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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Papineau.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ST. ALBERT

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Rendezvous 2011 is the 150th anniversary celebration of the founding of St. Albert, the oldest non-fortified community in Alberta.

The Rendezvous 2011 committee has organized many events as part of the year-long celebration, beginning with a black tie gala dinner in January. There was a bilingual outdoor snow festival on Family Day, interpretive street performances, and a huge homecoming weekend. In August, 10,000 St. Albert residents met for a record-breaking picnic in the Sturgeon River Valley.

The festivities will continue throughout the remainder of this year and will conclude with a giant fireworks display on December 31.

These events have given the entire community the opportunity to cherish our past, honour our present and look forward to our future.

I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere congratulations and thanks to the Rendezvous 2011 organizing committee and its chair, Mrs. Margaret Plain, for all of their hard work and dedication in making the 150th year-long anniversary such a great success.

I thank the hundreds of volunteers who have made this year-long celebration possible. Happy birthday. Great job, St. Albert.

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to point out that today is the International Day of Peace. It is an opportunity not only to promote pacifist values, but also to oppose violence of any kind in armed conflicts.

Such violence affects millions of people around the world. It takes various forms, both physical and psychological. Unfortunately, all too often, women and children are the victims of violence in armed conflicts.

Thus, in solidarity with these women and children and all other victims of war, I invite all parliamentarians and all Canadians to reflect on what we can do for peace, for a better world.

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[*English*]

PARLIAMENT HILL SOFTBALL LEAGUE

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the winners of the Bob Allen and Jean-Paul Lorrain Memorial Cup for the Parliament Hill Softball League were crowned.

The winning team, composed almost entirely of Hill staffers, played hard through a long season and embodied the twin goals of fitness and good sportsmanship with not a small touch of fun thrown in for good measure.

My apologies in advance but I salute the champions, known as the Hawntourage, for defeating the Ritz's Farm Team in a thrilling extra-innings game.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "When you play, play hard; when you work, don't play at all."

I would also like to salute all of our colleagues' staff who do so much work on our behalf, especially as we embark on what will be a very busy fall session in Parliament.

I am sure I speak for all of our colleagues when I say that I certainly could not do my job without Drew, Jordan and Branden here in Ottawa, and Averil, Oula and Linda in Edmonton.

May we all have a productive session and perhaps abide by my personal philosophy, "Work hard, play hard, but don't tear your sweater."

Statements by Members

Way to go, team.

* * *

●(1405)

POINTE-CLAIRE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year the city of Pointe-Claire celebrates its 100th anniversary.

[*Translation*]

Pointe-Claire was originally an agricultural parish built around a windmill on the St. Lawrence River, and it helped spawn a handful of neighbouring municipalities that now form a large part of what is known as the West Island.

[*English*]

Good public administration under the leadership of mayors like Art Séguin, David Beck, Malcolm Knox and Bill McMurchie, combined with a commitment to excellence in sport and culture, are the hallmarks of this city of 30,000.

[*Translation*]

You can find everything in Pointe-Claire: a hospital, schools under two linguistic school boards, an excellent community centre, the first indoor Olympic-sized pool in Canada, a multi-sport artificial turf field, as well as the National Field of Honour, a veterans' cemetery.

[*English*]

Pointe-Claire is called home by Olympic diving medallist Anne Montminy, internationally renowned violinist Chantal Juillet, former CBC hockey broadcaster Dick Irvin, Canadiens' great Elmer Lach, and Juno award-winning musician Sam Roberts.

I ask all members to join me in wishing Pointe-Claire a very special happy birthday.

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NATIONAL TREE DAY

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six months ago the House proclaimed National Tree Day.

[*Translation*]

That day has arrived.

[*English*]

We have a worldwide reputation for our wildlife, clean air and beautiful communities. For that, we should thank trees.

[*Translation*]

We all have a role to play in planting, growing and protecting trees.

[*English*]

However, there are leaders like Tree Canada that work tirelessly to improve our communities with more trees.

[*Translation*]

In the past 20 years, they have planted 77 million trees and have supported countless urban forest programs, and they are not alone.

[*English*]

I urge all Canadians to take time today to plant, to care for and to thank a tree for all they do to improve our lives.

I invite all members to join me at four o'clock today at the Canadian Museum of Nature to plant a sugar maple in symbolic reverence for all the mighty power of trees in our lives.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, the International Day of Peace is an important event. Members of my own family had to leave their country because of war. This day was created by resolution 36/67 of the United Nations General Assembly.

This year, we are celebrating its 30th anniversary, and the theme is "Peace and Democracy: Make your voice heard!". It is important to promote the desire for peace and the security of people.

[*English*]

On this International Day of Peace, on behalf of all of the victims of war, and of those who are advocating peace and especially on behalf of future generations, I wish to convey a message that has resonated loudly in a hotel room in Montreal: "All we are saying is give peace a chance".

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PRINCE GEORGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prince George Chamber of Commerce celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. The chamber began as the Board of Trade on September 17, 1911.

What began as a group of businessmen focused on the building of the foundation of their city has blossomed into an organization of more than 800 diverse Prince George businesses speaking with a single voice on issues that affect them locally.

To celebrate, on September 22, the Prince George Chamber of Commerce is having an open house and then on November 4, a formal centennial event.

Very few things last as long as 100 years in this day and age, so I congratulate the Prince George Chamber of Commerce, which has shown in spades that excellent service and longevity go hand in hand.

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ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Canadians of Armenian descent on this 20th anniversary of the independence of the Armenian Republic.

I am honoured to serve as chair of the Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group. I have enjoyed the opportunity to dialogue with Armenian Canadians in my riding, here on the Hill and across Canada.

Statements by Members

While visiting Armenia, I was fascinated both by how far it has come in 20 short years of freedom and how young its democratic traditions are. Even the largest cities like Yerevan are a model of peace, cleanliness and safety.

All members of the House are here as the result of the peaceful democratic process governed by the rule of law. Too often we take this for granted. Today I invite all hon. members to join me in congratulating our Armenian Canadian friends and our colleagues serving in the Azgayin Zhoghov on 20 years of independence, 20 years of democracy and 20 years of progress.

Shnorhavor. Shnorhagalem.

* * *

•(1410)

SENIORS' POVERTY

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Hamilton's Social Planning and Research Council released a report on September 16 entitled "A Profile of Vulnerable Seniors".

This report shows that the poverty rate for Hamilton seniors is now at 17%, which is nearly three times the national average of 5.9%. The single most important factor contributing to this poverty is of course inadequate income.

A single senior who relies solely on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement still lives well below the poverty line. Worse still, the poverty rate for senior women in Hamilton is 22%, which is twice the average for senior men.

To address this problem, the report's lead researcher believes that the Canada pension plan should be increased, and I could not agree more.

The government also needs to implement the NDP proposal to increase the guaranteed income supplement beyond the meagre \$50 a month offered by the Minister of Finance. We know that more needs to be done for seniors to eliminate poverty. The only thing lacking is the political will of the government.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 30th anniversary of the International Day of Peace. This year's theme is "Peace and Democracy: make your voice heard".

We believe that peace and democracy are bound firmly together. It is evident that in tandem they form an atmosphere that promotes prosperity for all.

As it is clearly entrenched in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, democracy supports an environment for a host of political rights and civil liberties.

[*Translation*]

On this International Day of Peace, there are many opportunities to take part in democratic activities. For example, District 5550 of Rotary International in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario is participating in discussions on human equality and discrimination.

Today we join together with those who benefit freely from democracy and peace. We also join together with those who do not enjoy these freedoms. Our government, now and forever, will work to promote the Canadian and international values of peace and democracy.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the Walk 4 Justice arrived in Ottawa after marching from Victoria to demand justice for missing and murdered Canadian aboriginal women. Sisters in Spirit has documented nearly 600 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women, some 30 of which occurred as the march progressed across Canada.

New Democrats support calls by Amnesty International, KAIROS, Sisters in Spirit and the Native Women's Association of Canada for a plan of action that must include a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women; support for women's shelters and support services; and equal access for aboriginal women to housing, education and employment.

These daughters, mothers, aunts or sisters are loved and deserve to be valued. We must act now to ensure our aboriginal sisters are spared further violence and injustice.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic position remains one of the world's best. However, the economic recovery is uncertain and remains fragile, and too many Canadians remain out of work.

Instead of supporting Canadian jobs and growth, the NDP finance critic chooses to fearmonger about a hypothetical recession as if the NDP is cheering for Canada to fail. Our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs and promoting economic health.

The IMF praises Canada for our "relatively healthy economic fundamentals" and our "sounder fiscal and financial position". While these are encouraging signs, Canada is not immune to the economic turbulence facing the global economy, especially Europe and the United States.

That is why we need to stay the course and implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan with measures like the hiring credit for small businesses. The last thing Canada's economy needs now is the NDP's massive tax hikes, which would kill jobs and set Canadian families back.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

WORLD CARFREE DAY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, September 22, is World Carfree Day. In Quebec, organizations such as the Association des Centres de gestion des déplacements du Québec, Voyagez futé Montréal, Développement économique Saint-Laurent and Mobiligo have organized a carfree challenge to create awareness among Quebecers about the benefits of available sustainable transportation options, to invite people who have never used sustainable transportation to try it, to encourage the public to use sustainable transportation more often and to encourage pedestrians and cyclists.

As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, I am proud to be participating in and supporting this initiative, and I invite my constituents and all Canadians to visit www.defisansauto.com and take the challenge by leaving their car at home. Together we can build a better future.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, it was wonderful to learn that according to a recent *Newsweek* survey, Canada is the third-best country in the world in which to be a woman. Canada earned a full 100 points on the justice indicator and scored in the 90s on indicators such as health, education and economics.

This should come as no surprise. Our government has invested a lot of time and money across the country on issues important to women. We have increased our funding for women to its highest level ever. We are working hard with Canadians to end the abuse of women and girls.

Women can count on our government to pursue measures that create jobs and growth, support seniors, protect our health care system and fight against crime, while working to reduce and eliminate the deficit. More groups than ever are getting involved because our practical approach works.

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WORLD ALZHEIMER'S DAY

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Alzheimer's Day, a day to acknowledge a disease that affects more than 24 million people worldwide. It is a debilitating disorder that has a significant impact not only on those who suffer from Alzheimer's but also on their families.

Today is a day of hope and awareness: hope in knowing that people are working hard to bring a better quality of life to persons with Alzheimer's and to one day find a cure and also, awareness that those suffering, and their families, need our compassion and our help. What is needed is a comprehensive plan that will address the reality of our growing seniors population, and we need to develop

the capacity to handle the increased numbers of seniors suffering from this disease.

I thank all those Canadians who support and care for people who suffer from Alzheimer's. Their sacrifices and dedication are truly heroic, and they deserve to be recognized.

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SIR ROBERT BORDEN

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, "100" is not just associated with Nova Scotian Sir Robert Borden because his image graces the front of the \$100 bill. Today is the centennial anniversary of the Conservative Party's 1911 general election victory, a victory that saw us form government for the first time in 15 years.

Prime Minister Borden led Canada through the Great War. It is said that it was on the battlefields of Europe that Canada came to age as a country. It was for those efforts that Sir Robert Borden fought with British Prime Minister Lloyd George to ensure that Canada would be a signatory at the Peace of Versailles, which was a very important step in Canada emerging as a key player in the Commonwealth.

Prime Minister Meighen said it best, when describing this proud Nova Scotian prime minister, when he said that Sir Robert served Canada well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister says that we are okay because we are not doing as badly as the others. That is not good enough.

This week's dismal report of the Canadian economy by the IMF should be a wake-up call. How can the Conservatives pretend the IMF report was good news? How can they brag about doing well when between 1.5 and 2 million Canadians are out of work?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Because it is true, Mr. Speaker. Canada is doing relatively well. That is what the IMF said yesterday.

We have the best fiscal position in the G7. We have the lowest total government net debt to GDP ratio in the G7. We have the best growth in the G7. We have the best banking system in the world. Canada is the best place to invest and do business in the next five years according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. We have the best job creation in the G7 since the recession.

All of this is true, and that is why we are doing relatively well.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' policies have widened the gap between the rich and the middle class. The poverty level is rising. The unemployment rate is rising. The minister can play with the numbers, but the truth is that in order for Canada to achieve the same level of employment that we had before the recession in 2008, we need 420,000 more jobs. That is the reality.

Why is the minister pleased to see that 2 million Canadians are out of work?

• (1420)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we had and still have a very successful economic action plan. A total of 600,000 net new jobs have been created in Canada since the recession began. We are still in the process of implementing our budget, including an upcoming hiring credit for SMEs. As my colleague the Minister of Finance, was saying, we see here that we have the lowest net debt to GDP ratio. We also have the best growth in the G7. Canada is the best place to invest in the next five years. These are results, and that is what Canadians expect. Thanks to the good work of the Minister of Finance, we are on the right track.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister needs to open his eyes.

Scotiabank is saying that we are on the verge of a recession. Moody's is saying that households are carrying too much debt. The IMF revised Canada's economic outlook downward. It is not the NDP that is saying these things. It is his friends. Inflation is way up, which will hurt the poor and the middle class and slow the economy down even further.

Is the minister aware of this?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. What is this report saying? It is saying that over the next two years, we will have the best economic growth in the G7 and will be the best place to invest. That says something for all the jobs that were created here. On the other hand, the NDP is proposing plans to increase taxes by \$10 billion a year. That would kill the economy. It would be an economic fiasco. That is not what we are going to do.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, job creation is not the same thing as growth in the labour force. It is far from encouraging for the families of the two million Canadians who are unemployed, underemployed or downright discouraged. The rising price of gas and groceries is putting additional pressure on Canadian families' budgets.

The Conservatives are very generous with the oil companies, but why are they not doing more for Canadian families?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the facts. The oil companies pay the same taxes as other Canadian businesses pay. It is high time that suggestions to the contrary are stopped, because they are not accurate.

I know the member opposite wants to try to be accurate when she talks about tax matters in Canada and accurate, of course, about the

NDP plan that that party advanced to the people of Canada in the last election to raise taxes by about \$10 billion per year on businesses, which we all know will be passed along to individuals as part of the cost of doing business. That proposal by the NDP is inflationary for Canadian families.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that the best antidote to household debt is a good job. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are doing almost nothing for the two million Canadians who need one.

The government persists with its generous tax breaks for highly profitable oil companies, and yet takes a wait-and-see attitude toward creating jobs for the employed or getting the economy going again.

Canadians want action on jobs now. Why will the finance minister not act?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the member opposite knows, our unemployment rate is too high, but it is much better than that in the United States, and that has not happened in more than a generation.

The economic action plan actually is working and continues to work. We have about 600,000 net new jobs in Canada today since the end of the recession. We have the strongest job growth in the advanced economies in the world.

All of that is true. Should we do more? Yes, and we are with the accelerated capital cost allowance; the new tax credit for small businesses, more than 500,000 of them, to hire people; and the continuation of our tax reductions, which is just the opposite of what the NDP proposes, which is to raise taxes again.

* * *

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a review of public accounts shows that the government spending on professional and special services, including the use of consultants, has gone up from \$7.24 billion to well over \$10 billion, a cumulative increase of over \$7 billion.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance what he thinks the chances are that the \$20 million consultants he just hired will come back and say, "Do you know what is a good way to save money? Cut the use of consultants".

• (1425)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the member opposite from Rosedale was very fond of big government during his days in Ontario: big government, big deficits, big debt. It was so bad he hung on until almost the last day because he knew the people of Ontario were going to throw him out of office because of his big deficits, big debt and accumulated public debt.

Yes, we are having experts from outside look at government spending. Yes, we should. Government should not be the sole judge of the way it is run. We need advice from the outside.

Oral Questions

For every dollar spent—

The Speaker: I am not sure how the hon. member for Toronto Centre heard the minister's answer, because there was quite a lot of noise. I would ask all hon. colleagues to listen to the answers.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

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CANADA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): I think most of the noise was coming from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the minister could now explain—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I know it is a Wednesday, but we will have to listen to the question before we can listen to the answer.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae: I did not know knuckle grazing could cause so much noise, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the minister could tell us, in negotiating with respect to perimeter security, why, when faced with the buy American problem, why, when faced with the labelling problem, would ending trade discrimination not be part and parcel of those negotiations?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on reducing barriers to trade, not raising new barriers, as some parties in the House have suggested.

Sixty per cent of our GDP is comprised of trade. One in five Canadian jobs is directly or indirectly related to trade, so any suggestion that we should be adding to the barriers that face our businesses is absolutely wrong.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister misunderstood the question I asked. Being a charitable man, I will repeat the question in my second language.

What I am trying to say is very simple. At a time when we are facing a real risk of discrimination against the Canadian economy with regard to our exports to the United States, why not make this issue of discrimination part of our negotiations with the Americans on security?

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the member listened to my answer. Had he been listening to the Prime Minister two days ago, he would know that the Prime Minister was very clear. The border vision initiatives are about deepening and strengthening the world's greatest trade relationship. Given our strong and mature relationship with the United States, we can separately address our concerns regarding the buy American provisions. This government will stand up for ordinary, hard-working citizens. Why will those members not?

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are outraged that the government is spending \$90,000 a day for a consultant to help plan cuts to services that Canadians rely on. If we add it up, we could keep 230 front-line employees on the job for over a year.

Why is the government throwing money at high-priced consultants while cutting staff who actually deliver services to Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know this would be contrary to NDP ideology, but there actually is some waste in government. Governments can actually reduce their expenses. We should not do it ourselves solely. We should get advice and expertise from the private sector. For every \$1 of spending on experts, we expect \$200 of savings, which is a pretty good deal.

● (1430)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the International Monetary Fund has reversed its predictions about Canada's economy, and is now warning that our unemployment rate is just going to keep climbing. While Canadians worry about the economy, Conservatives are throwing \$90,000 a day at high-priced consultants, planning even deeper cuts. The minister is turning his back on communities that depend on these positions. When will Conservatives focus on Canadian families instead of throwing money at high-priced consultants?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are focused as a top priority on jobs and the economy. The record on jobs is about 600,000 net new jobs as a result of the economic action plan.

Let us see what the IMF actually said. Here is what the spokesman said just yesterday: "Canada is actually matching up quite well on a relative basis...growth rates are 2%, the recession was not too deep, they haven't had a financial crisis to the extent that the U.S. has had or the Europeans are having it, and so, all in all, Canada is actually doing quite well."

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are spending \$90,000 a day for a high-priced outside consultant to plan service cuts. These cuts will have a direct and negative impact on Canadians, especially in rural regions. Seniors without Internet access and with limited access to public transit are being left behind by the government.

When will the government realize that paying private contractors top dollar to do its dirty work while short-changing seniors is certainly not the change Canadians were looking for?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deficit reduction action plan is necessary as we move on the fiscal track to balanced budgets. The member opposite should know that there is some waste in government, that it is possible to review programs, that not every program should go on forever, that sometimes there are new programs, sometimes there are programs that have completed their usefulness.

Certainly, it is the obligation of government to get the best advice we can, including the advice we will get from outside consultants. As I said, for every \$1 spent on experts, we expect \$200 of savings.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our seniors deserve better.

By significantly reducing the services offered at Service Canada centres, the Conservative government is showing no consideration whatsoever for our seniors. Apparently, according to the minister, anyone who cannot communicate with Service Canada over the Internet is unworthy of the 21st century. That is unacceptable.

Can the minister tell us here today how the cuts to Service Canada will better serve our seniors?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to modernize our employment insurance system, especially the processing of claims. At this time, processing is done mainly on paper. This is not working. With an automated system, Service Canada employees will have more time to help seniors, and this will be more affordable for seniors. We promised Canadians that we would respect their money and that is what we are doing.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of spending \$90,000 a day on learning how to cut public services, the government should put more resources into investigating how the Canada Revenue Agency bureaucrats were able to help a convicted fraudster escape paying taxes.

Money laundering, \$12 million in cash spent in casinos, and CRA private documents found in his safe in a building belonging to a mobster; after these troubling allegations, can the government explain what is going on at the Canada Revenue Agency?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to clarify that many of these allegations date back more than a decade. They are not new allegations. CRA officials are working with the RCMP, and the investigation is ongoing.

We do appreciate that this is a very serious issue and we will not tolerate these types of activities as they are alleged.

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government is so determined to make cuts, then perhaps it could cut off fraudsters instead of cutting services to honest citizens.

Canadians work hard for their money. We cannot blame them for being worried when they see how badly public funds are being managed. We have to shed light on what is happening at the Canada Revenue Agency.

Can the government assure us that it will get to the bottom of things and investigate these serious allegations?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and the House that the RCMP is investigating this matter. It is a very serious matter. CRA officials are working with the RCMP, and we will get to the bottom of the issue.

* * *

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while senior bureaucrats in the Summit Management Office, Infrastructure Canada and Industry Canada categorically told the Auditor General they had no direct involvement in the G8 legacy fund, we know that is not true. Either they were misrepresenting the facts, or perhaps they were simply moved beyond the reach of the Auditor General.

Here are simple questions for the President of the Treasury Board. Did the bureaucrats who participated in the secret meetings in Muskoka not have an obligation to come clean with the Auditor General? Were any of these key players later promoted, for example, Mr. Sanjeev Chowdhury, for keeping to this code of silence?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not correct. As I said yesterday, the facts have not changed. The Auditor General has made some observations with respect to the administration of this program and has given us some pointers.

We must not forget about the good news coming out of this. The good news is that every dollar is accounted for. All 32 projects came in on or under budget. And guess what? The project itself was under \$5 million.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, diverting \$50 million from border infrastructure to build outhouses in Muskoka is not a simple thing to pull off. The President of the Treasury Board has been sitting down for weeks refusing to explain how he pulled it off. Again, I would like to ask him a couple of simple questions so we can get to the bottom of this.

Is it not true that he went to local mayors and said that he personally would set up the meeting with the Prime Minister to make the money flow? Would the minister also confirm that he told mayors that for other pet projects that were outside the Muskoka slush fund, he would guarantee they got the money?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, that is incorrect, but let me talk about the good news on this infrastructure funding.

Oral Questions

This infrastructure funding was recommended by the municipalities. It enhanced the municipalities' infrastructure program. I will tell members what infrastructure programs the money was spent on: rehabilitation of the airport in North Bay, fixing up the provincial highway, and building a community centre that was used during the summer. What is wrong with that picture?

* * *

G20 SUMMIT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at last year's G20 meeting, my city was shut down. It was shaken. It was vandalized. A year later the government will still not pick up the tab. Gazebo, yes, but Toronto business owners with smashed windows is another story.

If it is not pork-barrelling, why will the government not reimburse Toronto businesses? When will it fix the deeply flawed summit management protocol so that the next time small businesses will not get hung out to dry?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the losses and damages to Toronto businesses are regrettable. The claims process is an independent process that has been in place since the previous government in 2001 and has been used successfully at previous summits. Following this review, Toronto businesses were treated the same as those affected at summits at Quebec City and Kananaskis.

This government is committed to providing a fair share to Toronto businesses.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot put up with this Conservative government's waste and mismanagement. It is wasting \$90,000 a day to have consultants tell it where to cut government spending.

Why can the cabinet ministers not make these decisions themselves? What exactly are Canadians paying these ministers to do?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not share the view that the member opposite clearly has that governments are the font of all wisdom and all knowledge and that governments should just examine themselves and come to their own conclusions without getting advice that is available in the private sector in Canada, very good advice. Therefore, yes, we are seeking that advice. For every \$1 of spending on experts, we expect \$200 of savings.

● (1440)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives, spending on consultants is up by \$3 billion per year.

I served on the cabinet expenditure review committee led by the member for Markham—Unionville. As ministers, we took our jobs seriously. We went through every spending item line by line and we made the decisions.

Why do the Conservatives outsource their thinking? Is it because the Prime Minister trusts consultants more than his own ministers? What exactly are Canadians paying those ministers to do if not to make decisions about the expenditures of government?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as if the leader of the Liberal Party then and the NDP did not do enough damage to Ontario between 1990 and 1995, now we have the member from the third party here saying that the Liberals did a good job on deficit reduction through their work. Sure, they did. They reduced funding for hospitals. They reduced funding for teachers, for education. They reduced funding for nurses in the province of Ontario. This is shameful.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the world looks to Canada when it comes to the vital research that is done by the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. Despite the minister's denial, the Conservative government is once again turning its back on scientific research.

Will the minister admit that the person who is in charge of this program is losing his job and his government is effectively terminating this program?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the assumption of my hon. colleague is absolutely false. We are not ending any of our ozone monitoring services or closing down the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. We are—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: You're firing the guy.

Hon. Peter Kent: No, we are optimizing and streamlining the way we monitor and we measure ozone to operate more effectively. That is what we were elected to do.

Some hon. members: Oh! Oh!

The Speaker: There is far too much noise at the far end of the chamber. I am going to ask all hon. colleagues to listen to the responses. We will have a little order.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the omnibus crime bill was tabled in the House. It—

Mr. David Anderson: Say thank you.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Conservatives are in complete denial over there about the serious financial consequences this is going to have to the budgetary process in our country, both provincially and federally. For instance, a single part of the bill will create several thousand plus additional people going into jail that we are going to have to pay for. We all deplore the cost of crime, but we have to have budgetary transparency.

Oral Questions

When will one of the two ministers stand in the House and tell us what this bill is going to cost Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that the hon. member has now become a fiscal conservative. He is worried about government expenditures. This certainly is something new.

If he is worried, I can assure him that most of the cost of crime is borne by victims. A study in 2008 said that the cost of crime in the country was \$99 billion, and 83% was borne by victims of crime.

Why do those members not stand up for victims of crime for a change? Why not make that a priority?

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all the minister and the government are going to do is dump more costs onto that \$99 billion figure, which is really questionable.

[Translation]

It is unacceptable that the government is refusing to disclose these costs. This bill will transfer the financial responsibilities to the provinces, which are already short on resources. The provinces are asking for help, but the government is refusing to listen to them.

Can the minister tell us how much this bill is going to cost the provinces? How much?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have good news for the hon. member. Provinces right across the country have been supportive of these government initiatives. I can also tell him that just in the last budget an increase of more than \$2.4 billion was given to the provinces.

If that individual wants to get on board with this, he should start standing up for victims, people who are the victims of sexual exploitation, do something about drug trafficking in the country and get behind this bill and support it right now.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament, the NDP fought to stop the Conservatives from passing legislation allowing police officers to spy on citizens on the Internet without a warrant. Since this measure is not included in the omnibus crime bill, it is a victory for the NDP and all Canadians.

Can the government confirm that it will, once and for all, heed the experts and the vast majority of the population, who are opposed to surveillance without a warrant?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, outrageous claims like that one, that private communications will be intercepted without a warrant, are a complete fabrication. Our proposed approach of linking an Internet address to subscriber information is on par with the phone book linking phone numbers to an address. What this will not allow for is access to private communications without a warrant.

Our message is clear. If someone wants to commit a crime, we will ensure that laws are in place to ensure that individual is apprehended, and those laws will be done in an appropriate lawful manner.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even former Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day was opposed to electronic surveillance without a warrant.

Can the minister confirm that his government is admitting that this surveillance initiative, an even greater intrusion into the lives of Canadians, has been abandoned? Can he guarantee today that it has been abandoned once and for all?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand where the member is getting his information from. This type of outrageous claim that lawful access would not be appropriately enacted by our government is simply that, outrageous.

The legislation will come. It will provide for appropriate judicial oversight in respect of access to private conversations.

Rather than repeating fabrications, the member might want to come and talk to me about what we are actually planning.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has become the envy of the world when it comes to our economic position. Just yesterday a senior International Monetary Fund official said of our economy “all in all Canada is doing quite well”.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister please update the House on what the Prime Minister is doing today in support of Canada's economic position while at the United Nations for international meetings?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Prime Minister held a round table at the New York Stock Exchange with leading executives from global financial firms to discuss the current economic situation as well as trade and investment between Canada and the United States.

As members know, our government's top priority remains completing the economic recovery, and that is our Prime Minister's top priority as well.

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to stay focused on what matters, creating jobs and economic growth. That is what our Prime Minister does each and every day. That is what he was doing today in New York.

*Oral Questions***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how many ways are the Conservatives going to fail aboriginal people?

It has been three years since the Prime Minister apologized for the residential school system, yet many of the most vulnerable survivors, such as the homeless, may not be compensated. The application deadline has passed, and Conservatives are doing nothing to reach out to those being left behind.

What will the government do to ensure all residential school survivors are fairly compensated?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to ensuring that victims from this dark chapter in our history are fairly compensated. We have conducted a grassroots outreach strategy implemented by the Assembly of First Nations and other aboriginal organizations. We did this in 16 aboriginal languages, English and French. This overall outreach strategy was developed by all parties to the settlement and approved by the courts. It has been deemed highly effective by the courts and all the parties to the agreement. The outreach is ongoing.

• (1450)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, National Chief Shawn Atleo has told us aboriginal high school students are more likely to be incarcerated than to graduate. Aboriginal women make up a whopping one-third of women in custody.

Anyone who commits a crime must face justice, but is it not equally important to prevent involvement in criminal activities in the first place? Instead of building more jails, why will the government not invest in better education and job creation for aboriginal Canadians?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made major investments in education and in other developments to a degree that no other government has ever done. We have, right now, a national panel going across the country on K to 12 education. We did that in collaboration. The Assembly of First Nations, the National Chief and myself appointed the panel. It is working quite independently. This is a major development with positive outcomes. This is the right way to go, and we are making those kinds of investments.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the Walk 4 Justice gathered on Parliament Hill, asking for answers about the hundreds of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

Back in February, Conservatives refused to renew funding they promised for Sisters in Spirit. This project tracked cases and gave a voice to communities facing this violence, yet Conservatives have severely hindered this groundbreaking initiative.

Why is the government shutting out the voices of the families and the affected communities?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite. Through our national strategy to

deal with this very difficult issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women, we have a community, a fund component that we are working very closely with community organizations in aboriginal communities across the country. I can list one of them. I have dozens here that I could use as examples. For instance, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake is providing information sessions that will enhance knowledge and access to justice for victims of family violence.

The community organizations are from aboriginal communities and are working closely with the public safety, justice and status of women departments to ensure we get them the help that they need.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a government that claims to be the champion of law and order, the Conservatives' attitude towards violence against aboriginal women is hard to understand. In the last three months, Walk4Justice has had to add 37 names to its list of missing women. Federal resources are needed to protect these victims who have no voice.

How can communities provide support to the families of the victims without the assistance of this government?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, funding is important. Just to put it into perspective, just one organization, the Native Women's Association of Canada, has received almost \$20 million from our government alone.

However, what I think is most important is that now we are working with law enforcement agencies across the country, including the RCMP's new missing persons' centre. We have created a public website for tips from the public to help find missing and murdered aboriginal women. We have enhanced our databases for all law enforcement agencies across the country. However, more importantly, we are working with women's aboriginal organizations at the community level to help support them.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance wags his finger at small business in Canada and tells them to hire more people, the minister from Service Canada is heading them out the door in droves.

We know it is not just the job losses; it is the services that are going to be lost to those who lose their jobs in this country. Right now it is taking five to six weeks to complete an EI claim. We know that with fewer workers we will see longer tie-ups, and these are people who are most vulnerable, most in need in this country.

Oral Questions

When will the minister stop this ridiculous scheme and stop the cuts in Service Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the recent recession we did take on some people to make sure that Canadians who have lost their jobs receive their first payment in a timely manner. We increased the standards. We increased the speed with which we provided those first payments, I am pleased to say, but those people were hired on a temporary basis. They were hired only to process EI claims.

Fortunately, thanks to our economic action plan, more Canadians are at work now than ever before, so there is not the same need to hire people to process the claims.

The individuals knew that they were temporary jobs, but service standards have improved compared to the 10 weeks it took when the Liberals were in power.

• (1455)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely asinine. The minister says the back-end workers are the only thing that is being changed. Service Canada workers know what she is doing to their back end.

I will tell the House what makes no sense: keeping centres in areas that have low records of unemployment. In Kitchener and Halifax, it is about 6%; in Edmonton it is at 5.5%, and Laval is under 5%, but they are ripping jobs out of Gander, where it is 17.5%, and Glace Bay, where it is 16%.

Of all the dumb, mean-spirited, ludicrous ideas, this—

The Speaker: Order, please. I see the hon. minister is rising to answer.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current EI system is essentially paper based. We want to bring the system into the 21st century by automating applications for EI and the processing of them. That will honour our commitment to Canadians to provide more efficient, more effective service to them. It will keep their taxes down, and we are going to make sure that we maintain the front-line standards of delivery. These changes are taking place in the backroom. Front-line service will not be changed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Monday once again the Minister of the Environment said that the department could lose hundreds of scientists without any effect on basic services, but this government has cut 43% of the budget of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

If assessing and reducing industrial impacts on our environment are not considered basic services, then what is?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is well aware that the environment is a priority for the Government of Canada during these times of fiscal restraint.

[*English*]

I can assure her that budget 2011, while it did reassign some resources, can cover without compromising any of the programs of my department.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday and then again today, the minister claimed that the crucial ozone data centre is not closing, but the only employee who runs the centre has actually already received notice of potential layoff. If the minister thinks that the centre can run all by itself, I suggest that maybe he agree to optimizing and streamlining his own office. It might make it a little harder to optimize and streamline the truth.

I asked on Monday, I asked on Tuesday, and I am going to ask again today: can the minister show us evidence of the impacts of these cuts?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can again say there is a great difference between letters to employees of Environment Canada advising them that they may be affected by workforce adjustment and separation from the department. It is entirely possible that all of the positions will be accommodated through attrition. The proof will be in the pudding as we continue to deliver the services for cleaner air and for protecting our great public spaces for the good of the people of Canada.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a recent survey conducted by the American news outlet *Newsweek*, Canada was ranked among the top three best places in the world to be a woman. Canada was ranked a world leader on the key indicators of justice, health, education, economics and political involvement.

Can the Minister for Status of Women tell this House what the government is doing to make Canada an even better place for women and the girls who will follow in their footsteps?

• (1500)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member from Miramichi for her tireless work for women.

Our government has increased funding for women to its highest level ever, and we are working hard with women across the country to ensure they achieve their full potential. Women can count on our government to pursue measures that create jobs and growth, to end elder abuse, to protect our health care system, and of course to end violence against women and girls.

Oral Questions

We are very proud that Canada is ranked third-best place to be a woman in the world, third only to Iceland and Sweden.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

The Commissioner of Official Languages has asked the government several times to introduce a bill to clarify the responsibilities of Air Canada and its affiliates with regard to providing services in French and English. In May 2010, 252 hon. members unanimously called on the government to do the same. The minister's two immediate predecessors promised to do so, but did not.

Will the Minister of Transport keep his government's promise or will he follow the other two and prove the old saying, "Bad things come in threes"?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Air Canada is responsible for meeting its official language requirements with its partner companies. We are ensuring that the official languages are respected and we will continue to do so.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prince Edward Island provincial nominee program has raised alarm bells for Islanders and all Canadians.

Recently three government workers have come forward with allegations of bribery and fraud within this program. These total over \$400 million, apparently in violation of the rules, with no accountability but with political interference.

Islanders and all Canadians deserve to know the truth. Will the government conduct an inquiry into the disturbing allegations staining this federal program?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are new allegations and they were recently provided to officials at the ministry. Those allegations have been provided to the RCMP. To be fair, because they are under investigation, it would not be fair for the government to comment further.

* * *

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has invested more in science and technology than any other government in Canadian history. When it comes to supporting basic discovery-oriented university research, Canada is ranked number one among the G7 countries. Our government's commitment to science and technology is paying dividends.

Can the Minister of State for Science and Technology please update the House on how our government has helped to bring a world-leading facility to Canada and to my riding?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for joining me at the grand opening of the Stephen Hawking Centre at the Perimeter Institute just recently.

This brand new federally funded facility will make the Perimeter Institute the largest theoretical physics research and academic organization the world.

This year we have invested more in the Perimeter Institute, showing our government's ongoing commitment to building a stronger economy, creating those job opportunities of the future and improving the standard of living for all Canadians through science and technology.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has demonstrated his lack of respect for francophones across the country by hiring a director of communications who has insulted francophones.

It is impossible to work with the Prime Minister unless you have more respect for the two official languages. This choice speaks volumes about what the Conservatives think about Quebec, Acadia and francophones elsewhere in Canada.

When will the Conservatives admit they were wrong and replace Mr. Persichilli?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that with this new Parliament we would be above such unfounded allegations. We know that the Prime Minister has distanced himself from Mr. Persichilli's remarks.

Instead of impugning motives, I will state the facts. We resolved the fiscal imbalance, we gave Quebec a seat at UNESCO and we recognized the Quebec nation. Quebec's jurisdictions have never been so well respected, after 13 years of denial by the Liberals and now an opposition party that wants to centralize everything—

● (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of the Environment.

Years ago, it was my great privilege to be part of the Canadian negotiating team for the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer. My question follows those of other colleagues.

We have heard today in the House that the minister says we will streamline and optimize our ozone measurements. I hear from academics around Canada that we will streamline our ozone measurements program right out of existence.

I would like to ask the hon. minister to make it very clear for us, to reassure everyone and to withdraw the letters threatening the jobs of the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Centre program manager, the ozone sonde program and the international—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the hon. member there to give the minister a chance to respond. The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her efforts in the past in working on the Montreal Protocol, but I can assure her that we are not cutting any ozone monitoring services or closing the centre.

Yes, we are optimizing and streamlining the way we collect data to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent in the most prudent but still environmentally correct way. That is what we were elected to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask for unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Minister of Immigration should halt the deportation of Paola Ortiz from Canada for humanitarian reasons.

I seek unanimous consent.

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

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Scrutiny of Regulations in relation to section 19 of the Statutory Instruments Act.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in this report later today.

Routine Proceedings

[*English*]

PURPLE DAY ACT

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-278, An Act respecting a day to increase public awareness about epilepsy.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would declare March 26 Purple Day in recognition of epilepsy awareness.

Purple Day was founded in 2008 by Cassidy Megan, who lives in my riding of Halifax West. At the time she was only nine years old. Her objective was to let other children with epilepsy know that they were not alone.

Purple Day is a grassroots effort dedicated to increasing awareness about epilepsy worldwide. Thanks to the leadership and dedication of Cassidy and Epilepsy Nova Scotia, Purple Day is now celebrated in more than 35 countries.

As in previous years, on March 26 people around the globe, including members of this House, wore purple to spread the word about epilepsy, which affects over 50 million people worldwide. That is more than multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease combined.

Greater understanding of this disease will help educate people about what to do when someone is having a seizure and will help give epileptics more safety and support.

The bill would enshrine March 26 in law as the date each year when we Canadians wear purple to raise awareness of epilepsy.

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

* * *

● (1510)

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-279, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (gender identity and gender expression).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a reintroduction of the bill that passed this House before the last election but, unfortunately, not the Senate. There is an urgent need for this legislation to help end the discrimination, social exclusion and, all too often, violence that face transgender Canadians.

I hope to work with members from all parties to ensure that this important bill becomes law. Let us take this step together so that all the Susans, Regans, Jordans, Daphnes, and all our other transgender friends and family members can take their rightful place in all aspects of Canadian life.

Routine Proceedings

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

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NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CHRONIC CEREBROSPINAL VENOUS INSUFFICIENCY (CCSVI) ACT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-280, An Act to establish a National Strategy for Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency (CCSVI).

She said: Mr. Speaker, my bill aims to establish a national strategy for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, CCSVI.

The bill calls for the minister to convene a conference with the provincial and territorial ministers of health to establish a national strategy, including: ensuring that proper health care is not refused to a person who is seeking or has obtained treatment for CCSVI outside Canada; identifying the most appropriate level of clinical trials for treatment of CCSVI to place Canada at the forefront of international research; estimating the funding necessary for clinical trials and tracking individuals who have received the treatment; establishing an advisory panel composed of experts who have been actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI, as well as an individual who has been treated; and ensuring that clinical trials begin by March 1, 2012.

I hope all hon. members will support this bill.

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

* * *

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-281, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act (discontinuance of listed sidings).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce another measure to better preserve producer car loading sites across western Canada. Located along railway sidings, these sites enable prairie grain producers to load their own railcars as an alternative to being forced to go through the grain-handling facilities of private elevator companies.

Down from over 700 such do-it-yourself loading sites some 10 years ago, fewer than 300 of these sites remain in existence today. The grain companies do not want farmers loading their own grain cars because, of course, they do not collect any tariffs on that grain and the railways have been trying to get rid of these sites. However, producers have actually been making greater use of their right to load their own railcars in recent years. The number of producer-loaded cars is up fourfold in the last decade, to nearly 12,000 cars per year.

The vast majority of prairie grain is handled through the conventional system but this is a right that was given to farmers to load their own cars over 100 years ago by the Supreme Court of Canada. It is enshrined in the Canada Grain Act but it is meaningless unless the sites exist for farmers to use. Right now, the railway can abandon those sites on 60 days' notice without any further due process.

This measure proposes to give three years' notice to ensure there will be a proper hearing, to put the onus on the railways to prove what they are doing is in the public interest, to provide other interested parties with an opportunity to buy and operate those sidings and to compensate municipalities when a siding is closed.

This is just decent behaviour in dealing with matters of this kind. I hope the measures contained in this private member's bill will commend themselves to all members of the House.

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

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Scrutiny of Regulations, presented to this House earlier today, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1515)

[English]

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of introducing a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from all across the country, more often than not in Quebec, calling upon the House of Commons to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known and, in fact, that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial and occupational causes combined. These signatories point out that Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world and that the Government of Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

SAFE STREETS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that Bill C-10, An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to open debate on Bill C-10, An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts.

The bill, which is known as the Safe Streets and Communities Act, fulfills the commitment in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne to quickly reintroduce law and order legislation to combat crime and terrorism. This commitment, in turn, reflects the strong mandate that Canadians have given us to protect society and to hold criminals accountable.

We have bundled together crime bills that died on the Order Paper in the last Parliament into a comprehensive piece of legislation and it is our plan to pass it within the first 100 sitting days of Parliament.

As I met with victims of crime and their families yesterday in Brampton, I was once again struck by the importance of having this legislation passed in a timely manner. Both in Brampton and in Montreal yesterday, people such as Joe Wamback, Sharon Rosenfeldt, Sheldon Kennedy, Yvonne Harvey, Gary Lindfield, Maureen Basnicki and Line Lacasse spoke about the need for these changes to our laws.

We have a duty to stand up for these victims, which we are doing by bringing in this legislation.

The objective of our criminal law reform agenda over the past few years has been to build a stronger, safer and better Canada. This comprehensive legislation is another important step in the process to achieve this end.

As I travelled across the country holding round tables or meeting people on the street, the message was clear. People want to ensure their streets and communities are safer and they are relying on us to take the steps needed to achieve this.

There are five parts to Bill C-10.

Part 1 includes reforms to deter terrorism by supporting victims of terrorism and amending the State Immunity Act.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live. They also call upon the government to end all subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and internationally, as well as to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present a petition signed by 820 people in my riding of Red Deer, Alberta.

The petitioners urge the federal government to honour its commitment to the UN protocol by providing adequate funding to set up safe housing for the victims of human trafficking.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present this petition on behalf of many constituents throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petition calls upon the government to dismantle the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for wrongful decisions, certainly when it comes to the management of the current fish stocks off the east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador and all of Atlantic Canada, for that matter. The petitioners request that the Government of Canada initiate a public inquiry into all aspects of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, also requiring that it place a model that takes into account fishery science with an emphasis on serving the fisher people who can make a living from that industry.

I humbly present this to the House on behalf of not only the fisher people of Newfoundland and Labrador but all stakeholders in the province.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

Part 2 includes sentencing reforms that will target sexual offences against children and serious drug offences, as well as prevent the use of conditional sentences for serious violent and property crimes.

Part 3 includes post-sentencing reforms to increase offender accountability, eliminate pardons for serious crimes and strengthen the international transfer of offenders regime.

Part 4 includes reforms to better protect Canadians from violent young offenders.

Lastly, part 5 includes immigration reforms to better protect vulnerable foreign workers against abuse and exploitation, including through human trafficking.

Some may say that this comprehensive bill makes it difficult to understand. In response I would note that these reforms should be very familiar to members of Parliament, indeed all Canadians, given that these reforms were before the previous Parliament when they died on the Order Paper with the dissolution of that Parliament.

Many of these reforms have been previously debated, studied and even passed by at least one of the two chambers of Parliament. For the most part, the comprehensive legislation reintroduces these reforms in the same form they were in previously, with technical changes that were needed to be able to reintroduce them in this Parliament in one bill.

A few additional changes have been made and I will describe them as I provide a summary of the individual areas of reform. However, I want to note that these additional changes remain consistent with the government's objectives when these reforms were originally introduced in the previous Parliament and, therefore, should also be supported today.

I will now take hon. members through some of the elements of Bill C-10.

Part 1 is comprised of clauses 2 through 9. These amendments seek to deter terrorism by enacting the justice for victims of terrorism act.

As reflected in the proposed preamble to the new act, these reforms recognize that, "terrorism is a matter of national concern that affects the security of the nation", and that it is a "priority to deter and prevent acts of terrorism against Canada and Canadians".

As Canadians recently marked the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, it was a stark reminder that the threat of terrorism remains and that we must continue to be vigilant.

● (1520)

Accordingly and with a view to deterring terrorism, part 1 proposes to create a cause of action for victims of terrorism to enable them to sue perpetrators and supporters of terrorism, including listed foreign states, for loss or damage that occurred as a result of an act of terrorism or omission committed anywhere in the world on or after January 1, 1985.

It also would amend the State Immunity Act to lift immunity of those states that the government has listed for support of terrorism.

Part 1's amendments were previously proposed and passed by the Senate in former Bill S-7, Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act, in the previous session of Parliament. They include technical changes to correct grammatical and cross-reference errors.

Part 2 is comprised of clauses 10 through 51. It proposes sentencing amendments to the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to ensure that the sentences imposed for child sexual exploitation, serious drug offences, as well as for other serious violent and property crimes, adequately reflect the severity of these crimes.

The exploitation of children is a most serious crime, one that is incomprehensible and must be met with appropriate punishment. Bill C-10 proposals addressing child sexual exploitation were addressed in the previous bill. These reforms seek to consistently and adequately condemn all forms of child sexual abuse through the imposition of new and higher mandatory sentences of imprisonment, as well as some higher maximum penalties.

They also seek to prevent the commission of sexual offences against children through the creation of two new offences and by requiring courts to consider imposing conditions to prevent suspected or convicted child sex offenders from engaging in conduct that could facilitate or further their commission of sexual offences against children.

The bill's proposed reforms addressing child sexual exploitation are essentially the same as the bill we had in the previous Parliament, that was passed by the House of Commons and was before the Senate at third reading debate when it died on the Order Paper. Unfortunately, some members kept on talking so that the bill did not get passed.

The primary difference is that this bill also proposes to increase the maximum penalty for four offences, with a corresponding increase in their proposed mandatory minimum sentence of imprisonment to better reflect the heinous nature of these offences.

The bill proposes to increase the maximum penalty on summary conviction for a number of offences. All of these are consistent with the objectives of the former Bill C-54 as originally introduced.

It also proposes Criminal Code reforms to further restrict the use of a conditional sentence, or house arrest as it is often called.

Government Orders

Originally proposed in Bill C-16, ending house arrest for property and other serious crimes by serious and violent offenders act in the previous Parliament, these proposals seek to make it explicitly clear that a conditional sentence is never available for: offences punishable by a maximum of 14 years or life; offences prosecuted by indictment and punishable by a maximum penalty of 10 years that result in bodily harm, involve the import-export, trafficking and production of drugs or involve the use of a weapon; or listed serious property and violent offences punishable by 10 years and prosecuted by indictment, such as criminal harassment, trafficking in persons and theft over \$5,000.

The bill's proposals are in the same form as previously proposed in Bill C-16 which had received second reading and had been referred to the justice committee but not yet studied when it died on the Order Paper.

It includes technical changes to the list of excluded offences punishable by a maximum of 10 years: to include the recently enacted new offence of motor vehicle theft; to coordinate the proposed imposition of a mandatory minimum sentence of imprisonment in section 172.1(1), luring a child; and to change the listed child abduction offence to section 281.

We are also addressing the serious issue of drug crimes in this country, particularly those involving organized crime and those that target youth because we all know the impact that such crimes have on our communities.

• (1525)

Part 2's proposals to address drug crime include amendments to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to impose mandatory minimum sentences of imprisonment for the offences of production, trafficking or possession for the purposes of trafficking or importing, and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting of schedule I drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine, and schedule II drugs, such as marijuana.

These mandatory minimum sentences would apply where there was an aggravating factor, including where the production of the drug constituted a potential security, health or safety hazard, or the offence was committed in or near a school.

As well, it would double the maximum penalty for the production of schedule II drugs, such as marijuana, from 7 to 14 years and it would reschedule GHB and flunitrazepam, most commonly known as the date rape drugs, from schedule III to schedule I.

As a result, these offences would now carry higher maximum penalties.

The bill would also allow a court to delay sentencing while the addicted offender completed a treatment program approved by the province under the supervision of the court or a drug treatment court approved program and to impose a penalty other than the minimum sentence if the offender successfully completes the treatment program.

These proposals are in the same form they were in when they were passed by the Senate as former Bill S-10

Part 3, which is comprised of clauses 52 through 166, proposes post-sentencing reforms to better support victims and to increase offender accountability.

Canadians have told us they expect their government to ensure that offenders are held accountable for their crimes because only then can they have complete confidence in our justice system.

Part 3 introduces reforms previously contained in bills in the previous Parliament. It includes proposals from the ending early release for criminals and increasing offender accountability act that would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to recognize the rights of victims, increase offender accountability and responsibility, and modernize the disciplinary system for inmates.

As now proposed in Bill C-10, it includes technical modifications that would delete provisions that were ultimately passed as part of the Abolition of Early Parole Act, as well as clarifications regarding, for example, sentence calculations, adding new offences recently enacted by other legislation, and proposes to change the name of the National Parole Board to the Parole Board of Canada.

It includes proposals previously contained in Bill C-5, the Keeping Canadians Safe (the International Transfer of Offenders) Act and which seek to enhance public safety by enshrining in law a number of additional key factors in deciding whether an offender would be granted a transfer back to Canada. The bill proposes these reforms as originally introduced.

It includes proposals included in the Eliminating Pardons for Serious Crimes Act in the previous Parliament and that propose to expand the period of ineligibility for a record suspension, currently referred to as a "pardon", and to make record suspensions unavailable for certain offences and for persons who have been convicted of more than three offences, prosecuted by indictment, and for each of which the individual received a sentence of two years or more. This bill corrects inconsistencies that occurred in the former bills before Parliament.

One of the areas of criminal law I received an extensive number of letters, emails and calls about is that dealing with violent and repeat young offenders. I have been particularly interested in correspondence I have received from young students themselves and I am always pleased to hear everyone's views on this subject.

Part 4, which is found at clauses 167 through 204, proposes reforms to the Youth Criminal Justice Act to strengthen its handling of violent and repeat young offenders.

Government Orders

These reforms include: highlighting the protection of the public as a principle, making it easier to detain youth charged with serious offences pending trial; ensuring that prosecutors consider seeking adult sentences for the most serious offences; prohibiting youth under the age of 18 from serving a sentence in an adult facility; and requiring police to keep records of extrajudicial measures. These reforms were previously proposed in Sébastien's law, which had been extensively studied by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights when it died on the order paper in the previous Parliament.

•(1530)

The bill includes changes to address concerns that had been highlighted by the provinces regarding the pretrial adult sentencing and deferred custody provisions in the former bill. A number of the provinces requested a less restrictive regime for the pretrial detention provisions than that of Bill C-4, and therefore the changes found in this bill respond by providing more flexibility to detain youth who are spiralling out of control and who pose a risk to the public and to themselves.

The test for pretrial detention will be self-contained in the act without reference to other sections of the Criminal Code.

Other changes are more technical, if that is possible, and include removing Bill C-4's proposed amendments in two areas: deleting reference to the standard of proof for an adult sentence, and the expanded scope of deferred custody and supervision orders.

Last, part 5, which is found at clauses 205 through 207, proposes amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to authorize immigration officers to refuse work permits to foreign nationals and workers where it would protect them against humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation and human trafficking. These proposals are in the same form they were in when they were previously proposed in former Bill C-56, the preventing trafficking, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable immigrants act.

I would point out as well that the proposed reforms would come into force in the same manner as originally proposed by the predecessor bills. Part 1 would come into force upon receiving royal assent, and the balance would come into force on a day to be fixed by the governor in council. This will enable us to consult with the provinces and territories on the time needed to enable them to prepare for the timely and effective implementation of these reforms.

I realize that I have taken some time to go through some of the details of this bill. We were very clear in the last election that this was a priority for this government. We have put these bills together and they better protect victims. As members know, in all the legislation that we have introduced, we always highlight how it better protects victims in this country and stand up for the interests of law-abiding Canadians.

I am pleased and proud to be associated, as are my colleagues, with this important piece of legislation.

•(1535)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, the public safety minister has pretty well lost all credibility when it comes to estimating what these crime bills are going to cost.

I point out the estimate he made originally on a couple of bills. His estimate was that it was going to cost \$90 million. That escalated up into the hundreds of millions and then into the billions. We are up to \$2 billion now just on the bills that have already been through the House of extra costs to the Government of Canada, and more important, to the provinces, because more of the burden has gone there.

With regard to this omnibus bill, are you planning to present to justice committee and/or the House a full analysis of how much it is going to cost the federal treasury and the provincial and territorial treasuries?

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind all members to direct their questions through the Speaker's chair.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, the hon. member will remember that when the public safety minister and I were before a committee of the House of Commons, we tabled hundreds of pages giving breakdowns and an analysis of what these pieces of legislation would cost the Canadian taxpayer.

In one sense I am pleased. If those members are truly worried about expenditures by the federal government, this is something new. I really have not heard this too much from the NDP over the years. Let us be fair. Most of the questions are always about spending more money. Those are the ones we get. If those members are now worried that somehow taking violent criminals off the street is going to cost money, I can assure them that the Minister of Public Safety has taken that all into consideration. Hundreds of pages have been tabled before them.

I would ask the hon. member to please look at the cost to victims in this country. Victims tell me every time I see them that they pay most of the costs. A study by the Department of Justice in 2008 confirms that. About 83% of all the costs of crime in this country are borne by victims. If those members are worried about costs, about taking a violent criminal off the street and locking up that individual, that is okay because that is their concern and their priority. That is fine, but they should also worry about the victim, the law-abiding Canadian who could be a constituent of theirs. I want them to worry about that individual as well.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this morning the minister appeared on *Canada AM* on CTV. He was interviewed by Seamus O'Regan, who asked him five times what the cost would be to the Canadian public, to the taxpayers, of the implications of this bill. Each time the minister refused to answer.

The minister has been asked several times today in the House of Commons, and perhaps he was asked the same question elsewhere. He still has failed to tell the House.

Government Orders

In fact, one of the minister's answers to Seamus O'Regan was that it would be a sustainable cost. If he can come to the conclusion that it will be sustainable, then surely he must know the amount. Does he know the amount and is not willing to tell the Canadian people, or will he tell us today? Will he give us the answer to the question he has been asked all day long?

If the minister absolutely refuses to answer the question of what the bill will cost, perhaps he will answer the question of how many times he has been asked that today.

• (1540)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I think I have been very clear. I can refer the hon. member to the hundreds of pages that were tabled before the parliamentary committee just prior to the previous election. I invite him to go through all those hundreds of pages and to note the comments of my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, with respect to this.

I did indicate that in 2008 there was a Department of Justice study on the costs of crime. It estimated that approximately \$99 billion is the cost of crime in this country. I will repeat that so the hon. member understands. The cost of crime is \$99 billion.

I appreciate that this is not a priority for the hon. member or for his party, but it is a priority for the Conservative Party that 83% of that cost is borne by the victims of crime. They are the ones who pay the price. I would hope that at some point in time those members will stand up and say that they are worried about costs and have become fiscal conservatives and they are worried about spending every dime, but they realize that most of the cost continues to be borne by victims in this country, who are the ones we have to stand up for. Those are the ones we have to protect.

I want the support of the hon. member and his party.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, as a British Columbian, I welcome members to visit the Okanagan any time.

It is a pleasure to be here and to have an opportunity to thank my hon. colleague for keeping our campaign commitment to keep our streets and our communities safe.

There was a horrific shooting this summer in our community. In British Columbia organized crime and the gangs, guns, and drug trafficking are serious issues. I am very appreciative that our government is committed to bringing some balance to standing up for victims within our court system.

One of the concerns raised is that judges are losing some of their ability to decide and that the government is forcing their decision making. I stand to be corrected but it is my understanding that the flexibility will remain within the judicial system and we are providing more tools for our law enforcement and judicial systems to be more effective and efficient.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I certainly thank the member for Kelowna—Lake Country for his continuing interest in this. I very much appreciate his support on all these efforts to better protect Canadians.

Our job as legislators is to provide guidelines for the courts. We provide maximum sentences on all criminal law legislation.

I recall a colleague saying many years ago, “Why put a maximum on? Just let the courts decide. If they want to give a guy more than five years, do not put a maximum”. I said that it was our job as legislators to put a maximum. On many occasions we are putting minimum sentences as well, but within the guidelines that we provide to the courts, it is obviously up to the courts where a sentence should lie for an individual who has been found guilty.

Many of those mandatory sentences are for drug crimes. I appreciate that and certainly it is my hope that this bill will quickly go to committee and will soon become the law of this country.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, in terms of the history, since 2006 in the justice committee and the public safety committee, I have repeatedly asked the various ministers of the government for cost assessments of all the bills that have gone through in this period of time. The information we got from the minister a few minutes ago was grossly inaccurate in that regard. I am not new to this file. I am not new to asking about the costs.

I ask the minister again. Is he going to say to the House at some point that he has gone to the public accounts officer, that he has checked with other sources and provide his analysis, not what the government did last time, even after it was found in contempt of the House for not providing this information? At best, it gave about 60%, probably only about 40%, of the information that the Parliamentary Budget Officer wanted to make a proper assessment.

Is the government going to give it all to us this time and is it going to do a valid assessment both for the federal government and the provinces?

• (1545)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I invite the hon. member to have a look at the documentation that was tabled before the committee. There were hundreds of pages of breakdowns.

What is really going on here is that if one does not agree that some of these violent individuals should be taken off the street, if one does not agree that people who are sexually exploiting children should receive mandatory minimum sentences, one will never be satisfied with the cost. I and my colleagues emphasize that the costs are borne by the victims right across the board. I hope, for once, that New Democrats would make that their priority. However, we have not heard it up to this point in time.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is really a historic day with regard to this bill in terms of the debate that we will see in the House over the next number of days and weeks.

It is historic because we have had a government for the last five years that has attempted to reverse the approach to the criminal justice system that we have taken in our country for the better part of 40 years.

Government Orders

It was about 40 years ago when governments, and not just governments in the ideological centre or left of the political spectrum, but progressive Conservative governments as well, followed this pattern. Then we saw the advance of the Reform and the Alliance, the radical right wing ideology adopted mostly from the United States, which, incidentally, is now reversing itself and looking at Canada as an example of how to deal with crime, with anti-social behaviour and how to build a fair, just and effective criminal justice system.

The current government is driven entirely by ideology, never by fact, never by solid evidence.

It is interesting. I always think of the minister who was the minister of justice before the current one, now the Minister of Public Safety, being challenged by Dan Gardner, one of the reporters or commentators for one of the Ottawa papers, to send him studies that showed deterrence worked, so he did. He sent him five studies. Three of them, when Mr. Gardner looked at them, showed that in fact deterrence did not work. The other two were totally unequivocal and were very subjective in their analysis and were not valid studies based on normal methodology for sociological and criminology studies.

The Conservatives have never been able to do anything better than that.

We heard today again that expression. The Conservatives stand in the House and talk about victims with the assumption that the bill, and the kinds of bills they have passed in the last five years, will somehow deter crime, that they will reduce that \$99 billion figure, which is highly suspect, as I keep repeating. They say they will do something to reduce crime by the use of punishment, by the use of deterrence, by the use of putting thousands and thousands more people into jail.

Not one study, not just in Canada, but any place in the developed world, any place in the democracy we can go to and find a study, says deterrence works. We are about to spend an additional, depending on whose estimates we want to use, anywhere from at least \$2 billion to \$11 billion, \$12 billion and \$13 billion over the next five years on a philosophy, on an ideology on criminal justice that does not work. The bill just repeats that.

This is me wearing my lawyer's hat to some degree. I have stood in the House over the last seven years as the critic for our party on both public safety and justice. I have advocated a number of times that we do need major reform to our Criminal Code and the methodology of doing that would be with omnibus bills. This is not the first omnibus bill we have had from the government; it actually is the second one. When I first heard the Conservatives would do that, I thought that they were finally listening to those of us who have advocated for the need for reform to the Criminal Code because of the duplication and contradictions in the Code, particularly around sentencing, but around offences as well.

However, the Conservatives are not doing that. All they are doing is lumping a whole bunch of bills together and sending them through, a number of bills that have no relevancy to each other. If they are to do an omnibus bill, if they are to do major reform to the Criminal Code, they have to do it systematically. For instance, even

in the bill we are seeing conflict in terms of sentencing principles that they are going to use as an example. We saw it in one of the newspapers reports overnight.

• (1550)

The bill will have this kind of a consequence. We are going to have a mandatory minimum penalty for an offence of trafficking a drug that is double what the mandatory minimum is for the rape of a child. We have that kind of confusion and contradiction just in this bill, and we have huge numbers of those kinds of contradictions.

Therefore, if we were really intent on building an effective criminal justice system that did not have these kinds of contradictions, that make it difficult for our police, judges, defence lawyers and the prosecutors to enforce the law, we would have started reform a long time ago.

I am going to go to the bill itself. As opposed to what the minister said, the bill is actually a composition of nine bills from the past Parliament. Although it has five parts to it, it actually encompasses nine different bills, and I will not have enough time to address all of them. Therefore, I will concentrate my comments, because of the cost factor, on the drug part of the bill.

This will be the third time that the bill is before the House. It has had some changes since the first time, but it is essentially the same. When it came before the House at that time, both the Conservative government and the Liberal party supported the bill. They got it passed. I am quite sure it went to the Senate. We had an election and it failed and we started over again.

In the last Parliament, it was a bill that came out of the Senate. At that time because of a change in leadership for the Liberals, they flip-flopped and decided they would oppose it.

We have been opposed to the bill in its various incarnations for two reasons: the cost; and the reality that the cost is totally unjustifiable in terms of this bill doing anything to combat drug trafficking. It is easy for us to say that.

I live in the most southern part of our country. In fact, I live in an area of the country that is south of our neighbours to the north in the United States. I have watched the United States legislature try to deal with the problem of drug trafficking. Starting about two and a half years ago, the Americans began to repeal legislation that had mandatory minimums. It was simply that they were going bankrupt in terms of keeping that many people in jail.

Government Orders

There was a similar pattern in California that hit its epitome a year ago in the spring. In the jails, people were double and triple bunking and were in fact being housed in the cafeterias and the gyms, with no rehabilitation or treatment, or sense that these people were going to get out, with a large number of them with mental health problems as well, the usual pattern. California was going to be required by the courts to release 35,000 to 45,000 inmates in that year. A good number of these inmates had been convicted of serious violent crimes, had no treatment or rehabilitation while they were in and they were going back out onto the streets. That kind of crisis occurred in the United States when it passed these kinds of laws and proceeded to enforce them. Over a period of 10 to 15 years, the prison population doubled there.

We are following the same route. It is back to the government refusing to look at the facts and accept any hard evidence of what this kind of legislation does. It is going down the same route that the United States went down between 15 and 20 years ago, and is now reversing itself. Now the Conservative government is starting down the same path.

It is not just the United States. If we go around the globe very few other countries have attempted this, I am happy to say. No other government in our western democracies has attempted this successfully. It does not work, yet in the next five years we are about to spend between \$10 billion to \$13 billion just on this bill.

• (1555)

The drug part of the bill in particular is going to increase the prison population, mostly at the provincial level. We have provinces that are double-bunking now to the rate of 200%. They are over capacity by 200%. There is not a province or territory that is not in excess of its capacity.

Perhaps the House should also appreciate this fact: we have signed on to an international protocol that says we will not do double-bunking at either the provincial or the federal level. We are in complete contravention of that protocol and have been for a number of years, and it is going to get much worse.

I know I am emphasizing the drug part of the bill because it is where the costs primarily are. It is not the only area, but it is the overwhelmingly large one. The vast majority of the people who are going to be affected by the bill are not the Hells Angels, not the bikers, not the people we have seen historically as organized crime. Again, I say that because we have studied the situation in the United States when it passed bills identical to this one. It is the low-hanging fruit that gets caught. The vast majority of those people, the petty traffickers in marijuana in particular, are the ones who get caught, especially because they only have to have six plants, and they do not have to be six-foot-high plants. It just says more than five plants. Someone with six plants that are three inches high will be considered a trafficker, in spite of some of the comments we have heard from the minister.

I do not think the minister has ever done a drug trafficking trial. I have, and the way the act is worded, anyone who has six plants or more cannot justify that he or she is not a trafficker. We are going to have a huge number of young people who are now being convicted of simple possession going to jail, including some of the children of the people sitting across the aisle from me and some of the children

of the people sitting on our side of the table. They will be going to jail for at least six months simply because they have six marijuana plants.

That is the consequence of the bill, and we are going to end up, as taxpayers, paying the toll.

I would like to deal in some detail as well with the bill that was Bill C-4 in the last Parliament, the bill that dealt with young offenders.

This one had a very interesting history. It was the attempt on the part of the government to return us to an old pattern of history, when we used to treat youth much more harshly than we have in the last 15 or 20 years. We heard from the minister again today that they are justifying it on the basis that they are going after the young offender who is already a serious violent offender. I say this from all of the parties that are sitting in the House and that were at the justice committee last time that we all accepted that as a reality. That is just a historical side note. We had major reform to the young offender law almost six years ago now. When the minister brought this bill forward, there was a lot of commentary from a number of sides that it was too soon to amend the bill. The committee as a whole, all political parties, said no. It was true generally, and some of the things they were trying to do—in particular, to reintroduce deterrence to young offenders—we rejected. We said no. We said we needed to look at whether there were mechanisms or enforcement tools or legislative tools that we could give our police and our prosecutors, and ultimately our judges, to be able to deal with that small percentage of young offenders who are already serious, violent risks to our society.

• (1600)

We all conceded that this group existed and we also felt that we could do something about it. Interestingly, three prosecutors came before the committee voluntarily. I and the other opposition parties do not take any credit for finding these senior prosecutors of young offenders in their respective provinces of Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta. They got together and asked collectively to come and make presentations.

The first thing they said to the committee was that the government's bill would do just the opposite: it was going to make it more difficult for them to prosecute serious, violent youth offenders.

In the last few weeks I received a letter from the attorney general confirming the prosecutors in Saskatchewan. We had representation from two Conservative governments and two NDP governments before the committee saying that we had messed up really badly, that our bill was going to do exactly the opposite of what we were telling the country it was going to do.

Government Orders

I take credit for asking them if they could give us the amendments they needed, and they did that. I want to recognize the work that they did. They gave us three amendments. Basically they let the youth criminal justice system focus in on the serious offenders and let the rest of the system work, because the rest of the system, from everything we heard at committee, is working reasonably well. It is effective, fair and just and it deals with youth crime quite effectively, but it is not doing so with serious offenders.

The prosecutors gave us three amendments and came back a second time to present and explain them to us in detail. I asked government members if they would adopt them. They said no. They were so certain they had a perfect bill that in spite of the experts, their own prosecutorial experts, the government refused to accept those amendments.

Interestingly, and I will give them credit for this, in this incarnation, this omnibus bill, Conservatives have taken two of the amendments. The third amendment deals with sentencing of youth as adults, and they need that amendment again for this one. I have no answer for why it is not in here. I was hoping I would have enough time to ask the minister today, but I will have to do that subsequently. However, it is not there.

Those amendments are necessary in the bill. Again, I repeat that the NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc members were prepared to support those amendments, and the government refused to do so simply because, in dealing with the Conservatives, it is their way or the highway. They were absolutely adamant about refusing to take those amendments.

The third part I want to address is the international transfer of prisoners. We have had a long history in this country of signing treaties with other countries that say that if we have one of their citizens convicted of a crime in prison in our country, we will allow the prisoner to apply to his or her country to be returned to that country of origin. Of course, we have the vice versa arrangement for ourselves, so that one of our citizens in another country can apply to be returned to Canada. I do not know how long we have had those arrangements, but it has been a number of decades.

When the Conservatives first came into power in 2006, they unilaterally decided they were going to change the pattern and reject a whole bunch of these applications. We went from accepting something in the range of 90% of those applications to less than 50%. There were court applications made against the government's conduct, and it was slapped really hard by the Federal Court.

The Conservatives have now tried to put into the bill what really amounts to absolute discretion for the minister to be able to continue that practice of reducing those numbers. This has created an international incident between ourselves and the United States, with which most of these prisoner exchanges occur. Americans actually sent a note of protest to the Canadian government in January 2010 because it had so radically changed the pattern.

• (1605)

The bill has major problems. There are parts of it that New Democrats could in fact support; I could not get to them because my time is just about up, but with the attitude we have of the

government, it is going to be very difficult to work out those kinds of compromises.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three quick points to make to my colleague, whose remarks I enjoyed, as I always do. These points all relate in one way or another to costs.

First, he is forecasting massive increases in the prison population. Until now the forecasts that were put out by Correctional Service Canada were based on what we did in the past, and these huge increases simply have not materialized, so I am not sure what he is basing that on.

Second, obviously a lot of prison structures are very old and crumbling and a lot of infrastructure has to be replaced right now, regardless of anything else. Would he acknowledge that replacement will cost some amount of money? I do not know what that is.

Third, I think we all believe in rehabilitation and deterrence, but it is difficult to quantify. The statistics I have seen say that a habitual criminal commits about 15 offences a year. Would he acknowledge that there is a significant cost, which we really could not determine, to society and victims of leaving that person on the street for a year, when as a habitual criminal the person could be incarcerated, which would prevent the 15 crimes that would prey on victims?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton Centre for those questions, although I still have not forgiven him for the damage he caused to the centre. I could not bring my grandson to visit it the day I was there. The centre is right across the street from his office, and I am sure he caused the flood in the centre the day I was there and my grandson could not visit.

With regard to past estimates that I know the government has been putting out, those estimates are based longitudinally. They have not all come to fruition up to this point. They will eventually. I do not think the estimates are that far off.

Let me say to the member that since the Conservative government has been in power, the budget for corrections has almost doubled. It is not quite 100%, but it is very close, just in five years. It almost six years now, but we have not seen the last year, so it probably has doubled by now. That is very real. Even though those estimates have not fully come to fruition, I believe they will, because I think they were properly done by Correctional Service Canada. We have very good Correctional Service Canada people. We need more of them, but they are very good.

With regard to prison repair, I agree with that. I know that in Ontario, in and around Kingston in particular, there are prisons that are over 100 years old and have had minimal repair in that period of time. There is no objection if that was the purpose, but that is not the purpose of the money that is being proposed to be spent. It is to house new prisoners, not to do the major repairs that are needed.

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Finally, with regard to habitual criminals, there are studies in the United States that suggest or show exactly what the member has suggested, which is that if people are kept in prison longer, the crime rate is going to go down. For a short period of time, I would accept that. However, when criminals are in for an extra length of time, they are in prisons where there is no rehabilitation for them at all. That was the California experience. There was no rehabilitation at all. When they get out, the crimes they commit are more violent, and in fact the crime rate goes up.

• (1610)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the reality is that we have seen this type of law and order policy in the United States, as he has articulated. If putting more people in prison for longer periods of time created safer communities, American cities would be the safest in the world, because nobody incarcerates more people than the Americans.

Earlier today, in response to the hon. member's questions, the minister stated that he had totally fulfilled the demands of the House in terms of the information requested regarding the costs of the government's justice bills.

I want to inform the hon. member that the answer given by the minister earlier today in the House was false. In fact, it was my motion that led to the minister's appearance before the operations and estimates committee due to the Speaker's ruling of contempt of Parliament by the Conservative government. When the minister appeared before the government operations committee, he did a data dump the morning of his appearance, dumping thousands of pages of paper, and he responded to only 26% of the information requested by Parliament for the cost of the legislation.

How does the hon. member feel about the continued stonewalling by the government and the minister of this Parliament, and about their refusal to respect Parliament and provide that kind of—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, I acknowledge and I am quite aware of the circumstances of how that occurred. For the first time in the history of this Parliament, and perhaps of every Parliament in the Commonwealth, a government was found in contempt for adamantly refusing to provide material. The hon. member is right. The contempt did continue after the contempt order and the majority vote that took place which found the government in contempt.

Specifically with regard to crime bills, it is my understanding that the Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that under that contempt order the information he received was no better than 60% and perhaps as little as 40%. Accordingly, he was not fully satisfied with the results of the analysis he had prepared. However, in retrospect, he did provide a much closer analysis than what was prepared by the Minister of Public Safety.

The Minister of Public Safety repeatedly told the House that the crime bills would only cost \$90 million, a figure which has now increased to \$2.2 billion. These are the kinds of discrepancies we are seeing.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, it appears sometimes we seek justice through headlines. Whenever there is a violent crime somewhere in the country the media and talk shows go on about it for weeks feeding the fever of all Canadian citizens who then get rattled and feel that we have to do something.

I take offence when the Minister of Justice indicates or hints to the Canadian people that we on this side of the House do not care for victims. That is nonsense. There is not one member of Parliament from any party in the House who is not concerned about crime and what it does to victims in the country.

The serious concern I have is that I have heard the anecdotal and not factual evidence that one-third of our prison inmates have mental illness. There is a huge push in this country from academia, corporations and governments of all sides to deal with this serious issue. However, the provincial and federal governments ignore the plight of the mentally ill and incarcerate them. Instead of having institutions for the mentally ill to get the help they need, they are thrown in jail.

Would my hon. colleague comment on how many more people who commit crimes due to mental illness would find themselves incarcerated instead of getting the help they so richly deserve if the bill goes through?

• (1615)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, with regard to the assessment, Mr. Head, who is the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, was before the public safety committee two or three years ago. His estimate then was that 50% of all inmates in federal prisons would be able to get mental health treatment under our provincial health plans.

On the 33% or 30% to 35% figures that my friend raised of those who have been diagnosed with serious mental health problems and given a prognosis, treatment in fact would be available in the community. However, very little of that treatment is available in our federal institutions.

I forget what the bill was we were dealing with a year or so ago, but evidence came forward from a psychologist who had received the Order of Canada and was recognized as an international expert in treating mentally ill people who had committed serious crimes that 10 psychologists had been cut out of the federal system in the Kingston area and that their contracts would not be renewed.

In terms of the second part of my colleague's question on the consequences of the drug bill, it is the small-time traffickers who are drug abusers and addicts who would end up in prison.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, 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 Cardigan, Fisheries and Oceans; the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, Canada Revenue Agency.

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[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today marks the second speech that I have given in the House. It has been a busy week.

As some of the members may know, I am a new member of Parliament for the riding of Charlottetown, the birthplace of Confederation. I trust I will be allowed this opportunity to thank the good people of Charlottetown for bestowing upon me the honour and privilege of representing them here in the chamber.

Madam Speaker, I very much look forward to working with you and with my colleagues on both sides of the House.

As members may know, my colleague, the justice critic and hon. member for Mount Royal, a former minister of justice and a world-renowned advocate of human rights, a law scholar and professor, is at the United Nations today participating in meetings. We wish him, along with our Prime Minister, well in their deliberations at the United Nations meetings as the world watches the events regarding the Middle East unfold.

I am here today to talk about Bill C-10. The bill is large and includes nine bills from the previous Parliament all lumped into one big buffet of division and fear. The title of the bill goes on for about seven lines. I can just imagine how much time, effort, deliberation in meetings and agonizing it must have taken to come up with a name for this bill.

I tried to imagine some of the other names that might have fallen on the cutting room floor. I will speculate on a few of the names that did not quite make it: an act to divide Canadians and keep the Conservative base happy; an act to provide inmates for empty prisons; an act to fill prisons in order to build new ones; an act to take more aboriginals off reserves and put them into prisons; an act to provide a Conservative comprehensive affordable housing strategy; an act to make prisons the largest mental health institutions in Canada; and, one I particularly like, an act to stimulate the penal sector.

After many lunches, dinners and late night meetings, the Conservatives finally settled on a short title for the bill. I understand this was the runner-up to the one that actually made it, that being, we won a majority, now get out of our way act.

Never has a piece of legislation been more deserving of the title "an act" because that is what this is. It is a performance. Facts be damned, crime statistics and effective crime prevention do not matter because the government is determined to put on a show. Simply put, it is a disgrace of the highest order.

With all the new prisons being built as a result of this "hang 'em high" mentality, one wonders who will staff these new prisons. Is this an opportunity for an alternate service delivery or a public-private partnership? Perhaps we could have the operations of these institutions farmed out for profit. Is that the plan? I am sure it is a question that the Conservative propaganda machine will surely avoid and deny.

This is a bill worthy of mockery. It is a bill that plays on fear, not hope.

● (1620)

It is a bill that ignores evidence and facts. It creates an illusion that crime is out of control and there is mass insurrection in the streets. It is without costing. It is a bill that does not reflect the values of Canadians as a smart, caring society.

We seem to be well on our way to a system of justice more reflective of our neighbours to the south and not reflective of a country like Canada.

Catherine Latimer from the John Howard Society stated:

We think it will endanger corrections workers and inmates and compromise rights and not promote good corrections and undermine principles of justices and have a disproportionately harsh impact on some of the most vulnerable members of our society...blindly following failed American policies is not in the interest of Canadians—

As it appears that the bill was influenced if not drafted by our Republican friends in the United States, I will quote from a recent U. S. editorial. With regard to crime and prisons it states:

California spends more money on prisons than on higher education. The governor is right—we've got it backwards and it's time to reverse course.

Only sixty-eight percent of our high school students are graduating. Yet we pay prison guards substantially more than teachers.

Fear of crime led us to vote for long prison terms and the three strikes law. We didn't intend to spend \$4 billion more on prisons than colleges—

The less educated our workforce...the more we feed the prisons.

It's time to admit our mistakes and make tough decisions. By pumping so much money into prisons, we're starving education. We cannot afford the consequences.

With regard to crime rates, in a report released earlier this year by Statistics Canada it stated:

Police-reported crime reaches its lowest level since the early 1970's.

It goes on to state that the "police-reported crime rate, which measures the overall volume of crime, continued to decline" right up until last year. In fact last year it was down 5%, "reaching its lowest level since 1973".

There is more. It claims that violent crime is at its lowest since 1999.

Last year both the volume and severity of violent crime fell 3% from the previous year, while the decline in the violent crime severity index was more notably down 6%. This is the fourth straight year where there has been a decline in the violent crime severity index and the largest drop in more than a decade. Overall, violent crimes accounted for just over one in five offences. Among the violent crimes that saw a decline were: attempted murder, down 14%; homicide, down 10%; robbery, down 7%; and serious assault, down 5%. In contrast, increases were reported among firearms offences.

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We on this side of the House are partial to public policy based on evidence. However, despite the evidence the Conservatives, or should I say the horsemen of the apocalypse, would like us to believe that there is mass chaos in the streets. Only in the Conservative world would we see a statistic showing firearms offences increasing by 11% only to be followed by the decision to get rid of the gun registry.

I mentioned our aboriginal community earlier in my speech. According to the 2006 census, 3.1% of our adult population identified themselves as aboriginal yet in the same year aboriginal adults accounted for 18% of our prison population in provincial and territorial institutions and 19% in federal institutions.

• (1625)

The bill would do a lot of bad things for Canada, not the least of which is an increase in aboriginal Canadians in our prisons.

How can a government, in any way, be taken seriously when one of the likely results is that the bill would lock up even more aboriginal Canadians? That is a national disgrace.

I understand that my words today might cause some difficulty and, in fact, I would suggest perhaps some disagreement from the members opposition. Although I am a new member of Parliament, I have views, which is part of the reason I am standing here today. My views are rooted in values of fairness and justice. I want to see crime legislation that is evidence-based, cost-effective and focused on crime prevention, not retribution. I will not stand for any suggestion that I, or the members of this caucus, are soft on crime. It is simply not the case. It will be rejected in the strongest possible terms.

I will close by saying that the government pretends to be tough on crime. It pretends to care. It is a game for the Conservatives. It is a diversion from the real issues that matter to Canadians. This week the government House leader told Canadians that the government will be focused on the economy during this session of Parliament and yet the first two days of this House have been occupied, not by proposals to help the economy and create jobs, but by a bill that is not evidence-based and that seeks to divide Canadians. It is a diversion.

The government likes to use slogans and gimmicks. It likes to look tough. Many of us on this side are wondering when the Conservatives will get tough on creating jobs, get tough on fighting poverty, get tough on fighting climate change, get tough on fighting for health care and get tough on helping the most vulnerable.

The only thing the government is tough on is the truth and it is Canadians who will suffer as a result.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

I move, seconded by the member for Winnipeg North:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-10, An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts, because its provisions ignore the best evidence with respect to public safety, crime prevention and rehabilitation of

offenders; because its cost to the federal treasury and the cost to be downloaded onto the provinces for corrections have not been clearly articulated to this House; and because the bundling of these many pieces of legislation into a single bill will compromise Parliament's ability to review and scrutinize its contents and implications on behalf of Canadians".

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, does my colleague across the aisle not recognize that in the last election there was a very clear distinction given to Canadians? On one side, there was the Conservative government which would finally get tough on crime and finally reverse the damage that the Liberals did to our criminal justice system by being soft on criminals and ignoring victims. Does he not recognize that the Liberals were reduced to 34 seats? Canadians do not want the Liberal way of dealing with criminals. Could he recognize that, acknowledge it and get in touch with Canadians as they view the criminal justice system today?

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Charlottetown, I should have acknowledged that the amendment was receivable.

The hon. member for Charlottetown.

• (1635)

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, I acknowledge that, yes, 40% of those who voted or roughly 25% of Canadians did support her party in the last election. I also acknowledge that there were significantly less who supported our party.

However, I would point out that this absolutely flies in the face of evidence. This is driven by ideology. This absolutely ignores the statistics that indicate that crime is going down. How this can be steam-rolled through in this manner is not reflective of Canadian values. Canadians are better than that. We are a smart, compassionate society.

We need to focus on the root causes. We need to focus on crime prevention. We need to focus on the economy.

When I am in my riding and people come through the door looking for help from their representative in the federal government, it is not crime on the streets that they want to talk about. They want a job.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will recognize members who are sitting in their proper place.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Charlottetown for his critique of the bill we are now examining on safe streets, otherwise known as the omnibus crime bill.

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My question is whether there are any portions of this bill that the hon. member finds that he might want to support were they not bundled together as an omnibus crime bill. For myself, the justice for victims of terrorism act as a stand-alone bill was one I would have voted for. However, I cannot imagine voting for other sections of this omnibus crime bill, such as those that would make it an offence to have more than five marijuana plants, as an example, to add longer sentences for criminal activity.

Is there any part of this bill the hon. member for Charlottetown could support?

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, the short answer to the question is, yes.

It is most unfortunate that the bill has been presented in the manner that it has, putting together 110 pages and compiling 9 acts. If there were any room for movement, compromise, amendment or to have this bill severed up into pieces, there are elements of it that our party could support. In the manner in which it is presented, it is not supportable.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Speaker, if the motion by the member for Charlottetown were to fail would his party be prepared to support Bill C-10?

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, I had hoped that I made that fairly clear in the course of my remarks. Lest there be any confusion, should the motion fail we will most certainly be voting against the bill.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, when I was back in the campaign in May, crime was a big thing. People really wanted to know what we were going to do about crime and they were really concerned that our crime legislation did not actually pass last spring. Now they want to see it pass.

I am kind of concerned why the Liberals, all of a sudden, are starting to back criminals again? Why can they not get behind victims for a change? Why can they not recognize the importance of a victim and preventing victims. Could the member please explain to me why his party in such great support of criminals?

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, here we go again, the language of division. This party and this member are not soft on crime. We are absolutely not backing criminals. I absolutely reject that suggestion and, quite frankly, it is offensive.

We stand in favour of victims. We stand in favour of crime prevention. We stand in favour of putting more resources into the root causes. This is all about division. It is all about streamrolling something through that is based on ideology and not on statistics.

Why will that member not recognize that crime rates are going down and address the root causes? This is not the answer. This is not the right way to go about it.

● (1640)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague from Charlottetown on his first speech in the House. It was excellent.

Earlier today, the minister, in introducing the bill, talked about his concern for victims, and I think that is a concern that is shared by all members of the House. As my colleague from Sackville—Eastern

Shore said a few minutes ago, it is time the members on the Conservative side recognized and accepted that. However, if this does not have the effect of lowering crime, how does it help victims?

It is reasonable to look at what has happened elsewhere when measures like this have been taken. We just need to look, for instance, at the U.S. where the incarceration rate is 700% higher per capita than it is in Canada. In California, where it had the “three strikes you're out” rule, there have been huge increases in incarceration. Does it have a much lower crime rate than we do? The fact is, its crime rate, like ours, has been dropping for 20 years. However, the rate of violent crime in the U.S. is still far higher than in Canada, suggesting that what the government is doing here will have no appreciable effect, perhaps none at all, on the rate of crime in Canada and will not help victims whatsoever.

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, the evidence is irrefutable that in the United States this tough on crime legislation, the increasing of mandatory minimum sentences, does not work. It is extremely costly. It costs \$108,000 per year to house an inmate in a federal institution. Is that caring for our economy?

There is absolutely no evidence in Statistics Canada nor in other jurisdictions that have taken this approach that it works. It is ideologically driven and it flies in the face of facts and evidence. For a government that purports to be focused on the economy, it is a backward step.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, the safe streets and communities act fulfills this government's commitment, as noted in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, to reintroduce law and order legislation to combat crime and terrorism. As highlighted by the Minister of Justice, the bill is in five parts and brings together the criminal law reforms that were proposed in nine bills in the last session.

Amendments to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act are found in part 2 of the bill, from clause 39 through clause 51 inclusively. These amendments are the same as those proposed in Bill S-10, which was introduced in May 2010, passed by the Senate last December and died on the order paper when Parliament was dissolved last March.

I also note that the government first introduced these amendments to address serious drug crimes as Bill C-26 in 2007 and again as Bill C-15 in 2009. We remain committed to enacting these reforms now included in the safe streets and communities act.

These amendments are not about imposing mandatory minimum sentences for all drug crimes. These amendments propose targeted, mandatory minimum sentences for serious drug crimes and ensure that those who carry out these crimes will be penalized. These amendments clearly send the message that Canadians find this type of criminal behaviour unacceptable.

A mandatory minimum sentence is the starting point for the judge's consideration of the appropriate jail term. Where a minimum sentence applies, the sentence imposed by the judge cannot be less. Presently there are no mandatory minimum penalties in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, or CDSA. The CDSA provides for maximum penalties based on the prohibited activity involved as well as on the substances involved. The maximum penalty for the most serious offences involving the most dangerous drugs is life imprisonment.

The most serious drug offences in the CDSA, as measured by their maximum penalty, are trafficking, possession for the purpose of trafficking, importation and exportation and production in respect of schedule I drugs. What are those drugs? They are drugs such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and morphine, and schedule II drugs which are cannabis-related.

All of these offences involving Schedule I drugs are punishable by up to life imprisonment. The offence of trafficking and possession for the purpose of trafficking of cannabis in amounts over three kilograms is punishable by up to life imprisonment, as are the offences of importation and exportation of any amount of cannabis. The offence of producing cannabis is punishable by up to seven years imprisonment.

The least severe penalties in the CDSA for designated substances offences, up to 12 months imprisonment on summary conviction, are reserved for offences involving substances listed in schedules IV and V; that is, substances such as diazepam, or Valium, and secobarbital, Seconal. It should be noted, however, that most of the prohibited activities in the CDSA are legal if committed by someone possessing the proper licence, permit, or exemption.

There are some who do not agree with the drug-related amendments proposed in the bill. They are of the view that serious drug offences do not require a response such as that contained in this proposed legislation. However, serious drug crime is a serious problem in Canada and it requires a serious legislative approach. That is what we are bringing to this issue.

• (1645)

Marijuana cultivation offences have increased significantly in the past several years. According to a study on marijuana grow operations in British Columbia, my home province, in 2003 approximately 39% of all reported marijuana cultivation cases, or 4,514, were located in B.C. Between 1997 and 2000, the total number of these cases increased by over 220%. Although the number of individual operations in B.C. levelled off between 2000 to 2003, the estimated quantity of marijuana produced has increased from 19,729 kilos in 1997 to a seven year high of 79,817 kilos in 2003, due to the size and sophistication of individual operations.

Investigations by BC Hydro indicate the existence of thousands of possible marijuana grow operations. The increase in the illicit production of marijuana has occurred not just in B.C., of course, but across all of Canada.

Available RCMP data indicates a rise in synthetic drug production operations in the last 10 years. The RCMP indicates that there were 25 clandestine labs seized in 2002. In 2008, 43 clandestine labs were seized across Canada. In 2009, 45 clandestine labs were seized by

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various Canadian police agencies. The majority of labs seized were methamphetamine and ecstasy labs.

It is in part because of the existence of these illicit activities that the Prime Minister unveiled Canada's national anti-drug strategy in October 2007. The national anti-drug strategy provided new resources to prevent illegal drug use, including illicit drug use by young people, to treat people who had drug addictions and to fight illegal drug crime.

The strategy comprises a two-track approach, one which will be tough on drug crime and the other which will focus on drug users.

The national anti-drug strategy includes three action plans: preventing illicit drug use; treating those with illicit drug dependencies; and combatting the production and distribution of illicit drugs.

The action plan to combat the production and distribution of illicit drugs contains a number of elements, including ensuring that strong and adequate penalties are in place for serious drug crimes. It is within this context that the drug-related amendments of this bill are to be viewed. Moreover, these amendments follow through on one of this government's key priorities, which is combatting crime and making our communities safer for all Canadians.

As I have mentioned, domestic operations related to the production and distribution of marijuana and synthetic drugs have dramatically increased, resulting in a serious problem in some regions of Canada. The situation has reached such a point in some parts of Canada that law enforcement agencies are overwhelmed.

Illicit drug production can pose serious health and public safety hazards to those in or around them. They can produce environmental hazards, pose cleanup problems and endanger the lives and health of whole communities. They are lucrative businesses, and I use that term loosely, and attract a variety of organized crime groups. Huge profits are available with little risk to operators and these profits are used to finance other criminal activities.

The penalties for drug-related offences and the sentences imposed on offenders are considered by many to be too lenient and not commensurate with the level of harm imposed on communities by such operations. The reforms that the government is pursuing in this bill are meant to deal with these concerns.

As members are undoubtedly aware, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act contains a complex offence and penalty structure. Penalties depend on the nature of the prohibited activity and on the type of substance involved. The most problematic and dangerous substances are listed under schedules I and II and the most serious offences involving these substances attract the severest penalties, up to life imprisonment. As I have noted, the CDSA does not currently contain any minimum penalties. The drug-related amendments of the safe streets and communities act propose to enact such minimum penalties for specific offences.

The offences being targeted are: trafficking, possession for the purpose of trafficking, production, importing, exporting and possession for the purpose of exporting drugs.

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•(1650)

The drugs that would be covered are schedule I drugs, such as cocaine, heroine and methamphetamine, and schedule II drugs, such as marijuana.

The drug-related mandatory minimum penalty scheme proposed in the bill is based on the presence of specific aggravating factors, most of which are commonly present in serious drug crimes. The scheme would not apply to possession offences or to offences involving drugs such as diazepam or valium.

As I noted at the beginning of my remarks, the drug-related proposals contained in the bill reflect a tailored approach to MMPs for serious drug offences. Some further details about the targeted or tailored regime will assist hon. members in understanding the approach and supporting speedy passage of the bill, we believe.

For schedule I drugs, and that is heroine, cocaine, or methamphetamine, the bill proposes a one year minimum sentence for the majority of the serious drug offences if there are certain aggravating factors. The aggravating factors exist where: the offence is committed for the benefit of, at the direction of or in association with organized crime; the offence involved violence, or threat of violence, or weapons or a threat of the use of weapons; or the offence is committed by someone who was convicted or served a term of imprisonment for a serious drug offence in the previous 10 years. If youth are present or the offence occurs in a prison, the minimum sentence is increased to two years.

In the case of importing, exporting and possession for the purpose of exporting, the minimum sentence would be one year if the offence is committed for the purpose of trafficking or the person, while committing the offence, abused a position of trust or authority or had access to an area that is restricted to authorized persons and used that access to commit the offence. The penalty will be raised to two years if the offence involves more than one kilogram of a schedule I drug. Again, these are drugs such as heroine, cocaine, or methamphetamine.

A minimum sentence of two years is provided for a production offence involving a schedule I drug. The minimum sentence for the production of schedule I drugs increases to three years where aggravating factors relating to health and safety are present. That is where: the person used real property that belonged to a third party to commit the offence; the production constituted a potential security, health or safety hazard to children who were in the location where the offence was committed or were in the immediate area; the production constituted a potential public safety hazard in a residential area; or the person placed or set a trap.

For schedule II drugs, such as marijuana, cannabis resin, et cetera, the proposed mandatory minimum sentence for trafficking, possession for the purposes of trafficking, importing or exporting and possession for the purpose of exporting is one year if certain aggravating factors such as violence, recidivism or organized crime are present. If factors such as trafficking to youth are present, the minimum is increased to two years.

For the offence of marijuana production, the bill proposes mandatory penalties based on the number of plants involved: production of six to two hundred plants and if the plants are

cultivated for the purpose of trafficking, six months; production of 201 to 500 plants, the penalty, one year; production of more than 500 plants, two years; and production of cannabis resin for the purpose of trafficking, one year. The minimum sentences for the production of schedule II drugs increases by 50% where any of the aggravating factors relating to health and safety, which I have just described, are present.

It is important to note that the drug-related proposals of the bill are not limited to creating minimum sentences. Amphetamines, as well as the date rape drug GHB and Rohypnol would be transferred from schedule III to schedule I, thereby allowing the courts to impose longer sentences for offences involving these dangerous drugs.

The maximum penalty for producing marijuana would be increased from seven to fourteen years imprisonment. That is the maximum penalty, speaking about the other end of the scale now.

•(1655)

Last, I wish to point out that this legislation is not just about punishing drug offenders by enhancing the sentence provisions. The proposed legislation would allow the courts, including drug treatment courts, to exempt an offender from the mandatory minimum sentence that would otherwise be imposed where the offence involved no other aggravating factors other than a previous conviction for a serious drug offence, and the offender successfully completes a treatment program.

The proposed reforms to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act also require that within five years after the coming into force of these provisions, a committee of the Senate or of this House or a committee of both places undertake a comprehensive review of these provisions and their operation, including, my friend opposite will be pleased to hear, a cost benefit analysis of the minimum sentence provisions.

It is a fundamental principle of the Canadian sentencing framework that a sentence should be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. The Criminal Code provides that the purpose of sentencing is to impose sanctions on offenders that are just in order to contribute to the respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society, something we all want.

Accordingly, the objectives in sentencing are to denounce unlawful conduct, deter the offenders and others from committing crimes and separate offenders from society where necessary, as well as to assist in rehabilitating offenders, have them accept responsibility for their actions and repair the very real harm that they have caused to victims or the community.

I would submit to members of the House and to Canadians in general that the proposed drug related mandatory minimum penalties contained in this bill meet these requirements. These are strong measures but they are reasonable and they are meaningful, and a meaningful response to a problem that is increasing in and plaguing our cities.

The manner in which these minimum penalties would apply is intended to ensure that they do not result in grossly disproportionate sentences being handed down.

Government Orders

As parliamentarians, we are this country's lawmakers. It is incumbent upon us to see that our laws provide appropriate and adequate measures to address this very serious problem.

Some members of the House may be of the view that serious drug offences do not require a response such as the one contained in the bill. However, serious drug crime is a growing problem in Canadian cities and in smaller towns, and a serious legislative response is required.

The government has made tackling crime a priority in order to make our streets and our communities safer. This bill is a reasonable, balanced and narrowly structured approach which the government is taking toward realizing this goal.

I am certain that we will have the support of the majority of the members of the House for these measures. I ask everyone to please consider them carefully.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, currently, only one out of five prisoners has access to anger management programs or to drug and alcohol abuse programs. Right now, these prisoners are released without having had access to treatment, which increases their risk of reoffending. This bill will send even more people to prison, which will increase pressure on the limited resources for these programs.

How can the government introduce a bill that will send even more people to jail, when existing prisoners do not even have access to the rehabilitation treatment they need?

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, the government does not create offenders. We are not in that business. We are in the business of dealing with offenders when offences have been committed and standing up for victims of crime.

With respect to the issue of the mentally ill in prisons, we are aware of that. It is a serious problem. It is one the Canadian Bar Association has identified and it is one we continue to work on with our partners in the provinces who are primarily responsible for treatment and those kinds of health issues. However, that does not make the suffering of a victim any less and it does not make their recovery any shorter.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a different concept of what harm reduction is. To me, harm reduction has less to do with the penalty phase in drug offences and more to do with the abuses that are caused by drugs, trying to rehabilitate and the programs that we have, which is more of an international concept.

I do want to speak to the issue of the mandatory minimum as it serves as a deterrent to crime. Now I ask this honestly. I am not infusing any opinion at this point. I would like to hear the hon. member's opinion. The hon. member says that in order to make the streets safe, we are imposing a mandatory minimum. We have heard from my NDP colleague who spoke passionately about mandatory minimum records around the world and, in many cases, it did not live up to what was expected.

In this particular situation, if a mandatory minimum is imposed, will it actually deter the crime that is being spoken about here? Will it actually make communities that much safer?

I would like the hon. member to explain reducing crime and reducing the number of future victims as a concept of mandatory minimums.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, would that I had a crystal ball and I could determine ahead of time just what all the effects would be both of crime and the impact on victims.

What we do see in the 2008 Department of Justice study is that the victims of crime bore 83% of the cost of crime in that year in Canada, which was over \$99 billion. Costs include costs to property, costs to time off work and costs of injuries. There are so many costs borne by the victims.

When we speak of minimum sentences, we are also trying to achieve some consistency of sentencing across Canada. As the hon. member may know, there are vast differences in sentencing from province to province with respect to very similar circumstances. We are trying to target that as well.

• (1705)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Speaker, as a retired police officer and one who has conducted countless cannabis-marijuana operations and was qualified as an expert for the Supreme Court of British Columbia in relation to grow-ops and the amounts that are required for the purpose of trafficking, I applaud this act coming forward as it would give the police officers, who work on the streets on a daily basis, the knowledge that something will be happening when they lay a charge.

Could my colleague please further explain how this bill would instill confidence to the public, something that Canadians have asked us to do?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, even though my colleague sits on the other side, we are on the same side with respect to where we actually sit in the House.

I appreciate what the hon. member said. We are trying to give law enforcement the tools it needs to deal with what is, as evidenced by my earlier remarks, a growing problem. My home province and the hon. member's home province of British Columbia particularly know the damage and costs caused by large grow-op operations, the connections to organized crime, the use of these operations and their products as currency in other crime, and it escalates from there.

This gives law enforcement some better tools to deal with those situations.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech by the parliamentary secretary. I have had occasion to meet her a couple of times outside the House. I have always found her to be very reasonable and rational. I think we will have to say that we simply disagree on the efficacy of mandatory minimum sentences.

I would like to ask the hon. member about another provision of the bill, which she did not touch on, which was the international transfer of prisoners. I think this is very much a public safety issue.

Government Orders

Would the member not agree that it would be better for almost all of those international prisoners, rather than completing their sentence abroad and coming back to Canada with no notice to Canadians and with no supervision, to be transferred back here and, on their release, be subject to our monitoring and parole system?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, with respect to that particular aspect, that is under public safety. As I am Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, it is not directly under my ministry. We do recognize that this is an issue when are incarcerated in other countries. It is something that the minister needs to consider when agreeing with transfers. There are inter-jurisdictional issues that come into play. In other words, it depends on the country, our relations with that country, how the rule of law is seen in that country and what that country's laws are.

However, we are aware that this is something we need to be vigilant about.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. parliamentary secretary if the government would give any consideration to allowing this House to consider these individual bills as individual bills and not as an omnibus bill. The omnibus bill does present difficulties for many of us who would like to see amendments to some sections, approval of others and so on. However, as a package, this presents problems.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, I am aware that the member is new to this House, as I am in this session, and, therefore, may not be aware that all of these bills have come before the House before, as mentioned in my early remarks, some going back several years. With respect to the trafficking provisions, it is the fourth time this has come before the House. These will be studied in committee, as all bills are. They will be looked at clause by clause, discussed and witnesses will be heard, but they are being put forward as a comprehensive package. That is what we promised the voters. We are committed to protecting victims of crime. We told the Canadian public that and we will honour our commitments.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, does the member not see the value in terms of investing more resources into things that would prevent crimes from occurring in the first place? I am talking more about crime prevention type of programs by investing in young people so they have alternatives to hanging around the streets. Does the member see the merit in that and would she support those types of initiatives just as enthusiastically as—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has about 40 seconds to respond.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Madam Speaker, in my role as parliamentary secretary and also as a mother of four, I always applaud initiatives that help youth to keep themselves busy, active and engaged in our communities. Politics is a good place to start.

Of course this is all about protecting communities and protecting youth. A lot of these provisions are targeted at helping youth and helping youth get away from this kind of activity. I would always applaud initiatives that help youth.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives introduced nine pieces of legislation in

one big bundle. There are over 100 pages in the bill. These pieces of legislation fall under the purview of three separate ministries. The bills range from broad changes to our corrections system that are based on a failed U.S.-style approach, to giving the minister absolute power to approve or deny the international transfer of offenders. These changes are sweeping and will fundamentally change several aspects of Canada's criminal justice system.

The way this bill was introduced speaks a lot to the Conservatives' approach to crime. They have introduced a big bill to help them appear to be tough on crime, but again they have proven that they are not smart on crime.

The goal of any changes to our criminal justice system should be public safety first. It should be safer streets and communities. We should accomplish this by finding cost-effective programs and policies that really make a difference. However, that clearly is not the priority of the Conservatives. They are not interested in looking at the evidence or studying the real impacts of the measures in this bill. The way they introduced them in an omnibus bill shows they have no intention of studying impacts. They just want to ram the legislation through before the public learns how ineffective and expensive it will be.

I will say that some measures in the bill make some sense, but unfortunately the vast majority of the bill really does not matter. We need to be able to examine this on a case-by-case basis. This is also an incredibly fiscally irresponsible piece of legislation. Earlier in the House the minister was asked a number of times about the cost. We do not know the cost. How much is it going to cost?

The government is asking us to support a bill it has not costed. It has refused to provide the Parliamentary Budget Officer with information so he can cost these initiatives. I imagine the government is withholding that information because it does not want Canadians or Parliament to know how big the tab for its big crime bill is going to be, not just for the federal government but for much of what is going to be downloaded to the provinces. Unfortunately, taxpayers in this country are going to be the ones left to pay this big crime bill's tab.

The experts agree, as many studies have been done, that the Conservative approach on crime is the wrong approach. It is not based on evidence and the majority of these measures will not make our communities any safer.

Government Orders

Across the U.S., governments have tried this before and have seen it fail. We have seen this south of the border. Many of the states are now abandoning the ineffective approach to crime that the Conservative government is pursuing in this country. Governments in the U.S. are abandoning it because it does not work, because it is incredibly expensive and it has been shown to be very ineffective.

I do not know how the members across the aisle can justify ramming a bill through that is so reckless that it has the potential to be financially crippling to the government and will not make any of our communities safer. I come from a community where crime, gang violence and drug-related crimes are real problems. I want to see changes that stop gangs from recruiting young children. I want to see more police officers on the streets. I want prisoners to come out of prison rehabilitated and able to be contributing members of society, but clearly that is not a priority for the Conservative government.

● (1715)

I have a number of concerns with key parts of the bill. One major area is the changes that are being proposed for our pardon system.

Our pardon system needs to be fair to all Canadians and it needs to be strengthened. It must protect public safety by promoting the reintegration of reformed offenders and ensuring that the public is protected from those who still pose a threat to society.

This portion of the bill proposes a number of changes which must be carefully considered.

Changes to the pardon system must be rational, evidence based, and put public safety first. There needs to be a thorough study of the pardon system, and any changes should come from the results of that study. Unfortunately, the Conservatives across the aisle seem more interested in using this issue to score political points.

Of course we need to make changes to protect Canadians from pardons in outrageous cases where clearly our system has failed over the years, but making broad changes, such as disallowing pardons for those with four or more indictable offences, changes the nature of our system completely.

Pardons serve a very important function. They allow people who have made positive life changes and who have abstained from criminal behaviour to be freed from many of the negative impacts of having a criminal record, such as what occurs when securing employment and housing.

Approximately 3.5 million Canadians have a criminal record. I find it hard to believe that the government has thought of the impact these changes will have on these Canadians.

Four offences can occur in one incident. Someone could have one misguided event, but under this legislation the individual would not be able to have his or her record sealed. For people trying to turn their lives around, the inability to get a pardon can have very detrimental implications on their lives.

Employment is a stabilizing factor in reintegrating individuals and the inability to gain employment only increases the risk of reoffending. Stable meaningful employment, as well as the income, housing and social networks that employment can foster, are significant protective factors against reoffending. From a public

safety perspective, this type of incentive offered to individuals trying to reintegrate successfully back into the community makes good sense.

By summarily making pardons more difficult to get, and by doing it without any study or rationale, the Conservative government will make it more difficult for people to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. If the Conservatives make it more difficult for deserving people to get pardons, those people will not be able to get back into society and will be far more likely to commit crimes in the future. It is entirely possible, in fact very likely, that in some ways this legislation will actually increase crime.

Another area of concern for me are the corrections and conditional release changes in the bill.

Aspects of the bill would open the door to the violation of human rights in Canadian prisons. These changes would have Canada adopt a U.S.-style approach to prisons that is regressive, expensive and which has shown to be very ineffective.

One particularly disturbing part of this legislation about which many experts have expressed concern is the changes to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The act currently reads that the Correctional Service of Canada must use the “least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of the public, staff members, and offenders”. The least restrictive measures language is a time tested and court derived standard for the acceptable treatment of prisoners.

This legislation removes the “least restrictive” language and changes the standard to “measures...that are limited to only what is necessary and proportionate” to the objective for which they are imposed. This change will open the door to more severe treatment of offenders. In the absence of any evidence that the “least restrictive” language is hindering the ability of the CSC to fulfill its mandate, it should not be carelessly discarded.

● (1720)

I support changes to our federal corrections system that will result in more offenders being successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated into communities upon their eventual release. This is the most effective way to promote public safety, to make our communities safer places for our citizens to live. However, the reality is that our federal prison system is lacking in the programs needed to get offenders to turn their lives around.

This omnibus bill creates a paper obligation for prisoners to participate in non-existent rehabilitation programs and then sets out how to punish them for failing to get rehabilitated. To me it makes no sense. Experts in the corrections field have stated very clearly that this is the wrong approach to take. The government is setting itself up for failure because this legislation will not achieve its stated objective. In fact, it will make things worse.

Government Orders

The bill reflects an outdated U.S.-style approach to prisons which wastes money and incarcerates more people for longer. We have seen the results in the United States. Most importantly, it does nothing to reduce reoffences. Public safety means getting smart on crime. Those are not smart changes.

Another part of the legislation that concerns me is the changes regarding the international transfer of offenders. This bill claims to enhance public safety, which of course is something I agree with. However, the bill grants absolute discretion to the minister to pick and choose who is brought back to Canada. The act needs to be strengthened, not shredded. The bill does away with a clear legal process that has been in place since 1978 and it replaces it with decisions made at the minister's whim. This bill opens up the process to bias. It does away with any transparency and accountability.

There is no doubt there are offenders who should not be brought back to this country and public safety needs to be considered when we are making these decisions. There are cases when public safety is enhanced by allowing the transfer to take place, which gives Canada the control of the offender's rehabilitation program and supervision after the offender has finished his or her sentence, rather than have the offender return to Canada unsupervised after finishing a sentence abroad.

To allow the minister such wide-ranging discretion to ignore criteria completely and to use his or her own subjective opinion as to the test for the criteria he or she does consider is wrong. It replaces an established law-based process with a politicized subjective process.

This is not the way to make wholesale changes to our criminal justice system. Before any changes like this are made, Parliament must study their effects. We owe it to Canadians. It is part of our job.

All indications are that the changes Conservatives want to make are the same mistakes that many state governments have made in the United States. We have seen this approach fail in the U.S. Many states are now repealing these laws, but the Conservatives seem determined to repeat mistakes made in the United States. We should be learning from our neighbour's mistakes, not repeating them.

● (1725)

Where does this leave us? What is the goal of this legislation? It would seem that effectiveness is not the goal. The goal seems to be stoking fears among Canadians and playing up those fears for political gain. A responsible approach for any large policy change would be to thoroughly study proposed changes and seek advice from experts. The Conservatives seem intent on refusing to do that and on ramming this through recklessly.

Why are they doing that? It has been mentioned in this place many times before. Key stakeholder after key stakeholder, expert after expert has spoken out against the kinds of legislation that the Conservatives are bringing forward. However, they will not talk about whether or not this will actually make our streets and communities any safer. They will not talk about how this initiative has been tried and has failed elsewhere. They will not talk about how much of a huge financial burden this will be on our economy and on Canadians.

It seems that many goals of this legislation are to score political points and play on fears. New Democrats have been clear about the approach we should be taking. We should be taking an approach that is based on evidence, that works in our communities, that hires more police officers, that is built on more than simply the outdated megaprison system. Most of all, we need an approach that is based on putting public safety first.

I urge the government to listen to experts. Earlier in question period we had the finance minister talking about how the government needs to listen to experts; I encourage the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public safety to listen to experts, to look at the evidence, to look at the cost, and at the very least to give this massive piece of legislation a proper study in Parliament.

We owe it to Canadians to be clear about the costs and to be clear about the effectiveness of this legislation. It will cost untold billions of dollars and will not make our streets any safer. This is not tough on crime and it is not smart on crime; it is wrong on crime.

● (1730)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that as opposed to some of the other speeches that were given in the House, my colleague's speech is worthy of compliment. I think this is one of his first speeches in the House, and it was on subject matter that is very important to British Columbia. I want to compliment him also for doing giving his speech in what I thought was a respectful tone, which I think is helpful.

The thesis of his speech was that the government should do three things. First he said that we should have thoughtful study before we bring forward legislation. Well, we are halfway through our sixth year as a government, although of course only a couple of months into our majority mandate, and we have tabled this legislation in the past. It is legislation that has been debated thoroughly in the House. In fact, it was a centrepiece of our election campaign platform, and Canadians had an opportunity to have input during the campaign. I can say that after five and a half years, this subject has been studied, and it is indeed time to act.

He said that the government should propose changes. In fact, we are proposing changes. We are proposing changes that we presented to the Canadian people, and the Canadian people have given us a mandate.

He also said we should seek advice. We have sought advice. I have to point out to those Canadians who are watching that what we are doing in this legislation is precisely what we told Canadians we would do if we were entrusted with a majority government. This is what we said we would do, and we are going to do it.

If we were to break up this legislation, as the leader of the Green Party says, she would ask why we were breaking up legislation and say that we were breaking our word with Canadians. If we were to consider a battery of amendments that would slow down the process, the NDP and the opposition would ask why we were not acting and why we were slowing down the process.

Government Orders

What we have done here is what we said we would do if we were elected. It is the right and appropriate thing to do. The opposition is more than free, obviously, to make its case and to propose amendments at committee, but we are going to move forward, because that is what we said we would do.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am a new member to the House. Frankly, over the last number of months and the last couple of years I have read about speaker after speaker and expert after expert talking about this bill and the crime agenda for the Harper government. It failed in the United States. It did not work. In fact, the United States is repealing most of the tough-on-crime laws that were implemented back in the 1980s and 1990s.

To spend billions and billions of dollars on prisons does not make sense to me. Maybe it does to my partners across the aisle, but it does not make sense to me, and I do not think it makes sense to Canadians. I think we need to invest in education. We need to invest in health care. That is where the priority should be. The priority should be jobs.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage mentioned that the member is free to oppose this legislation. I would like to put forward that if we follow democracy to its logical extent, he is in fact mandated to oppose it, as he received the majority of votes in his riding.

Regarding mandatory minimum issues, how does he feel that mandatory minimums in this case will not be able to make the community safe as a stand-alone tool in the toolbox of devices used to help curtail crime and to help victims?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, we have heard this from my Conservative colleagues not only today but many times. They have talked about how they are standing up for victims and how they get behind victims.

The mandatory minimum sentence for marijuana is more than that prescribed for child rape. How is that standing up for victims? That is troubling to me. Members across the aisle need to look at this. How is that standing up for victims?

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it struck me during one of the first speeches in the House by the member for Surrey North that his speech had a common sense to it, a balance of what we should be talking about in the House.

The point he just raised is so troubling. When we pause to think about it, we see that the mandatory minimums for marijuana are more than for child rape. Someone somewhere in the government did not take a good solid look at what the Conservatives were about to do. I would like to hear the member's views on their lack of common sense, which I would suggest is not necessarily common on the other side of the House.

● (1735)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I am the father of two children. I have a 15-year-old and a 5-year-old and I am very concerned that the government proposes a longer sentence for a marijuana offence than it does for the rape of a child. That is troubling to me, as well as the whole concept of where the government is going in regard to how many billions it is going to cost. In the United States it has

almost brought a number of states to bankruptcy, and they are reversing much of the tough-on-crime legislation introduced in the 1980s and 1990s. We need to learn from our neighbours and not repeat those mistakes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the member for Surrey North to the House and congratulate him on his position as critic for the official opposition on public safety.

I was troubled by his speech. He talked several times about the so-called U.S. failed system and how sending more people to jail does nothing to deter crime or protect citizens. If he truly believes that, if he truly believes that sending more people to jail does nothing to protect society, he must believe that no one should be sent to jail.

Is that his position? If jail is so ineffective as a crime deterrent, does he subscribe to the notion that no one should be sent to jail?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, clearly the premise of the question is absolutely wrong.

We believe people should be punished for crimes that are committed, but the punishment must fit the crime. We must look at it in a little bit bigger context. We cannot just narrowly focus on setting minimums. It is very troubling when a minimum sentence for marijuana use is longer than for the rape of a child. That is very troubling to me.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech. He talked about crime, the drug problems that exist in his community, and street gangs. He also spoke very clearly about the ineffectiveness of the harsh legislative measures that have been taken in other countries to try to reduce crime. Those measures have not worked.

I wonder if he could give us some examples of measures that he believes would be more effective in reducing crime and recidivism.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of ways corrective measures have been put into place.

We can have better programs in the prisons to help rehabilitate prisoners so that when they do come out, they are better able to integrate into society more productively.

We need to have better programs for our children and our youth, and more programs in schools. These programs would keep our youth from hanging out at the local 7-Eleven stores or from being recruited by local gang members. We need recreation programs for our kids so that they would not only have a healthy life but would also be able to stay away from criminal activities.

Certainly there are many things that can be done in order to have safer communities

However, this approach by the Conservative government, this tough-on-crime approach, has not worked anywhere in the world. In fact, anywhere it has been tried, they have been repealing those laws. They are getting rid of them and focusing more on youth and more on preventative programs.

Government Orders

In Texas alone there were 21 youth detention centres. Can we guess what happened? They have now reduced that number to about five or six. That is clearly the right approach, and they have saved billions of dollars in prison costs.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise here today to speak at second reading of Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act.

As many of my colleagues know, this government committed to introducing once again—yes, once again—any law and order bills that died on the order paper at the dissolution of the 40th Parliament.

The proposed changes aim, for example, to protect children from sexual crimes, to clarify ineligibility for conditional sentences and pardons, and to protect other vulnerable members of our society.

With all that in mind, the bill before us constitutes a comprehensive bill incorporating all the changes previously proposed in nine separate bills introduced during the previous parliament.

The first part of the bill—clauses 2 to 9—contains the changes suggested in the former Bill S-7, the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act.

Part 2 contains clauses 10 to 51 of the bill, which include the amendments found in former bills C-54, the Protecting Children from Sexual Predators Act, which was designed to protect children from sexual predators and certain sexual offences; C-16, the Ending House Arrest for Property and Other Serious Crimes by Serious and Violent Offenders Act, intended to limit the use of conditional sentences; and S-10, the Penalties for Organized Drug Crime Act, to increase sentences for serious drug-related offences.

Part 3—clauses 52 to 166—includes measures to increase the accountability of offenders, eliminate pardons for serious crimes and modify the factors considered in the international transfer of Canadian offenders. These amendments were contained in former bills C-39, the Ending Early Release for Criminals and Increasing Offender Accountability Act; C-23B, the Eliminating Pardons for Serious Crimes Act; C-59, the Abolition of Early Parole Act; and C-5, the Keeping Canadians Safe (International Transfer of Offenders) Act.

Part 4 of the bill—clauses 167 to 204—amends the Youth Criminal Justice Act to better protect Canadians against violent young offenders. These amendments were included in former Bill C-4, Sébastien's Law (Protecting the Public from Violent Young Offenders).

The last part of the bill—clauses 205 to 207—proposes amendments contained in former Bill C-56, the Preventing the Trafficking, Abuse and Exploitation of Vulnerable Immigrants Act, that would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in order to protect workers who want to work in Canada and are at risk of being subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation.

In particular, I would like to elaborate on clause 34 of Part 2 of the bill, which seeks to curtail the use of conditional sentences for some property crimes and other serious crimes.

As I mentioned earlier, these amendments were contained in a previous bill, Bill C-16, which died on the order paper with the dissolution of the third session of the 40th Parliament. However, there are some technical differences, which I will discuss later.

Currently, under the Criminal Code, conditional sentencing, sometimes referred to as house arrest, can be imposed when an offence is not punishable by a mandatory minimum sentence and the court hands down a prison sentence of less than two years.

In fact, since December 2007, conditional sentences have no longer been available for indictable offences with a maximum prison sentence of 10 years or more in the case of serious personal injury offences, terrorism offences or organized crime offences.

• (1745)

What is more, the court imposing a conditional sentence has to be satisfied that serving the sentence in the community will not jeopardize the safety of the community and that the sentence is consistent with the fundamental purpose and principles of sentencing.

It is important to note that the fundamental purpose of sentencing, as set out in section 718 of the Criminal Code, is to contribute to respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by imposing just sanctions that have one or more of the following objectives: to denounce unlawful conduct; to deter the offender and other persons from committing offences; to separate offenders from society, where necessary; to assist in rehabilitating offenders; to provide reparations for harm done to victims or the community; and to promote a sense of responsibility in offenders.

The Criminal Code also informs us that a just sanction is a sanction that is proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. To achieve this, the courts take into consideration aggravating and mitigating factors in each case. Before describing the key aspects of the proposed changes, I want to provide some background on the provisions in the Criminal Code on conditional sentences.

Conditional sentencing came into effect in 1996, when the government wanted, among other things, to reduce excessive use of incarceration for less serious crimes. I repeat: less serious crimes. Moreover, the information document that accompanied these sentencing reforms states that the addition of conditional sentencing as a new form of sentencing means that offenders who have committed a less serious crime and who otherwise would be incarcerated can serve their sentence in the community under close supervision.

Government Orders

The limits that I mentioned earlier were established in order to guarantee that conditional sentences could be given only for less serious crimes, in keeping with the fundamental principles and purpose of sentencing. However, in the years following the creation of this type of sentencing, there has been a complete lack of consistency when it comes to determining when conditional sentencing is appropriate.

At the time, many court decisions gave a conditional sentence for serious and violent crimes. This contributed to the public's loss of faith in the justice system. Clearly, many people, and some provinces and territories, wondered whether the limits on conditional sentencing set out in the Criminal Code were sufficient.

In order to deal with this lack of consistency in conditional sentencing, this government introduced Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment) on May 4, 2006. This bill proposed the elimination of conditional sentencing for any indictable offence with a maximum prison sentence of 10 years or more. However, Bill C-9 was amended by the opposition parties to limit the ban on conditional sentencing to indictable offences with a maximum prison sentence of 10 years or more that constitute serious personal injury offences, terrorism offences or criminal organization offences. These amendments took effect on December 1, 2007.

The definition of serious personal injury was developed in the context of dangerous offenders, which is why this definition is found in part 24 of the Criminal Code. According to this definition, serious personal injury offences include any indictable offence, other than high treason, treason, first degree murder or second degree murder—punishable by at least 10 years in prison—involving the use or attempted use of violence against another person, or conduct endangering or likely to endanger the life or safety of another person or inflicting or likely to inflict severe psychological damage on another person.

• (1750)

The second part of this definition is clearer, as it lists sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon and aggravated sexual assault as serious personal injury offences.

It is important to understand that the opposition parties borrowed a term straight from the dangerous offender regime in order to put limits on a sentence that should only be applied to less dangerous offenders. That created two philosophical approaches for interpreting the definition of serious personal injury in the context of conditional sentencing.

Another issue with the definition of serious personal injury is that it only targets violent offences. The definition of serious personal injury cannot ensure that a conditional sentence will not be used in the case of serious fraud or theft over \$5,000.

The amendments in this bill will ensure that certain non-violent serious offences will still be treated as serious offences, thus avoiding the use of conditional sentencing. The amendments to the conditional sentencing regime proposed in this bill aim to establish clear benchmarks to allow for consistent use of conditional sentencing in order to respect Parliament's intention when it created this sentence.

That is why the bill proposes eliminating the reference to serious personal injury offences and restricting the availability of conditional sentences for all offences for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 14 years or life.

The same will apply to indictable offences punishable by a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment when they result in bodily harm, involve the import, export, trafficking or production of drugs or involve the use of weapons.

When an offence is committed under these circumstances, it is even more important to deter the offender and denounce the crime. This justifies restricting the availability of conditional sentences in such cases. It is possible however that the limits I just described do not cover all offences prosecuted by way of indictment and punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison.

Therefore, the bill also proposes limiting the availability of conditional sentences for prison breach, criminal harassment, sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, abduction of a person under 14, motor vehicle theft, theft over \$5,000, breaking and entering a place other than a dwelling-house, being unlawfully in a dwelling-house, and arson for fraudulent purpose.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, there are technical differences between the changes proposed in this bill and those contained in the former Bill C-16.

For example, Bill C-16 proposed the abolition of conditional sentencing for the offence of luring a child, described in section 172.1. This is no longer on the list of offences that would not be eligible for conditional sentencing, since article 22 of this bill proposes a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of one year in the case of an indictable offence, or 90 days in the case of a summary conviction.

Another change from Bill C-16 is that the list of offences that are no longer eligible for conditional sentence includes the new offence of motor vehicle theft, described in section 333.1 of the Criminal Code.

The final change would correct an error that slipped into Bill C-16. That bill did not include the offence of abduction of a person under 14 by a parent or guardian. The intent was, however, to target the offence described in section 281 of the Criminal Code, which has to do with the abduction of a person under 14 by a stranger.

I want to reassure my colleagues that even though the reference in section 742.1 to serious personal injury offences is set to be eliminated, the changes in this bill will ensure that those who are convicted of sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon and aggravated sexual assault will not be eligible if prosecuted by way of indictment.

Government Orders

• (1755)

Note also that conditional sentencing will no longer be available for persons convicted of sexual assault against a person 16 or under since clause 25 of the bill proposes a minimum sentence of one year when the offence is prosecuted by way of indictment, and 90 days on summary conviction.

This government is addressing the concerns of Canadians who no longer want to see conditional sentences used for serious crimes, whether they are violent crimes or property crimes.

For the reasons I have just mentioned, I urge my fellow members of this House to unanimously support the proposed changes to the conditional sentencing system.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments.

He said that the government is very attentive to Canadians' concerns, but we already know that this bill will cost us billions of dollars that could be invested in the education or health care systems. I think that the government is not very attentive to what is actually of concern to Canadians.

We know that this bill will criminalize and target the people who are already the most marginalized in society, such as youth and people with mental illness. We also know that the first nations represent 10.8% of the population of Canada but 18% of the population of federal prisons.

I would like to hear the hon. member's reaction to these figures, and I would like to know why he wants to pass a bill that will increase the overrepresentation of first nations people in federal prisons.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

Certainly, many people who pass through in the penal system may not have the same mental capacity as an ordinary Canadian citizen. However, methods of defence are available for people who lack this capacity. In addition, it is important to remember that, as painful as it may be for the person who is incarcerated, the prison system has rehabilitation programs. In many cases, the problems that people in the system have were not identified at a young age. It is often once they enter the penal system that they are diagnosed with mental or other problems. In such cases, it is always possible to transfer them to another centre that can help them to become more productive members of society.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a number of years I was the justice critic in the province of Manitoba. When Ottawa makes changes and brings in legislation, quite often it has a profound impact in terms of the budgets at the local and provincial levels governments. That impact is fairly profound on this bill. We have had great difficulty in terms of trying to come to grips with just how much Bill C-10 will cost the taxpayers and how much money the provinces will have to come forward with in order to compensate the bill.

When I was the critic, I was always pretty gung-ho on wanting to prevent crimes from happening. That meant taking those scarce

resources and trying to invest them so that little Johnny, as opposed to getting involved in a gang activity, would be involved in a school activity.

Does the parliamentary secretary have a sense of how much money this will cost the different types of jurisdictions, or can he take this as notice and provide us information on how much, for example, it would cost the province of Manitoba to implement Bill C-10?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, I was elected on May 2 and I am not aware, of the hundreds and hundreds of pages that were tabled, of the cost of these systems. I know, in speaking to the hon. minister, that there has been much co-operation between the provinces and the federal government. In fact, many of these bills have been on the order paper and have been debated. The provinces have asked for them to be put in place because they also want their streets to be protected.

I am sure the provinces could perhaps provide a more detailed look at what the cost would be. It appears from their willingness to co-operate that they are more than willing to see these measures put in place so that they, like us, will stand up for Canadians and protect them.

• (1800)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues missing from this debate thus far is the issue of judges and their ability to make rulings and judgments. When mandatory sentencing is present, a lot of the discretionary power that judges have is taken out of their hands.

One of the reasons our justice system works as well as it does is because judges do have discretion. There will be many situations where we must remember that these are actual people appearing before judges and not pieces of paper or machines. Judges need to have that discretion.

Would the member like to make a comment about that issue?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly a very relevant question, which was canvassed at length by the Canadian Bar Association and on which it focused.

However, in our role as parliamentarians, we fix maximum sentences, we fix minimum sentences and we give guidance to the courts as to what is appropriate and which crimes are determined to be more heinous than perhaps others. We dictate the severity.

I do not remember the exact year, but not long ago Parliament abolished the death penalty. That was our call as well. Yes, there is a spectrum, but it is Parliament's call to give the courts guidance on where the crime fits with respect to the question of severity.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the honourable member point the House, in any way, shape or form, to a scintilla of evidence that shows that minimum mandates actually contribute to the reduction of crime or repetition of crime?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. Once one is in jail, one certainly does not commit crimes. That is the way in which our streets and our citizens are protected.

Government Orders

There are two types of dissuasion. There is general dissuasion and there is specific dissuasion. Specific dissuasion is particularly important upon repeat offenders. The sentence is upped, it is made more severe each step of the way and there is no vacation when criminals are in jail. They are not committing crimes or stealing cars.

From the point of view of general deterrence as it relates the question of the issue of the drug bill, we have people flying from Seattle because they would rather be caught in Canada for a drug-related offence because there is no sentence. People who deal with drugs in Canada will go to jail. The people of Canada have spoken on that and that is what we are standing up for. We walk the walk and talk the talk.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the logic he has presented in the House, that basically because young people are overlooked, there are no resources to diagnose or address mental illness, offenders go to jail and their mental illness is addressed there.

It seems to me that this is an argument for prevention and investing in resources, which has not happened in our country. The Conservative government has been as guilty as any government in terms of undermining any ability to address the problem of mental illness among Canadians and Canadian youth.

Perhaps the hon. member can square the circle for me and explain how building more jail and investing more in incarceration will help, while at the same time rehabilitation and efforts to help people with mental illness have been reduced over and over again.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, as I noted, oftentimes issues are identified at a very late stage and many of the entry points where issues of mental problems or perhaps difficulties in coherence are identified are in provincial areas such as schools, in social services and various ports of entry in provincial jurisdictions. Certainly there is work to be done between the federal government and the provincial jurisdictions to identify these issues early. I am sure that in the future we will be willing to work hand in hand with them.

• (1805)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the parliamentary secretary's comments on deterrence.

Before I came to this chamber, I spent 20 years working in the area of criminal justice, where it is very well known that deterrence that actually works is based on the certainty and the swiftness of detection and prosecution.

Why does the government insist on trying to work at the other end of the system where deterrence does not work, rather than investing resources into prosecution and police officers on the street, which actually does have a deterrent effect?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a perfect answer, but I do know that violent criminals who are in jail do not commit crimes against law-abiding citizens, and that is who we are standing up for.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I often like to do when we stand in the House and have a dialogue and debate among each other about issues of crime and safety in our

country, I like to start with what I think is a bridging set of statements in which we all believe.

I think every member in the House believes in and wants to create policy that keeps our communities safe.

I think every member in the House, legitimately and sincerely, wants to ensure that we have a justice system that is efficient, effective and geared toward the goals that we all hope our justice system would be geared toward, which is to ensure that our justice system accomplishes the goals that it purports to have.

That goal would be twofold, when we combine effective public policy on crime and an effective justice system, and that is to adopt policies that prevent crime as much as we can from happening in the first place and once crime is committed, to do everything we can to ensure that the person committing the crime does not commit it again.

I had the honour of being our party's public safety critic in the last Parliament and spent a good part of almost two years examining, in detail, the situation in our corrections system. I had the distinct honour and privilege of touring some 26 federal correctional institutions and seeing first-hand the work that our correctional officials do every day in our prisons. It also gave me an eye-opening experience into the real situation that was occurring in our federal prisons. I would encourage all members of the House, as members of Parliament, to inspect our federal institutions and learn first-hand what is going on.

A provision in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act specifically gives MPs the untrammelled right to go into our federal institutions and inspect them. As legislators, that is a very important responsibility so we can be supervising, monitoring and inspecting our federal prisons.

I will tell the House what I have noticed in visiting those prisons from my point of view. The people who populate those prisons are, as has been said, among the most marginalized people in society, in general. It is true that there is a small segment of the prison population who are incorrigible, dangerous and violent people for whom we have very little option but to keep locked away from society. Nobody in the House would suggest that the Clifford Olsons and the Paul Bernardos of the world should safely ever be returned to the streets of our country and they should pay a price for the crimes they have committed by being incarcerated for the rest of their lives.

However, we cannot make policy based on that small percentage, because what I also saw was that 80% of the people who are in our federal prisons today, men and women, suffer from an addiction. This figure is widely accepted on all sides of the House. The public safety committee heard expert testimony after expert testimony from corrections officials, from wardens, from the John Howard Society, from the Elizabeth Fry Society, from all manner of people who all agreed with that figure, that 80% suffer from an addiction.

Government Orders

Another commonly accepted fact on all sides of the House is that there is a substantial number of men and women inside our institutions who suffer from mental illness. Leaving aside, the obvious point is addiction itself is a mental illness. Issues like fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, brain damage, low cognition and those with brain injuries also are disproportionately represented in our prison system.

That leads me to my first point. If we truly want to ensure that when those people come out of prison they do not recommit offences, then we need direct resources at the real problems they face.

It is true that well over 90% of people in our federal institutions will leave those institutions and come back into our communities. They will be walking down our streets, walking down our alleys, sitting beside us in restaurants, applying for jobs. They will be members of our communities.

• (1810)

It is only common sense. It is not only from a moral point of view but it is from a self-interested point of view for us to ensure we do everything possible when we make policy to improve the situations that cause them to commit their crimes in the first place. That is why the New Democratic Party is a consistent voice for putting resources into crime prevention and into resources that address and attack the fundamental causes of these people's criminogenic behaviour where we can do so.

What I see in Bill C-10 is an accumulation of ineffective policies to solve a diminishing problem that is inexorably expensive. I do not see how that will make a noticeable dent in the problem that we have in this country.

At the public safety committee, we asked a person from the United States who is a member of an initiative called right on crime to appear before our committee to tell us about the experience in the United States. The person who came up was the appointee of Ronald Reagan as the original drug enforcement agency czar. He also was the chief architect of the tough on crime policy that has been pursued by the United States over the last two decades.

What he told us was remarkable. He told us that the policies of toughening up sentences and incarcerating more people in the United States by pursuing policies like mandatory minimums, lengthening sentences, taking away judge's discretion and reducing sentencing options for judges has resulted in poor outcomes. He said that it threatened to bankrupt the treasuries of every state in which these policies are being pursued and that it has made no noticeable dent in crime. So, after spending billions and billions of dollars and locking up hundreds of thousands of citizens, the net result was that they were nearing bankruptcy and the crime rate was unaffected.

I said to members opposite in the House at that time that they had the benefit of the justice department and public safety department and that they had access to our civil servants who can access research that one hopes is being done before legislation is being brought before the House. I asked them to tell me the name of one jurisdiction anywhere in the world, a state, a government or a province, where these policies that the government seeks to put into law have resulted in safer communities with lower crime rates.

The answer I received was that there were none. No country could be named. That is instructive. Before we embark on a policy that will cost the Canadian taxpayers billions and billions of dollars, it is instructive and responsible of us as legislators to do our homework and to at least have an even chance of accomplishing the goals that we seek the money to achieve.

Crime is not an issue that is restricted to Canada. Every society in the world is grappling with this, whether it is Europe, Asia, South America or Africa. Crime exists everywhere. This is not a unique situation. We have examples all over the world of different approaches to dealing with crime. We have very harsh approaches, like the current government seeks to take our country in, and we have examples of more lenient approaches.

Surely there is a wealth of information in this world that we can glean from and craft best policies to ensure we accomplish the goals that Canadians want us to accomplish, and that is to ensure we prevent crime as much as we can and to reduce the possibility that somebody will commit a crime a second time.

I want to talk a little bit about police officers because our party, the New Democrats, has been calling, through the last three elections, for the increase of 2,500 police officers in this country. We do believe in putting police officers on Canadian streets and using them properly.

• (1815)

In my view, that means putting them in our communities and having police officers on bikes. Putting them around high-crime areas like sky train stations in my city of Vancouver is an important way that we can improve community safety.

The Conservative Party promised to create 2,500 police officer positions in the 2008 election. I have met with police boards and police chiefs across this country and they all tell me the same thing, that only a fraction of those 2,500 police officer positions have been created. The reason is that the money the federal government promised to give jurisdictions to create those positions has been reduced from ongoing funding, to five-year funding, to three-year funding. Police chiefs have looked the Conservatives in the eyes and said that they are not creating a single position when they only have funding for only three years.

There is no funding for the civilian staff that each police officer position engenders. The money has been transferred to provinces with no strings attached. The provinces have received that money without any obligation to actually create police officer positions and, in some cases, that money or portions of it have disappeared into provincial treasuries' general revenue.

The Conservatives have not fulfilled their promise to Canadians to create those 2,500 police officer positions. I would encourage them to do so because they have unanimity on this side of the House to do that.

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If we really want to improve our justice system and reduce crime on our streets, we need to add more prosecutors and judges in this country. Our courts are overburdened. There are cases kicked out of courts across this country every day for want of prosecution and delay. I see nothing in Bill C-10 that adds police officers, judges, prosecutors and nothing that addresses addiction, mental illness and crime prevention. Those are valid, fact-based criticisms of this bill.

I will talk about what I have also seen in our federal prison system. There was a program in our federal prisons called CORCAN which allowed inmates to learn skilled trades and engage in programs like making furniture. The furniture would then be sold to the federal government at reduced prices. It was a win-win situation. It gave underskilled inmates an opportunity to learn soft and hard skills, to learn the discipline of work, to learn skills that would allow them to survive on the outside and maybe have a better chance of escaping the criminal lifestyle. It also gave the federal government much needed equipment at a reduced price.

Do members know what has happened to the CORCAN program? It has been reduced. I am not saying that rhetorically. If people were to go to Kent Institution 90 kilometres outside of Vancouver, they could walk into the CORCAN rooms, which are three big rooms that look like industrial arts labs in junior and senior high schools, and all they will find are storage rooms. They are empty.

The government has closed prison farms. We have had big debates, and I do not intend to open that debate again, but there were prison farms operating at four or five institutions in this country that were absolute models of success. They gave offenders a chance to learn soft skills, to get up in the morning and show up for work. They had responsibilities. The arguments I heard in the House about the closing of the farms were absurd, like those people would never find work on a farm. That is not the point of prison farms. The point of prison farms is to teach skills of responsibility, of working together, of having to show up at the same time every day, working with animals, for hardened people to emotionally reconnect and consider the feelings of other people and learn responsibility. They were very effective programs and the government closed the farms.

This bill is titled “the safe streets and communities act”. I think it should more aptly be called “the overcrowded prisons, no crime prevention and overburden taxpayers with no results act”. That is just as accurate a title as any other.

● (1820)

I want to talk a little about some of the pieces of Bill C-10. Part of this practice of governing that the Conservative Party has proven a predilection for is to take a whole bunch of unrelated bills and throw them into one great big conglomeration before the House, which is a very imprecise and ineffective way to govern because we then need disentangle all of the pieces, some of which are good, some of which are bad. I want to focus on some of the pieces of this.

I want to talk about the international transfer of offenders provision of the bill.

For many years, Canada has had a provision whereby Canadians who are convicted abroad have the opportunity to apply to serve their sentence in Canada. This is not done just because they want to.

The host jurisdiction must agree, Canada must agree and the offender must agree.

There are criteria and the criteria are that they must satisfy the Canadian authorities that they are not able to access proper rehabilitation services in the country of origin, sometimes because no English or French is spoken, sometimes because there is no rehabilitation programs and sometimes if there is particularly compelling humanitarian and compassionate grounds. We all remember the fellow who was convicted with Conrad Black, his compatriot, who successfully applied and came back to Canada.

There is another important reason that the bill is important for public safety. If a Canadian in the United States finishes his or her sentence, the second after that sentence is completed the individual is deported back to Canada. The individual comes into our country and we have no record of him or her coming and we have no probation and no parole. We do not even know that the individual is in our community.

If the person is actually transferred back to Canada, however, and serves his or her sentence in Canada, we have a record of the sentence and we often will have parole conditions so that when the individual is released from jail we can impose conditions and monitor his or her re-entry into Canadian society. It is actually better for public safety and community safety to have this program.

This bill essentially would gut that program. It would allow the minister to have virtually unparalleled discretion to refuse such a request without any real kind of review. That is not good legislation.

I want to talk briefly about the pardon system.

The New Democrats, not last June but the one before, worked with the government to toughen our pardon system. We are the ones who proposed that we give the National Parole Board the power to deny a pardon in any case in which the administration of justice would be brought into disrepute. We added the provision that someone convicted of manslaughter would be prohibited from obtaining a pardon for 10 years whereas it was 5 years before.

Those are the provisions that would prevent Karla Homolka from getting a pardon, which, under the Conservative government's watch, was going to happen unless we did something. The New Democrats worked with the government to ensure that did not happen.

The government has now come forward with further pardon provisions that are simply unjustifiable. It wants to deny the ability of anybody with more than three convictions from ever in their entire life qualifying for a pardon. We heard evidence before our public safety committee from people in that situation, people who had four convictions or ten. We heard from one who had 26 convictions, and it sounded really bad.

Adjournment Proceedings

The person with 26 convictions had a constructive story. He was a young executive who was recently married and bought a house and his wife developed leukemia and died. He went into depression and he started selling steroids for six months. Over the course of those six months, he engaged in selling steroids over the Internet. When he was convicted, he pled guilty. For every one transaction involving the sale of steroids, he had multiple convictions: possession, trafficking and there were offences because he was selling across the border. He is now an executive with Corus media. He appeared before our committee as a bright, rehabilitated, productive member of our society. This is the kind of person who would be prevented from getting a pardon under this legislation.

The “three strikes and you’re out” approach that has been prevalent in places like California are being repealed in those jurisdictions because they have found that it has put a straitjacket on their justice system. That is not effective and it does not result in better community safety. It is also expensive.

The New Democrats are opposed to this because we want to create effective, strong, rational, fact-based policy that will likely result in safer communities, which, as I said at the beginning of my speech, is the goal of everybody in the House.

I would urge the government to listen to what the experts say, listen to what people across the justice system have to say, and not pursue a blind, ideological approach because it may be good wedge policies, but to actually work together with all members of the House to craft good policy to make our communities and our country safer for everyone.

• (1825)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Kingsway demonstrated again with his speech why I have such respect for him and the thoughtful way in which he presents his perspective on criminal justice reform, but I would encourage him to recognize that the approach our government has taken, both in the previous two Parliaments and again in this Parliament, is actually based on a great deal of consideration of the perspectives of provinces and of those who are not necessarily Conservative supporters and voters.

As a matter of fact, in the last Parliament, as the member knows, we eliminated the faint hope clause, we got rid of two-for-one sentencing for criminals, and we established mandatory minimum prison sentences for those who are sexually abusing our kids. We did these, by the way, with the support of the NDP government in Manitoba and, in British Columbia, as he knows, the then solicitor general critic for the NDP, Mike Farnworth, who is now the House leader for the NDP in British Columbia. These are radical right-wing people. Mike Farnworth, I think, would describe himself as a proud socialist, but he recognized the common sense of standing beside those who are victims of crime and not having a litany and a constant focus as a government on only those who are committing the crimes.

I entirely respect the approach that he recommends rhetorically, which is to have a balanced approach as a government, and we do. We have programs. A Chance to Choose is a phenomenal program in my riding that supports kids who are at risk of becoming career criminals, who are without any kind of structure in their lives. We

support those kinds of programs. However, we also believe in making sure that the common-sense approaches to ensuring that we are tough on crime are in fact a part of the government's agenda. That is what this legislation is about.

By the way, Canadians are with us. It is why we have a majority. It is to pass this legislation and to get it done, and we are going to do it.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I respect the thoughtful intervention by my hon. colleague from British Columbia, but I am not sure whether there was a question. I suppose it just reflects a different philosophy of how best to achieve those safe communities that we all want.

For instance, I understand why the Conservatives would have criticized the faint hope clause. They would want someone who has committed murder to serve the full sentence. In general, I agree with that. The reason I supported the faint hope clause is that, as a lawyer myself, I know that a cookie-cutter approach to justice does not work. Often one case with a unique set of circumstances comes up where someone could demonstrate that he or she has earned the right to come back into society. We want there to be that carrot-on-a-stick approach. We want people to have that incentive. Corrections officers have told me it is a good tool for maintaining co-operation and good behaviour in jail when people think that if they behave properly they may have a chance of getting some sort of benefit from it.

These are some of the tough considerations that go into these difficult issues, and I appreciate that they are different perspectives on this matter.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member for Vancouver Kingsway will have seven minutes remaining in the period for questions and comments when the House next considers this matter.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in my place and look for a few answers to a question I asked on June 8 concerning cuts to DFO.

Before doing that, I would like to thank the people of Cardigan for having faith in me once again and re-electing me to the House of Commons. It is important that I bring to the House the issues that affect the people of Cardigan, but of course this issue affects people right across Canada. The fishing industry is so important to the people of my riding.

Adjournment Proceedings

There are many concerns in the fishing industry and one of the major concerns is what takes place with respect to midshore seiners.

I would first bring to the attention of the government the edge project which gave 2,500 tonnes of spring stock in herring that would be able to be applied in the fall. The fishermen in my riding and the fishermen in Prince Edward Island are trying to fish herring right now and they cannot catch herring. It is a serious problem if they are trying to make a living. It is nothing to smile about. The fact of the matter is these people need to catch fish in order to make a living and they are not catching them.

When there is a reduction in the funding for DFO, it is very difficult to find out just what effect these kinds of changes have. The government can spend \$90,000 a day and up to \$20 million in order to have consultants tell the government how to put cuts in place, but it is pretty difficult for people involved in the fishing industry or even the people who work where my office is located, in Montague, P.E.I., in the claims processing area to find out that they have no job.

I want the government to look at the economic benefits and how important the safety issues are. Of course, we must have the research capacity in order to ensure we have a strong fishery. The problem economically is when the funding is cut, we have no wharf repair. All across my riding and in places like Avondale, Hants County, and Little Harbour in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, there are a couple of wharves in Atlantic Canada that are starving for dollars. These kinds of things are so important.

Regarding the rationalization program, when the member responds to my question, could he tell me if the rationalization program will continue? Prince Edward Island depends so much on areas 24, 25 and 26A. The fact is that the licences are issued by the Government of Canada. They are owned by the Government of Canada. Many people in my area have invested a lot of dollars in the fishing industry but they just cannot make a living. We need to ensure these dollars are put in place.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to indicate what will be done for the fishermen and people involved in the fishery who have little or no catch. What will happen to the rationalization program? Why would the government reduce or remove the coast guard from Newfoundland and Quebec to Halifax? Newfoundland would seem to be a pretty sensible area to have a coast guard. It is impossible to understand. Why would the government slash the budget when it is so necessary? More dollars are needed in the small-craft harbours for research, safety and to ensure they have the structure in place to enable people to go fishing. I hope the parliamentary secretary will elaborate on these questions.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about our government's commitment to the fishing industry in Canada.

As my colleague will know from his briefing that the minister offered to him in the spring, we take this responsibility very seriously. Our government has consistently ensured that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has the funding to properly implement the programs and policies for which it is responsible.

Since 2006, the annual operating budget for Fisheries and Oceans has seen steady incremental increases each year of approximately \$1.4 billion in 2005-06 to more than \$1.8 billion in 2011-12. This, for example, has helped us address the neglect of harbours and vessels caused by the significant underfunding of the department in the mid-1990s when, I might add, my friend was a member of the government, and at the same time to tackle ongoing and unforeseen challenges, like storm damage.

In addition to annual increases in the department's operating budget, our government injected an additional \$455 million in direct stimulus to Fisheries and Oceans Canada as part of Canada's economic action plan.

As a result, we were able to complete more than 240 repair, maintenance and dredging projects at small craft harbours, procure 98 new vessels for the Canadian Coast Guard, upgrade an additional 40 Coast Guard vessels and enhance 16 laboratories across Canada, among other projects.

The economic action plan did what it was intended to do: provide short-term economic stimulus and target important projects across the country.

We now have the opportunity to take stock of our departmental programs to ensure we are continuing to respond to the priorities of Canadians. We must ensure our programs, like those in every department of government, are efficient, effective and achieving the expected results for Canadians.

That is what the strategic review process has been all about. Under strategic review, Fisheries and Oceans Canada worked to identify ways to continue its transformation toward a streamlined, efficient and responsive department.

Modernizing fisheries management, adopting new technologies and eliminating duplicative work are ways the department can focus on its core mandate and ultimately spend Canadians' tax dollars more wisely.

The department did not undertake this process lightly. Every change proposed was carefully considered and designed to improve the work we do and the services we provide.

Our government will build on recent achievements to promote the best interests of long-term, viable fisheries that are both ecologically and economically sound for future generations to enjoy, fisheries that are characterized by stability, predictability, transparency and trust.

I know that some reports have focused on the potential impact of the budgetary measures on our workforce, so I will say this. We estimate that a very small percentage of employees could be affected over three years and our goal is to address this reduction to the greatest extent possible through attrition, reassignment, relocation, planned retirement and other staffing mechanisms.

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Once the details are finalized, managers will talk to employees who are affected. We owe it to employees to speak with them before making details public. We will make every effort to identify re-employment opportunities within Fisheries and Oceans or other federal departments.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is at an important juncture. The minister and I are committed to working hard, consulting with stakeholders, getting as much information as we can and making decisions that are in the best interests of the long-term economic prosperity of the fishing industry in Canada.

• (1835)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague, who I know quite well, is concerned about the fishery.

I have one example in the Malpeque Harbour where a boat went aground. The boat was lost but the lives were saved. However, when dollars are taken out of DFO and when the capacity and manpower of the Coast Guard is reduced, and I would like the member to indicate whether they will be reduced or not, not only does it endanger the fishermen but the Coast Guard expertise is not there when needed to ensure that lives are saved.

It is important that we keep the infrastructure in place, that we have the dollars for the dredging and that we have the Coast Guard fully equipped, instead of being reduced which is the case now. I hope my hon. colleague will elaborate on that.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, the minister has answered this a number of times. He said that the on-the-water service that the Canadian Coast Guard provides will not be affected.

However, I hope my colleague agrees with the main point that taking opportunities to review a department's expenditures is an important practice because it forces one to look at every dollar of expenditure in light of the bigger picture. That is what we have done.

Over the next few years, this is what this will mean. We will see accelerated progress toward a more modern, economically and ecologically sustainable fishing industry. We will see regulatory practices that are characterized by clear rules, consistently applied, bringing predictability to stakeholders. It will mean programs and services that are better aligned with priorities, more efficient, relevant and better designed to take advantage of modern technologies.

That is a worthwhile destination and I encourage my friend from Cardigan to support us as we work hard to get there.

• (1840)

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak and have a debate on the question that I asked in June.

I stated that despite the Canada Revenue Agency giving itself A grades on service to taxpayers, an internal audit found that these grades were in fact inflated by almost 20% and fell well below acceptable standards. I asked the minister to please explain this lack of accountability to Canadian taxpayers, who have the right to expect timely and respectful service. It seems like a reasonable question.

The CRA falsifying their own audit is really tied into bad service that affects individuals and especially small business tax filers. In fact, on my recent tour of small businesses in rural British Columbia I heard that small businesses are being left out by the government and that the complexity of tax filing and administrative reporting is a nightmare. A vast array of administrative charges that affect them are announced in budget after budget, which the government then does not implement in their implementation bills, or if they do, they then do not come into force. Those small businesses that can afford professional advisers are spending a lot of time and money on a complicated system set in place by the government's ineffectiveness and mismanagement.

One would think that the response to me would have been that this is an important issue and that the government would look into it. However, that was not what I received as a response. In fact, the minister at the time claimed that an important example of how the government was doing just fine with respect to my question was the taxpayer bill of rights and the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman.

Well, there has been very strong comment among those who work with those two offices in that they are completely ineffective. I will read from an article in the *National Post* by Mr. Drache, a Quebec-based lawyer, entitled "Taxpayers' Bill of Rights a weak publicity stunt".

The writer talked about the community being "underwhelmed" by the announcement of a Taxpayer Bill of Rights, "because we've seen it all before".

In 1983 the Conservatives latched onto a hot issue: abuses by Revenue Canada. They then stoked the public's outrage about that and then proceeded to do nothing about it. It was a public relations stunt.

This is another public relations stunt. The ombudsman's office lacks teeth and is not a benefit to the taxpayers, especially to small business people who are struggling to fulfill their responsibilities in job creation and stoking the engine of our faltering economy. They need help. They do not need just platitudes from the government.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly delighted to have the opportunity to give more extensive discussion to this very important question and I thank my colleague for the intervention.

This question was asked of the minister in June of this year. The member takes a rather negative view of the report; however, we welcome these findings, as they provide an opportunity to make efficient and effective program improvements that will support the agency's focus on GST and HST.

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I do want to note again that the audit found that controls currently in place support the responsibilities and activities of the GST-HST rulings program, which includes the provision of accurate and consistent rulings and interpretations. It revealed that functional support to field offices is strong, and working relationships with internal and external stakeholders are well established and effective.

The audit also identified that controls relating to planning, forecasting and the allocation of resources should be strengthened.

I can share with my colleague that in response to CRA's own internal audit, the agency has taken a number of steps to address the issues identified.

These measures include the establishment of collaborative working groups to examine and recommend appropriate changes regarding issues related to workload management, quality monitoring and outreach; consultation with the strategy and integration branch to ensure consistency of GST-HST rulings external service standards with other CRA programs and corporate practices; and ongoing monitoring of GST-HST technical publications to ensure they remain accurate and up to date.

Our government is very much action oriented, and when potential improvements are identified, we move quickly. I believe this is part of the reason that in May of this year, Canadians chose to give us a strong, stable majority government.

Canadians gave us a mandate to focus on the economy. Creating jobs and growth are issues that really matter to Canadians. We have created over 600,000 net new jobs since the beginning of the recent global economic downturn, and 80% of those are full-time positions.

Just this week the International Monetary Fund forecast that Canada will have the strongest overall economic growth of the G7 countries over the next two years. The IMF praised Canada for our "relatively healthy economic fundamentals" and our "sounder fiscal and financial position".

While these are encouraging signs, Canada is not immune from the economic turbulence facing the global economy, especially in Europe and the United States. That is why we need to stay the course and implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

I do want to quickly make note of the red tape reduction commission, which has support from the CFIB. The hon. member talked about talking with small businesses. We have talked with small businesses across the country, and they have made some great suggestions. They are very positive. It is a process that is going to really move forward in terms of great results for small and medium-sized businesses in Canada.

I invite the member to support our government and help us implement these very important measures for Canada.

● (1845)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for mentioning the red tape reduction as a process, because so far it is all process and no action. That is not good enough for small businesses.

The member talked about HST-GST. That is another case where the government disassociated itself from its own actions. The Conservative Prime Minister gave British Columbia a take it or leave it ultimatum, giving that province no time to consult and leading to the disaster that we have today, which is falling squarely on small businesses that will have to adapt to a whole new tax structure.

The government cherry-picks the facts and figures around the economy and fails to reveal the reports that are negative about how Canada is doing, and they are there.

[*Translation*]

Canadian taxpayers are not naive and they are not stupid. The government must stop treating them that way. When the government says one thing and does another, people become cynical.

How can Canadians believe in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I must interrupt the member, as her time has expired.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue.
[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from the third party for taking an interest this evening.

Our government is committed to the fair and equitable tax treatment of all Canadians. That is why we have created the taxpayer bill of rights, along with the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman. That is also why we mandate government agencies like CRA to conduct internal audits.

Internal auditing is in place in order to keep the agency accountable and to ensure that service to Canadians is constantly improving. Audits generally result in change, and change leads to improved services for Canadian taxpayers.

While it is obvious we cannot get the third party to share our view that taxes should be lower and that their ideas for massive tax hikes would kill Canadian jobs, surely we can agree that internal auditing is important in order to improve services for Canadians.

● (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to an order made on September 19, 2011.

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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