay them. Well over 90% of seniors do receive a cheque within the first month of eligibility.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question that I asked last Friday about changes in terminology within his department, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had the nerve to insult the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, saying that our work was not serious. Once again, instead of being accountable, a Conservative minister chose to denigrate the work of parliamentarians.

If he wants to protect women's interests, how can the minister say that the work done by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is not serious?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to dredge up that debate on semantics.

[English]

This is about gender rights and equality between women and men.

[Translation]

Overall, the committee generally does excellent work. I dared suggest that the committee study the action plan that we tabled concerning UN resolution 1325, which aims to protect women in conflict zones around the world.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs' sneak attack on the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is symptomatic of the government's attitude in general. In recent years, the Conservatives have slashed Status of Women Canada's budget, cut funding to numerous women's rights organizations and abolished the court challenges program. As a female Conservative senator said, with the Conservatives, women had best shut up.

When will this government stop attacking those who promote women's rights?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is entirely false. In fact, our government has increased funding to Status of Women to its highest level ever in the history of our country. We are supporting projects in every province and territory across the country. In fact, we are oversubscribed.

We are doing work with organizations everywhere, including in Montreal where we are now funding a program in which 85 community workers and trainers in charge of immigration integration are going to receive training in gender-based analysis as well as leadership and women's rights in Canada.

• (1455)

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today faith leaders from across Canada are meeting in Ottawa, talking to politicians about poverty and discussing the human resources committee report on poverty that was tabled in the fall.

Under the government, poverty is rising dramatically, by 25% in fact, and the government refuses to address it. The minister snuck her response to the poverty report into Parliament without so much as a word. Why not? It is an insult to Canadians who live in poverty, just as she insulted people on EI and Canadians who used child care.

If the Conservatives refuse to listen to Parliament, the UN, or all the social advocates, what do they say to Canada's churches that want action on poverty?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken several steps to reduce poverty levels in Canada, including introducing and then increasing the working income tax benefit, reducing taxes and creating jobs. We believe that lower taxes create jobs.

However, let us see what the Liberal colleague says:

We cannot increase corporate taxes without losing corporate investment. If we lose corporate investment, we have a less productive economy...That means fewer jobs. That means more poverty.

That is the member for Kings—Hants.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is International Women's Day. Women, including single moms and elderly single women, suffer from poverty and it is getting worse under the government.

How can the minister justify \$6 billion for corporate tax cuts and billions of dollars for jets? By the way, spending billions of dollars on megaprisons is not a national housing strategy. A fraction of that money could lift so many women and families out of poverty.

Canada's faith leaders are part of the call for action. The minister's choices are hurting Canadians. Did she even read that poverty report? Does anybody over there care about Canada's poor?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is our government that voted for pension income splitting, that increased the age credit to help seniors and that raised the age for RSP. We brought in the new horizons for seniors program and a financial abuse awareness program to help defend seniors.

Oral Questions

We voted for those things because we brought them in to help seniors and to help keep them out of poverty. Unfortunately, that member and the Liberals voted against every one of those things.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Sayisi Dene of northern Manitoba are in Ottawa today seeking nothing more than justice.

In 1956 the Government of Canada forced the people to relocate. This relocation caused trauma, suicide and a dark history that this first nation struggles with today. While the government has apologized to others, this first nation still waits. Today is about a chance for leadership and a new beginning.

Will the Minister of Indian Affairs agree to meet with the Sayisi Dene? Will the Government of Canada truly commit to a path of reconciliation?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2009 Dr. Jeremiah Bartram was engaged to explore the prospect of a negotiated settlement with the first nation. Dr. Bartram has submitted his final report and it is currently under review to determine the best way forward.

We recognize the Sayisi Dene First Nation's difficult history. Addressing historical grievances is a complex process that requires significant time and care in order to ensure they are resolved in a manner that will satisfy all parties and stand the test of time.

* * *

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe that under Canada's correctional services management protocol, women are kept in solitary confinement for years at a time.

Thirty per cent of women in prisons are aboriginal and currently all the women on the management protocol are aboriginal, a fact for which the correctional investigator has expressed deep concern. There is no equivalent system in the men's correctional system.

Would the minister admit that the management protocol is cruel and inhumane and agree to drop the practice?

• (1500)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, segregation is a disciplinary tool used only in the most serious circumstances to ensure the protection of correctional officers as well as other inmates.

Rather than continually putting the rights of the worst offenders first, I would call upon the member to work with us to ensure that not only are rights protected inside the prisons, but that victims rights outside the prisons are also protected.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was one of the first countries to take action with respect to the tragic situation in Libya. Our swift response to secure the safety of Canadians has been well-documented and we continue to work closely with our international partners.

Last week the Prime Minister announced that Canada would assist the people of Libya on the humanitarian front.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation please update the House on our progress?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is providing humanitarian aid to those fleeing the conflict in Libya.

Today I am pleased to tell Canadians about our most recent efforts that will provide nutritious food for over one million displaced persons. We will help supply tents, blankets and bedding for 90,000 people and provide the much needed water, food and sanitation services they lack as they await repatriation to their homelands.

Our government not only makes empty promises, we are telling Canadians what their humanitarian aid is delivering.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 19, 2009, former minister Jim Prentice said that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline was a key part of the government's northern strategy and that the government was prepared to contribute to infrastructure and pre-construction costs as well as sharing of risks and returns.

The National Energy Board made its decision in support of the pipeline on December 16, 2010 and northerners were anxiously expecting cabinet approval last December.

If this project, which is of national interest, is a priority of that regime, why has there been nothing but delay since the NEB decision?

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 is a normal process involved in getting to the order in council. It is in process. The member can expect an announcement in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: It being 3:03 p.m., pursuant to order made Monday, March 7 the House will now proceed to statements by ministers.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would ask my hon. colleagues to join me in celebrating the 100th year of International Women's Day.

Over the last century, women and girls have made great strides and we can take this opportunity to reflect on the successes, challenges and aspirations of women and girls in Canada and around the world.

[Translation]

As Minister for Status of Women, I have had many wonderful opportunities to meet with women and girls in Canada and around the world. In February, I attended the 55th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The enthusiasm and energy at that session was contagious.

[English]

One of the groups I had the opportunity to meet with was Plan International and Girls Delegation. During this meeting I listened to the stories of 13 girls from around the world. They spoke eloquently about the importance of girls showing leadership to achieve equality, end abuse, overcome barriers to go to school, and soar to new heights.

This year Canada's theme for International Women's Day is "Girls' Rights Matter" because girls face incredible barriers around the world that need to be overcome.

A girl who enjoys equality has a greater likelihood of being self-confident and aware of her potential and of being empowered to access education and job opportunities that will contribute to her success.

Today I am pleased to be announcing Canada's intent to support a United Nations resolution to establish an international day of the girl later in the fall. This is a great opportunity and one for which I would ask the support of all parties as we move forward.

[Translation]

Today I am pleased to be announcing Canada's intent to support the establishment of an international day of the girl by the UN later in the fall.

[English]

We believe that when girls have a solid foundation from which to spring, with the right tools and conditions they can truly soar to new heights.

A day of the girl will awaken more ideas, support and enthusiasm around the world, and will help raise awareness about violence, abuse, inequality, lack of nutrition, health care requirements and the right to education and training.

● (1505)

[Translation]

Girls play a key role in a nation's prosperity and can become excellent leaders if they are given the opportunity.

[English]

It is why at Status of Women Canada we have doubled funding in support of community organizations that want to empower Canadian women and girls in three areas: putting an end to violence and abuse, fostering greater leadership, and promoting greater economic prosperity.

[Translation]

Lastly, this morning, at an event with women business leaders, I announced funding for the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance to provide mentorship for young women who aspire to success in the technology field.

[English]

Today, on International Women's Day, let us take the opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made, but more importantly, let us look forward and realize the incredible potential we have to help the next generation soar to new heights.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for Status of Women for her statement and for the opportunity to offer some words of my own on behalf of the Liberal Party.

2011 marks the 100th year of International Women's Day, an event that is being marked in communities and in schools across Canada.

Women in Canada and around the world have gained much over the last 100 years, the right to vote, to work, to equal participation in government.

It is a testament to the women who came before, in civil society, this House and in the Senate, that I rise today to reply to a statement by a female cabinet member responsible for the status of women.

International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate these achievements, but also to reflect on how far we have to go and must go to achieve full gender equality and eradicate gender discrimination in its entirety.

[Translation]

Here in Parliament, less than 25% of members are women. Increasing women's participation in this important role would have an impact on how young women perceive themselves as well as on their country and the world.

[English]

Women in Canada also continue to earn, on average, less than men. Despite high educational attainment, this wage gap remains a reminder that we must provide the range of supports necessary so that women can enjoy full participation in our political and economic life.

While I share the minister's enthusiasm for the great potential of our young women and girls, I believe that this potential will never be fully realized and the wage gap never fully closed if these supports do not exist. The need for affordable, accessible child care remains great, and Canada has yet to adequately meet this challenge. The need for a national housing strategy is also urgent.

I would encourage the government to respond to the unanimous will of this House and implement a national violence against women prevention strategy. There is also an urgent need for a national action plan on human trafficking so that Canada's efforts in this area are comprehensive, coordinated and effective.

I recently attended the 55th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. While there I heard a vision of a world “where women and men have equal rights and opportunities, and the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are firmly integrated into the development, human rights, and peace and security agendas”.

We have already done much in Canada to promote these rights and provide these opportunities for women at home and abroad, but much remains to be done.

We in this House have both the mandate and the enormous responsibility to ensure that gender equality and equality of opportunity are real, so that women's potential and women's creativity can be fully embraced for a better future for all of us.

• (1510)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yet another International Women's Day. It is the 100th anniversary. It is beginning to become repetitive to have to examine, every year, how women are doing, as if no other problems existed.

What? In 100 years, did they not obtain the right to vote? Now they can go to work. They can decide whether they want children and when. They now have the pill. They can choose—whether the pro-life caucus in this House likes it or not—whether or not to have an abortion. What more do women want? At some point could we stop celebrating this International Women's Day?

We agree that having International Women's Day for the hundredth time is becoming repetitive. But whether those who are bored by women's demands like it or not, everything is not rosy. According to the World Health Organization, between 100 and 140 million women have been subjected to genital mutilation. Somewhere in the world, a woman dies every minute because of complications arising during pregnancy or childbirth. Even today, women are stoned as punishment for adultery. In countries ravaged by war, such as the Congo, Ivory Coast or Sudan, rape is used as a weapon of war. This is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, and we are still at this point.

In 2007, Quebec women earned 84.25% of what men earned on average; in Canada, women earned just over 70%. According to the OECD, the wage gap between men and women in Canada is the fifth highest of 22 industrialized countries.

Routine Proceedings

In 1996, Quebec passed a proactive pay equity law. In 2009, Canada made pay equity a negotiable right, which was nothing less than a step backwards.

Quebec has implemented a preventive withdrawal program for pregnant women, which allows them to receive 90% of their salary. Canada pays only 55% of their salary to women under its jurisdiction, and for only 15 weeks.

The National Assembly unanimously voted to support a motion to highlight the consensus on women's freedom of choice with regard to abortion. The debate continues to rage in Ottawa.

We are celebrating the 100th International Women's Day, and so much more remains to be done. I do not know how many more years it will take, but I do know that the fight for equality is not over. And I also know that the women in this House and around the world are patient and determined and that, in the end, we will be victorious.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today women and men around the world are celebrating the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

We recognize the efforts of women and girls in challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers to their full equality. However, as far as we believe we have come, there is still much work to be done.

Globally, women and girls continue to face violations of their basic human rights. In many nations, women and girls face unacceptably high rates of maternal mortality because they cannot gain access to safe and legal abortions and often lack access to information on family planning.

In too many parts of the world girls are prevented from going to school. As we well know, women and girls are the backbone of societies and helping them to obtain an education is key to improving the social and economic conditions in their communities.

Although Canada's current government may claim that girls' rights matter, its systematic cuts to Canada's international development programs and partners threaten the progress of the world's most vulnerable women and girls. Cuts to honourable organizations such as KAIROS, Match International and the Canadian Teachers' Federation dishonour women in every part of the world. These organizations were doing important work on gender equality issues in developing nations, at least until the government decided that their programming no longer fit the Conservative vision of gender equality.

Not only has the Conservative government cut funding, but it has also deliberately dampened the gravity of language used by Canada internationally to describe the horrific impunity that exists for crimes of sexual violence in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Routine Proceedings

At home in Canada, things are not much better. The government continues to systematically attack women's equality rights through its cuts to the operating budget of Status of Women Canada, defunding of organizations like Sisters in Spirit and groups that help newcomers, neglecting lost Canadians, failing to make investments in child care and affordable housing, ignoring pay equity rights, failing to fully address violence against aboriginal women and girls, and the list goes on. It is blatantly obvious that the government does not care about the inequality women still face in Canada.

New Democrats will continue to fight for equality and confront the government's agenda, because it erodes the rights of women and girls. We invite all Canadians to join with us in celebrating International Women's Day and to speak out on the issues that matter to all women.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 13 minutes.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In response to a question that I asked the President of the Treasury Board, he referenced a legal opinion that he had regarding the integrity commissioner. He referenced the actual opinion, and I would ask that the minister table that referenced document.

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly look into this, as I indicated to my colleague opposite, to see what can be released in terms of whatever legal agreement was reached.

I also want to clarify the record. I was asked a question today in relation to any meeting with the previous commissioner. The question was posed in light of these difficulties. I have never met with her or talked with her in light of any of these issues.

My scheduling assistant just informed me that there was a meeting about a year ago, last May I believe it was. I just want to correct the record. I do not want to have said anything that could be misconstrued in any way, so I just want to correct that.

I will get back to my colleague on whether we can release the legal advice that we were given.

REBRANDING OF GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S NAME

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises out of the point of order raised yesterday by my colleague from Westmount—Ville-Marie. I am worried that maybe the House does not get the seriousness of the point of order, and I want to add to it.

The member's point was that members' names cannot be used in the House, and we understand the reason for that. However, the Prime Minister has changed the branding of the name of the

Government of Canada to something other than the Government of Canada.

Since December this new name has been showing up more and more in government documents. I personally see the new name as an affront to Canadians because they believe the government is not for one man, but that government is by the people for the people.

I as a member will not be able to quote that name in the House because of the rules. Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker, and I expect you will cut me off and I understand why. I have a release from the Canada Revenue Agency which outlines an announcement in Sault Ste. Marie. The headline of the release is, "Harper government standing up".

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, I know you are standing to cut me off.

The Speaker: The hon. member can avoid doing that by referring to the Prime Minister's government or whatever. He does not need to use the name and I would urge him not to.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, your standing to give me that ruling makes my point. The Prime Minister is branding the Government of Canada as something other than the Government of Canada. I, nor my colleagues, nor even government members can stand in the House and quote directly from a release by a government department. This is wrong.

The Government of Canada is not an entity of one man. I would ask you to take these comments, Mr. Speaker, and your ruling in all seriousness in terms of the point of order raised by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

• (1520)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand my friend's frustration when he has not been given the full information by his own researchers.

First, as we have already said, it is common practice across governments that we would see the name of a leader of a party referenced from time to time. It happens many times. This was approved by the former clerk of the Privy Council working under the Liberal government. It was also approved by the president of the Privy Council.

If he is looking for a quote, there are lots of them. I have one here in an actual release about the 2004 budget. It says, "Paul Martin government announces...". Right after that it says, "Budget 2004, announced today by the Paul Martin government...". In the next sentence it says, "Budget 2004, announced today by the Paul Martin government...". That is three times in two sentences. Even we have not been that aggressive.

The Speaker: I would point out to hon. members that when they are reading quotations from newspapers, magazines or any other source, if a member's name occurs in it they cannot use it. This has been standard practice in the House for years and years.

Business of Supply

While I can sympathize with the hon. member for Malpeque wanting to read these government press releases word for word into the record, he will have to restrain himself a bit by using some other word, as members have been doing for the last few days. We all have to do it when we are reading other materials. However much he may regret the government's decision to make this change, which seems to be more, if I can take it this way, the point he is making, it does not alter the rules of the House in respect of the way we conduct ourselves in here in debate.

Therefore, as tempted as he may be to read the thing verbatim, I am sure he will find that, as he does currently with other material that references other hon. members by name, he will refrain from doing so and sound very eloquent, nonetheless, despite the lack of reading it verbatim.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I would say with great fear and trepidation and nothing but the hugest of respect for you, your office and all of your rulings, I was not sure, and *Hansard* may show, if you were reflecting that there was a change in practice. Of course, our position is that this is a continuation of an existing practice. I respect the verbiage that you chose and I am just pointing out that one element of debate.

The Speaker: I do not know whether there has been a change in practice or not. I make no ruling in respect of that. I was simply urging the hon. member to not change the practice of the House and refrain from using hon. members' names. That is the point I was trying to make.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTORAL FINANCING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel had the floor. He has seven minutes remaining to make his remarks.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with our excellent hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

Before question period, I was talking about the motion moved by the Liberals. I will reread part of it:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conservative Party of Canada's "in and out" electoral financing scheme was an act of electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based...

This is important. During question period, we heard all sorts of claims coming out of the mouth of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. For weeks now he has been claiming that the Conservative Party provided the Chief Electoral Officer with all the documents. That is not true and he knows it. The RCMP had to search the offices of the Conservative Party to obtain the information, and that is serious. It is clear, under the law, that the

national party has the right to spend a certain amount of money. In 2006, it was \$18 million. What is more, the ridings had the right to spend a certain amount of money per riding. The total for all the ridings is roughly the same amount, \$18 million.

However, expenses are different. I am the chief organizer for the Bloc Québécois. The party is entitled to its expenses at the national level. Usually, ads represent the biggest part of the expenses to which we are entitled and in which we invest during an election campaign. In Quebec, for the next election, it will be roughly \$6 million nationally. The party will have a budget and will spend a certain amount of money for its national ads. The ridings have their own budgets and are entitled to local advertising.

In the 2005-06 election, the Conservative Party was moving up in the polls. That is how the Conservatives have always governed. They were experiencing some popularity and the money started to come in. The ridings did not have their own fundraising campaigns and were having a lot of trouble raising money. I should point out that a right-wing party was not very popular, at least not in Quebec. I cannot speak for the rest of Canada, but in Quebec, it was not. The party had reached its \$18 million limit at the national level. It saw the potential for a majority and needed to spend money on national advertisements. Since money was pouring in, it sent money to local ridings and asked them to spend that money on national advertisements, which is in violation of the act. That is why only Conservative Party offices were searched by the RCMP and Elections Canada. In fact, when the returns came in, Elections Canada realized that the expenses were not for local advertisements. In my riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, there are 13 local weekly newspapers. With my budget, I purchase advertisements in the weekly newspapers. That is not national advertising. The national Bloc Québécois party, for which I am the chief organizer, pays for national advertisements on television and radios and in the major national media, but each riding is responsible for local advertising.

It is not surprising for this to happen when a political party does not have enough money for advertising, and the Conservatives know that. It is always about the money, and advertising is the biggest expense a party makes to try and sway the public, which is often very lazy and does not follow election campaigns, aside from catching a few one-minute clips on *The National* or another national news program. The way to sway the public is to blanket the radio and television airwaves with advertisements showing the party leader, while in the ridings, the focus is on showing the candidates.

● (1525)

Elections Canada very clearly understood the scheme. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and I have informed the Conservative members opposite that they are going to lose their appeal before the Supreme Court. A party should not be able to influence the outcome of a national campaign by sending money to ridings so that they can send it right back to the national party to cover the cost of national advertising. This will have to be monitored in future. The Conservatives are not raising any more money than before at the local level. They are collecting it at the national level, particularly in Quebec.

Business of Supply

What was done differently in 2006 and what will happen during the next election campaign? They have had time to send money before the election. If I look at the list of Conservative Party donors in Quebec ridings, I see that often those donors do not live in the ridings to which they are contributing. That is legal. However, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and representatives of the Chief Electoral Officer are analyzing this practice and trying to abolish it. In theory, a riding that wants to run a local election campaign with its local candidate must be able to raise the money to do so on its own.

The current act allows money to be sent to the ridings before the election campaign. This practice must be reviewed. However, there is one other thing that is not legal under the act during an election campaign. When the Conservatives reached their \$18 million spending limit, they noticed that some ridings had not raised any money and were broke. They told those ridings that they would send them money, not for local advertising, but for national advertising. The Conservatives needed national advertising to win a majority. This is what the Chief Electoral Officer condemned, and he was completely right. There is a reason Elections Canada won its appeal and will win—

• (1530)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member for Mississauga South for questions and comments.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to break down the transaction to see whether the hon. member concurs. This is quite simple. It says that the Conservative Party transferred \$1.2 million to 67 candidates. It was then immediately transferred back to the party. That alone has no impact on any expenses or any rebates. It is just a transfer of cash.

However, the Conservative Party had overspent its national media by \$1.2 million so it made up phoney invoices for riding associations and passed those invoices down to these ridings. The ridings then claimed the election rebate on the \$1.2 million of phoney invoices and got \$800,000 from the taxpayers of Canada.

What we have is the national government overspending its national campaign by \$1.2 million and candidates getting \$800,000 that they were not entitled to.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. It gets even worse. The goal of the Conservatives was not to receive the rebate. They had no choice but to receive it. When the riding has an expense, it gets a 60% rebate. Let us ask the Conservatives whether they were interested in receiving the money. They were not interested because they had too much. That is what is wrong with the Conservatives: they have too much money, and that is dangerous for democracy.

The problem is that they are trying to manipulate the law. The Conservatives are saying that they gladly repaid that money and that they did not want it. What they wanted was to exceed the national ceiling allowed under the law. The spending limit under the law was \$18 million. Their spending reached \$19 million, which they invested in advertising to win an election. That is not allowed. They lost in the court of appeal and they will lose in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. In 2003, a court handed down a ruling against a certain Jean-Paul Marchand, a Bloc Québécois candidate. He lost the election, and here is what the judge had to say in the November 21, 2003 ruling:

Mr. Marchand concluded that the real purpose of this personal commitment was to fund the Bloc Québécois with public money and not to reimburse election expenses, as provided for by the Act.

Mr. Marchand had filed legitimate expenses. The Bloc demanded that he spend more and then took him to court because he had not claimed enough expenses. Elections Canada did nothing. Can the Bloc member, who is also his party's organizer, tell us why the judge said this?

In this case, the reason why the candidate made a personal commitment to the Bloc Québécois "to fund the shortfall" was possibly for financing purposes.

Can he tell us why Elections Canada—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, the Conservative member knows full well that the legislation has been amended since that incident occurred. Once again, I understand that they are trying to muddy the waters with a bunch of examples from 2003 and 2004, but the current issue with the in and out scheme is that the Conservatives used the money for national ads, which are a key part of any election campaign. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister did not say a single thing about that. This is what they do: they say they have enough money. If worst comes to worst, they do not even want reimbursement.

The problem is that they want to spend more than the law allows. And that amounts to buying an election campaign. That is not permitted. They lost the appeal. And they will lose at the Supreme Court. They still do not understand that democracy cannot be bought. It is not permitted in Quebec—where we pay the bill for about a quarter of the federal government's expenditures—or in the rest of Canada.

Perhaps if they win a majority, they can amend the Canada Elections Act and will thus be in control forever and be a dictatorship financed by dirty money.

• (1535)

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Madam Speaker, today, the Liberal members are proposing debate on a motion that I believe, as I am sure you do, deals with a fundamental issue, namely, respect for the democratic rules that govern our society. It is even more important to ensure respect for these rules given the election rumours that are going around and that seem to be growing every day as March 22, the date for the tabling of the next Conservative budget, approaches.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois supports the Liberal motion before the House today and believes it is of the utmost importance that the Conservatives pay back the money they spent illegally during the 2005-06 election campaign. The Bloc Québécois believes that, not only must they repay the money they stole from the citizens of this country, but they must also, as quickly as possible, remove all individuals facing charges for this violation of the Canada Elections Act from any position of responsibility within government or the Conservative Party of Canada. In addition, these individuals must not be allowed to participate in future elections.

Year after year, as we have seen scandals of all kinds since the Conservatives came to power in Ottawa in January 2006, we have no choice but to recognize that the Conservative Party simply cannot and will not abide by democratic rules, and that it sees the Canada Elections Act as an obstacle that it may circumvent as it wishes. It can do anything it wants, anything that helps keep the party in power. Much like the majority of Canadians who care about respecting democratic rules, I believe that the Conservative government's ideology makes it truly incapable of respecting the most basic electoral rules that are common to modern democratic societies.

It is a good thing we have institutions like Elections Canada. This independent, non-partisan organization reports directly to Parliament. It is responsible for organizing elections and administering the political financing provisions of the Canada Elections Act. Furthermore, its mandate includes monitoring compliance and enforcing electoral legislation, to the great displeasure of those who try to circumvent it. We are truly privileged to live in a society that has such an organization to guarantee a truly healthy democracy. It is thanks to the work of that institution, which is responsible for defending our democratic rules, that the House has become aware of a scandal that dates back to the 2005-06 election campaign, which brought the Conservatives into power following a long Liberal reign, which also ended in a nasty scandal.

Although the Liberals are vehemently condemning the governing party's undemocratic behaviour today, we must not forget that, when it was in power, the Liberal Party of Canada created government programs with the primary but unspoken agenda to buy votes. The sponsorship program and the transitional jobs fund at Human Resources Development Canada enabled the Liberals to invest funds in ridings held by their political adversaries to buy the sympathy of voters. The Gomery inquiry uncovered an elaborate kickback scheme that enabled our Liberal friends to accumulate hundreds of thousands of dollars in their election fund.

But let us get back to our Conservative friends who, at the time, wrapped themselves in a cloak of integrity and transparency, but who have since found other equally reprehensible schemes to cheat democracy and abuse the electoral system. It bears saying and repeating that the Conservatives will stop at nothing to gain power, and that is why, in 2007, the Conservative Party had the audacity to sue Elections Canada in Federal Court because it refused to reimburse the election expenses of 67 candidates, including 27 in Quebec.

The dispute was over what we commonly refer to as an in and out system, which the Conservatives implemented and which enabled them, in 2006, to conceal national expenses by passing them off as

local election expenses. Strangely, the Federal Court of Canada ruled in favour of the Conservative Party, but Elections Canada had the good sense to appeal, and a ruling was issued on March 1, 2011, by the Federal Court of Appeal, which overruled the earlier decision of the Federal Court. The ruling handed down on March 1 confirms Elections Canada's interpretation that the Conservatives violated the Canada Elections Act by using in and out financing.

● (1540)

The Conservative Party had almost reached its spending limits, so it spread \$1.3 million that it spent on national ads among Conservative candidates who had not reached their personal spending limits.

According to Elections Canada, this money, which was purportedly used to fund local Conservative Party ads, was actually used for national ads. In its ruling, the Federal Court of Appeal said that if the Conservative Party were allowed to use that strategy, which the party still claims is legitimate, it would:

—weaken compliance with the limits set by Parliament on the amount of money that candidates may spend on their election and can recover by way of reimbursement from public funds. Abuses could well proliferate, and the statutory objective of promoting a healthy democracy through levelling the electoral playing field undermined.

It should be made clear that, in addition to this ruling, the Conservatives will be in Ontario Provincial Court on March 18, to defend charges laid by William Corbett, the Commissioner of Elections Canada, who began a parallel inquiry into the same transactions that the Chief Electoral Officer was so concerned about.

Mr. Corbett decided to lay charges against the Conservative Party and four high-ranking officials from the party, including two senators. Elections Canada has accused them of election fraud for supposedly having hidden overspending during the 2006 federal elections.

The Conservatives are even saying that everything was done legally. They are claiming to be the victims and they are even claiming that Elections Canada is taking revenge on the Conservative Party for its 2007 lawsuit against Elections Canada for refusing to refund dozens of candidates' election expenses.

But none of that holds water. The documents included in the Elections Canada affidavit and its annexes prove that.

During the 2005-06 election campaign, when they realized that the party was about to exceed its authorized spending limit, high-ranking Conservative Party officials developed a national advertising campaign scheme paid for by local candidates.

Business of Supply

There were 67 Conservative candidates involved, and a number of them are cabinet members in the government of the Prime Minister, whose name I cannot say in the House, but whose name the Conservative government uses shamelessly, instead of the “Government of Canada”. I was saying that a good number of the candidates involved in this in and out scheme, deemed illegal by Elections Canada, today are ministers or hold senior positions in the Prime Minister's office. Alarm bells went off at Elections Canada in October 2006 and it has been investigating the Conservative government ever since.

In short, we will not be fooled under the circumstances: the Conservatives' version and their explanations do not hold water. The Prime Minister himself criticized Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, after the 2007 court case seeking reimbursement from Elections Canada. When he was the president of the National Citizens Coalition, he called him the “perfect politician” capable of “providing the wrong answers to questions that no one asks”, and above all “having a public agenda”. These are criticisms that the Conservatives are again trotting out even though Mr. Kingsley is no longer there.

It is obvious that the Conservative leader prefers to blame the messenger rather than dealing with the source of the problem, which is the party itself.

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was an excellent member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics which dealt with this issue. She may recall that the government filibustered the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when it tried to deal with this. It filibustered our committee and witnesses were told not to appear and to disregard the subpoenas. Conservatives had a binder with instructions on how to make Parliament and committees dysfunctional. The government gets rid of senior public officials who do not agree with it. It prorogues the House when it gets into hot water.

The pattern of behaviour shows that the government cannot be trusted. Conservatives have contempt for Parliament, contempt for democracy and contempt for the law.

Does the member have anything to add to that list?

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comments, especially since he was the chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for a number of years. He carried out his duties in an exemplary fashion. We have had our ups and downs with the Conservative Party. I moved a motion at the committee to examine the in and out scheme in detail, but there was an election and we were unable to do it.

The Conservative Party has this constant tendency to try to circumvent the law or to do everything to not admit the obvious. My colleague, who was chair of this committee, could also tell you this. When a committee serves a summons to a witness, as was the case last spring, and the law and most basic rules of democracy are not

respected, something is not right. The Conservative Party is ignoring the Elections Act and all other Canadian laws.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Bloc Québécois member a question.

Jean-Paul Marchand was a candidate. He lost the election in 2000. He was sued by the Bloc Québécois, which had used such a scheme. Mr. Marchand testified before Justice Godbout, a Superior Court judge. The ruling was handed down on November 21, 2003, in which it states:

Mr. Marchand concluded that the real purpose of this personal commitment was to fund the Bloc Québécois with public money and not to reimburse election expenses, as provided for by the Act.

Mr. Marchand's actual expenses were \$22,276.37. He had agreed to spend \$66,565. He made up fake expenses to claim rebates from the public coffers. There was no complaint to Elections Canada. Elections Canada did not intervene.

Can the member explain why Elections Canada did not intervene?

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, what an honour it is to hear this question from the Conservative Party member.

Barely five minutes ago, he put the same question to my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, who is our party's election organizer. My colleague explained the details of this question at some length.

I would like to know why he repeated the question. Perhaps he needs to reread his notes. We have answered the question eloquently and there is no reason to go over it again and again.

[English]

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today and speak to the motion of my colleague, the hon. member for Beauséjour. I also want to share my time with the hon. member for Malpeque. I am looking forward to his comments in regard to the motion as well.

The in and out affair is troubling and illegal. It shows that the Conservatives think the rules do not apply to them. We have to ask where is their law and order agenda now, when they are at the heart of the matter?

It is part of a broader pattern of secrecy and deceit, and of contempt for the rule of law. It is part of a pattern which results in the gutting of access to information laws. It results in attacks on independent agencies and officers of Parliament. It results in attacks on Parliament itself, with Tories now questioning the cost of answering questions. In all of this there is no respect for democracy, for the principles of fairness and for our institutions like Elections Canada.

Business of Supply

The Tories, especially people like the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton, like to claim that all parties engage in the in and out process. There are provisions in the Canada Elections Act which allow for honest and legal transfer of funds between local campaigns and the federal party. My own campaign did so honestly and legally in 2005, but we did not do so to avoid national campaign expenditure caps. We did not do so to allow local party organizers to claim rebates from the Canadian taxpayer that they otherwise would not have been entitled to.

Honest and legal versus dishonest and illegal; there is a major distinction. That is why the Conservative Party offices were the subject of an RCMP search. They were raided. It is why the Conservative Party and its officials now face charges.

If this is so innocent, as the Tories claim, why did the member for Simcoe—Grey and the former member for Dauphin—Swan River, Inky Mark, reject taking part? It did not pass the smell test with them and it does not pass the smell test with Canadians.

Unfortunately, in the process many good people, even some good Tories, are being harmed. In my riding of Labrador my opponent in 2006 was Joe Goudie, a long-time politician, activist and craftsman. We fought hard during the campaign and in the end the voters made their decision. Certainly I am humbled and grateful for their support.

However, in the process of that campaign, the national Conservative Party, from its Ottawa headquarters down the street from this chamber, implicated Joe in the in and out scheme. His campaign was invoiced, and it was spelled, “nvoice”, for \$2,097. It had the same typo as dozens of other “nvoices” to Conservative campaigns across the country. That strange typo, “nvoice”, is what helped investigators realize something unusual was going on with the Conservative Party finances. They were phony.

I want to quote from an affidavit of the official agent of Mr. Joe Goudie during the campaign. He said, “On January 16, 2006, the sum of \$2,097.20 was deposited into Mr. Goudie's campaign account by the Conservative Party of Canada. On January 17, 2006, the Conservative Party of Canada debited Mr. Goudie's campaign account in the amount of \$2,118.20. The difference between the two amounts, namely \$21, was the bank's transfer fee which was charged to Mr. Goudie's campaign account and to my knowledge this amount has never been refunded by the Conservative Party of Canada”.

● (1550)

In one day, out the next.

He went on to say and swear in his affidavit, “I did not realize what we had been drawn into until I saw the coverage of the in and out transfers in the media. In the end, all I have is my reputation and my integrity. The fact that I and our local campaign team were innocently drawn into this scheme by the Conservative Party of Canada angers me greatly”.

In all, there was over \$1.2 million in the shady invoices for supposedly local TV advertising. That is a clever trick in Labrador where we have no local TV stations.

I want to refer to the affidavit of the campaign manager for Joseph Goudie who said, “I was told by Mr. Hudson, a Conservative operative, that the Conservative Party of Canada would be sending

us money for advertising but that we would have to send the money right back to the Conservative Party of Canada”.

She went on to say, “Mr. Hudson said that the money would be used for national ads run locally. Our campaign had just started and we had very little money and so I asked Mr. Hudson if I could use some of that money to advertise on local radio and in the local newspaper. Mr. Hudson said no, that this money was for TV advertising and that we would have to pay for radio and newspaper ads ourselves”.

She continued:

I then asked Mr. Hudson if the TV ads would mention or in any way reference Mr. Goudie's campaign. He said the TV ads would be generic and there would be no reference to Mr. Goudie.

She then said:

To my knowledge, none of the television ads run by the Conservative Party of Canada during the election mentioned Mr. Goudie or his campaign either by spoken word or in writing.

She then summed up her feelings:

This whole thing really bothers me. When I begged for help from the Conservative Party of Canada, they wouldn't even reply to my emails. It appears to me that the only interest the Conservative Party of Canada had in our campaign was to use us as part of this scheme. When I begged for help from the Conservative Party of Canada, they wouldn't even reply to my emails. It appears to me that the only interest the Conservative Party of Canada had in our campaign was to use it as part of this scheme. I had absolutely no reason to think or believe that there was anything wrong, or even questionable, about what Mr. Hudson told us to do. I simply followed instructions. I feel awful that we were used in this fashion. If I was the victim of one of those email scams, I wouldn't feel any more duped than I do now for having been innocently caught up in this matter.

The spending that put the Conservatives over their national campaign limit resulted in improper benefits provided to Conservative riding associations. Let me make it clear that this was orchestrated by the Conservative Party at the national level. I want to return to the fact that Joe Goudie made it clear in his affidavit that he had no knowledge of impropriety. He did not know his campaign had even been involved until three years ago when his name came up on a TV newscast. He said he was used by the Conservative Party of Canada and that he has lost all faith in that party and its leader. Who could blame him?

Throughout this, Joe has done all the right things. He has been open in sharing what he knows and how his campaign was used by federal Conservative operatives. If only the Conservatives here in Ottawa could be as transparent and forthcoming. This illegal scheme illustrates how far the Conservatives will go in their quest for power. It is a shame.

● (1555)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments. We know how much the sponsorship scandal impacted Canadians over the years. Now we see the in and out scandal, as we call it, on the part of the Conservatives.

Does the member feel that it is time that we put more honesty in government? This is what we have been advocating for many years now.

Business of Supply

We have talked about transparency. Obviously, there were transparency problems when we had the Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien governments in place. Members on the other side keep talking about transparency and that has not been happening.

I am wondering if the member thinks that we should go to proportional representation system instead, given the fact that some of his colleagues do support that type of change in government. I believe that at the end of the day we would better serve Canadians.

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from the New Democratic Party. However, I am not sure that if we had proportional representation that put x number of Conservatives in x number of seats that it would make the Conservatives any more honest or transparent.

The fact is that the Conservatives have not been honest, have not been transparent and they are willing to use whatever is at their disposal. Now before the courts are their alleged illegal practices to further their own aims and ambitions. In the process, it is the regular Canadians who have some faith in the democratic system and who want to do something better who get caught up in their mess and their scheme. It shakes the confidence of all Canadians in terms of their participation in the political process.

The Conservatives have done a disservice to Elections Canada, a disservice to this House by not being transparent and accountable and a disservice to ordinary Canadians who want to be involved and participatory.

• (1600)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the speech. I learned earlier today that in my riding the former member of Parliament was part of the Liberal in and out program. I think it was \$5,000 that went in and \$5,000 that went out.

I referenced earlier today the fact that we are actually here talking about the Liberals' inability to get over the fact that the people of Canada threw them out of power in 2006. They do not understand why it is that we were brought in to clean up the mess. That is one of the reasons that they were thrown out.

The NDP members also have some responsibility because they knew in 2004 that the Liberals were a corrupt lot. They had stolen millions of dollars from the taxpayers of Canada to finance campaigns in 2004. The ad scam was something that was reprehensible to everybody but the NDP still cut a deal with the then Liberal government to keep them in power longer.

Will the member and his party get over the fact that they lost the 2006 election and that now is the time to look forward and start focusing on what really matters to Canadians, mainly the economy?

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, given the Conservative Party's practices in 2006, some would say that the election was stolen and not won at all. I congratulate him on trying to use some pretty words, but I have to say that when wrong is done, it is honourable upon a party or a member to admit the wrong and to face it.

The Conservatives have laundered taxpayer money, honest people's money in this country. They are the ones who stand up in

this House and cry that they represent the taxpayer. They do not represent the taxpayer. They represent themselves and they will use taxpayer money to further their own aims and their own objectives any day of the week. That is what Canadians will hear whenever they have another chance to vote for the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the opposition day motion that reads, in part:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conservative Party of Canada's "in and out" electoral financing scheme was an act of electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based....

It goes on to name some consequences.

As others have said before me, this is about the in and out scheme of the Conservative Party of Canada that occurred in the 2006 election campaign which fraudulently took money and transferred it around. I will get into more detail on that later.

From a high of \$49,999 to one riding to slightly over \$2,000 in another, and some 67 ridings in all, it was a major scheme to get around the national advertising rules. The plan was simple enough. It was to send money to individual ridings for the purpose of buying advertising, only the advertising being purchased was for the national not the local campaign.

In an article today in the *Globe and Mail*, Jeffrey Simpson summed this up probably better than anyone. He backgrounds it in about half of the article and I will quote what he had to say in looking back at that election campaign. He says:

Yes, the Liberals were wounded, but they weren't done. They were running their own nasty TV ads warning darkly of Mr. Harper's hidden agenda.

We certainly know that is true. There is certainly one of those.

• (1605)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to remember that he cannot name sitting members in the House.

Hon. Wayne Easter: My apologies, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Simpson goes on to say:

On TV and on platforms, the two parties were battling, ad for ad, charge for charge. But as the campaign wore on, the Conservatives were running out of money, or at least money they could spend under election financing rules. They needed every dollar they could find to buy more ads.

What did they do? They had to find a scheme to get money. They had overspent in the first few weeks of the campaign. They had a week left to go so they had to find a scheme by which to get around the election rules.

Jeffrey Simpson went on to say:

It was, as the appeal court said, a "scheme." Now the director of public prosecutions has charged four Conservatives, including two senators, with having organized the scheme.

I think Mr. Simpson sums it up pretty well in the *Globe and Mail* article.

The CBC also reported:

Business of Supply

The plan was apparently hatched in the midst of the campaign as the national Conservative Party was reaching its legal spending limit of about \$18 million, but wanted to spend more on advertising.

The CBC report went on to provide a brief example of how the scam, this money-laundering scheme, worked. It said:

Individual Conservative candidates had their own legal election expense limit of about \$80,000, and lots of them weren't planning to spend anything close to that amount.

We all know that a lot of candidates do not spend close to their amount.

To understand what happened next, I will take the case of one Ontario Conservative candidate. Her campaign had not spent anything near the allowable \$80,000 limit for the riding. The party sent her campaign \$29,999 on the strict condition her campaign immediately transfer the same amount of money back to the national party. In return, the party issued an invoice showing her campaign had just bought local advertising worth \$29,999. The party used the money to continue its mostly national advertising blitz, while the local candidate later got to claim a 60% rebate on her expenses from the government. In her case, that meant a cheque for \$18,000 from taxpayers for local advertising that never happened.

This was achieved by sending the money to the riding, having the candidate or duly appointed officer sign off on the receipt of the money and then immediately send the money back to the national campaign. By doing this, the Conservatives were able to exceed the legally mandated spending ceiling under the Elections Canada Act in their attempt to buy the election. However, even worse, through that they were able to fill the coffers of some of the local riding associations with funds being returned for expenses at the local level that never happened. There is no question about it. The fact is that this is plainly illegal. It is election fraud, short and simple. The Conservative Party has been up to election fraud.

What do the Conservatives do now? As they usually do, they try to change the subject. They organize a public relations campaign claiming that this was an administrative error, an accounting error, and nothing more. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is no accounting error. This is no administrative error. This is electoral fraud. All we need to do is walk down that hall and we will see two of the people who have been rewarded for coming up with this scheme and have been able to buy that national advertising during the last week of the campaign. We will find down that hall two senators who were involved in this scheme. We will find two others at the senior levels of the Conservative Party who were involved in this scheme of electoral fraud.

For the Prime Minister to stand and talk about law and order, it is not about laws for everybody else and different laws for him and his party. Everybody should have to respect the Elections Canada Act and that party obviously did not and they have been charged as such.

• (1610)

The Conservatives claimed, as did the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, that the party had every right to send money to local campaigns. It is interesting how he fails to mention that the requirement for the ridings getting the money was that they were obligated to kick it back to the centre. I wonder why? I wonder why the parliamentary secretary forgot to place this part of the transaction

on the record in the House that they were obligated to kick it back. That is the catch. It was certainly a scheme that was cooked up by the party in order to raise money for its election campaign.

We need to bear in mind that the Prime Minister, long before he was elected, attempted to challenge the manner in which campaigns had been financed. He has never been one who has accepted the rules that the rest of the country live by. As president of the NCC, he found himself on the wrong side of a Supreme Court ruling which found against his efforts to undermine our election financing laws.

It is apparent that we have a Prime Minister who believes that if he does not consider the laws legitimate he can ignore them. However, he and the party are devious enough to attempt to hide it. There is a lack of moral courage at the very core of that party, not to mention integrity.

Let us consider for a moment two things. The first is that the Conservatives have, by practising this fraud, bought themselves an election. The Federal Court of Appeal has ruled unanimously with three judges against the government and its lunatic scheme that this is an administrative matter.

In closing, I will make on last point. The Chief Electoral Officer, the Commissioner of Elections, the director of Public Prosecutions and an entire three judge panel of the Federal Court of Appeal have now taken action against the Conservatives in this election fraud.

It is time for the Government of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, to own up to the wrong it has done, to stop playing Pro games here and to kick out those two senators down the hall, fire those two Conservatives and let us get on with integrity and honesty in this place.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech intently and heard a lot of bluster about money coming in and money going out, and how people were trying to avoid Elections Canada rules.

When I look at the Elections Canada reports for in and out money in the Liberal Party, I find that on January 5, 2006, in the riding of Malpeque, an amount was transferred in from the Liberal national Party for \$5,350. It did not even take a day before the \$5,350 were transferred back out on January 5. So money was going into that riding and out of that riding. I am wondering if that money was claimed for election expenses at the end of that campaign.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I am most pleased to answer that question because this is the kind of game that the members on that side play. They talk from their propaganda notes from the PMO and, in trying to create a defence for themselves, they change the topic.

This was not transferred in and out illegally. The moneys we are talking about here in the 2006 election fund—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Wayne Easter: Let me suggest this to you over there. Talk to Elections—

Business of Supply

•(1615)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I understand this is a pretty intense debate but I ask hon. members to restrain themselves. I would ask the hon. member who is speaking to make his comments through the Chair.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I would tell the members opposite, through you, Madam Speaker, that if they think there is something wrong in my riding, they can go to the federal prosecutor and find out that what I did was legal.

What I am talking about is a scheme that was designed to transfer money that the Conservatives were using and to kick it back illegally for a national campaign. That is why the Conservative Party has been charged and no other parties have, because other parties abided by the Canada Elections Act and the rules. The Conservative Party of Canada did not and has been so charged.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been following this debate very closely, as I am sure thousands of people have from across the country have. For me, the issue really is one of trust and accountability, which is what the Conservatives ran on in 2006. This is one issue that really is the tip of the iceberg.

Let me remind the House of some of the others. There were documents altered in the KAIROS scandal; there was the renaming of the government in the name of the Prime Minister; critics were silenced; and there were the issues of the integrity commissioner; the West Block renovation scandal; and the \$130 million spent on advertising for the economic action plan.

What all of this is doing is undermining the confidence that Canadians have in the government. It is very similar in a cumulative way to the sponsorship scandal under the Liberals. What I am profoundly worried about is the cynicism about the electoral process that will result among the Canadians who are watching this House.

I want to ask the member for Malpeque whether he has any suggestions on how to restore confidence in this very chamber and democracy in Canada. I would suggest that as a result of the sponsorship scandal and the cumulative effect of what we are seeing now with the in and out scandal and all the others, this confidence has been severely undermined.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, the member's preamble to the question certainly showed how long the list is of the falsehoods and dishonesty of a government that ran on the theme of accountability. The Federal Accountability Act is itself a farce because there is no accountability on that side of the House. Access to information is being denied more often than not in many cases. The list goes on.

There is something that is not often talked about. We have the biggest cabinet in Canadian history now, a full-sized cabinet with many staffers. What do the 500-plus staffers whom cabinet ministers have around them do? As we have seen from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, they are using their offices for propaganda purposes to target communities and votes. That is what they are doing with that money.

There is clearly no accountability with the government. It should own up to what it did wrong and support the Liberal motion in the House. That—

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

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 Gatineau, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Windsor West, the Census.

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

I rise to take part in the debate on the motion presented by the Liberal member for Beauséjour. I have to wonder if he wrote the motion himself or if it was just handed to him by the office of the Liberal leader. Unfortunately, there seems to be a trend around this place, both in the House and committees, for members of the Liberal Party to bring forward motions that are outrageous in their scope and nature.

When our party was in opposition, I can tell members that we would never have brought forward such a motion because we respect Parliament and we respect the priorities of Canadians.

Getting back to today's debate, I want to begin my remarks by stating that I find the text of today's motion very troubling. As my colleague pointed out earlier today, today's motion passes judgment on a political entity and on four private individuals. It asks the House to serve as judge and a jury over a private civil matter currently before the courts. Specifically, it makes a finding of fraud. It asks the Prime Minister to direct the financial affairs of a political party; it asks the Government of Canada to remove individuals from employment; and, similarly, it asks the Conservative Party to do the same.

I find these proposals contrary to the principles and values of a mature democracy. In Canada, we respect the rule of law, which includes due process and the presumption of innocence. For these reasons, the motion is at odds with long-standing parliamentary conventions and practices.

With that said, let me address the issues in the motion before the House today.

We completely reject the partisan motion brought forward by the Liberal Party. It is a clear attempt to play partisan politics. Unlike the Liberal Party, our Conservative government is, and will remain, focused on the real concerns of Canadians. It is a shameful that at a time when our economy is coming out of a tough recession and is slowly recovering, the Liberal Party brings forward a motion like this one today, instead of focusing on the real needs of Canadian families.

Canadians are rejecting the approach of the Liberal leader. That fact we can see throughout the last few weeks and months. Why is that? It is because Canadians know that the Liberal leader did not come back to Canada after being out of this country for many years because he cared about the interests of Canadians. Today's motion is proof that he is looking at his best interests and not the interests of Canadians, and that is a shame.

Business of Supply

However, let us contrast the Liberal Party's approach with that of our Conservative government. While the Liberal Party would rather play partisan games, we are focused on the economy and bringing forward the next phase of Canada's economic action plan on March 22.

As for the matter currently before the courts, we will appeal the decision made recently by the Federal Court of Appeal. As the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary have recently said in this House, this is an administrative dispute with Elections Canada. It has been going on for five years. The dispute is whether certain expenses should be counted as local expenses or national expenses. There certainly is a difference of opinion. We acknowledge that we have a difference of opinion with Elections Canada.

The Conservative Party of Canada acted under the law, as it understood it at that time. When it was clear that Elections Canada had changed its interpretation of the law, the Conservative Party had adjusted its practices in the 2008 election campaign.

Another very important fact is that these were Conservative dollars, donated by Conservative supporters. The funds were used for Conservative ads by Conservative candidates.

I also want to bring to members' attention a story from the *Ottawa Citizen* dating back to July 2008.

In 2008, the Chief Electoral Officer appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister read into the record an email. I would like to read into the record that email from the *Ottawa Citizen* of July 18, 2008. It states:

Hi Phyllis, We are told by communications folks in BC that these were radio ads with the Candidate's personal tag on the end—therefore a local expense to be reported under the Candidate's expense ceiling, regardless of who pays. For rebate purposes, we were asked to bill each campaign—in the case of VanEast, \$2,612.00. The good news is that the Federal Party will transfer \$2,600 to the Federal Riding Association as we agreed to pay for the ads. We hope that you are able to squeeze this in under the ceiling. Some expenses are not considered election expenses subject to spending limits, such as fundraising costs. Please have a look at the totals and get back to us if you think we have a problem.

• (1620)

This email was signed by the federal party bookkeeper. However, it was not an email from the Conservative Party but an internal email from the New Democratic Party.

The Phyllis in question was Phyllis Loke, the official agent to the NDP MP for Vancouver East. They were both involved in a transfer of funds that exactly paralleled the practice that the Conservative Party engaged in for advertising purposes. This was common practice.

The email in question was from the NDP national party bookkeeper, Lucy Ladouceur. She—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1625)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, the NDP's national bookkeeper, Lucie Ladouceur, sent this email to an NDP candidate. It has all of the characteristics that the Conservative transaction had.

This email was in the possession of Elections Canada. I am sure we will now see some investigative reporting by some of the media, who will also realize that these same practices were commonplace and paralleled by other parties. The email was filed with Elections Canada, and we obtained it from them through the Access to Information Act.

As John Robson from the *Ottawa Citizen* said at the time:

The more I watch this stuff...the more convinced I am that if there's a scandal here, it doesn't involve the Tories. But nobody seems to care. The opposition want a scandal, the press want a scandal...let's not bore ourselves with details—

However, let us also see what other supporters of the opposition say.

Robin Sears, a longtime advisor to the Liberal MP for Toronto Centre, as well as a longtime New Democrat, had this to say about the matter on the CTV news channel on February 25:

It's a load of nonsense—the guys at Elections Canada have a few bricks short of a load. Every party plays games with moving money around, have always done, will always do. What's a national ad, what's a local ad? It's nonsense. It's time we got back to things Canadians care about.

I am very surprised to be in agreement with a staunch NDPer like Robin Sears, but he hit the nail on the head with comments like those.

It is quite evident that the motion by the Liberal member for Beauséjour is contrary to the principles and practices of the House. It assumes there is a presumption of guilt and that the House can pass judgment on individuals without any respect for due process. Regardless of one's partisan support or opinion on the political financing issue being debated, I think Canadians would agree that the motion is very troubling when put in this perspective.

I submit that in a mature democracy such as Canada, we ought to respect the rule of law and due process before condemning anyone. I say this to preserve the credibility of the House, as well as the reputation of all of its members. Our democratic values require that the rights of the individual are not subject to the tyranny of a majority, in this case, the opposition or its coalition majority.

I therefore encourage all members to stand up for our democracy and reject the motion.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was disappointed by my hon. colleague's speech because she ought to know better. She ought to know there is a difference between local and national advertising. To the rest of us, and probably to her, it is actually obvious. If we had asked her before that election, she would have made the distinction very clearly. Now she is trying to deny that one exists.

The fact of the matter is that there is a difference between what other parties might do in terms of transferring money from the local level to the national level, or vice versa, and doing so for the purpose of exceeding the spending limit on what one is allowed to spend on advertising nationally. That is what happened with the Conservative Party.

Speaker's Ruling

It is not an accident that the director of public prosecutions of Canada, the top crown prosecutor in the country, has decided to lay charges against four senior Conservatives that could result in jail time. That is a very serious matter and that member ought to understand it. She ought to take crime seriously. However, the Conservative regime seems to have a pattern of rewarding wrongdoing, such as making two of those Conservatives senators.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, the Liberals are very familiar with their own party operatives being in jail for criminal charges. We were never so. Sadly, in the sponsorship scandal, criminal charges were laid and in fact people were prosecuted and put in jail.

The member brings forward an interesting point about local versus national ads. That certainly is a disagreement we have with Elections Canada. We have been forthright with it, that we disagree and we are talking, discussing and bringing this forward in court.

What is interesting, and I find it quite questionable and I have been asked by a lot of my colleagues, is this. When it came to money going in to NDP ridings, for example, and the money going out again, or in the case of the Liberals, where money went into their ridings and then out again to the national campaign, did they claim the 60% rebate from Elections Canada?

I am sure we will look into that as well as possibly some more investigative journalists because it was common practice. The NDP put money in, took money in and the Liberals put money, took money out and then claimed the 60% rebate.

• (1630)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague from Portage—Lisgar this. The first position that her party took was the paranoid delusion that Elections Canada was somehow full of crypto-Liberals and they were persecuting the Conservative Party and nobody else because of what they did. This attitude that everybody does it has been disproved time and time again.

However, the Conservatives switched from that original stance of the delusions of persecution, where they had the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs channelling Saint Sebastian with the arrows in his noble chest as if they were being persecuted by Elections Canada, to an almost as ridiculous notion that everybody else is just as bad as they are.

We have a saying in Manitoba that they should fix health care, not elections, and that is—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to give the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar equal time to respond.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, I can see my Manitoba colleague from Winnipeg Centre has had a little chamomile tea since yesterday, when I debated with him. He personally attacked and attacked me. It was shameful and disappointing.

However, let me proceed to what the issue is and what has the opposition parties so angry. The fact is they moved money from their national campaigns to their local campaigns and then moved the money back from the local campaigns to the national campaigns and

claimed the 60% rebate on it. They want to say it is not true. The proof is on the Elections Canada website.

We also wonder what Elections Canada is looking at when it sees this information before all of us in the House and indeed all Canadians.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Before we resume debate, I am prepared to rule on the point of order raised earlier today by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons concerning the applicability of the *sub judice* convention to the supply day motion proposed by the member for Beauséjour.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for raising this matter, as well as the hon. members for Charlottetown, Skeena—Bulkley Valley and Joliette for their interventions.

[English]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons argued that the motion as drafted contravened the *sub judice* convention and should be ruled out of order on that basis.

[Translation]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, at page 100, makes reference to the Speaker's discretion in the application of the *sub judice* convention:

In 1977, the First Report of the Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the imposition of the convention should be done with discretion and, when there was any doubt in the mind of the Chair, a presumption should exist in favour of allowing debate and against the application of the convention. Since the presentation of the report, Speakers have followed these guidelines while using discretion.

[English]

In addition, as hon. members are aware, over the years the Chair has given considerable latitude in the wording of supply day motions. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at page 854, states:

The Standing Orders give Members a very wide scope in proposing opposition motions on supply days and, unless the motion is clearly and undoubtedly irregular (i.e., where the procedural aspect is not open to reasonable argument), the Chair does not intervene.

This may explain why there are examples of this kind of motion coming before the House in the past, notably one proposed by the then member for MacLeod, Mr. Grant Hill, on February 16, 2004, and another proposed by the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie on April 14, 2005. Both motions were proposed after the government of the day had established a public inquiry to look into the matters referred to in the motions.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Nevertheless, with these procedural principles in mind, the Chair has carefully reviewed the motion currently being debated, with particular attention to how it relates to court proceedings to determine whether the *sub judice* convention ought to apply.

Business of Supply

[English]

There are two kinds of court proceedings at issue. First, in terms of the civil aspect of the matter, a unanimous court decision has been rendered. At this hour, no appeal has been filed. Until further steps are taken on that aspect of the question, there is no possible application of the *sub judice* convention at this time.

With regard to the reference to criminal charges filed against certain individuals, a close reading of the motion reveals that they are properly referred to as “individuals facing charges”. The motion does not comment on their guilt or innocence. The question of whether persons charged should be able to continue to hold positions in government or a political party, which is the point addressed by the motion, is not covered by the *sub judice* convention.

That being said, out of an abundance of caution, the ordinary practice of the House in respect of matters which may be *sub judice* has been for the Speaker not to stop debate, but rather to caution members in their choice of wording. Along with a number of my predecessors, I have frequently advised the House to proceed judiciously when debating matters that are, or might be, *sub judice*.

In addition, the wording of the motion before us contains the key words “in the opinion of this House”. If adopted, it would serve merely as an expression of the opinion of the House rather than compel the government to take any action. It is also important to note that the motion is general in nature, lacking in specifics about related proceedings.

For these reasons, I have been prepared to allow the debate on the supply day motion to proceed and I rule that it can continue to the expiry of the time provided for the debate, at which time the question can be put.

[Translation]

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTORAL FINANCING

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion on electoral financing and accountability moved by the hon. member for Beauséjour.

Today I would like to explain to Canadians, and to this House, the falsehoods presented in this motion, according to which our democratic principles were allegedly attacked by the current government during the financing of the election campaign.

First, I would like to take a moment to present the facts. There is currently an administrative dispute between the Conservative Party and Elections Canada. The issue is whether expenses should be considered national or local. This type of transfer is common practice among the parties and is entirely legal.

It is in no way an attack against democracy, and this type of unjustified accusation is not only irresponsible, but also a waste of precious time in the House of Commons when Parliament could be debating issues that are truly important to Canadians, like the economy.

On the contrary, the motion moved by the hon. member for Beauséjour has to do with a dispute over the administrative interpretation of the fact that Conservative candidates spent

Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. What is more, the false and misleading accusations by the hon. member for Beauséjour are somewhat surprising, coming from the Liberal Party, which still owes \$40 million plus interest following the sponsorship scandal. Taxpayers' hard-earned money was redirected to the Liberals' coffers.

In fact, it is this Conservative government that strengthened democracy in Canada by making accountability and transparency a priority. Our actions show Canadians that we are working in their interests.

More specifically, I would like to focus on our accomplishments with regard to electoral administration and financing. I would also like to underscore the major reforms in the Federal Accountability Act, which our government passed to put an end to the long-standing corrupt practices of the previous government.

Among other major improvements, the Federal Accountability Act prohibits political contributions by corporations, unions and associations and reduces the influence of big money within our electoral system by changing the individual contribution limit from \$5,000 to \$1,100.

By eliminating the anti-democratic influence that the wealthy could potentially exert, these reforms guarantee that our democratic system treats all Canadians equally. We are ensuring that the voices of all Canadians are heard.

Our government is the one that eliminated the influence of big money, not the one that was caught trying to claim some of that big money. The elimination of the influence of money in the government and the substantial amendments made to the lobbying regulations are perhaps the most significant changes that our government has made, and they illustrate our government's priorities and character.

In addition to key reforms to restore the fairness of the political financing system, our government also took measures to reduce the possibility of electoral fraud. Before we made these key changes, an individual could vote, no questions asked, if his or her name was on the voters list. Identification was not required unless an election agent, the candidate or the candidate's representatives had reason to doubt the person's identity or his or her right to vote. In order to address this shortcoming, our government took steps to require voters to present a piece of ID and proof of residence.

Our commitment to a fair election process is perfectly illustrated by the changes we made to protect law-abiding Canadians who work hard to prevent potential voter fraud. These types of measures protect the integrity of our electoral system by ensuring that the person requesting a ballot is actually the person who is entitled to it.

We also took measures to improve the administration of the election process. For example, when we required voters to present ID at the polls, we also made other changes to improve the accuracy of the National Register of Electors.

Clearly our government is committed to an open, transparent and accountable democratic process, and its actions continue to improve Canada's reputation as one of the most respected democracies in the world.

Business of Supply

While we have achieved a great deal over the past five years, there is still considerable work to be done to ensure that Canada remains a world leader in democracy. We continue to take action to strengthen the Federal Accountability Act, making the most of our principles of transparency and accountability. While we have taken steps to ensure that politicians are not influenced by those with deep pockets who give too much money, our legislation still allows those people to lend too much money. In order to stop that practice, we introduced the Political Loans Accountability Act to impose new requirements concerning transparency and tighter restrictions on lending practices.

● (1640)

While there are limits on contributions, there are no limits on the amount an individual can lend, and this government wants to fix that. Under the Political Loans Accountability Act, parties and candidates would have to apply for a loan from a financial institution for any amount beyond the annual contribution limit and pay commercial interest rates, just as ordinary citizens must do. This is something the Liberal Party clearly cannot understand.

Lastly, the bill would prevent candidates from walking away from the repayment of the loan, a practice that the Liberals continue to use, which illustrates their contempt for the rules. Some four years after the 2006 Liberal leadership race, six Liberal members still had not paid back their loans, despite an 18-month extension, according to a *National Post* article on January 5, 2010. What did Elections Canada do?

If the Liberals want to talk about attacks on democracy, I would like to ask the members for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Parkdale—High Park, Willowdale, Vancouver Centre and Eglinton—Lawrence to explain to Canadians why they explicitly violated Elections Canada's financing rules despite the generous extension Elections Canada granted them.

Do they believe they are above the rules? If there was any wrongdoing, it was committed by the Liberal members who did not obey Elections Canada's rules regarding campaign loans. That is an indisputable fact. What did Elections Canada do?

Our government is proud of its unmatched commitment to accountability and transparency. Be it through the Federal Accountability Act, through legislation to improve the electoral process or through tougher rules on political loans, this government is committed to giving Canadians an accountable democratic process. Our record speaks for itself. If the Liberals want to talk about democracy, I would love to join in the debate. The root of the word democracy is "power of the people". And by people, I mean Canadians—the parents who work hard and whose priorities include the economy, high-quality jobs and the promise of a bright future that is filled with hope for our children.

Instead of using an opposition day to talk about creating jobs for Canadians or about measures to ensure that our economy is stronger than ever, the Liberals are wasting their time making irresponsible, reckless and, most importantly, false allegations about the Canadian government.

The member for Beauséjour should focus on creating jobs in the aerospace industry and supporting the investments made by our government in businesses in his riding instead of acting as a pawn

for the Liberal leader, who is pushing his own agenda. We all know that he is not interested in Canadians. He is only thinking about himself.

Even Robin Sears, the former NDP campaign director, told CTV News Channel on February 25, 2011, that it was time to get back to the issues that matter to Canadians. Canadians are worried about the economy, as is our government. It is unfortunate that the Liberals are only worried about themselves.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it highly rich that the individual who just made the speech talked about accusing others of only being in it for themselves after the Prime Minister rebranded the government in his own name.

I would also like to point out that in his speech he talked about the measures the government has taken regarding Elections Canada. In my opinion, he described it as being very prescriptive in what it should be doing. However, I believe the nub of the issue here is certainly the behaviour by which the parties either follow these particular rules that it has laid down or try to circumvent them.

In this particular case, what has happened is that the practices of the central party calls into question whether it was following the rules or running up against the wall to find out how far it could go to get around them. Obviously, it did not work out, the party surpassed them and now that is being called into question.

I would like to point out that a lot of people in this situation were called on the carpet and were innocent. My colleague from Labrador spoke of Mr. Goudie and his financial officer who had no idea they were perhaps running against the law that was set down. There was innocence on their part and they got in trouble.

I wonder if the member could comment on that. Has he received comments from others about the fact that they were involved in this and had no idea?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Madam Speaker, through you, I would like to tell my colleague that, first of all, I did not understand his question, and second of all, he spoke about things that did not really have to do with his own motion.

Why did Elections Canada not take action against the six Liberal MPs who missed the 18-month refund deadline? A backbench member of Parliament would get a slap on the wrist. There are six on the Liberal side who did not get a slap on the wrist. That is what he should answer for.

Why did Elections Canada not take action against those six Liberal members and why, now, are they accusing us of making in and out transfers, something that they themselves did? They made just as many. It is still legal and we will prove in court that it is.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, for Canadians who are watching, there is nothing incorrect about the national campaign and local campaign transferring money back and forth. However, it becomes illegal when the purpose of that transfer is to avoid legal spending limits. The allegation and charges against Conservatives today concern the federal party exceeding its limit nationally and trying to get around that by transferring funds to local campaigns, which were transferred immediately back so they could try to make it look like national advertising was transferred to the local campaigns. In doing so, the party exceeded the national campaign limit of \$18 million by \$1 million.

The ads that were placed were clearly of a national nature. They were not local ads. This is unlike the New Democrats' situation, where funds were transferred from the national campaign to the local campaign for local ads. That is the key difference and that is why the New Democrats have not been charged.

The Conservatives find themselves charged under the Canada Elections Act for exceeding legal campaign spending limits.

I wonder if that distinction could be commented on by my hon. colleague.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Madam Speaker, I will respond to the hon. member's question through you as follows. First, a request was made by the Conservative Party. We won our case before the Federal Court, Trial Division. We lost our case before the Federal Court of Appeal. The score is currently one to one. The parties have the right to appeal to the Supreme Court.

I would like to point out that Elections Canada lost the first round. It did not lose the second round; it lost the first. There was a hearing that lasted several days. As a result, it cannot be said today that Elections Canada suddenly changed.

Nevertheless, here is what Elections Canada did, for example. It is another point. Elections Canada filed criminal charges against representatives of the Conservative Party.

I would like to point out that people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. I will not hold a trial here since these people are not even here to defend themselves.

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Mississauga South.

I am going to read the motion again because I really want it to be understood:

That, in the opinion of House, the Conservative Party of Canada's "in and out" electoral financing scheme was an act of electoral fraud and represents an assault on the democratic principles upon which Parliament and our electoral system are based, and that, further, the House calls upon the Prime Minister to: (a) order the immediate repayment of any and all illegally obtained electoral rebates that were paid out to candidates for the Conservative Party of Canada as a result of the "in and out" fraud; and (b) remove all individuals facing charges for this fraud from any position of responsibility within Government or the Conservative Party of Canada.

Everyone who is responding from the Conservative side of the House say that it is none of the business of this House. Well it is, because all of us when we were elected to this House had to sign that we agreed with the Canada Elections Act. The idea of democracy being put in jeopardy is a good enough reason for the House to discuss this issue.

The Court of Appeal ruled against the Conservative government on February 28, 2011 and charged four senior Conservatives, including two sitting senators with wilfully exceeding spending limits in the 2006 campaign and with providing false and misleading statements.

As the court said, this breaking of the law would "weaken compliance with the limits set by Parliament", which is where we are now, and "abuses could well proliferate, and the statutory objective of promoting a healthy democracy through levelling the electoral playing field" would be undermined.

That is why we are discussing this issue in the House. It is about democracy and Parliament has a role to play.

We have heard a lot of answers in this House from the Conservatives. I just want to mention very quickly what happened.

According to the Court of Appeal and Elections Canada, everyone is allowed to transfer funds from the national body to a local riding. That money goes to pay for advertising for the local riding, which directly—and the word "directly" is consistently used—benefits the local candidate.

When the other parties did that, they followed the rule of law. However, the Conservative Party did it but did not put forward ads that benefited the local candidates at all. They put forward the same old big national ad.

Why did the Conservatives do it? They did it because they wanted to be able to spend another \$1.2 million over the limit, which they had already spent, in what was a very close campaign and in which they knew that advertising would give them the edge.

Not only did they do that knowing that they had contravened the Canada Elections Act by doing exactly that and not directly benefiting the candidates to whom the money was sent, but they also set up an elaborate accounting scheme to make sure that no one could see what they did. It was a shell game. In fact, as the Court of Appeal said, it was a scheme. It was deliberately set up to defraud and fool people into believing that something else had happened. That is the gist of this whole issue.

When the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister stands in the House and says that the transfer of advertising money was something that everybody else did, that they moved money back and forth, he is being cute. Actually, he is being very deceitful in what he is saying because that is not true. It is very clear in the act what is meant to happen and what in fact this party did.

Not only that, there were candidates who thought they smelled a rat. I want to quote some Conservative candidates.

Joseph Goudie, the Conservative candidate for Labrador said:

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It most certainly did smell to me...for a national party, or any kind of a political party, to benefit in what I perceive to be an underhanded manner, using not just my campaign but many others across the country, left me with a feeling of being used.

Liberato Martelli, the Conservative candidate for Bourassa, said:

I was told it would be deposited and quickly withdrawn....I was told there would be invoices but I never saw them.... When I joined that party, I believed its vision at the time...I came to the realization they don't have as much integrity as they claim.

● (1655)

The third candidate, Cynthia Downey, the Conservative candidate for Random—Burin—St. George's said: “[Harper] gives his word, and he breaks his word. If I—”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would like to remind all members that the Speaker earlier reminded members that it is not permitted to quote directly verbatim from an article referring to the name of a sitting member.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Madam Speaker, she said, “[He] gives his word, and he breaks his word. If I can't have a leader that I can look up to and respect, I have no need to be part of something that is not honest and above board.”

Even a long-standing member of Parliament many of us respect, who is no longer in Parliament as he resigned his seat last year, who was the member for Dauphin—Swan River, said that his staff was contacted by party officials during the 2006 election campaign. He said the officials asked if they could deposit several thousand dollars in his campaign account and withdraw it later to buy advertising. He wondered why they would give him money and take it back. It did not make sense, so he said, “no thanks”.

There are many people with some integrity who thought that it did not smell right. We know the old saying that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like duck, it has to be a duck. A lot of people thought they saw a duck and did not want to participate in the scheme.

However, there are other issues. We have a sense that the government always, whenever someone asks questions about accountability or asks it to explain certain things, it has a tendency to start blaming everybody.

First and foremost, we have a parliamentary secretary who said, “It was not just us. Everybody else did it”, and started naming the people who did it. In fact, Elections Canada did not accuse any of the political parties or members who were named of anything at all.

The next thing that was said was, “Elections Canada does not like us. Obviously, Elections Canada is out to get us”. So there is the second tranche of people who do not want to take responsibility, who are becoming very paranoid and saying, “They are all doing it because they do not like us”.

Then there is a third piece. The parliamentary secretary said, “We believe that we did not break the law”. So it was immediate denial. Then he said, “I know the Court of Appeal said I broke it, but that's okay. The law has been made by this government and the law should be broken by this government if this government did not particularly like the law.”

In all of this we see a government that is defensive and sometimes dismissive with answers in the House with members of Parliament

laughing and thinking it is very funny, making it sound as though it is no big deal, that a member does not know what he is talking about and everyone is out to get the Conservatives and that it never really happened. It is beginning to sound like a petulant eight-year-old who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar and is now saying, “Don't look at me. It's not my fault.” This is not mature behaviour. This is not the kind of behaviour we expect from a government that ran in 2006 saying it was going to be accountable, that it was going to do everything above board, that it was going to bring in a new generation of ethics to this place.

We have seen none of that happen. We have seen some members who were liked by the government but given the back door immediately when they stepped on the wrong foot. We have to remember the former secretary of state for status of women who was kicked out of caucus without anyone finding anything wrong and they still have not found anything wrong. Yet, we see ministers sitting in the House day after day who have been caught with their hand in the cookie jar, who have been caught falsifying documents, who have been caught using the office of the minister to do party work and they are still here. We see senators who have been charged with illegal activity, whether they have been found guilty or not, still sitting in the Senate.

What about the double standard? I really would like to understand the double standard that the government likes to use when it talks about anything that it does.

If the government felt and the Conservative Party felt that it was doing no wrong, why did it not co-operate with Elections Canada and give up the documents?

The RCMP had to go into its offices and seize the documents. That is a real indictment on the attitude of the government that feels it does not have to be accountable to anyone at all. I have never heard of political parties and governments not co-operating when they are asked to give information or when they are asked to hand over documents.

It is obvious that the Conservative Party knew that it had done something wrong and documents had to be seized from it by the RCMP.

Finally, it is the party that closed down government and prorogued—

● (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there because it is time for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not often that I enjoy the Liberal members' speeches because they usually do not really talk about a lot. But today in particular the Liberals are so upset. They cannot accept the fact that in 2006 their government was thrown out of office as one of the most corrupt governments in the history of this country. It is driving them crazy that they were thrown out, that the people of Canada turned their backs on them. It is driving them crazy that Canadians from coast to coast to coast are donating to the Conservative Party because they know we are a good government.

Business of Supply

I have been searching high and low across my riding for just a portion of the \$40 million that was stolen by the previous Liberal government. I would ask the member a couple of questions.

First, does she know where we can look to find some of the \$40 million that the Liberals stole in buying the 2000 election? Is the reality not that they are talking about this motion today because we are a couple of weeks away from a budget and they have nothing to offer Canadian families? They have nothing to offer the people of Canada. They have nothing to offer the armed forces. They have nothing to offer for the environment. They have nothing to offer for natural resources. The Liberals have nothing to offer the people of Canada, so they are going to do everything in their power to try to avoid talking about the things that matter to Canadians; the economy and jobs. Is that not the bottom line?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, it always amuses me that while I made a speech in which I quoted the facts from the Court of Appeal and from Elections Canada, and everything that was laid out was factual, but the hon. members across the way, as soon as we put the facts in their faces, they begin to get personal. They begin to be dismissive of other people who are hon. colleagues in the House. It is a trick that they always use. It is something I learned when I was in university and we were learning debating, that when they do not have an argument or a point to make, they begin to get personal and they vilify individuals. I will not bite on that bait—

Mr. Paul Calandra: You stole \$40 million from us.

Hon. Hedy Fry: When I am allowed to answer the question, I will.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member asked a question. I am sure all hon. members would like to listen to the response. I will give the member for Vancouver Centre a few more seconds to wrap up.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, again it is a matter of they shoot everybody down, obfuscate, make a lot of noise just so people will not listen.

Again, it is like that small child who puts his hand over his ears when he is told, “Look at what you did”, and he just says, “Do not tell me, I am not listening”. That tells us the maturity of the government.

• (1705)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reason the Conservatives have been charged in this particular case is that they were actually spending over the limits. The opposition motion is very reasonable. It asks for the “immediate repayment of any and all illegally obtained electoral rebates that were paid out to candidates for the Conservative Party of Canada as a result of the ‘in and out’ fraud”.

The question is why not just simply pay it back?

It would not be the first time that parties, without mentioning any names, in other jurisdictions have been in trouble with the elections authority in their jurisdiction and have simply paid back the money. The Conservatives have had five years to do this. They could have done that.

The motion also asks to “remove all individuals facing charges for this fraud from any position of responsibility within Government or the Conservative Party of Canada”. What is wrong with that?

If they used some common sense, they could extricate themselves from a problem that they have developed for themselves. It continues to fester and snowball and it did not have to be this way.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a great point. When people are ethically challenged they believe they can do no wrong and that whatever they do, no matter how wrong it is, that it is right because they did it.

There is a definition for this in the *DSM*, about people who are terribly ethically challenged and do not believe they can do any wrong. If they did believe they could not do any wrong and if they are waiting to see if they did, the decent and ethical thing to do would be to say “I will remove the persons who have been charged. I will put the money back in a place where it can be retrieved and I will therefore show that I am behaving ethically”.

However, denial has nothing to do with ethics.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate. This is all about the Conservative Party's abuse of power and its belief that it is above the rules and above the law. That is a very serious statement to make, so I want to see if I can explain to the House and to Canadians why.

Four members of the Prime Minister's inner circle, including two Conservative senators, his former campaign director and the chief financial officer, face potential jail time after being charged with what amounts to electoral fraud as part of a \$1.2 million scam to exceed national campaign spending limits in the 2006 election. As well, we found out today that the Prime Minister's current chief of staff, Mr. Nigel Wright, has also been associated with this scam. I listened to the debate all day today. The Conservatives have come back with one defence, and that is that everyone does it. That is patently false.

The motion before us encourages the Prime Minister to order the immediate repayment of any and all illegally obtained electoral rebates that were paid out to candidates of the Conservative Party of Canada as a result of this electoral fraud.

With regard to persons who have been charged, the motion urges the removal of all individuals, the two senators in particular who are facing charges for this fraud, from any position of responsibility within the government or the Conservative Party of Canada.

Let me see if I can explain in basic terms what in and out really means. If we really want to confuse people it is pretty easy with this one because parts can be left out. I will try to explain.

Business of Supply

There was a transfer of \$1.2 million to a large number of Conservative candidates in the 2006 election. That is legal because it is political money that is going to support the different aspects of a campaign. There is no problem with that. Then there was an immediate transfer of the same amount of money, \$1.2 million, from those candidates back to the party. There is nothing wrong with that because there are no consequences. No receipting is involved. That money has already been receipted. It is simply within the political party system. No expenses are associated with that. It is basically a wash.

The transfer of the cash in and out has no consequences whatsoever and should not be considered in this debate. What should be considered is that the Conservative Party spent the legal limit of \$18.3 million on its national advertising campaign. However, the party had more money and it had to figure out a way to get more of the cash spent during the campaign without getting charged with exceeding the limit for advertising.

The Conservatives came up with the idea that if their national advertiser, Retail Media, made the national ads it could provide an invoice. The Conservatives spent \$1.2 million on it. If they had stopped right there they would have exceeded their limit. To get around that, the Conservatives made their own invoices and broke the \$1.2 million down into smaller invoices and sent them to Conservative candidates. The overspending of \$1.2 million was distributed among various candidates as if they had bought advertising. Although the cash had no impact on anything, the fact that they were able to transfer this expenditure among all of those candidates allowed those candidates to claim the invoice as an election expense.

• (1710)

Because advertising expenses are a legitimate election expense, they were then allowed to claim an election expense as a rebate, which is equal to 60% of the amount spent. Of the \$1.2 million of invoices they gave to all the candidates, those candidates collectively charged election expenses of \$1.2 million and received a rebate of \$800,000.

Where did that 60% come from? It came from the taxpayers of Canada. They footed the bill for \$800,000 just because the Conservatives figured out a scheme on how they could ratchet down the access cash they had into ridings and falsely claim them as election expenses.

It went to the courts. The government has said that this is an administrative dispute. The Federal Court of Appeal has looked at everything and, by unanimous decision, has said this constitutes electoral fraud. Four people have been charged. People are facing jail time. Moneys will have to be recovered. It is really a mess. Yet the government continues to be defiant and says that it will fight it in the courts.

The government will not pay for this. The Conservative Party will pay for the court case. However, as I said before, the Conservative Party gets its money from donations from taxpayers. That means this charade of playing it off in the courts will be paid for by the taxpayers of Canada. It is outrageous that Conservatives want to continue this all these years later. That is my breakdown.

If they are absolutely convinced that this is just an administrative disagreement, why did they filibuster the procedure and House affairs committee for six months? The committee tried to examine it and the Conservatives filibustered.

Then it was brought to the ethics committee and it was filibustered there again, but the committee finally got it on the floor. Then there were witnesses. What happened? The Conservative candidates and their official agents told those witnesses not to appear. Then the committee issued subpoenas? What did the Conservative Party do? It told the witnesses who were subpoenaed to ignore the subpoenas, to ignore the law. Then the Conservatives called an election to shut it down.

That brings us up to the 2008 election.

When the House resumed, what did the Conservatives do? It was not the Federal Accountability Act, I can assure everyone of that. The first thing they did was to produce a 200-page binder on how to disrupt committees and the House to make them look totally dysfunctional.

I am not sure of the rationale, but I think it is something like this. If the Conservatives make this entire place look dysfunctional, then everyone is treated the same, everyone is the same down at the bottom rung and nobody wins. They are happy with that because they believe they can beat other parties at the polls simply by the money they have to buy votes. That is my view.

As I have only one minute left, I would seek the unanimous consent of the House for an extra three minutes.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, this is a defined and uncooperative government. It prorogues when it gets into hot water. It refuses to respect the rights and privileges of parliamentarians to call for persons, papers or records, Afghan detainee documents, finance committee requests for information. Conservatives are not open, or transparent, or accountable. They are prone to secrecy and they cannot be trusted to tell the truth. They have contempt for Parliament, democracy and the law.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the previous speaker. He used the phrase, "We believe the Conservatives are above the rule of law".

I would like to remind him that I have with me an 84-page ruling of the Federal Court dated January 18, 2010. I do not have time to read the entire report. I will not ask for unanimous consent for extra time to read it. However, I want to remind our colleagues, "The decisions made by the respondent", which is Elections Canada, "on or around April 23, 2007 to exclude from the amount of reimbursement calculated under section 465 of the Canada Elections Act". It goes on, "are set aside and the matter is referred back to the respondent", which is Elections Canada.

It goes on to say:

Business of Supply

With regard to the candidates' electoral campaign returns submitted under section 451...the cost incurred, or non-monetary contributions received, by said candidates during the 2006 election with respect to their participation in the regional media buy...program, are candidate election expenses within the meaning of sections 406 and 407 of the Act.

At the end it says, "Elections Canada shall recalculate the amount of reimbursement to give the candidates that they had actually" There is clear evidence that the Federal Court has ruled in favour of the Conservative Party—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, he is reading the wrong document. The Federal Court of Appeal found the Conservatives guilty of electoral fraud.

I have a list of 14 senior civil servants who were pushed out of government because they disagreed with the Conservatives. I wish I could read them in.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons gave a speech and he said, "A slur never created a job". Let us talk about slurs. Let us talk about advertising that appeared on the Olympics, on the Oscars and on the Super Bowl.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will ask the House, as there are a few minutes left before the vote is taken, to tone it down a little so we can listen to the rest of the response.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The Super Bowl, the Olympics and the Oscars, Mr. Speaker. Imagine how much it costs to run attack ads and slurs against another parliamentarian? Who paid for that? The taxpayers because the Conservative Party and the other political parties do not have their own money. They collect it from taxpayers who get electoral receipts.

No slur created a job, and the parliamentary secretary is absolutely right.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even that is being evinced in this debate, but I would like to bring back some rationality. I think all members of the House agree that we should be respecting taxpayers dollars and all members of the House ought to respect the fact that we have laws in the country that govern our electoral financing.

I want to come back again to what I think is a fair characterization of the issue, which is the federal Conservatives, in 2006, came up against their national election spending limit, which was \$18 million, or thereabouts. When they came up against that, they transferred funds to local campaigns, which then transferred the money immediately back, effectively diverting an additional \$1 million of national campaign ads over and above their national allowed ceiling.

The issue is whether the Conservatives broke the election laws by spending effectively \$19 million on election ads. I am struck by the fact that those election ads, when we saw them on television, were not of a local nature. They were identical to the national advertising.

Could we have some comment from my hon. colleague on how they explain exceeding that—

● (1720)

The Deputy Speaker: There is less than a minute left for the member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what the court found and that is exactly what Elections Canada reported.

When we think about it, this is not just about the in and out; it is about the character of the government and the fact that it does not respect Parliament, democracy or the law.

We have had so many other things. We have the KAIROS issue and a minister lying to Parliament. We have another minister using his office for political fundraising. We had a public works minister using his office to interfere with legitimate access to information requests.

It is basically "do as I say or you're gone", and that is the meanness in the Conservative Party.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know I have very little time, so I will try to raise a few points that I do not think have been raised thoroughly in this debate today.

First, what is really offensive to Canadians is the echo effect of the whole in and out scandal, this whole well-orchestrated premeditated conspiracy to defraud the spending limits of the Elections Act, in that the ill-gotten gains from the 2006 election were supposed to bankroll the 2008 and subsequent elections in these riding associations.

I would like to raise another point that I do not think has been raised. The in and out scheme had two levels. Tier one was for advertising, and 67 riding associations took part. Many more honest riding associations turned it down.

Tier two was for polling. People seem to forget this. Fully 50 riding associations orchestrated a second parallel in and out scheme with polling overspending in the amounts of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per riding association under the guise that they were polling locally. Let us remember, these were expensed as local expenses.

First, no one does a public opinion poll in the middle of an election campaign in a single riding. It is just not done. It is a waste of time and money.

Second, nobody could spend \$20,000 on a public opinion poll in one riding association during the writ period. It would not happen. I have priced them out. Viewpoints Research will poll 400 people in my riding for roughly \$4,000, \$4,500. It does not cost \$20,000. In some of these cases it was \$28,000.

We have the in and out scandal for advertising. Clearly the national advertising buy was expensed at the local riding associations for two reasons: first, so they could exceed the limit nationally; and second, so the riding associations could use it as a cash cow and get the rebate.

Business of Supply

Then there is a whole second tier on one of the other big expenses in a federal election campaign, the polling costs. They are busted dead to rights. As soon as they are finished prosecuting these four people, the two senators and Susan Kehoe and Mike Donison, they can go after the architects of the second tier, which is the polling scandal.

Let me remind members what precipitated, and I hope the member for Mississauga South hears this, the 2008 federal election. It was the work that the chair of the ethics committee at the time did, the member for Mississauga South, in issuing 31 summons to 31 principals of the in and out scandal because the witnesses refused to come otherwise.

Very wisely, the member exercised his parliamentary rights and issued summons. These 31 witnesses were told not to come to the parliamentary committee, which was meeting during the hot days of summer, during August. The Conservatives advised their own official agents and officers of their party to not attend.

Some of those people were Patrick Muttart, the Prime Minister's closest aide in the Prime Minister's office. Another was the current senator, Doug Finley, and Mike Donison and Irving Gerstein. These are some of the people who refused to attend the parliamentary committee.

Just before the chair of the committee called the police to have these people dragged before committee, in a paddy wagon if they had to, guess what happened? The writ was dropped. We are talking about August 18, August 20. Parliament was going to resume, and the committee would start sitting again September 5, September 6. On September 6, the Conservatives dropped the writ to avoid this very issue, the in and out scandal.

We are getting very close to that point again. The Conservatives are running and hiding and cannot take the heat. They are busted dead to rights. They are probably going to find some way to weasel out of facing justice in this regard as well. "Villainy wears many masks, none of which so dangerous as virtue". That was a Johnny Depp quote.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There seems to be a lot of members who are anxious to ask questions or comments. Maybe they could hold off until there is time for questions and comments. Right now the Chair is having difficulty hearing the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Villainy wears many masks, Mr. Speaker, and none so treacherous as the mask of virtue. So day after day to see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister stand up pretending he is St. Sebastian with the arrows of accusations piercing his noble breast as if the Conservatives are the victims being persecuted by a bunch of crypto-Liberals and Elections Canada is almost laughable. Then they put up Little Bo Peep when the parliamentary secretary stands down. They do not know whether they are coming or going. One thing I do know, they should fix health care not elections. That is what we say in the province of Manitoba because we are familiar with this.

The genesis of the whole in and out scandal was actually the provincial Conservative Party in Manitoba in the 1999 election. Can members guess who was busted, charged, tried and convicted for this very thing? It was the current Minister of Public Safety when he was a provincial member of the Manitoba legislature. Can members guess who the architects of that scheme were? One of them is the current member for Portage—Lisgar who was just up in the House of Commons trying to defend the indefensible.

We had a motto in Manitoba—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being 5:28 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 195*)

YEAS

Members

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

Business of Supply

Easter
 Faille
 Foote
 Fry
 Garneau
 Godin
 Gravelle
 Guay
 Basques)
 Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
 Hall Findlay
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hughes
 Ignatieff
 Julian
 Karygiannis
 Laforest
 Lamoureux
 LeBlanc
 Lemay
 Lessard
 Malhi
 Maloway
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McGuinty
 McTeague
 Mendes
 Mourani
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Murray
 Neville
 Ouellet
 Paillé (Hochelaga)
 Paquette
 Pearson
 Pomerleau
 Rae
 Ratansi
 Rodriguez
 Russell
 Savoie
 Sgro
 Silva
 Simson
 Stoffer
 Thi Lac
 Tonks
 Valeriotte
 Volpe
 Wznesnewskyj
 Eyking
 Folco
 Freeman
 Gagnon
 Gaudet
 Goodale
 Guarnieri
 Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
 Holland
 Hyer
 Jennings
 Kania
 Kennedy
 Laframboise
 Lavallée
 Lee
 Leslie
 Lévesque
 Malo
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Masse
 McCallum
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Ménard
 Minna
 Mulcair
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nadeau
 Oliphant
 Pacetti
 Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
 Patry
 Plamondon
 Proulx
 Rafferty
 Regan
 Rota
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Siksay
 Simms
 St-Cyr
 Szabo
 Thibeault
 Trudeau
 Vincent
 Wilfert
 Zarac — 152

NAYS

Members

Abbott
 Aglukkaq
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Ashfield
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Blaney
 Boucher
 Braid
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooge
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casson
 Clarke
 Cummins
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Dreeshen
 Dykstra
 Fast
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Généreux
 Goldring
 Ablonczy
 Albrecht
 Allison
 Anders
 Armstrong
 Baird
 Bernier
 Blackburn
 Block
 Boughen
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calandra
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Davidson
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Fantino
 Finley
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Glover
 Goodyear

Gourde
 Guergis
 Hawn
 Hoback
 Holder
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lemieux
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 McColeman
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 O'Neill-Gordon
 Oda
 Payne
 Poilievre
 Raitt
 Reid
 Richardson
 Ritz
 Scheer
 Shea
 Shory
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Tilson
 Trost
 Uppal
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Woodworth
 Young — 139
 Grewal
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hiebert
 Hoepfner
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lebel
 Lobb
 Lunn
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 McLeod
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Obhrai
 Paradis
 Petit
 Preston
 Rathgeber
 Richards
 Rickford
 Saxton
 Schellenberger
 Shipley
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thompson
 Toews
 Tweed
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wong
 Yelich

PAIRED

Members

Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Chow
 Dufour
 Rajotte
 Cadman
 Deschamps
 Layton
 Smith — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

The House resumed from March 3 consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 3, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment of the member for Québec to the motion of the member for Hamilton Centre relating to the business of supply.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting no.

The Speaker: Is it agreed to proceed in that fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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

Business of Supply

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The Bloc Québécois will be voting yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The NDP will vote yes.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I oppose the amendment.

[Translation]

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

*(Division No. 196)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Beaudin	Bellavance
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Christopherson	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Desnoyers	Dewar
Donnelly	Dorion
Duceppe	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godin	Gravelle
Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	
Hughes	Hyer
Julian	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Lemay	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
Malo	Maloway
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysse	Ménard
Mourani	Mulcair
Nadeau	Ouellet
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Paquette	Plamondon
Pomerleau	Rafferty
Savoie	Siksay
St-Cyr	Stoffer
Thi Lac	Thibeault
Vincent — 77	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Ashfield
Bagnell	Bains
Baird	Bélangier
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Brunooge	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis

Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Coady	Coderre
Cotler	Crombie
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Day	Dechert
Dei Mastro	Devolin
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dosanjh
Dreeschen	Dryden
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra	Easter
Eyking	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Folco	Footé
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Généreux	Glover
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guergis	Hall Findlay
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Holland	Ignatieff
Jean	Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kania
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kennedy	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauson	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	McTeague
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliphant
Pacetti	Paradis
Patry	Payne
Pearson	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Proulx	Rac
Raitt	Ratansi
Rathgeber	Regan
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Silva
Simms	Simson
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Volpe	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin

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PAIRED

Members

Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Chow
Dufour
Rajotte

Cadman
Deschamps
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Smith— 8

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

[*English*]

The next question is on the main motion.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 197)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Bevington
Christopherson
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dewar
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Gravelle
Hughes
Julian
Maloway
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mulcair
Savoie
Stoffer

Angus
Atamanenko
Charlton
Comartin
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Bernier
Bigras
Blais
Block
Bouchard
Boughen
Braid
Brison
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie
Casson
Clarke
Coady

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
André
Armstrong
Bachand
Bains
Beaudin
Bellavance
Benoit
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bonsant
Boucher
Bourgeois
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Byrne
Calkins
Cannis
Cardin
Carrier
Chong
Clement
Coderre

Cotler
Cummins
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Basques)
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Paillé (Hochelaga)
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Pomerleau
Proulx
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simms

Crombie
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Davidson
DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro
Desnoyers
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Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
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Goldring
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Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Hawn
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Kania
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Kerr
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Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Lobb
Lunn
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Saxton
Scheer
Sgro
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Silva
Simson

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Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Volpe
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PAIRED

Members

Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Cadman
Chow	Deschamps
Dufour	Layton
Rajotte	Smith— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

It being 6:22 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-470, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (disclosure of compensation — registered charities), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1825)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri moved that the bill, be read the third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, having received complaints from my constituents about the lack of services provided in French by the Department of Foreign Affairs and/or Citizenship and Immigration Canada, I thought it best to ask that the Standing Committee on Official Languages receive representatives from both these departments.

The question I asked in the House of Commons on November 10, 2010, was about receiving government representatives with regard to official languages. My question was worthwhile, because in the days following, the Standing Committee on Official Languages received testimony from the departments in question.

The Canadian missions that seemed to be causing my constituents problems with regard to services in French were those in Nairobi, Kenya, Islamabad, Pakistan, Bogota, Colombia, London, England and Kampala, Uganda. There was also the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville, Alberta.

Requesting services in French in a Canadian mission abroad is a fundamental right to which every Quebecker and every Canadian is entitled.

Under the responsibility of its federal institution, the Canadian mission abroad is required to comply with the Official Languages Act. In this case I am referring to part IV: communications with the public and delivery of services.

Angela Bogdan, inspector general at Foreign Affairs, is responsible for the quality of services in both official languages. She indicated that there are still non-imperative positions because of the lack of competent bilingual staff within mission teams. Non-imperative means not required to be bilingual. That is very troubling. It means that services in French will suffer.

Monica Janecek, director of corporate resourcing at Foreign Affairs, assured us that a mission employee who does not obtain the second language proficiency levels of “C” for comprehension, “B” for writing and “C” for oral expression within two to four years will be transferred to a post not requiring the CBC levels. Why are we not hiring bilingual people in the first place? This question always comes up.

We are well aware of the fact that, in the 260 or so Canadian missions abroad, local people are hired. Depending on their duties, these people are not necessarily required to know both of Canada's official languages. I am thinking of a gardener, for example. Nevertheless, positions designated bilingual should be just that.

Canadian missions overseas—which include embassies, high commissions and consulates—provide a range of services. I am thinking primarily of diplomatic services, but there are others, because the missions also provide Citizenship and Immigration Canada services. I will come back to that.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada recognizes bilingualism as an important component in Canada's international relations. I would like to take this opportunity to give our assurance that the department is responding to all its legal obligations in official languages and is devoting great efforts to promoting linguistic duality.

I would like to take this opportunity also to address the recent report card that Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada received from the Commissioner of Official Languages. As members know, our department was one of the 16 institutions that received a report card. We are taking the feedback very seriously and we are already taking concrete steps to improve those areas requiring attention.

We are pleased that the commissioner acknowledged that the service we provided by email was available 100% of the time in the official language of choice and that visual active offer was present 97% of the time. Equally, we are happy to know that service in the language of the linguistic minority was available 92% of the time.

Other areas of strength are the overall management of the official languages program, awareness sessions for staff at all levels, an integrated system for monitoring, including official language performance at missions, and promotion of linguistic duality by celebrating la Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

We are also a member of the implementation committee of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 2006-2011 strategic plan to foster immigration to francophone minority communities. Also, through the speakers program, departmental officials made several outreach efforts to be in contact with the official language minority communities in order to promote our mandate, priorities, programs and services.

To address areas of concern we are finalizing the development of a new comprehensive official languages action plan for 2011 and onward. The plan is an integral part of our corporate planning and is in keeping with our report on plans and priorities for 2011-12, which commits to an active promotion of the use of official languages in the workplace. The plan includes the implementation of strategies and monitoring mechanisms to improve the management of the official languages program and to increase the visibility of official languages in the department.

To ensure broad and coherent planning and implementation, we have accelerated the work of our network of official languages coordinators which represents headquarters, regions and all of our missions abroad, over 150 offices. The network holds quarterly meetings, chaired by our official languages champion.

We have already communicated with all of our heads of mission and asked them to provide us with measures that they have implemented to ensure bilingual service to the public. Missions responded overwhelmingly with positive, proactive measures to ensure linguistic duality, including for services offered by all relevant sections of our mission.

We are well aware that there is still work to be done and we will pursue initiatives already under way and continue to evaluate how we can improve and raise awareness at our missions abroad.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, Citizenship and Immigration Canada provides extremely important services. Let us think about applications for immigration, refugee resettlement, temporary resident visas and temporary work and study permits. This department helps clients complete their applications and ensures that immigration applications are processed in accordance with the law.

These duties must be carried out while respecting both official languages. All federal departments, agencies and crown corporations must provide quality service in both French and English and not in one language to the detriment of the other.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, we are actively promoting linguistic duality by creating and maintaining a work environment conducive to the effective use of English and French to enable our staff to use the language of their choice. We are ensuring that management and employees are aware of the Official Languages Act and its obligations as well as employees' rights by continuing to provide awareness sessions on the Official Languages Act.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada is committed to promoting Canada's linguistic duality, communicating with and serving the public in Canada and abroad in both official languages and to creating and maintaining a work environment conducive to the effective use of English and French so that our staff feel comfortable using the official language of their choice.

CENSUS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again on the issue of the census.

The government has killed the long form mandatory census and brought in a national survey. I asked the government about an NDP bill that would make the chief statistician independent and out of politics in order to guarantee the data that Canadians were providing would be useful for those in the scientific field. This is important because we make a lot of decisions based upon our census information.

Ironically, today at committee we had hearings about the census. One of the things we learned is that the government is going to spend \$670 million on a census that it has not tested. We found no other society, no other country that, when moving to a national survey, did not run a sampling.

It is akin to an individual going to a car dealership and buying a car without taking it for a test drive. Would an individual get on a plane that was built but that had not been tested? No. We should have had some type of test in the development of the long form survey.

Adjournment Proceedings

Today we heard from witnesses that they were never consulted. They were never even asked their opinion. We are talking about people who deal with this information on a daily basis. They use it for everything from deciding where public transit goes, where language supports go, how economic decisions are made, how we train our population and how we work as an organized civil society. All that information that we have been using in the past on a continuum from 1971 will now be made useless in many respects. We will not know the damage that will happen as rates and anomalies increase in this new national survey.

What is very odd about this is that if the government truly wanted to switch from a mandatory census, it could have consulted with a wide range of scientists and operators and people who are in the business. They would have been able to provide some input to mitigate and ameliorate those types of problems. But no, the government did not do that, so we have a \$670 million gamble. That is \$670 million that the government is borrowing from taxpayers. We are in a deficit right now. We will have to pay interest on that money.

The census is very important. There are customers who use it. Millions upon millions of dollars are put back into coffers to offset the cost of the actual census. That money could help the taxpayers in terms of reducing the costs of the census. We do not know if we will lose those customers. Those customers may evaporate. What is important is that it also affects other surveys. Surveys which are backed up by good, scientific data will now be lost.

Interestingly enough, the government will still not get rid of the mandatory agricultural survey. That will not be voluntary, so those individuals will be scoped by the government. The short form census will still exist, so there will be individuals under that purview as well.

Why is it that we would want to contaminate one set of very important data? Why would the Conservatives provide different sets of rules for different types of censuses? Why would they want to risk \$670 million of the taxpayers' money without doing any type of pilot project or investigation?

When we have employment insurance reforms, we do pilot projects in communities to find out whether they are helping. We make sure we do due diligence. What has happened here is it has been thrown out the window. That is why the chief statistician needs to be independent and above politics. We need to make sure our scientific data is clean, is developed strongly and most important, is very secure and very reliable for actual census usage.

● (1840)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to my hon. colleague, I wondered if he was at a different meeting this afternoon than I was because he portrayed a different picture of what I remember hearing from the witnesses who were before the committee today.

We had a good committee hearing today. We heard from three statistical experts who shared with us the work that is ongoing right now as Statistics Canada undertakes this national household survey. By all reports today, that work seems to be going well. Some good progress is being made in the north where the process has begun. We are hearing that there is a very strong response rate of 99% for the

census and, I believe, 85% so far for the national household survey. That is a good start.

I would like to clarify some of the inaccuracies that we hear from time to time. There was some confusion in the committee today because one of the Liberal members did not realize that we still had a census. I think it is important to clarify that we do still have a census in this country. It is what most Canadians would equate to a census. It is the counting of all Canadians. It identifies their gender, where they live, their marital status and those types of important things for gathering information. As the member mentioned, that census is still mandatory.

In addition to the census, we have a national household survey that is not mandatory. We will no longer be threatening Canadians with fines and jail time because they do not want to tell the government, for example, what their religion is, or how many bedrooms they have in their house, or how much yard work they did last week. We think it is inappropriate and unacceptable to threaten Canadians with fines or jail time for not wanting to answer those questions.

It is fully understandable that we might have a situation where new Canadians may not want to tell the government their religion. Under the law previously, they would be threatened with up to a \$500 fine or jail time. In fact, the Liberal member for St. Paul's has introduced a bill that would reinstate that threat of fines. Of course, if people do not pay their fine they are subject to jail time as well.

We think that is inappropriate and unacceptable in a modern democracy like Canada. We think that Canadians, when they receive their national household survey, will, for the most part, want to act responsibly and fill it out. I know I will. We heard from virtually everyone in the room today that if they get the national household survey they intend to fill it out and send it back.

We have some world-renowned experts in statistics who will be working on this and executing the new process to ensure we get the best information that we can possibly get. Perhaps the hon. member underestimates the skills that exist at Statistics Canada. We do not. We believe that we will get terrific, usable and useful information through this process, but we will do it without threatening Canadians.

● (1845)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, when I hear the mantra with regards to jail time, I only feel embarrassed for the parliamentary secretary and the minister. They make it appear as if *Dog the Bounty Hunter* will knock down people's door, grab them, throw them across the hood of a car and make them fill out their census. None of that is true. It has never happened. No Canadian has every had jail time for not filling out the census. That has been eliminated already.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would point out that it has been the Conservatives' policy for the majority of their years here. It has only been when we have raised this that they actually dropped that, but that is not the case any more. People are not going to be jailed for not filling out a census.

What we need to know is why the government is gambling \$670 million of taxpayer money.

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about policy since the Conservative government has been in power. The fact is that the last long form census was held in 2006. That process was long in place before the new government was elected. We did not set that process in place, just to clarify that for the hon. member.

In regards to threats, one does not need to throw people in prison for them to feel threatened. Simply threatening jail time if someone does not want to tell the government their religion and then having to tell the government subsequently, is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to this government or to Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now 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 6:47 p.m.)

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