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Thursday, September 22, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 22, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

SAFE STREETS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

The House resumed from September 21 consideration of the motion 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, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: When this bill was last being debated, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway had seven minutes left to conclude his remarks. I will give him the floor now.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think we were in questions and comments.

The Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the speech provided by my colleague yesterday.

One of the things that came across my mind as he was articulating was the whole issue which both opposition parties have been raising, which is regarding the costs. There is no doubt a great deal of effort by both the provincial governments and local municipal governments to try to come to grips with the issue of fighting crime.

The idea of trying to invest more resources in those things that are going to prevent crimes from taking place in the first place, such as community policing and after school programs for high-risk offenders, is where priorities should be.

I wonder if the member could provide any information he has in regard to the costs that have been provided for the implementation of this particular bill and the possible impact of those costs on being able to provide other forms of programs that would have more of an impact on preventing crimes.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, there is lot of wisdom in that question. It touches upon a number of issues that reflect the deficiencies in the bill before us.

There is nothing in this bill that deals with prevention. There is nothing in this bill that addresses the need for increased resources to help prevent crimes from happening in the first place.

As I said in my speech yesterday, it is a renowned accepted fact on all sides of this House that 80% of the people in federal institutions suffer from an addiction. I do not think one has to be a criminologist to realize that if we really want to assist people so that they do not commit an offence once they leave prison, it would be wise to put resources into addressing their addiction.

There is not one iota in this omnibus bill, that takes in 10 separate acts, that addresses that matter. It is highly predictable that we will not make a dent in terms of helping those people to not reoffend once they come back to our communities. I have seen statistics that show that a very high percentage of people released from federal prison are returned to prison for breach of conditions. One of the conditions is invariably that they stay away from alcohol and drugs.

Well, if 80% of them are addicts or alcoholics and they are not getting acceptable treatment in prison, it only stands to reason that when they return to the communities, they will reoffend. They get into that revolving door of prison, which is very expensive for taxpayers, ineffective, and leads to recidivism, which everybody on all sides of the House would like to reduce.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill continues a long-standing pattern of disrespect by the government to our judiciary by taking away judicial discretion around sentencing in particular. It is imposing very rigid guidelines, and not just guidelines, but legal mandates as to how people would be sentenced, giving no discretion to our judiciary to handle the cases on a case-by-case basis.

Ironically, with regard to the part of the bill that deals with sexual offences against children in particular, we have the very real prospect that those types of criminals will go to jail for shorter periods of time because the government has set mandatory minimums at a very low level in some cases.

I wonder if my colleague could just comment on the history of the government's attitude toward the judiciary and what kind of respect it pays the judiciary.

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Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, this allows me to expand on something I said in my speech last night. The public safety committee benefited from the testimony and experience of a representative from the United States who represents a group called Right on Crime. The person who testified at committee was the first appointee of Ronald Reagan to the drug enforcement agency and also was a key architect of the tough-on-crime policy over the last 20 years.

He told the committee that they made clear errors and the errors they made were imposing mandatory minimums and things like “three strikes and you’re out” policies that did nothing but stuff their jails full of prisoners, burden the taxpayers with billions of dollars of unnecessary expenses, and did really nothing to reduce the crime rates in their communities. He testified that states like California and Texas are reversing those trends because they find that they are challenging state treasuries and risking bankruptcy for no real measurable community safety.

Those are key measures that attack judicial discretion. Any mature, intelligent, efficient, effective judicial system will give our judges, who are highly trained and highly skilled, the tools they need in order to render appropriate sentences in each case. For justice to be done, it must be tailored to the individual case. That is what justice is about, and the bill is harmful in that respect.

• (1010)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will probably recall in the last Parliament the government telling us that the actual cost of Bill C-25 was going to be \$90 million and later it was updated to \$2 billion, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer told us that the actual cost would be \$9.5 billion over five years.

Could the hon. member tell me why the government will not come clean on the actual costs of justice bills?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the costs of the government's approach to crime have been escalating and are huge. The last Parliament was full of that kind of discussion about how much the bills would cost, and there were estimates and underestimates. As all Canadians and all parliamentarians know, the cost of the government's crime agenda will be in the billions. That is without any doubt whatsoever. No one on the government side will stand and deny that the cost implication will be in the billions.

Also, I hear the Minister of Finance repeatedly attack the Liberals about downloading costs to the provinces in the nineties. That is exactly what the current bills will do as well. They will download costs to the provinces because many of the people who go to jail will be in provincial institutions.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have a chance to speak to Bill C-10.

The legislation before us today fulfills one of our government's strongest commitments made to Canadians, both in the Speech from the Throne and our 2011 election platform, a commitment that we would take action to make our streets and communities safe and to stand up for victims.

I am very proud of our government's strong record on making families safer. Not only is this what we were elected to do, but it is

what we have made a point of doing from the first day we took office back in 2006.

Canadians have spoken loudly and clearly about their expectations from day one as well. They have told us that law enforcement agencies must have the resources they need to make our communities safe; they want the rights of victims, law-abiding Canadians, to be considered first; they want serious offenders to be held accountable by serving sentences that reflect the severity of their crimes; and they want to see action that will help to prevent crimes before they happen.

Our government listens to Canadians, which is why we have delivered in each of these areas.

Our government is making communities safer by giving our police the tools they need to strengthen the protection of victims and law-abiding Canadians. For example, we have hired over 1,000 additional RCMP personnel as part of our effort to combat crime.

We also said that we would provide funding to the provinces and territories to allow them to hire additional police officers. We delivered on that commitment with a one-time \$400 million police officer recruitment fund. I am very pleased to note that Statistics Canada reported last December that the number of police officers across Canada is now at its highest point since 1981. From 2009 there was an increase of almost 2,000 police officers on our streets.

On the legislative side, our government has passed a number of laws to crack down on crime, especially violent crimes. For instance, we have taken steps to champion the rights of victims in the justice system by ensuring offenders serve sentences that reflect the severity of their crimes. Before we passed the Truth in Sentencing Act, serious criminals were receiving two-for-one or sometimes three-for-one credit for time served while in pre-sentence custody. Of course, this was clogging up our provincial remand centres in places like Manitoba, where 70% of the prisoners were in fact remand. Once we passed the two-for-one and three-for-one, that of course moved the people out of the provincial system and into the federal penitentiaries.

Our government has passed the Serious Time for the Most Serious Crime Act to ensure first-degree murderers serve their life sentences of 25 years without the possibility of early parole through the so-called “faint hope clause”. Our government also passed reasonable measures to ensure that convicted con artists, fraudsters, and drug traffickers cannot be released onto our streets after serving just one-sixth of their prison sentences. This was unacceptable to Canadians, and our government has taken action. I want to specifically point out the assistance that was provided by the Bloc Québécois in assisting us in passing that in a minority Parliament.

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The measures I have listed thus far are but a few examples of our efforts to keep communities safer, give police the tools to fight crime, and assert the rights and interests of victims of crime. However, are we finished? Not by a long shot.

As stated in the Speech from the Throne, “Our government will be here for all Canadians—for individuals, for families and for all regions of the country—as together we move Canada forward”. We will continue to be “here for law-abiding Canadians” since “the Government of Canada has no more fundamental duty than to protect the personal safety of our citizens and defend against threats to our national security”.

Victims have a right to be safe from the people who have done them harm, and our children have a right to be safe from sex offenders, which is why I am very proud that our government passed legislation to strengthen the national sex offender registry and the national DNA databank so that all sex offenders are registered with the police. Of course, when the Liberals passed that legislation in 2002, they deliberately put administrative blocks in the way, additional hearings that would have to take place after conviction, with the result that over 40% of those who were supposed to be on the DNA registry and the sex offender registry were not there, simply because of the administrative burdens.

• (1015)

This is typical of Liberal legislation. The Liberals try to appease the voice of victims by bringing forward legislation while through the use of administrative hurdles ensuring that the legislation cannot accomplish what it was set out to do. Therefore, it discourages Crown attorneys, courts and police officers from actually proceeding with those additional hearings.

What we have done is made those registries automatic upon conviction, which is only proper. Anyone who has been convicted of a serious offence should be on the registry.

Tackling crime on all fronts remains a key priority for the government, as it is for all Canadians. This is why I am proud to support the legislation before us today as it builds upon our government's already impressive track record of cracking down on crime and standing up for victims. Indeed, one important component of Bill C-10 involves standing up for victims, and specifically victims of terrorism.

The bill proposes a fair and balanced approach in allowing victims of terrorism to seek redress. First and foremost, the proposed legislation would allow any victim of terrorism to sue the perpetrators of terrorism and their supporters. The bill would allow these victims to seek redress for a terrorist act that occurred on or after January 1, 1985.

I also want to emphasize that Bill C-10 would allow victims to sue supporters of terrorism. This is crucial, because we all know that terrorist organizations rely on financial support to operate. By targeting such supporters, the legislation would become yet another important tool in our fight against terrorism.

Since the target of legitimate lawsuits could include certain states known to support terrorism, the proposed government legislation contains provisions to amend the State Immunity Act. Specifically, it

would authorize the government to create a list of states that could be sued for their role in supporting perpetrators of terrorism.

Bill C-10 strikes the right balance. It addresses the needs of victims for redress against perpetrators and supporters of terrorism while preserving the important international relations that Canada enjoys.

From its first day in office, this government has been working to ensure that law-abiding Canadian families feel safe and secure in their streets and communities. With Bill C-10 it is taking the next logical step in the fight against terrorism. We are giving victims not only a voice but a legal means to seek justice against those who cause them harm.

In addition to proposing measures to stand up for the victims of crime, Bill C-10 would also introduce reasonable and balanced provisions to help ensure that offenders are fully held accountable for their crimes.

In 2010, our government passed important legislation to provide the Parole Board of Canada the discretion to refuse a pardon in some cases.

Bill C-10 would further strengthen reforms to the current system of pardons in this country in a number of ways.

First, it proposes to replace the term “pardon” with the more appropriate designation of “record suspension”. This would better reflect what is actually taking place.

We need to be clear about what this mechanism would and would not do. We believe the term “record suspension” better reflects the purpose of the legislation, that being to close off general access to a criminal record in appropriate cases as opposed to expressing forgiveness for the offence. After all, it is up to the victims to decide whether or not to forgive the criminals who have abused them, not the government.

This change in terminology is an important one in terms of reinforcing the role of this legislation and eliminating pardons for serious crimes.

Second, the government is clear in Bill C-10 that eligibility for a record suspension would be more restrictive. Bill C-10 would ensure that no one convicted of committing a sexual offence against a child would be eligible for a record suspension.

There are some crimes that should never have the opportunity to be sealed. We believe that sexual offences against children is one of them. Unlike members of the New Democratic Party, we do not believe that those who sexually abuse children should be able to hide their criminal records.

On top of this, individuals convicted of more than three indictable offences would not be eligible to apply for a record suspension if they have received a federal sentence for each of those offences. We believe this is a fair balance between those who have committed a few youthful indiscretions and repeat offenders with serious criminal histories.

Government Orders

●(1020)

In addition, the waiting period to apply for a record suspension for summary offences will be increased from three to five years and from five to ten years for indictable offences. However, the reforms we propose will better align the pardon system with the public's expectation for a fair system, yet one that distinguishes those who have committed serious crimes and whose records should not be sealed.

As well, Bill C-10 would help to enhance offender responsibility and accountability while strengthening the management of offenders during their incarceration and parole. It would also give victims access to more information about the offenders who have harmed them and modernize disciplinary sanctions for offenders serving their sentences.

Bill C-10 would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to emphasize that the primary purpose of corrections and conditional release is the protection of society. As the House is aware, in 1971 solicitor general Jean-Pierre Goyer stated that rehabilitation would be the first concern of the state, rather than public safety. We have seen the justice system turned on its head by that pronouncement and subsequent legislation. Since 2006, our government has been working to turn the justice system right side up by ensuring that the interests of victims and the public are paramount to those of convicted criminals.

Unlike the NDP and the Liberals, the primary purpose we are expounding is in line with key recommendations from the independent review panel that our government established in 2007 to review Correctional Service Canada's operational priorities, strategies and business plan. It is also in line with our commitment to put the interests and safety of law-abiding Canadians first in the justice system.

The amendments before us today would require offenders to conduct themselves in a way that demonstrates respect for other people and their property. As well, they will require all offenders to obey all penitentiary rules and conditions governing their release while also actively participating in the setting and achieving of objectives in their correctional plans.

Since a corrections plan plays a key part in offenders' rehabilitation, Bill C-10 proposes amendments to ensure that a correctional plan is completed for each offender, who sets out objectives for behaviour, program participation and the meeting of their court-ordered obligations, such as restitution for victims. As well, Bill C-10 would modernize the system of discipline in federal penitentiaries by addressing disrespectful, intimidating and assaultive behaviours by inmates, including the throwing of bodily substances.

Bill C-10 also proposes to strengthen the management of offenders in their reintegration into society by allowing police officers to arrest without a warrant offenders who appear to be in violation of their parole. Our government is delivering on these changes asked for by police and other criminal justice partners.

Victims have also long requested access to more information on offenders and to have a greater say in the justice system. Bill C-10 would deliver on this in a number of ways. The bill would allow

victims to obtain information on the reasons for a temporary absence, offender transfer, offender program participation and any offender convictions for serious disciplinary offences.

Also, a victim's right to attend and make statements at a Parole Board of Canada hearing would be enshrined in law. As well, in most cases offenders would be prevented from withdrawing their parole applications 14 days or less before a hearing date, which routinely happens and often causes further suffering to victims.

These proposed amendments are balanced and fair. They respect victims and hold offenders accountable.

Finally, Bill C-10 proposes important amendments to the International Transfer of Offenders Act in order to expressly include public safety as a purpose of that act. This would provide a more flexible decision-making framework and would ensure that the protection of society is paramount when the minister is considering an offender's request to be transferred.

I find it amazing that opposition members continually talk about how terrible Canada's prisons are. However, Canadian prisoners convicted abroad continually want to come home, and foreigners who are incarcerated in Canadian prisons do not want to leave. That should give the opposition an indication of the relative benefits of being in a Canadian prison.

●(1025)

Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, will further strengthen our government's already impressive track record of protecting families, standing up for victims and holding offenders to account for their actions. These reforms respond to the needs of Canadian families, victims, law enforcement agencies and many Canadians.

I therefore urge all hon. members to work with the government to ensure that these proposed reforms receive the speedy passage they deserve.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite spoke about protecting our children from sex offenders, and I agree with him. We must take action to protect our children. We agree on that. However, there is substantial evidence showing that minimum sentences are ineffective as deterrents. Texas, for example, is in the process of backtracking because its minimum sentences are ineffective and costly.

I would like my colleague from Provencher to tell me how he can claim that Bill C-10 will truly protect our children.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the issue of mandatory minimum prison sentences.

We know that an offender in prison is not out committing offences. It is called incapacitation to commit offences. It is a very important aspect of criminal justice.

The American studies indicate that for every year dangerous offenders are out on the streets they commit at least 12 serious offences. Having mandatory minimum prison sentences for dangerous offenders ensures they will not be out victimizing another 12 people.

My colleague fails to understand that while some of the American states do not have mandatory minimum prison sentences they do have sentencing guidelines that are actually used by judges who adjust them up or down accordingly under very strict conditions. Therefore, they in fact do have mandatory minimums.

Another point made to me by the homeland security secretary was that the reason Canadians want to come back to Canada is that they are released on parole after serving one-sixth or one-third of their sentences, whereas when serving sentences in an American federal institution, they receive 15% off for good behaviour. Therefore, time served in the United States is actually real time as opposed to the sentences being imposed here.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the minister's comments about the relative merits and the attractiveness of Canadian federal prisons.

I am not sure if the minister is aware, but there are many provincial institutions that are absolutely stretched to the max. I was interested to hear that part of the plan to deal with this is to give offenders longer sentences so that they can serve them in federal institutions.

Is that the sum total of the government's plan to deal with overcrowding in provincial institutions or would it fairly compensate the provinces for the impact this would have on the provincial budgets by locking people up longer and putting more people away?

•(1030)

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Every single province supports this legislation. These legislative provisions, including the Truth in Sentencing Act passed last year, were asked for and passed by provincial governments of every political stripe. Therefore, I suggest to those individuals who now stand up and pretend to be speaking on behalf of the provinces to ask their premiers what they said to us in terms of bringing this forward.

In respect of two or three for one credits, lawyers were telling their clients to stay in remand to receive those credits so that once sentenced they would basically be free and out on the streets. The provincial authorities realized this was clogging up their system. For example, 70% of all prisoners in Manitoba were in remand.

This legislation gives no incentive for offenders to remain in provincial institutions. Rather, they would go to trial quickly or plead guilty and receive sentencing so that appropriate programming could be delivered to these sentences.

I would advise the hon. member to ask his premier why that province supports this legislation.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his comments today and his efforts to put more police on the streets.

I constantly hear from people in my riding their concerns about crime. There is a notion that crime is going down. I think it is going down because people are not reporting crime. They do not see the use in doing that.

Statistics Canada reports increases in pornography, firearms, drug offences, criminal harassment and sexual assault. Could the minister talk about the efforts in the bill to specifically address those types of crimes?

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I note with some interest that members of the NDP laugh when we talk about the issue of crime. They think crime is funny. They may live in safe, secure, gated communities where they do not have to worry about that kind of thing but most people are concerned about crime.

For example, in 2009, in Winnipeg, the violent stuff, sexual assaults, robbery and murder, jumped by 11%. That same category of crime in 2008 went up by 14%. That is 25% in those two years. It is no wonder that an NDP government came to us and asked if we could do something about the legislation.

Those individuals who sit in the luxury of their seats here and perhaps in the luxury of Ottawa may be insulated from crime, or maybe not. Maybe they are insulated from the reality that their constituents are facing. Let them laugh, but it is their premiers who have been asking for this type of legislation. They should go back to their premiers and ask why they wanted this legislation and why we are bringing it forward.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on the comments we heard from the minister regarding the transfer of prisoners.

Members may recall that the Americans sent us a diplomatic note on this issue, and the problem was inconsistency. The problem was that we were not doing our job here. This legislation will not help that. The Americans are telling us to take care of our own and we are saying no.

The minister said that individuals would fulfill their sentence there, but there will be no supervision when they come back to Canada. People here are saying that this would make public safety worse, not better.

I would like to hear the minister's comments on that.

•(1035)

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, only a socialist would say that bringing a dangerous prisoner back to Canada and putting that individual back on the street would be great for public safety.

Government Orders

We are concerned about that relationship with the United States. I had a long conversation with the homeland security secretary and she was not aware of the kind of prisoners the Americans were holding there. Prisoners spend 85% of their time doing federal time and, when they get federal time, as some prisoners might know, it is a long period of time, and they spend most of it down there. The reason they want to come back to Canada is that they can get out on parole after one-sixth or one-third of time spent and then they are back out on the street where they commit more offences and victimize more Canadians.

Appropriate criteria is set out in the bill. I would point out that the Federal Court recently came out with a whole series of decisions saying that the minister has a broad degree of discretion in making these decisions. However, we want to put some more guidelines in place. This legislation would give the exact guidelines that the member is looking for.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister said that we do not understand crime. I was a victim of assault, so I understand the impact of crime.

The government takes expert advice and hires expensive consultants for its financial information. Why does it continue to refuse to listen to experts who have refuted the effectiveness of mandatory sentences and continues to ignore the 20 year trend of decline in the crime rate?

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, last year, there were 2.1 million reported crimes. Statistics Canada indicates that the rate of reported crimes is going down. Reported crimes dropped to about 31% from about 34%.

The point is that many people have simply given up trying to deal with the justice system. What we are doing, as opposed to what the opposition is trying to do, is restoring faith in the criminal justice system. Every individual should be entitled to walk down the street, not just during the day but 24 hours a day. It is our right as Canadians. We have a right to be safe from criminals.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to what is a very complex, complicated bill that is actually being treated without the proper oversight from the government.

We have heard from other members of the House the problem with the bill when it comes to the costs, which is something that is resonating from Canadians. As we hear, the financial crisis is getting worse. In fact, I believe the Minister of Finance right now is speaking to it just outside this place. We have a government that said that the priority would be the economy and yet, at the first opportunity to deal with the economy, what do we see? We see an omnibus bill, which is an ominous bill, that would pass down costs to provinces.

Just yesterday, the Minister of Finance stood and, with great vitriol, said that the government would never do what the previous Liberal government had done, which was to push costs down to the provinces. Well, that is what this bill would do. Billions and billions of dollars in costs would be pushed down to the provinces, be it members' home provinces, or mine, right across the country.

What we do not see is the evidence as to why we need this legislation. What we have is the politics, which is what we have heard time and time again from the government. In fact, since 2006, it has been the brand of the government to get tough on crime, often waiting until the next election and the next election to bring in its legislation because it is also helpful to the Conservatives to manipulate this issue.

There is a lot in the bill. I will touch on a couple of things that are important. I already touched on one in my question to the minister with regard to foreign affairs and the transfer of prisoners. I was interested in the minister's response when I asked him how he was dealing with the fact that we had a diplomatic note sent to us from the United States last year telling us that we needed to take care of the problem of Canadian citizens who are arrested in the United States. The United States told us that we were not taking care of them and that we needed to bring them back to our own country. What do we do? We outsource the problem to the United States in this case.

The reciprocal is interesting. The United States has a convention and a policy that it does not let that happen. We created a diplomatic spat over an issue around whether we will take care of Canadian citizens who are arrested abroad. I could tell many other stories about the problems of Canadian citizens stranded abroad but I will save that for another day.

The point is that, in this legislation, the minister stood just minutes ago and said that we should not worry about it because he would be given, as a minister, a lot of room to interpret and, therefore, be able to deal with the issue. The problem right now is the way in which the minister and the government are interpreting it. Canadians who are arrested in the United States are often left there, and there are inconsistencies. We have percentages from 14% of applications that are actually received and dealt with by the Americans, to upwards of 62% over one year. In other words, there is a total inconsistency in the application for the transfer of prisoners.

Why does that matter? The claim of the government is that this is about public safety. When prisoners finish their time in the United States, they then come back to Canada. We can talk about the situation of prisons there in a minute. However, if the government is concerned about public safety, there is no supervision of those prisoners after. The minister says that we should not worry because that will be taken care of, that at a time when the government is cutting services to do the actual supervision that is required.

Here is the problem. We have the Americans coming to us with a diplomatic note, which, in Foreign Affairs, is substantive. They do not write diplomatic notes every day. It is when there is a problem that cannot be resolved between countries. A diplomatic note raises the red flag to say that we are not doing enough. The response from the government is to basically ignore it and say that the American prisons are much tougher and we would rather they stay there.

Government Orders

● (1040)

The Conservatives have been in power since 2006 and it is saying that they would rather the prisoners stay in the United States because it is a better situation and we want them to stay there and, when they come back, they can just go out on the street without supervision. Talk about cognitive distance. We have it in front of us with this one example of transfer of prisoners.

By the way, it is not just the NDP. I know that does not always sell with my friend across the way as a salient argument. We are talking about diplomats from the United States. We are talking about people who deal with the criminal justice system, the advocates and lawyers, who are saying that this is a real problem that we need to deal with, never mind the people who are trying to deal with crime prevention. The bill fails just on that one piece. It actually undermines our credibility internationally with our best friend and closest neighbour.

I will turn to the issue of taking a stronger stance against perpetrators of terror, which is also in the bill. On the surface, I think we could all agree, it is important that there should be ways of dealing with anyone who is involved in or funding terrorism. It is about preventing terrorism but we have concerns with what the bill would do. We believe this is a valid issue that should be dealt with, no question, but there are some components in the bill that are worthy of putting out.

The bill would create a cause of action that would allow victims of terrorism to sue individuals, organizations and terrorist entities in Canadian courts for loss or damage suffered as a result of terrorist acts as defined in the Criminal Code. Second, it amends the State Immunity Act to remove state immunity for states that are on a list of countries, established by cabinet, that have supported or currently support terrorism. The bill would allow victims to sue foreign states that are on the list.

That sounds fine, and I would say there are some good things in that, but there are significant steps that we need to look at. There are a couple of concerns I want to underline because they are very serious. If we are going to do this, we need to do it right.

The question is whether amending the State Immunity Act would cause retaliation against Canadians. What are the risks? I have not heard from government why it is limiting the cause of action to a certain list of states. This is where we have to focus in. If we just list certain states, then we are saying that it is open for others and we would be defining terrorism in a very limited way. That is where I think the bill needs some work.

Also, there is the question of the merit in extending the cause of action created by the bill to victims in other forms of state violations, such as human rights and torture. Frankly, I would have liked to have seen us fold that in. I believe my colleague from the Liberal Party had legislation to amend the State Immunity Act.

Right now a person can go after someone for economic cause and sue someone in another country, but if they have been tortured, they can not. We have had many cases in this country, the Mr. Arar case being one, where they cannot use our courts to seek justice. It is a human rights issue and it is an issue we need to take on. I have no idea why the government did not include it.

I was happy to support my colleague, the former justice minister in the Liberal government, who brought legislation forward to do that. It is sensible to amend the State Immunity Act for those Canadians who have had the unfortunate experience of being tortured by other governments and sometimes with the complicity and knowledge of our own government. It is absolutely critical that we do that. It is not in the bill and it should be. That is a failing facet of the bill.

It is very interesting to hear the rationale for the omnibus bill. It is along the lines that the government believes it would deal with a perceived problem and sometimes a factual problem. The government's perceived problem is that crime is higher and is getting worse.

Crime is in the eye of the beholder, of those who have suffered as victims, as my colleague said. However, the programs we have in place for reconstructive justice and reconciliation, sadly and bizarrely, are not being funded to the degree they should be.

● (1045)

If we are serious about crime and serious about victims, then we have to be serious about funding those programs. Many of us have talked to victims and some of us are victims. The one thing victims want is justice, but there is no justice in using a hammer to whack a peanut. What we are talking about here is making sure there is justice for victims and making sure there is reconciliation.

I attended a conference in California on HIV and the law, and what is happening in the United States. The spectacle right now is that judges are forcing the State of California to release prisoners. Why? Because the "three strikes and you are out" policy and putting people in jail for drug crimes has failed.

There is a consensus, with the exception of our friends across the way, that the approach used in the war on drugs was an abysmal failure. Why? Ask people like Newt Gingrich. My goodness, I never thought I would use him for validation, but it turns out he is now. God bless him, Newt Gingrich now says not to do what they did because it is costly and ineffective.

California has privatized its prisons. It has more prisoners than it can handle. Judges are forcing the state to release prisoners. California has absolutely no programs in the prisons to deal with treating addictions, which we all know is a major problem in our prisons and the U.S. prisons. What are we going to do? It turns out we are going to adopt its failed policy.

I would plead with Canadians to hold their members of Parliament to account on this because it is going to cost us more. There is the economic argument regarding downloading all the costs to provinces which right now have difficulty withstanding the costs associated with education, health, et cetera. There is the question of justice. Does this work? The evidence is pretty clear in other jurisdictions that it does not.

Government Orders

Then there is the question of politics. I have sensed a change in this country around why governments and politicians are using issues as important as justice and criminal justice for political gain. We only need to look at the government's talking points. Government members are not citing evidence from peer-reviewed studies; they are saying they have received a mandate so it is a blank cheque and they can do what they want.

It is very important that we look at this issue carefully. If the prisons are full of people who need help, they need to be given supports. Victims need justice, but we will not find it in the bill to the extent that it should be.

We do see little parcels of politics, such as, if the government wants to give the notion that things are really bad, it says that it is going to crack down. It is going to make sure that judges are not allowed to look at the circumstances, and instead it will direct them. The government will make sure that more prisons are built because that is its idea of justice. The government will make sure in the transfer of prisoners to keep them in the United States because the U.S. is tougher on crime; or on something as important as the State Immunity Act, it will not fold in the whole issue when it comes to victims of torture and other human rights abuses.

I wonder whether Canadians see in this legislation any change in politics that they were hoping to see, such as looking at the problem from an evidence-based point of view. If the evidence is such that crime has changed, and I acknowledge that, the indications are it is lower. Let us look at how to prevent crime and get smart on crime. This tough on crime idea is to put people in jail for longer and bring in mandatory minimum sentences. To be smart on crime, which is the way to go, is to look at preventing crime.

● (1050)

In many of the downtown core ridings in many of the cities across the country, the programs to help youth at risk are themselves at risk. I am thinking of recreation programs, arts programs, access for kids from lower income families to things to which middle-class families and families of better means can afford to send their kids. These programs have been cut.

Part of prevention is to make sure there is equity of access for kids. As a teacher who taught in a downtown school, I know what happens when kids do not have access to recreation, the arts, et cetera. They are given fewer choices and less opportunity. If we invested more of our dollars into prevention and opportunity for our kids, we would not have to worry about what will happen later in their lives. We would be able to prevent crime.

It goes without saying that when we look at prevention and reconciliation in the case of victims, we would be able to deal with crime in a strategic way, not a political way. Over the last couple of years, the framework that has been set in this country is that we will deal with crime in an overtly political way, which is unfortunate. It is unfortunate for victims. It is unfortunate for those who for many different reasons find themselves before the criminal justice system.

I want to finish my comments by underlining something that is a crisis in the United States, but we must not be arrogant because we have a similar problem and challenge. There is a disproportionate number of African Americans in the U.S. prison system. That is not

news. It is a disturbing trend that has been going on for many years. We must not be arrogant about it in our country, because we have a similar challenge, and that is the disproportionate number of first nations people in our prisons.

Like many members in this place, I was very proud when we acknowledged the issue of what happened in the residential schools. That acknowledgement was a proud moment for Canada, but what did those words mean? If there is a disproportionate number of first nations, aboriginal and Inuit people in our prisons and we have not acknowledged why they are there, we are simply treating them in the same manner as is happening in the United States, as people who broke the law and let us just send them to jail. We have not only failed in terms of dealing with the situation on the ground, but we also have turned our backs to the spirit of what that reconciliation was supposed to be about in the House of Commons a couple of years ago.

On the issue of crime and justice, we need more justice. We need more prevention. We need to make sure that we honour our treaties with our allies in the United States. When it comes to looking at the State Immunity Act and making sure that we acknowledge that it needs to be amended, we have to take in the issue of torture, we have to take in the issue of human rights. If we do not do that, then we will have failed in that opportunity as well.

I hope Canadians will get in touch with their members of Parliament regarding what the government is doing on this issue. The costs are financial. This is about dealing with an issue which all Canadians are seized with, but doing it in an intelligent manner, based on evidence and making sure we take what I believe is an overtly political agenda out of an extremely important issue. We need to deal with it in a sensible manner for all of our citizens and all our constituents.

● (1055)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on a good speech and a good analysis of the bill.

He touched upon the cost of the bill. We have had some discussion about that. There is also the cost of not doing crime prevention.

Crime prevention is critical to lowering the rates and making sure people get back on the right track for those who had committed small crimes. I used to run a youth program, and we had a 90% success rate when there was intervention. They had a job. They had hope and opportunity. They went back to school.

Statements by Members

I want to ask the member a specific question in terms of crime prevention. Windsor has the largest border crossing in Canada and North America, and our customs facility is being moved to Fort Erie, nearly 400 kilometres away. Customs officers will have to phone someone 400 kilometres away to see whether they should move on suspicion of drugs, guns and smuggling, which are the tools for organized crime, tools that inflict a lot of serious problems on people.

That move was motivated by the possibility of cutting a couple of million dollars. There will be a cut of a couple of million dollars and that greater intrusion.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that if we are to be smart on crime, we have to invest in the right places, but the government cut in an area where there is a huge need for more resources.

If we are going to be smart on crime, we have to ensure there is the requisite supervision of our borders.

The member is absolutely right. A huge issue is guns coming over the border and we must prevent that. The NDP has called for more resources for the border to be smart on crime. The best way to deal with lowering crime rates is to prevent crime. One way is to ensure there are more resources on the border. The notion that officials at the border have to call someone 400 kilometres away to take action speaks to the lack of logic in the government's action.

Why is the government doing something that would further inflict problems—

The Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the member, but he will have eight minutes to conclude his period of questions and comments at some later time.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

NEW BRUNSWICK SENIOR BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to salute the Chatham Ironmen on winning the New Brunswick senior baseball championship for 2011. The team defeated the Fredericton Royals in a 3-2 thriller to take the best-of-seven series four games to two. This is the Chatham Ironmen's 10th provincial title, and all in Miramichi are so proud of the team. It will now represent the province of New Brunswick at the senior nationals in Prince George, B.C., in August 2012. Also, Miramichi can be proud of having both the senior and junior Ironmen as baseball champions for 2011.

Congratulations to all the players for an excellent season, with special mention of Greg Morris, long-time coach; Daryl Matthews, manager; Ronnie Hardy and Terry Leggatt, assistant coaches; and Ronnie McCormack, trainer, as well as the fans and volunteers.

Good luck in British Columbia, boys. Go, Ironmen, go.

●(1100)

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is perhaps no greater evidence of the government's failure on the economy in communities across the country than the silent steel mill of the former Stelco in Hamilton.

When the government approved this takeover by U.S. Steel, a promise was made to protect jobs. We see exactly the opposite happening.

Hundreds of families are losing a breadwinner, and economic hardship is being felt by families throughout the region because the government has failed to act to ensure that U.S. Steel keeps its word. Nine hundred Stelco workers have been locked out for nearly a year because the government is refusing to do what it takes to make companies live up to their commitments. These workers and Stelco pensioners are being held hostage by Stelco because of the government's bad deal.

EI benefits will soon run out. The government must do what is right and extend these benefits and, most importantly, push the company to keep its word. New Democrats stand in solidarity with U.S. Steel workers and with the community. We will continue to speak out until the locks are removed and the workers are able to get back to work.

* * *

WILLIAM GEORGE LESICK

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we pause today in tribute to a former member of the House of Commons who recently passed away. Born in Alberta of immigrant Ukrainian parents, this man contributed to his province and to his country with great distinction in a way that can be best described as truly honourable.

He served Canada in World War II in Europe, helping liberate Holland with the 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards. He owned and managed the Beverly Pharmacy. He was elected and served as member of Parliament for Edmonton East and then served as citizenship judge. As a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Norwood Branch, he chaired the Remembrance Day parade at the Beverly cenotaph for many years.

William George Lesick was a war veteran, a member of Parliament, pharmacist, judge, recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal and friend. Bill Lesick, respected for his service to his country in war and peace, will be greatly missed by his family and his many friends.

We will not forget.

*Statements by Members***LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT RESEARCH BRANCH**

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through retirement we are losing one of the best from the Library of Parliament's research branch. John Christopher has provided distinguished service to senators, members of the House, and a variety of parliamentary committees for more than four decades.

John's special expertise was on a full range of transportation issues. I cannot even imagine the number of transport committees and topics he has attended to: the Crow rate, the WGTA, railway reviews, airlines, air transport strikes, shipping. If we just name it, he has seen it all.

From a personal perspective, John's service to the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group was beyond the call of duty. His research, advice and documentation of cross-border issues has been superb. His calm presence and cordiality were greatly appreciated by legislators of both countries.

On behalf of us all, a sincere thanks for a job well done.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board issue is a rights issue. When the Canadian Wheat Board was established 90 years ago, it was created respecting the right of farmers to choose to market their grain through the board or not. There was no monopoly. This right was removed in 1942-1943 under the War Measures Act to get cheap grain to feed the war effort in Europe. Sadly, this monopoly was not removed after the war ended. It is unbelievable but true.

Justice was restored years ago for farmers in eastern Canada, but not the west. Our Conservative government is about to change that and will reinstate the fundamental rights of western wheat and grain farmers by ending this monopoly. The Wheat Board will be returned to its original form, which is that of a marketing agency that farmers can choose to use or not.

No one else should choose for western farmers, and from now on, no one will.

* * *

● (1105)

WORLD CARFREE DAY

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to voice my support for World Carfree Day. This event takes place in over 2,000 cities across the world and represents an ever-growing phenomenon of increased environmental awareness.

In my riding in Lachine, Piché Street was closed yesterday to mark the event. Over 150 people took part, including students from six different primary school classes. This day focuses on the importance of public transport, bicycling and walking as ways to ensure environmental sustainability. This is the time to reflect on our use and overuse of the planet's finite resources.

These ecological arguments are powerful, but let us not forget that they are only one side of the coin. Let us use the experience of this

day and seize this opportunity to invest in our public transport systems and make our cities greener, healthier and happier, and to allow Canada to live up to its potential as an environmental leader on the global stage.

Congratulations to all people today who did not use cars.

* * *

FLOODS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again I would like to acknowledge the constituents of Souris—Moose Mountain who have suffered loss or damage due to excessive moisture and flooding. Initially there was shock, and then frustration and anxiety. I know it can be heart-wrenching to see one's home suffer the ravages of flooding, to not be able to put in one's crop or to have access roads covered by water.

At the same time, I am pleased to say that we as a government had an immediate response by way of the provincial disaster assistance program, crop insurance, a federal-provincial top-up of \$30 per acre, including the ability for farmers and ranchers to defer their income from cattle sales. When natural disasters strike, we are there to help.

Many constituents of Souris—Moose Mountain have asked for this response, and I am pleased to say that this government acted and delivered. With time, the resilience of our constituents will prevail, and we will continue to be the economic leaders in Saskatchewan and Canada that we are destined to be.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, rather than joining Israel at the negotiation table, the Palestinian Authority will submit a written request for independent statehood at the United Nations. Should it be recognized, it would be the first time in global history that a borderless state will be declared.

I stand in support of our government's long-standing position that the only solution to the current conflict is negotiation between the two parties. A unilateral Palestinian bid for statehood only serves to undermine this process by circumventing Israel as a relevant party. Israel has a right to be recognized as a Jewish state and to exist within safe and secure borders. As the Iranian ambassador to Egypt remarked, the Palestinians' push for full membership as a UN member state is "a step towards wiping out Israel".

I urge the Palestinian Authority to return to talks to conclude a framework agreement on all final status issues. Our Prime Minister has taken a clear stand at the UN to reject this UDI.

I call on members of this House to join our government to condemn this unilateral action. Members should be prepared to consider all options.

* * *

ECOLOGY ACTION CENTRE

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Ecology Action Centre on its 40th anniversary of dedicated environmental championship.

The EAC has achieved many things during the last four decades, from preventing the construction of a nuclear plant to a ban on aerial spraying of chemical pesticides and from a moratorium on uranium mining to the active and safe routes to school program.

These successes and many more have been acknowledged with the 2009 Arthur Kroeger Award for public affairs.

The EAC is home to its own Tarred Duck Award, “presented to a group or individual who has caused egregious or widespread damage to the environment”. The proud laureate of 2007 was our own Prime Minister.

The EAC celebrated its anniversary with an unprecedented 40 days of action, with daily events ranging from giving cakes to local environmental groups to the EAC's very own superhero squad, the Green Avengers, taking on the Bluenose Marathon. By the commitment and creativity of its own people, the EAC has reminded everybody that “action” is its middle name.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

M. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, PCC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that, once again, our Conservative government has proven that we remain focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs and promoting economic growth.

The figures released by Statistics Canada this morning indicate that the number of people receiving regular employment insurance benefits fell by 22% compared to July 2010. That number has been dropping for 10 consecutive months now. The number of Canadians filing an initial or renewal claim dropped by 3% compared to the same time last year.

This is because nearly 600,000 jobs have been created since July 2008, including 29,000 full-time jobs in August alone. This only proves, once again, that Canadians made the right choice during the last election when they chose our low-tax plan for job creation.

* * *

• (1110)

REVITALIZATION OF SMALL MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about something that is very important to my region and to me: the decline of our villages and the urgent need for Government of Canada support so that they can take charge of their development.

Statements by Members

Among the nine municipalities in my riding, two are devitalized: Petit-Saguenay and Rivière-Éternité. They each have less than 800 inhabitants and their populations are declining. Their people are also aging, and their financial and administrative capacities are limited.

Small municipalities across Canada are our most precious jewels. They are not asking to be rescued by the federal government. They are asking for support for their various revitalization projects.

The gas tax fund transfers to the municipalities are not a miracle solution when the village gas station is contemplating closing down.

The Government of Canada must keep these villages alive by financially supporting their revitalization projects.

I am calling on the government not to forget small municipalities, which have the lowest demographic weight. If they disappear, important pieces of Canada's history will disappear with them.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the NDP, led by the member for Surrey North, criticized the Safe Streets and Communities Act. He even stated that it was unfair that we are seeking to limit the ability of criminals to get pardons. Sadly, out-of-touch statements like that are not surprising from the official opposition.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act is reasonable and tough, and it is what Canadian gave us a mandate to do. For example, it stops those who have committed sexual offences against children from getting pardons.

On this side of the House, we believe that often, while a criminal's jail term may end, the suffering caused to his or her victims lasts a lifetime. Canadians have been clear: it is unacceptable to ever forget the harm that child molesters have caused to their victims.

I call on the NDP members to finally put the rights of law-abiding Canadians ahead of the rights of convicted criminals and support the Safe Streets and Communities Act. It is not too late for them to come to their senses.

* * *

WORLD CARFREE DAY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Carfree Day, a day to encourage people to get out of their cars and cycle, run, walk or take public transit. It is about promoting awareness of alternative forms of transportation, providing an opportunity to break the normal pattern of behaviour, highlighting the public health benefits of active lifestyles and participating in dialogue about the future of our cities.

In Canada, as Canadians travel to school, work or the local store, they should join in solidarity with almost 40 countries and 2,000 cities and towns in thinking about our cities and how they should grow and develop.

Oral Questions

If alternative transport was easy today, tomorrow Canadians should question whether they need to drive two minutes down the road for milk, or whether a walk might be a better, healthier choice.

Let us think about intergenerational and moral responsibility. We must protect the endless future instead of serving the fleeting present.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, exactly one year ago today, the House voted on Bill C-391, a bill that would have ended the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Instead of representing their voters' wishes, NDP and Liberal MPs turned their backs on their constituents that day and voted to keep the registry. Rather than joining our Conservative government in supporting measures to put those who use firearms to commit crimes behind bars, they stood up for a registry that targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

Our Conservative government has been absolutely clear about its position. We have to abolish the long gun registry and focus our resources on real criminals.

Thankfully, much has changed in the House in the last year. On May 2 Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to focus on their priorities, which includes ending the long gun registry.

Canadians can rest assured that we will deliver on our promise and that their Conservative MPs will represent their views in the House. We will end the long gun registry once and for all.

* * *

•(1115)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over one billion people on the planet live in extreme poverty. Of these people, 70% are women and girls, representing the poorest of the poor.

In many regions of the world, girls face unique barriers to survival and development simply because they are girls. They are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, to be denied access to education, to be forced into child marriages, to be subject to violence and to be victims of slave labour or trafficking.

On March 24, 2011, a motion was unanimously passed in the House declaring that Canada would lead the effort to have the United Nations declare September 22 as the international day of the girl.

An international day of the girl would focus the world's attention on the importance of girls' rights. It would serve as a foundation for advocacy to ensure that girls get the investment and recognition they deserve, not only as citizens but as powerful agents of change.

Today, September 22, I stand with my colleagues to pay tribute to the girls in our lives, the girls of our great nation and the girls across the globe.

DURBAN

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the events taking place to mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban declaration. This event will be used as a platform to single out and demonize Israel, and it will be used to spread anti-Semitic views to a global audience.

I am proud that Canada was the first nation to withdraw from Durban II and that Canada is joining 13 other democracies in not participating in the Durban III hatefest. That is why the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is speaking at the Perils of Global Intolerance Conference in New York this afternoon, to make our government's position clear to the world.

Canada is committed to the fight against racism. That is why Canada does not, and will not, support the Durban III charade, whose agenda has been usurped by some who seek to promote racism rather than combat it.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's inability to effectively manage the economy puts Canada at greater risk of a recession. The markets are tanking. Scotiabank, Moody's and the IMF have issued serious warnings to the government. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are not heeding these warnings. They refuse to see that there is a difference between spending and investing. It is time to invest. It is not time to cut services.

When will the Prime Minister realize this?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this analysis is completely false. I was in New York, and the reality is that the world has great confidence in Canada. However, economic uncertainty is on the rise everywhere in the world as a result of certain difficulties, particularly the sovereign debt of certain countries. Today, Prime Minister Cameron and I put out a letter encouraging world leaders to act in a way that will allow us to continue the global economic recovery.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, cuts to public services this year and next year will account for approximately 1% of the GDP. The IMF is saying that cuts of this order will have the same negative effect on the economy. In short, the cuts the Conservatives are making to public services will make a recession even more likely.

The Governor of the Bank of Canada is saying that the government can help the economy by making strategic investments. Why is the government doing the opposite?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's statements are completely false. The reality is that we are trying to save a modest amount of money while making major targeted investments in the Canadian economy to encourage long-term growth. We still have a very stimulating economic policy, a tax policy. This government will continue to manage the economy in a way that has been praised around the world.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are refusing to acknowledge Canada's economic challenges. Economists say that the real unemployment rate, which is all Canadians who would work if there were jobs for them, is up to 11%. That is almost two million unemployed Canadians. Today we learned that less than one in three qualify for EI.

Where is the plan to get people back to work?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that unemployment remains too high, the world knows that Canada has one of the best employment job creation records in the industrialized world. I always appreciate ideas from the opposition to improve that, but good ideas do not include raising debt and raising taxes, as that party advocates.

Today, Prime Minister Cameron, I and other world leaders have put out a letter encouraging those leaders around the world, who are in countries that are encouraging global economic uncertainty, to act in a way that will allow us to continue the economic recovery.

The world has great confidence in the policies we are following in Canada. We need to see more of that around the world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government prefers to boast about doing better than Greece rather than helping the two million unemployed in this country. There is no shortage of projects in which we could invest and create jobs. The Champlain Bridge is a perfect example.

The Minister of Finance knows that investments in infrastructure yield five times the benefits of corporate tax reductions. So what is the government waiting for?

[*English*]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government did not wait. We acted and we acted quickly.

After we took government, we paid down \$37 billion in debt. That is what put us in the position where we could stimulate the economy. What happened with that stimulus? Our country has 600,000 more people working now because of our economic action plan.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two million Canadians who want to work cannot. That represents tens of billions of dollars in lost wages and spending in our domestic economy. That is a tragedy for those families and a real drag on our economy. Putting these Canadians back to work is just the sort of measure that would help solve the government's deficit problem.

Experts and economists agree with the opposition. Why is the government so resistant to sound economic logic? Why is it refusing to act?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, excuse me for confusing sound economic policy with anything the NDP puts forward. That is not exactly the case. In fact, as the Prime Minister has just said, unemployment rates are still too high, but they are 1% below the United States. We put money into this economy to create jobs and that is what is important to Canadians. We continue on job creation and the economy. That is our main focus to ensure that as many Canadians who want to work can have a job.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have both said that if circumstances seem to change from where they were at the time of the budget, they will show flexibility, they will show a willingness to re-engage on job creation and to re-engage on what needs to happen in the economy.

Could the Prime Minister tell me just exactly what it will take to convince the government that in fact circumstances are changing and that now is the time to react to the circumstances about which he has talked?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is not only engaged in the economy, it is our principal priority. That is why Canada has one of the best job creation records in the industrialized world.

Obviously we are concerned about developments and we always look for useful ideas from everyone in terms of how to move our economy forward. I would encourage the leader of the Liberal Party to suggest some of those ideas. After all, the Liberals just ran an election campaign without a single important thing in terms of an economic platform.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will make a very specific suggestion: that, in the North American security perimeter negotiations, the government promote Canadian interests and seek assurances that the "Buy American" initiative will not discriminate against Canadian companies. It will result in job losses and be very detrimental to the Canadian economy.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to ensure that Canadian interests are protected?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, negotiations about the perimeter are negotiations about our access to the American economy. It is the same thing that the Liberal Party leader is asking for. I urge the Liberal Party to support this very important initiative to guarantee that we have access to the American market.

*Oral Questions**[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we now know, with great regret, that the Minister of National Defence ordered his search and rescue helicopter to pick him up from his vacation on the Gander River. The response, “It was a demonstration of their capabilities”. Even the Conservatives are laughing at that one.

He feels that he is entitled to use vital life-saving equipment for his own personal limousine, and we would like for him to answer to it.

The Prime Minister has suggested that the Chief of the Defence Staff pay back the money for his personal flights. Will the Minister of National Defence do the same, pay back the \$16,000 and apologize?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question from the hon. member, I was in fact in Gander in July of 2010, on a personal visit with friends for which I paid. Three days into the visit I participated in a search and rescue demonstration with 103 Squadron of 9 Wing Gander. I shortened my stay by a day to take part in that demonstration and later flew on to do government business in Ontario.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are all shocked to learn that the Minister of National Defence sees his country's military equipment as his own personal chauffeur service.

The government is paying consultants to tell it how to save money, but the Minister of National Defence used a helicopter, which should be on standby for search and rescue, to pick him up from a personal fishing trip. This helicopter was ordered on the day by his office in Ottawa.

How can the minister possibly justify such an inappropriate use of public funds?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I just explained that I shortened a personal visit to take part in a search and rescue demonstration in Gander.

Had any emergency requirement arisen that would have required search and rescue assets, they would have of course been immediately diverted.

As the member would know, having participated in the parliamentary program with the Canadian Forces, members of Parliament, in fact 20 including himself, took part in search and rescue activities in the past.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, being picked up at a cost of \$16,000 from a fishing camp is not the way to learn how search and rescue helicopters operate.

Average Canadians are being told to tighten their belts, but when it comes to the minister and his department's use of military aircraft, money is apparently no object.

How can we count on this minister to provide leadership on this issue when he himself treats a search and rescue helicopter as private transportation?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work of the Canadian Forces, particularly those who take part in search and rescue.

Canada has a rescue area of responsibility of over 18 million square kilometres of land and sea, the size of continental Europe. Our Canadian Forces and Coast Guard partners respond to more than 8,000 incidents every year, tasking military aircraft for over 1,100 cases, and in fact save on average 1,200 lives each and every year.

I think that as Minister of National Defence I should familiarize myself at every opportunity with the important work of those who perform these daily heroics.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government is planning to make cuts to the Department of National Defence, but it is clear that those at the top will not be affected. While the minister and his staff are gallivanting around the country at taxpayers' expense, departmental staff are being shown the door.

Can the minister tell the House that it will not just be employees who have to tighten their belts?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I am very proud of the work of the Canadian Forces. I have observed the work they do in Operation Nanook in the Arctic. I have observed search and rescue activities. I have observed live fire operations, as have members of the opposition who take part in the parliamentary Canadian Forces program.

I can confirm that all government departments are looking at their departments for efficiencies, as Canadians would expect them to do, as Canadians and businesses themselves are doing.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have some advice for the government on how to save money, and I will not be charging \$90,000 a day. It should start by reducing the spending of its own ministers. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom takes commercial flights when visiting other leaders, as he did recently to visit President Obama.

Why do our ministers not walk the talk by cutting their wasteful and extravagant spending, such as the Minister of National Defence's use of a search and rescue helicopter for personal travel?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary program put on by the Canadian Forces every year has the enthusiastic participation of members of Parliament, including members of the opposition.

I note that the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue took part this year in the program that was put on by the air force. I suspect she may have availed herself of a Canadian Forces asset at that time.

Oral Questions

This is a great opportunity for members of Parliament to see first-hand the important, critical, life-saving work that the men and women in uniform perform each and every day on behalf of our country.

* * *

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Muskoka minister was able to divert \$50 million in border infrastructure to be spent on dubious spending in his riding certainly gave him enormous political clout in the region. It may have even helped secure an election, which would be why he was setting up his meetings in the middle of the campaign.

Will the minister confirm to this House whether or not he used his new-found power and clout to offer anyone a job related to the G8?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is incorrect. As I have said in the past in this House, the facts have not changed. The minister said that the infrastructure money and all the money was spent wisely, and under budget for the people of that riding. It was money very well spent and that is good news in that region.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the song and dance, but this is not a foreign affairs intervention. This is a question regarding the credibility of a minister.

I would like to ask the minister, when he was the minister of health he sent an email to a friend who asked if he would like to be retained by the town. The minister then contacted the mayor who said he would get on it right away. The Muskoka member replied “good stuff”.

Will the minister stand in the House and tell us whether or not he thinks this kind of pork barrel, backroom politics is an ethical way to run government?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the opposition will not listen to the good news that was coming out from there. The whole project came in under \$5 million. That is quite substantial. It was done. The Auditor General has looked at it and given a recommendation. Let us move on. It was a good project, let us move on.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives thought that it was a good idea to offer \$90,000 a day on a silver platter to a consulting firm with annual revenues of over \$3 billion. Let us be clear: this \$20 million of public money that is going into the pockets of Deloitte is equivalent to the operating budget of the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec for two years.

Do the Conservatives at least realize how out of touch they are with the priorities and needs of the people?

● (1135)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, private sector advice is a key part of our plan to ensure that Canada does not experience the economic and financial problems that other countries in the world are experiencing.

[English]

It is important to seek advice, not only from the public service but also from private sector experts. We are proud of that. We are proud of the fact that this government focuses on the real issues: jobs for Canadians, economic recovery. That is what we focus on and that is what the opposition should focus on as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Conservatives' enlightening explanations, we have learned that for every \$1 spent on consulting, we expect to save \$200. The way they see it, the more we spend, the more we save. That is not really a logic that I would suggest to Canadian families right now. The reality is that with this amount of money, we could create 450 good jobs that would guarantee good public services.

Today we learned that at Public Works and Government Services Canada alone, consulting fees have doubled and have reached \$1.8 billion.

Has the government lost all control over public spending?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance said yesterday, for every \$1 of spending on outside experts, we expect \$200 of savings.

[English]

It is important that we get that outside advice. It is important that we focus on finding savings, so that we can still be an economy and country that other countries look to for leadership. Our Prime Minister provides leadership not only to this country but worldwide economic leadership and that is because we keep our eye on the ball, unlike the opposition.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$90,000 a day for consultants. The citizens of Toronto have seen this movie before and they know what happens when private consultants are hired to find cuts. Toronto paid millions for its consultant report and now arts, recreation centres, child care, transit, even public health are on the chopping block.

We know that members of the government, including the Prime Minister, are good buddies with Toronto's slash and burn mayor. The question is, what kind of essential services are on the chopping block for the government?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a strong mandate from the people of Canada. They want a government to spend within its means. They want to make sure that essential, good services delivered by the Government of Canada continue to be delivered in an efficient and effective manner. That is our mandate from the people of Canada.

We do not want to raise taxes. We do not want to have the kind of spending programs that the opposition members have. We want to deliver high quality services to Canadians and spend within our means. That is our mandate.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the defence minister has blatantly abused his position by using a search and rescue helicopter as a taxi service. While the minister supports slamming the door on the search and rescue sub-centre in St. John's, he did not mind calling upon a search and rescue helicopter to bring home his fresh catch from his personal fishing trip.

Now we learn the minister took a two-hour, \$20,000 jaunt aboard a Challenger jet, just one day before the last federal election campaign, to make a political announcement.

One MP used to say, "Burning jet fuel in the Challenger making phony announcements [is wrong]". Who said that? The current defence minister .

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what a member from Newfoundland has against fishing.

With respect to the question of the trip to Gander, I have already explained I was there on a personal trip that I paid for myself. I cut the trip short to take part in a search and rescue demonstration. I went on to make a government announcement later that day.

With respect to Canadian Forces assets, members of Parliament from all parties have taken part in the Canadian Forces parliamentary program, which is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the incredible work that is done by our men and women in uniform.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has been caught, yet again, unable to justify sole sourcing its contract for new jet fighters.

Despite repeated assertions that Canada needs a fifth generation fighter and that the F-35 is the only jet to meet those specifications, the government did not bother waiting to review complete F-18 Super Hornet specs.

Fifth generation is merely a U.S. trademark of Lockheed Martin, not a guarantee of suitability.

Why will the Conservative government not serve both our forces and taxpayers by holding an open competition for the best fighter jet?

• (1140)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2001 Canada participated in the extensive

and rigorous U.S.-led competition process where the two bidders developed and completed prototype aircraft. Partner nations were engaged during the competitive process. This led to the selection of Lockheed Martin as its partner at the joint strike fighter manufacturing of our F-35

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for months now the government has been saying that the price per plane for the F-35 is \$75 million.

In light of statements made yesterday, the cost must have gone up to at least \$125 million per plane. This leaves less than \$1 billion for engines, spare parts, training, maintenance, initial suite of weapons, and everything else. The numbers just do not add up.

In light of these new figures, would the Minister of National Defence now agree that the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Congressional budget officer were right all along?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada needs military aircraft in order to protect our sovereignty. The current CF-18s must be replaced. We have budgeted \$9 billion to purchase F-35s.

Let me be clear. In the last election, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to ensure that the brave men and women of the Canadian armed forces have the tools they need to do their job, and come home safe and sound at the end of their —

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There continues to be far too much noise from that end of the chamber, so I am going to ask members down there to pay respect to their colleagues that is due when they are answering a question.

The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

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TAXATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister claimed that many of the allegations of fraud at the Canadian Revenue Agency date back "more than a decade".

If allegations date back so long, why are we only hearing about them now? The CRA needs to be a credible and trusted agency by all Canadians, not a safe haven for fraudsters.

Could the minister tell this House why the government was sitting on its hands, without conducting a proper investigation?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been conducting proper investigations and the government is co-operating fully with the RCMP into these matters.

We do appreciate this is a very serious issue. We will not tolerate the types of activities that have been alleged.

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are sick of seeing this government blame its predecessors. The Conservatives can certainly ask Canadians to tighten their belts, but the least they can do in return is ensure that public funds are managed responsibly and transparently.

In light of what is happening at the Canada Revenue Agency, why is the minister waiting for the RCMP to investigate before taking real steps to reassure the public?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this matter is in the hands of the RCMP.

As I did say, many of these allegations date back more than a decade. Some of them are now going through the court process and that is why we are reading about them in the media.

I can assure the House that the RCMP and officials at CRA are co-operating fully, and this matter is being investigated.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a tightening of the tax fraud sanctions by the United States will have an impact on one million Canadians. Only a small fraction of people with dual citizenship are aware of these requirements. Law-abiding citizens who are unaware of the new rules should not be treated as fraudsters.

What is the government planning on doing to ensure that Canadians are well informed?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned with this implication on Canadians. The finance minister has raised that concern directly with his counterpart in the United States and strongly expressed our frustration with Canadians being put in this place. We know it is a long-standing act but most Canadians were not aware of their obligations.

• (1145)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new U.S. rules also require all Canadian financial institutions to disclose the personal financial information of Canadian and U.S. citizens directly to the IRS. This will be a costly process that will compromise privacy obviously. The bank account of a pensioner in Canada should not be treated the same way as a bank account of a tax evader in the Cayman Islands.

Will the minister engage with the U.S. government to ensure the privacy of everyday Canadians is protected?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is what the finance minister has actually done. He made sure that our American counterparts were aware of the frustrations and the concern that this did provide to seniors whose savings perhaps could be implicated in this. We were also very clear in stating to them that the penalties imposed in this potential would not be collected by CRA.

Oral Questions

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs and promoting economic growth.

This week, the IMF forecasted Canada's overall economic growth will lead in the G7 over the next two years, an example of our global economic leadership.

Our finance minister will represent Canada at the upcoming G20, IMF and World Bank meetings as world financial leaders meet to discuss the challenges facing the global economy.

Could the Minister of State for Finance please outline what Canada's message will be at these meetings?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, our top priority remains the economic recovery, both at home and abroad. That is why our finance minister is meeting with our global partners to continue the work toward strengthening economic confidence and to promote global economic recovery.

Canada's role is very important. Why? It is important because our experience and our success in implementing Canada's economic plan and our low tax plan to return to balance serves as a very strong and forceful example to other countries.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said he simply wants to optimize our ozone monitoring services. Yet all experts agree that resources are needed to study the ozone layer effectively, and they are worried about the cuts. This past winter, the ozone layer was thinner than ever. Scientists around the globe have praised the existing monitoring programs.

Why is the government jeopardizing this research with cuts to the environmental sector?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the preamble to the question is false.

[English]

I will be very clear. Environment Canada will continue to monitor ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will continue to deliver world-class services.

This government will continue to protect the environment in the most cost effective way as possible.

Oral Questions

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is mortgaging our future. We need this data now more than ever. Climate change is accelerating the thinning of the ozone layer, which, I would remind the minister, is what protects us from harmful UV radiation. I would remind the minister that these ozone monitoring programs are a made-in-Canada solution to an international problem. We should be showcasing them, not shortchanging them.

Why does the minister refuse to be upfront with Canadians about the impacts of his cuts on our environment?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for correcting my flawed French.

I will be very clear. Environment Canada continually reviews its programs, aligning staff and resources where they will have the greatest impact. We will continue to monitor ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will continue to deliver its world-class services.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Keystone pipeline project raises great concerns in both Canada and the United States. In fact, environmental consequences are still unknown and it may lead to an uncontrolled expansion of the tar sands.

At a time when Canada needs a plan for job creation, why is the government ready to sell out Canadian workers and ship thousands of jobs south of the border?

• (1150)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is concentrating on what matters to Canadians, that is to say, jobs and economic growth.

The fact is that the oil sands are responsible for over 140,000 jobs across Canada. The job number is expected to grow to almost half a million jobs. That is how many jobs the opposition members say no to when they bash Canada abroad.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government refuses to strike a balance between protecting our environment and developing the oil sands.

The unbridled development of the oil sands cannot go on at the expense of our long-term economic and environmental prosperity.

Why is the government giving up our resources and our jobs and getting nothing in return, apart from pollution and unemployment?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition needs to stop knocking Canada's economic growth and start supporting the hundreds of thousands of jobs that depend on the oil sands industry. Employment in Canada is far too important to be used to try to gain some kind of partisan political advantage.

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[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is no friend to the refugee community. We just need

to look at the anti-smuggling bill and how it tried to demonize refugees as a whole.

Today, a family of refugees will be arriving here in Canada. The minister knows them quite well. He is the one who actually deported them. It took a federal court in order to get that family back to Canada.

I look to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism or to the government to do the honourable thing and apologize to the Tabaj family for the harm caused because the government chose to deport this particular family.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows, as do all Canadians, that we have a very fair and just refugee system in this country. In fact, so much so that we ensure that we will improve upon that system with Bill C-11, the refugee reform act, of which every member of the 41st Parliament supported unanimously.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is bragging about Canada's leadership abroad in the area of child and maternal health, but he is refusing to take action here in Canada.

The infant mortality rate in the aboriginal population in Canada is two to four times higher than in the non-aboriginal population.

When will the minister commit to responding to the Health Council of Canada's damning report so that we can better understand and improve the health of aboriginal children and mothers in Canada?

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of aboriginal Canadians is a top priority for the government. We have entered into agreements with provinces on child and family services. This is an area where we have agreement between the federal government, the provinces and the territories that there needs to be care and attention paid to this and we are happy to enter into those agreements.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to pretend that he cares about jobs but his inaction tells a different story.

After the last buy America plan, the government pledged to negotiate exemptions for Canada on any similar deals. However, instead, it did nothing, and now we have been shut out again.

When will the government stop playing politics with this issue and start negotiating trade deals that actually protect Canadian jobs?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear and I have been clear. We are focusing on creating on jobs in Canada and removing trade barriers. I raised our concerns regarding the buy America provisions with my counterpart, as well as with the U.S. ambassador to Canada. We will continue to impress upon them that imposing these kinds of trade restrictions is harmful not only to Canada but also to the United States.

• (1155)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what have the Conservatives been doing the last couple of years? They have been sleeping at the switch.

The last time around, by the time the government got involved, Canadian firms got access to \$1.3 billion, 0.5%, of the stimulus program. In return, U.S. companies got access to \$25 billion worth of Canadian contracts. The math just does not add up.

Why is the government bowing to the Americans over and over again instead of putting Canadian procurement and Canadian jobs first?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty rich coming from an individual in a party that actually has a senior member, one of its MPs, contemplating running for the leadership of the party and has a motion before the House calling for the same trade measures to be implemented in Canada. This government is focused on removing trade barriers, not erecting new ones.

We are focused on building the economic prosperity of this country. We are standing up for ordinary, hard-working Canadians. Why are they not?

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POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, *Le Devoir* revealed that the NDP received at least \$85,000 from big unions for its recent convention in Vancouver. Big union representatives paid between \$25,000 and \$35,000 to be sponsors at the last NDP convention. As the opposition clearly knows, union donations of this kind were banned in 2005. It is clearly ignoring what is right just for its own political gain.

Could the minister reiterate the rules and regulations on union donations to political parties because, clearly, the NDP needs a reminder?

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that type of behaviour is absolutely unacceptable and breaks Canadian election laws. The Canada Elections Act clearly indicates that corporate and union donations are not allowed. Political parties are required to raise their money through donations from ordinary Canadians.

Elections Canada has been asked to investigate these sponsorships, but the NDP and its union friends should not wait for an investigation to provide transparency.

Oral Questions

We urge the New Democrats to provide full disclosure of all contributions. Canadians deserve to know the full extent to which big unions have been subsidizing the NDP.

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EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with great surprise we hear the Conservatives' spin on job creation when the complete opposite is happening in Cape Breton.

Since 2008, when those guys came into power, we have lost 10,000 jobs and the closures of an automotive plant, a pharmaceutical plant, a call centre and now a pulp and paper mill. However, that was not enough. They are going to get rid of 120 Service Canada jobs in Cape Breton.

Why will the minister from Nova Scotia not save some jobs in Cape Breton, get some jobs and not go on his fishing trips paid by the hard-working taxpayers of Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have explained every day this week, and perhaps the member should focus on what is said here, during the global recession we hired a number of people to help us deal with a spike in applications for employment insurance. The good news is that, thanks to our economic action plan, more Canadians are at work now than before the recession. That means there are fewer EI applications to be processed.

The jobs were temporary. We are respecting taxpayers' money in that regard and that is why there will be fewer employees. They were temporary jobs and they knew it, but we will respect Canadian taxpayers.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Prime Minister that Canadians did not give the Conservative government a mandate to put our veterans on the street, forcing them to use food banks and making them homeless.

Every week we hear about more and more of Canada's heroes being homeless and using food banks. In Alberta, Jonathan Denis, the housing minister, now says that Alberta will pick up the slack where the federal government has failed.

My question is quite simple. Why is the federal government abdicating its responsibility to veterans in our country, having the provinces pick up that responsibility?

Points of Order

• (1200)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only are we working with our partners, but we are taking decisive action to reduce homelessness in our country and among veterans. That is why we have established outreach initiatives in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver to provide assistance to homeless veterans, and also in all our district offices.

I was in Toronto this summer and I could see the action of the Good Shepherd Ministries on the ground in downtown Toronto, and of our officials working hand in hand in the refuge with those people.

We are helping our veterans to transition to civilian life in a seamless manner and we will keep up that work.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canadians learned that we were ranked third best country in the world to be a women. This bodes very well for the girls here at home.

Despite progress, girls continue to face barriers that hamper their development. On March 24, the House unanimously passed a motion, brought forward by the Minister for Status of Women, calling on Canada to adopt a resolution proclaiming September 22 International Day of the Girl.

Could the minister update us on Canada's efforts on this important initiative?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the International Day of the Girl will provide a key opportunity to consider girls' rights and raise awareness around the world. There are places in the world where girls are deprived of basic rights only because they were born girls.

We are working successfully with countries around the world, as we submit our proposal to the United Nations in October, to shed light on the discrimination and injustice suffered by girls.

Girls deserve to go to school and to have a full life. With Canada's leadership at the United Nations, we will support girls' rights all over the world.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, the number of affordable housing units has dropped by 17,000. People with access to adequate, affordable and safe housing are far less likely to end up on the street, develop addiction problems or commit crimes. It is called prevention; however, the Conservatives prefer repression.

Rather than imposing additional costs for prisons on the provinces, why does the government not support them by investing in new social housing units?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, we introduced Canada's economic action plan. That is what our government did. To stimulate the economy, we invested a lot of money in the very type of affordable housing to which the hon. member is referring. Fourteen thousand projects were completed, as well as renovations. It is the hon. member's party that voted against all these efforts.

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GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after learning about a \$90,000-a-day contract for advice on where to cut in order to eliminate the deficit, now we have learned that the Conservatives paid nearly \$2 billion to private consultants in 2010-11, and that was in the public works department alone. To add insult to injury, at the beginning of the summer, that department laid off public servants who could have done the job internally for a lot less money.

Will the Minister of Finance continue to justify this wasteful spending by claiming that his government will save \$200 for every dollar spent in the private sector, as he said yesterday and as the President of the Treasury Board maintained today, and that he is going to save \$400 billion a year? Is that what he would have us believe?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is always looking for ways to save taxpayer money. We will ensure that when situations arise where it is cheaper to bring in experts from the outside for the short term, we will do just that. We believe there are cases when contracting outside is cheaper and more flexible than it is to maintain someone on the public payroll.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I have noticed a few times now that when government members on this side of the House speak, government members on the other side tend to make a lot of noise. It is my concern that people watching at home will believe it is NDP members who are making this noise.

I would like to ask the Speaker to suggest that government members allow their own members to be heard during question period.

• (1205)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first opportunity to ask the traditional Thursday question, I want to officially greet my counterpart, the government House leader, and wish him a productive parliamentary session that serves the interest of the public who elected us to improve life in our country.

Since the beginning of the week, the government has assured us that its top priority would be the economy. What we got instead was leftovers from the past few years that the Conservatives have reheated and are dumping on Parliament's plate. The economy was supposed to be their top priority, but instead we got served their law and order agenda.

What is the plan for the rest of this week and next week? Is the agenda going to start reflecting what was meant to be their top priority? I would also like the government House leader to tell us when the first opposition day will be for this fall session.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the opposition House leader quite astutely noted, our priority is the economy. We saw that already with successes this spring when we introduced a budget that was adopted by the House. We introduced a budget implementation bill with measures like an increase to the old age security payments, which was also adopted by the House. We continue to pursue that economic agenda.

Our other priority is also related to having a sound economy, and that is having safe communities and safe streets by combatting crime. As members know, there is a strong linkage between severe crime and harm to the economy. We obviously want to change that, and this is why we have moved in that direction. That is what we have been debating this week, primarily.

[Translation]

In the next week, our government will continue to move forward with important bills that Canadians elected us to implement. Today we will continue debate on Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act. We will continue to debate that next week until it is dealt with.

[English]

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the House just how long the measures in the safe streets and communities bill have been before this House and the other place. When we tally up all the days since those bills have been introduced, it has been a combined total of 2,700 days since their first introductions. That is almost 20 years of elapsed time that those bills have been before the House in one form or another.

We have already had over 180 speeches given in the House on those bills, important law and order proposals as they are. Unfortunately, right now we are no longer actually debating the safe streets and communities bill; we are technically debating an

Routine Proceedings

opposition motion to delay and obstruct our efforts to tackle crime and get that bill passed.

I urge all members to put aside their parliamentary maneuvers designed to delay and obstruct and give all members the opportunity to vote, once and for all, on the important measures included in the bill.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, we will be debating Bill C-4, the Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act.

[English]

As the Prime Minister stated earlier in the week, the government will be introducing a motion to extend our involvement in the UN-sanctioned NATO-led mission in Libya. I will be scheduling that debate for Monday.

[Translation]

Next Thursday, September 29, will be the first allotted day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1210)

[English]

PETITIONS

JUSTICE

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition pertaining to the case of Nicholas Djokich. Mr. Djokich is currently serving a 20-year sentence in a U.S. prison.

The petitioners, numbering over 400, call upon the House of Commons to launch a royal commission of inquiry to investigate the actions of the RCMP in relation to Mr. Djokich's case.

On behalf of the petitioners, I look forward to the government's response.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition to the House of Commons. I act on behalf of a great number of citizens by presenting their petition in support of International Day of the Girl.

Their intention is to advocate to ensure girls get the recognition they deserve as citizens and as powerful agents of change within their families, their communities and their nations.

*Government Orders***WEEKLY STATEMENT**

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a brief point of order to correct something in the *Hansard* on the Thursday question. I am told I said that all the combined bills for the safe streets and communities act had been before the House, in one shape or another, for a combined total of 2,700 days. The actual total is 7,200 days. That would make it 20 years, as I said. Therefore, it is time to get on with this bill.

* * *

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to present a petition signed by thousands of Canadians from all across Canada who call upon the House of Commons to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. In fact, they point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than from all other industrial and occupational causes combined.

The petitioners also draw the attention of the House to the fact that Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world and that not only is asbestos not banned in Canada, but Canada still spends millions of dollars subsidizing and promoting the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

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

* * *

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SAFE STREETS AND COMMUNITIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion 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, and of the amendment.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to add my voice to those of my colleagues in support of this crucial piece of legislation that we are debating.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act is comprehensive legislation that will go a long way toward meeting the government's commitment to Canadians that we will protect families, stand up for victims and hold offenders accountable. I am very proud to say that the government has received a strong mandate to deliver on that commitment.

Since first elected in 2006, the government has been taking action to keep families safe. We have been working to stand up for law-abiding Canadians and victims while holding criminals accountable as well as to protect the most vulnerable in society, especially children, from those who would want to do them harm. That is why I am so proud to speak to Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act.

The legislation before us continues the important work that we have started. It proposes important reforms to the Criminal Code, the State Immunity Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. As well, it proposes to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act.

Bill C-10 addresses a significant number of law and order issues that affect our society. It is wide-ranging and touches on public safety, justice, as well as citizenship and immigration. It includes measures to make the safety and security of Canadians the primary concern when considering whether or not an offender should be transferred back into Canada. It includes measures so that victims of terrorism are able to file an action and seek justice against individuals who carry out terrorist attacks. It includes actions to strengthen the laws around pardons to ensure that repeat offenders of serious crimes and those who commit sexual offences against children are ineligible to apply for a pardon.

It includes provisions to increase the accountability and responsibility of offenders to ensure that they contribute to their own rehabilitation as well as measures that would enshrine in law a victim's rights to make statements at a parole hearing. It also includes reforms that in most cases would prevent offenders from withdrawing their parole applications 14 days or less before a hearing date thus saving victims from unnecessary travel and disruption.

Victims of crime have asked for these changes and the government is delivering them.

I want to point out that we tried to pass bills that would achieve these goals in the last Parliament yet time and again opposition members held them up with their soft-on-crime agenda. Thankfully, Canadians in the riding of Ajax—Pickering and across the country rejected the soft-on-crime mindset of the opposition and elected a majority of Conservative MPs.

Government Orders

The Safe Streets and Communities Act also includes measures that would get tough on child sexual offenders, crack down on illegal drug trafficking and improve the overall efficiency of our judicial system. For example, it proposes to help protect our kids from sexual predators by increasing penalties for sexual offences against children.

It targets organized drug crime by creating tougher sentences for the production and possession of illicit drugs for the purpose of trafficking, which speaks to the grave concern of all parents whose children are directly targeted by drug traffickers. It is a very important piece of the legislation in terms of protecting children from involvement in drug activities. Therefore, I am especially pleased to see that we are getting tough on drug traffickers. I would strongly urge all opposition members, especially those with children, nieces, nephews and/or young people in their lives who should never be involved with drugs, to support this piece of legislation.

The bill aims to protect the public by ensuring that violent and repeat young offenders are held accountable for their actions. Youth sentences would become more proportionate to the severity of the crime. Protection of society would be given due consideration when applying the Youth Criminal Justice Act. I believe parents across the country see this as an important piece of the legislation. It is best for parents to hold their children accountable by ensuring that the consequences match the action, whether minor or severe.

Thankfully, the bill would end the use of conditional sentences or house arrest for serious, violent and property crimes ensuring dangerous criminals would no longer be serving sentences from the comfort of their living rooms.

● (1215)

It also proposes to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to help protect foreign workers who could be at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking or exploitation, such as low-skilled and unskilled labourers. Combined, these measures provide new tools in our effort to build stronger and safer communities.

Last spring our government made a pledge to Canadians to rapidly move forward and introduce comprehensive law-and-order legislation that would strengthen our laws and courts while putting victims' rights at the forefront.

On May 2, Canadians gave us a strong mandate to continue working to build our economy and to focus on keeping our communities safe. We have listened to them and acted on our pledge by introducing this legislation.

In particular, I will spend some time discussing a measure that falls under the purview of public safety, that being the elimination of pardons for serious crimes. Canadians firmly believe that these measures are long overdue, as do I.

These amendments are a natural next step to further strengthening measures contained within the Limiting Pardons for Serious Crimes Act that our government passed last year, which received royal assent in June 2010. That act ensures that anyone convicted of a serious personal injury offence, such as manslaughter, will not be eligible to apply for a pardon before 10 years rather than five. This 10-year ineligibility period also applies to those who have

committed a sexual offence against a minor and have been prosecuted by indictment.

For those convicted of a sexual offence against a minor and prosecuted by summary conviction, the ineligibility period for a pardon is now five years, whereas it previously was three. That act also provides the Parole Board of Canada with the discretion to determine whether the granting of a pardon would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. To make this determination, the Parole Board is now able to give consideration to the nature and gravity of the offence, the circumstances surrounding its commission and the information related to the applicant's criminal history.

Let me speak to what this legislation in Bill C-10 would do. First and foremost, it proposes to change the term "pardon" to "record suspension" as the word "pardon" implies that the government has forgiven the individual. We firmly believe that it is not the role of the government to forgive someone for his or her crime. That can only come from the victim or the victim's family, certainly not from the government.

Indeed, we are aware that it adds insult to injury when a victim discovers his or her offender has received a pardon. That is another reason why we have proposed changing the term to "record suspension". In addition to being a more accurate and less offensive term to victims, we believe it better reflects how the legal system works. When an individual is granted a pardon, his or her record is not permanently deleted. Rather, it is sealed or, in other words, suspended.

We believe the term "pardon" is misleading and that replacing it with the term "record suspension" in this legislation would clarify that.

Another proposed amendment put forth in this legislation would require the Parole Board of Canada to submit an annual report to Parliament. This report would include statistics on the number of applicants applying for record suspension as well as the number deemed successful.

More importantly, we have proposed amendments regarding who can and cannot apply for a record suspension. We have seen agreement across the board on this issue from victims, victims' rights and community support groups, as well as other Canadians. Individuals convicted of sexual offences against children should never be allowed to apply for a record suspension. We are confident these reforms would be better for victims, would provide better protection for children, and would be better for our Canadian society as a whole.

The government is also proposing that limits be set on how many times offenders can be convicted of serious crimes before becoming ineligible for record suspension. The amendments propose that individuals who have been convicted of more than three indictable offences wherein they have received a sentence of two years or more for each offence be no longer eligible for record suspension.

Government Orders

●(1220)

I can assure the House that we have gone to great lengths to thoughtfully consider how this amendment would be interpreted and applied in the real world for real people.

It is defined in this way. A person who is convicted of more than three offences and receives a penitentiary length sentence of two years or more for each of these three or more offences would not be eligible to apply for a record suspension.

What does this mean in practice? It means that if an individual is convicted more than three times of a serious crime and sentenced to more than two years in jail for crimes such as a major drug crime or home invasion, that individual would not be eligible to apply for a record suspension.

Suffice it to say that an individual who is convicted of indictable offences on more than three occasions and has received a federal sentence for each has certainly demonstrated a pattern of behaviour that establishes a serious risk that he or she will commit grievous harm to members of our society. The government's view is that the risk and consequences of reoffending are so high that this person's record should never be sealed. We believe that this reflects the views of Canadians as well.

Our government has included these measures in Bill C-10 because we want to ensure that the consequences of truly serious criminal activity cannot be sealed with a pardon. The need to protect public safety must be our primary consideration at all times.

We recognize that not everyone agrees with the number of more than three. We believe that setting the limit at more than three offences, or put another way, four or more offences, is tough yet reasonable.

We have all heard of a young adult making a bad decision one night. That person could end up being convicted of multiple indictable offences. If that were to happen, that individual would have a record for life.

This provision accounts for that possibility. Disqualification would only occur where individuals have been sentenced to two or more years in custody on more than three separate occasions and not one bad night or week in which a number of indictable offences occurred. Therefore, a person making one bad choice would be eligible to seek a record suspension whereas a serious repeat offender would not. That is a very important distinction for the members of the opposition to comprehend and take into consideration.

While passing the Limiting Pardons for Serious Crimes Act in 2010 brought about positive changes, it was only a first step in strengthening Canada's pardon regime. We must now continue with the final steps to complete these important reforms.

These changes would ensure the Parole Board of Canada has the tools it requires to properly consider, order and deny where appropriate, record suspensions for ex-offenders.

These measures would ensure that offenders who have committed sexual offences against children will never be allowed to have their records suspended.

Most importantly, these changes would increase the confidence of Canadians in the corrections and pardon systems.

Our government made a commitment to continue to protect the safety and security of law-abiding Canadians. That is why they gave us that strong mandate on May 2. Canadians deserve to feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods. We are working hard to ensure that they do.

This legislation is too important to be delayed any longer. We must make this a matter of high importance for the sake of victims and their loved ones. Our government has pledged to finish what it has started by moving forward with this bill.

I urge all hon. members on both sides of the House to support and pass this legislation. Let us work together to continue protecting Canadians and the law-abiding citizens that we represent.

●(1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I learned that with the Conservative government's omnibus crime bill, mandatory minimum punishments for child rapists would be less severe than for marijuana growers, I was disgusted. It makes no sense that the Conservatives would rather punish marijuana growers than child rapists.

I would like the Conservative member to defend the Conservatives' priorities that child rapists would be less severely punished than marijuana growers.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, the member may possibly have misunderstood some of the terms of this legislation. For example, yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice articulated very clearly the penalties for trafficking marijuana. We are not talking about growing marijuana plants, we are talking about trafficking marijuana, growing it for the sole purpose of trafficking. And there would be additional penalties if offenders were trying to traffic to young people and depending where these offenders would be trafficking.

Certainly, we agree sex offenders, as we said, should not be receiving any kind of record suspension. They certainly need to do the time and there needs to be minimum sentences for them.

As I said in my speech, as a parent, the issue of drugs is such a serious one with young people and marijuana is a gateway drug. There is no question about it. So we have to get tough on those who are trying to traffic and trying to get our young people into drug activity.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any denying the Statistics Canada information that shows that crime rates in this country are falling. Also, I do not think there is any denying that the tough on crime legislation in many American states has failed.

Government Orders

Looking at those two, I would suggest, indisputable facts and realizing that we really cannot manage what we cannot measure, my question for the member opposite is this. Once the Conservatives jam through this piece of legislation, how are they going to be able to measure its effectiveness, given that crime rates are falling and will, in all likelihood, continue to fall? Will their plan be to take credit for the crime rates that are falling anyway as a result of these measures, which have been shown to fail in other jurisdictions?

• (1230)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, there is a huge gap in the way the opposition looks at crime and how to address crime, and the way that the Conservative government and, I believe, the majority of Canadians look at crime. There seems to be an attitude on the other side of mediocrity, “Let’s just kind of do enough so that we’re maybe seeing some crime rates reduced”.

That is not the way we look at it. We look at a broken justice system where victims have been victimized time and time again with current legislation. We look at a system where prisoners and criminals have been coddled, many times spoiled, and sometimes even almost rewarded for their criminal activity. We promised Canadians that we would change it. I am so proud that we are doing things differently from the Liberals.

So, on the other side, if they want to look at statistics and decide it is just going to be good enough and “Let’s just be mediocre”, I disagree. Let us aim for excellence. We need to ensure our young people are safe. We need to ensure any kind of sexual crime against children is stopped. We need to ensure that pardons for people who have committed serious crimes do not happen.

So, we are going to keep working hard, we are going to aim high, and we are not going to let mediocrity guide us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L’Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely nothing mediocre about wanting to help people before they become criminals, instead of developing a repressive society.

I have a very specific question for my hon. colleague on the other side. We have a hodgepodge of legislation here that talks about child sexual predators, pardons for serious crimes and drug dealers. These are all very socially complex elements. Each of them requires discussion and reflection regarding the legal, social, ethical, philosophical and even religious aspects.

How can the government justify putting all of that in one big package and preventing Canadians from having a healthy debate on each of these important issues? That is unacceptable. How does my colleague explain that?

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, again, we need to acknowledge there is a completely different philosophy on how crime is looked at on the opposition side versus the government side. Here, I think, is the stark contrast. There seems to be an aversion to ensuring that sexual predators and drug dealers are in jail. Instead, we hear time and time again that it is complex and that there are so many factors.

Let me give an example. It seems, though, that the opposition has no problem wanting to put law-abiding gun owners in jail, or farmers who want to sell their wheat in western Canada, or maybe people who do not fill out their census form to the fullest extent that the opposition wants.

There seems to be just this opposite, almost illogical, view of, “Let’s protect and coddle and watch the criminal, and make sure that all of their complex issues are addressed”. When a criminal, a violent offender, is in jail I can guarantee that he or she will not be committing that same violent act again. That is something I know. That is something Canadians know. They have asked us to carry forward and we are going to do it.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague not only for her presentation today but for the amount of work that she has done on a topic that she just touched on a minute ago in terms of the long gun registry.

My question to the member would focus a little bit around the response that she gave to the member opposite, I think it was the member for Charlottetown, regarding the difference in terms of presenting these types of bills. What is the focus on of this bill, is it actually on the criminals or families and victims?

• (1235)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a very important point. So many aspects of this bill are looking at ways in which we can fix and correct some of the mistakes and injustices that have been done to victims through the current legislation.

I would not assume to say that there was any government that purposely did that. I think that sometimes governments can, by making one bad decision after another, come to the place where victims, unfortunately, are not the top priority.

That is something that we want to fix. Sometimes these things are very difficult for the opposition and for different political parties to come to an agreement on.

What is important is that we listen to the people in our ridings, and we listen to the common sense of people on the streets, no matter what their political stripe, in terms of if people commit a crime there should be a penalty and Canadians should be protected, and victims should be protected.

No matter what party we are from, we all believe that victims should be protected and their rights should be top of mind. That is something that this legislation has done. It has done it very thoughtfully. We have tried as much as possible to take some circumstances into consideration, for example, where criminals may have other factors in their lives that have contributed to the downfall and the bad decisions they have made, but never at the cost of protecting communities and Canadians, and never at the cost of victims.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): The bills that have been introduced only deal with crime seen in the news, that is petty crime. The small-time criminals on street corners are not the ones bringing in containers of drugs. They do not have the means to bring in plane loads of illegal substances. They do not launder money around the world. They have not transformed Quebec's construction industry into a corrupt industry. They do not attack the democracy of our provincial, federal and especially municipal governments.

Hard-core criminals are responsible for these crimes. They are the ones who make drugs available on the street. They are the ones who make weapons available on the street. The bills introduced by the Conservatives do not address organized crime. This government has abandoned its mandate to defend Canadians and is quite simply doing some marketing and targeting small-time criminals.

Yes, they are targeting street prostitution. Yes, they are targeting low-level drug pushers. No, they are not protecting Canada from organized crime.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to hear that there is support for getting tough on organized crime, terrorism, large crime, and people who are dealing and committing crimes that are having a serious effect on our country.

It seems like there is this whole attitude of, "Well, let us not worry about the so-called small criminal". I do not know about people in this House, but I think Canadians consider someone who is trying to sell drugs to our children a criminal. It has a serious effect and serious consequence.

Instead of looking at things from a view of not worrying about that, letting them get away with it because there might be some complex factors that affect their lives, we have been very clear with Canadians, and Canadians are supporting us with this mandate, that we are going to move ahead.

The more that we can talk about this, discuss it, and talk about ways to help prevent crime, the more productive it is. However, it is not going to be at the cost of protecting innocent, law-abiding Canadians.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

There is no doubt that every member in the House is committed to the safety of their constituents, their communities and our nation. The framers of our Constitution knew from the start that peace and order is essential for good government.

That said, evidence-based laws are key to peace and order. Sadly, for all its focus on crime and punishment, the government lacks the evidence to support its legislation. With pieces of the legislation having reached committee stage before, members of the House are fully aware that evidence given at committee completely contradicts the Conservative preoccupation with heavy minimum sentences.

I have talked to the chief of police in Guelph, to prosecutors, to correctional officers, and to criminologists. We have read countless evidence-based reports and statistics, and the jury is in. Based on all the evidence, these experts have come to the same conclusion: in

order to be tough on crime, we must first be smart on crime. Locking up everyone is not a smart solution. It makes us dumber on crime.

There are a good number of things that prisons are not. They are not a place where skills are developed. They are not addiction treatment centres. They do not combat the scourge of mental illness and they provide little or no treatment options. A jail cell does not even provide support to victims, except to give them the satisfaction of retribution.

Smart on crime means that instead of spending \$108,000 a year on each and every additional criminal the government insists on incarcerating, that money could go to drug treatment programs in my riding like Stonehenge.

Stonehenge was established 40 years ago. Through the dedication of its staff, managers and donors, this program helps to restore hope and dignity to those afflicted by addiction. It restores lives and livelihoods so that those suffering from substance addiction can once again feel a sense of relevance and dignity, and be productive and successful members of our society. Clients at Stonehenge are from the general public, or are people in conflict with the law diverted to Stonehenge in Guelph for drug treatment. Imagine for a moment how many people could be treated using the \$108,000 annual sum spent on incarcerating a single person suffering from an addiction, a terrible disease.

Smart on crime means developing and funding programs that reduce poverty, create jobs and tackle mental health issues. Jails, under the government, have turned into public housing for individuals with addictions or mental health issues.

Smart on crime means not increasing the rate of recidivism. Even before this bill was tabled, there were prisons in Canada at 200% capacity. Overcrowding has shown to lead to more crime. There is no way anyone on the other side could argue that increasing the number of Canadians incarcerated would be a deterrent or cut down on the crime rate.

What of the costs? The government refused to disclose the cost in the last Parliament and was found in contempt of this great institution. Despite the hundreds of pages the Minister of Justice cited yesterday that were provided to Parliament, he purposely evaded every single question put to him about the cost of this legislation. Applying 2009 forecasts the total cost to the federal and provincial governments by 2016 would be over \$18 billion. Meanwhile, the government has not consulted with the provinces on the additional financial burden they would now shoulder.

Government Orders

Mandatory minimum sentencing is already considered a failed policy in the United States, a nation with an incarceration rate 700% higher than ours per capita. It is illogical for the government to go down this path to satisfy ideological urges. Even in the United States lawmakers are moving away from the “lock them up and throw away the key” mentality that created mega prisons that became crime factories. Experts in the United States came late to the realization that they were spending more on incarcerating citizens than enrolling them in post-secondary education.

As a young lawyer, it fell to me on a couple of occasions to defend one client or another who had, on a lark, or suffering from mental illness or depression, committed a non-violent offence. Remorseful and entirely aware of the impact of their actions and how wrong they were, the judge granted a conditional discharge.

● (1240)

Without the stigma of a criminal record or, in some cases, possible incarceration, these clients were then able to gain admission to university, keep or get a good job, travel across the border and ultimately become the successful contributing members of society they otherwise might not have been.

We must trust our legal professionals, our judges, prosecutors, police and corrections officers, to exercise their judgment on a daily basis. They deal with the law up close and personal. Who are we to presume to know better than they when someone deserves treatments options or diversion from incarceration, a second chance, an opportunity to make something better of themselves, to kick a drug habit, to deal with mental illness, to work in the community and develop skills that will lead to stable employment and a fulfilling life?

Criminal justice is about so much more than just throwing people in jail. It is about recognizing people's circumstances and building programs to help them cope, adjust and manage those things that may otherwise lead to criminal activity.

For all the Conservatives' talk about victims and the terrible costs borne by the victims of crime, the bill is absent of any provision to help them. There is nothing in the bill that deals with the numbers members opposite continue to throw around. Victims cannot be compensated through retribution. An eye for an eye does not make up for a wrong done.

Crime is at its lowest rate in nearly 40 years and yet the government is willing to turn around nearly two generations of decreasing crime rates out of fear and fiction instead of facts, ideology instead of evidence.

My colleague, the hon. member for Charlottetown, put it very succinctly yesterday when he said that the bill was really an act, that it was cosmetic window dressing, rhetoric that was sound in theory but contained little action to address the real problem at its source, investing unnecessary billions of dollars on building unnecessary prisons while crime is receding, instead of investing on crime prevention, social housing, employment assistance, health care and child care, which will create more crime than justice.

Throughout my career as a lawyer and now into my career as a legislator and a representative of my community, I have reviewed the law as a tool to advance the issue of social justice whenever possible.

While engaged on the committee against family violence and women in crisis or the Wellington-Guelph Housing Authority on great projects like Onward Willow Better Beginnings, Better Futures, or changing Guelph's police response to violence between spouses and changing court sentencing for offenders by ensuring their enrolment in anger management programs, not incarceration, I gained a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding justice issues.

My community of Guelph is a compassionate one. We are top five in Canada for education, number one per capita for volunteers and have an incredibly professional police force. The engagement and care for at-risk members of our community is responsible for Guelph being the safest city in Canada, as identified by Statistics Canada.

Public safety and crime can be a divisive political issue but it does not need to be so long as we listen to the facts and heed our expert evidence. We have an opportunity to be smart on crime and not pass this omnibus bill in its present form.

We do not need to completely ignore painfully learned and carefully documented and researched lessons by treating crime as a black and white issue. There is no strong or weak on crime. That is ideological language used to divide and to provoke misinformation based on fear, anger and misplaced need for revenge.

If more and longer sentences were the answer to increasing public safety, the United States would be the safest country in the world, and it is far from that. Instead, even the most conservative U.S. lawmakers are now turning away from their old approach, while we run ahead on into it.

I implore the government not to continue on this reckless path.

● (1245)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree with what the member said in his speech this afternoon.

He talked about compassion and so on. Recently there was a case in British Columbia where a former sex offender was walking the streets and he took a child from his home for days and days. The parents and the families in that community were suffering because they thought the young child was being abused by a sex offender who was a predator on the street.

The bill before us talks about sex offenders and pedophiles. Where is the compassion? What does the member say on that particular issue? Why are the Liberals not supporting the bill to keep those types of people off the street?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the hon. member.

I wish the question had been placed this way: Are there any provisions of the legislation that I agree with? I would have said, yes, there are provisions in this legislation that I agree with. Sexual predators is one of the sections that I happen to agree with. Perhaps a trafficker trafficking to children at a school might be one of those sections that I agree with. Luring children is a section that I agree with.

Government Orders

What I disagree with is the ideological commitment to absolute minimum sentences in all circumstances, where the government takes away the discretion of a judge, a lawyer, a crown attorney, a probation officer who has prepared a pre-sentence report and they say, perhaps, that in a minor incident of possession of marijuana plants there is a better solution than to throw the fellow in jail.

The solution is going to a treatment program like that offered at Stonehenge because offenders can be rehabilitated there rather than criminalized by being put in jail.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has touched on an important problem and I would like to hear more from him on this subject.

I am referring to the tendency to establish foolish and specific laws. I have been reading quite a bit about this. This tendency has a significant impact on the legal system and the very discretion of judges who, faced with a crime, must consider why it was committed, whether it was a stupid mistake or whether the offender was compelled to commit it. They must be aware of the context before arriving at a decision. How will it end if we simply apply foolish solutions such as “one plus one equals two” without ever giving judges the freedom they require to analyze cases? I would like to hear more from my colleague on this aspect of the problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely it. My hon. friend has hit the nail on the head.

By passing this legislation, it will, in many respects, remove the discretion of judges in the courts to look at circumstances on a case-by-case basis. It is a sad society when all people are painted with the same brush; given no opportunity to explain the circumstances from which they come; given no opportunity for rehabilitation, which is not found in our jails; and given no opportunity to pursue a meaningful life because of the criminalization they will face by being put in jail. They are given no opportunity to attend a mental health treatment program when perhaps it was because of a temporary depression that led to the particular offence. Those offenders have no opportunity to receive treatment for it or, as I said, drug treatment or any other incidents that may be appropriate under the circumstances.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am compelled to speak to Bill C-10, a 110-page omnibus bill rolling together nine past proposals, as crime prevention and reduction is of major concern to my constituents.

Before I begin, however, I want to praise Etobicoke North's superintendent, Ron Taverner, and the officers of 23 Division for their excellent policing and for their outreach to our community, attending numerous community events, building bridges, participating in anti-drug marches, partnering with faith groups and restoring streets through community cleanups.

I also want to recognize the work of organizations, such as the Rexdale legal clinic and the Youth Without Shelter, that work

tirelessly to support those requiring legal services and those requiring a home and a new beginning.

I will now share the story of an extraordinary young man in our community. He has just received three scholarships and is in his first month of college. He is in fact the first one in his family to go to college. He works and has just started an organization to inspire youth to achieve their greatest goals. What few know is that he lives in a youth shelter. He is a remarkable young man who is being celebrated because of his tremendous achievements. In fact, he gave his first public address last week and humbled all those in attendance.

This young man has fought hard for a life following abuse, abandonment and drug use. He is making it today with the necessary supports. He is succeeding and, for the first time in his life, he is part of a family at the shelter and is looking forward to a future.

The point is that we must address the root causes of crime, provide police with the tools they need to do their job effectively, provide necessary deterrents to crime and provide the supports necessary to reduce recidivism, because we all want safe streets and safe communities.

The fundamental question of this debate must therefore be whether this bill would make Canada safer. Would it protect victims who often feel abandoned by the justice system? The reality is that the bill has been highly criticized by criminal lawyers, prisoner advocates and critics as costly, ideological, irresponsible, misguided, and overreaching largely because of falling crime rates and predicted massive costs to taxpayers for prison expansion.

Critics claim that the Conservative government's tough on crime agenda will be fought out in Canadian courts for years to come.

National crime rates are continuing their 20 year decline, reaching levels not seen since 1973. Statistics Canada shows the overall volume of criminal incidents fell by 5% between 2009 and 2010, and the relative severity of the crimes showed a similar decrease. Homicides, attempted murders, serious assaults and robberies were all down last year. Young people were accused of committing fewer offences. Even property crime was reported less frequently, with reductions in both break-ins and car thefts. True leadership would, therefore, provide accurate statistics and reassure Canadians rather than invoke fear to convince them that the bill is for the greater good.

Kim Pate, executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society, said:

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We're being encouraged to believe we need this for public safety. It's a farce. If in fact it was true, then the U.S. would be the safest place in the world, the States would not be going bankrupt and they would not be retreating from this agenda. .

Others claim that the bill would allow the government to keep a spotlight on what it considers popular law and order measures at a time when economic news is bleak.

● (1255)

The government appears to be focusing on unreported crime as a rationale for its tough-on-crime approach. Unfortunately, it is unclear how tough sentencing for unreported crime will make communities safer. If under-reporting is the issue, perhaps measures should be put in place to address it. However, evidence of crime being unreported is marginal; in fact, there is evidence that reporting of domestic violence has increased, as has reporting from schools, because of police protocols.

Correctional Service Canada estimates the system's operating cost will rise from \$1.6 billion in 2006, when the Conservatives took power, to \$3 billion this fiscal year.

Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page is still trying to obtain comprehensive data on the government's anti-crime agenda. The justice minister has been asked repeatedly about the costs of the bill but has declined to specify the projected costs of the measures or even to reveal the federal government's own projections of increased prison populations.

Criminal defence lawyer John Rosen predicts that there will be many constitutional and legal challenges, especially regarding mandatory minimum penalties. He explained that these penalties violate an accused person's right to fundamental justice. He believes the measures will be judged an inappropriate infringement on the case-by-case analysis that has been mandated by the Supreme Court in sentencing cases. He further explained that the Conservatives are trying to Americanize our system.

The Globe and Mail states that Canada is one of the few jurisdictions worldwide that is headed in the direction of cracking down on crime. The article also states that the tough-on-crime approach in the face of contrary evidence is "bemusing international observers".

Criminologists, judges and policymakers in Australia, Britain and the United States, whose systems for the most part mirror Canada's, have recognized that a jail-intensive approach is counterproductive in reducing crime.

Texas, which had 15 youth incarceration institutions four years ago, is down to six. The executive director of the Youth Commission in Texas said, "There's been a real shift to make sure that we really look at the youth, the seriousness of the offence and the youth's risk to reoffend, and only incarcerate those that are the highest risk in terms of public safety".

Further criticisms of the bill are that scarce resources will be diverted from treating offenders with mental health problems or addictions and that more youth will serve longer jail times, despite evidence showing longer sentences increase the likelihood for youth to reoffend.

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the John Howard Society of Canada said the bill would lead to overcrowded prisons, jeopardize inmates with addictions or mental health problems, divert funding from treatment programs and dissuade sexual assault victims from pursuing charges against assailants who are often related to them.

Defence lawyer Rosen has said that most professionals who work in the justice system, whether corrections officials, defence lawyers, judges, prosecutors or social workers, agree that the goal is not only to suppress crime but to prevent the recurrence of it. The government is gradually strangling all of the social programs that address those issues and address the root causes of crime, while spending money to prosecute.

Had my extraordinary young man been subject to this legislation, he would be living a very different life today. He would not have had a chance to get an education. He would not have had a social worker. He would not have had his family at the shelter. He would not be contributing to society.

I have one last question. What will it take to get the government's attention and to re-evaluate?

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we often hear the argument from the other side of the House that if we do not support this bill we are automatically in favour of criminals. That simplistic argument detracts from the real debate. Right now, the protection of the public is not being called into question. That is not at all what we are talking about here. We simply want to know what debate we can have on how to protect the public and improve the quality of life for Canadians. That is what we are actually talking about here.

I would ask my colleague, who made a very interesting speech, whether she is concerned about the fact that the government wants to increase punishment, but that the bill does not mention prevention, education or reintegration of prisoners.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, rehabilitation is fundamental. I would like the House to know that the Canadian Paediatric Society has also expressed disapproval for the bill.

The society reports that changing the youth crime law to allow stiffer sentences for children as young as 14 will have significant negative consequences. The society says the current Youth Criminal Justice Act supports rehabilitation and reintegration instead of putting the emphasis on incarceration, and it recommends that the federal government work with the provincial and territorial governments on youth crime prevention strategies that would include early detection and treatment of behavioural and mental health issues that might lead to criminal activity.

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I will take the example of Texas. In just two years, the focus has been on more education and therapeutic programs and on transitioning back to their home communities so that there is a greater chance for successful re-entry. The result is that youth incarceration rates have been halved in a number of years.

• (1305)

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question on her comments.

I understand from her comments that the Canadian Paediatric Society has approved our bill, the bill that is front of the House as we speak. I am very concerned that she is worried about that, because these are the front-line doctors. These are the people who see children hurt. These are the people who see the ravages of abuse. They see the ravages of sexual abuse on young children.

I am thrilled that the Canadian Paediatric Society is supportive of this bill, because their members are the first line and are able to see that.

Could my hon. colleague please explain why she is concerned with their support? They are the front-line people who see the hurt done to young people.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her comments.

I will be very clear. Everyone in this House and everyone in Canada wants our most vulnerable, our children, protected.

I will be very clear that the Canadian Paediatric Society has expressed disapproval for the bill and wants the emphasis to be on rehabilitation and reintegration. I think it is really important for that point to be brought out.

I also think it is important to bring evidence here again. I want to bring out that the recent statistics and other surveys simply do not show that we are in a crime wave. Attempted murders are at their lowest levels in 30 years. There has been a 15% drop in auto theft. That is continuing a downward trend that started in the mid-1990s, and last year there were 15,000 fewer youth crimes, a drop of 7%.

Alan Young, a law professor at York University, said that the Conservative vision for criminal justice ran its course 30 years ago. He said they had been there, done it, tried it and failed.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today at the second reading 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.

Part 2 of the bill proposes sentencing amendments to the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Clause 34 of the bill, within part 2, proposes to restrict the availability of conditional sentences in the same manner as was advanced in former Bill C-16, which had received second reading and had been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights but had not yet been studied when it died on the order paper at the dissolution of the 40th Parliament.

Conditional sentences are an appropriate sentencing tool in many cases, but not when it comes to serious property crimes and violent offences. Conditional sentences became a sentencing option with the proclamation in September 1996 of Bill C-41, chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1995. They were created in recognition that many less serious offenders who would otherwise be sentenced to custody could remain among other members of society as long as they adhered to strict and appropriate conditions.

When first introduced, conditional sentences were available if the sentence imposed was less than two years of imprisonment, the offence for which the offender was sentenced was not punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty and the court was satisfied that allowing the offender to serve the sentence of imprisonment in the community would not endanger the safety of that community.

Shortly thereafter, a requirement was added to require the court to be satisfied that sentencing the offender to a conditional sentence of imprisonment would be consistent with the fundamental purpose and principles of sentencing set out in section 718 to 718.2 of the Criminal Code.

Where a conditional sentence is imposed, the effect is that the offender serves his or her sentence in the community with conditions, and sometimes with a condition of house arrest. This new sentencing option generated considerable debate following its creation because it was available at sentencing for any offences not punishable by a minimum sentence, including serious and violent offences, provided that the accused met all the above-mentioned prerequisites. Parliament intended that conditional sentences would be available to non-dangerous offenders who would have been, before the creation of conditional sentences, sentenced to a term of incarceration of less than two years for offences with no minimum term of imprisonment.

In 2000 this debate on certain controversial cases led the Supreme Court of Canada to examine the conditional sentence regime in *R. v. Proulx*. The court explained that a sentencing court must first find that a sentence of imprisonment of less than two years is appropriate before examining the other prerequisites to the availability of conditional sentences.

In other words, a conditional sentence is not on an equal footing with the rest of the sentencing options available at sentencing, because the court must be of the opinion that other non-carceral sentencing options, such as a probation order or a fine, would not adequately address the seriousness of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. It is only in situations in which the court is of the opinion that the term of imprisonment should not be more than two years that a conditional sentence order may be considered, if the court is also satisfied that allowing the offender to serve the sentence in a community would not endanger public safety.

Over the years there has been a loss of public confidence in the appropriateness of conditional sentence orders because of the wide array of offences that received conditional sentences of imprisonment, including offences punishable by the highest maximum in the Criminal Code.

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Our government responded to these concerns by tabling Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment) on May 4, 2006.

Bill C-9, in its original form, proposed to eliminate conditional sentences for offences prosecuted on indictment and punishable by a maximum sentence of 10 years or more. It was, and still is, the opinion of this government that offences prosecuted on indictment and punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years, 14 years, or life are serious offences that should never, ever, result in a conditional sentence order.

• (1310)

However, the scope of Bill C-9 was amended in committee to only capture offences that are punishable by a maximum sentence of 10 years or more and prosecuted on indictment, that are terrorism offences, organized crime offences, and serious personal injury offences as defined in section 752 of the Criminal Code.

The use of the term “serious personal injury offence” to restrict the availability of conditional sentences has not accomplished the objective of ensuring that conditional sentences are not available for serious crimes. In fact, this approach allows certain serious offences, punishable by a maximum of 10 years’ imprisonment or more, such as robbery, to be eligible for a conditional sentence or house arrest.

As defined in section 752 of the Criminal Code, a serious personal injury offence has two components. First, it specifically includes the three general sexual assault offences in sections 271, 272 and 273 of the code. This is pretty straightforward. The second component of the serious personal injury offence does not provide the same certainty because it includes indictable offences 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, and for which the offender may be sentenced to imprisonment for 10 years or more. This calls for interpretation of whether an offence endangered the life or safety of another person or was likely to do so. For some offences this will be clear, but for others it will not be clear.

This government wants to clearly indicate the offences for which a conditional sentence is never an option. This is what the relevant amendments contained in the bill before us address. Rather than leaving it to individual courts to determine whether a particular offence qualifies as a serious personal injury offence, it clearly identifies all offences which should never be eligible for a conditional sentence. It removes all of that uncertainty.

Until the coming into force of Bill C-9 on December 1, 2007, sentencing courts only interpreted “serious personal injury offence” for the purpose of determining whether the threshold for a dangerous or long-term offender application had been met. That is from part XXIV of the Criminal Code. This is because the term had been enacted and defined for the dangerous and long-term offender provisions only.

Since Bill C-9 came into force, courts have had to interpret the definition of “serious personal injury offences” in the context of conditional sentences, a context which is quite different from that for dangerous and long-term offenders. For instance, in the 2009

decision by the Alberta Court of Appeal in *R. v. Ponticorvo*, the court held that serious personal injury in the conditional sentence context included the use, or attempted use, of any violence and was not restricted to only the use of serious violence. In so doing, the court applied a different interpretation than it had to the same term in the dangerous offender context in *R. v. Neve* in 1999.

In 2010 in *R. v. Lebar*, the Ontario Court of Appeal confirmed this approach and concluded that for the purposes of the availability of conditional sentences, Parliament created “a divide between crimes where violence is or is not used, not between crimes of serious violence and less serious violence”. That is in paragraph 69 of the decision.

These cases illustrate there is considerable uncertainty about how the existing conditional sentence regime will be interpreted. This bill will provide the needed clarity and certainty to say which offences are not eligible for a conditional sentence. This will in turn prevent the need to wait for these issues to be finally resolved by the appellate courts, including perhaps the Supreme Court of Canada.

Another concern we have is that the definition of “serious personal injury offences” on its face does not cover most serious property crimes which could still be eligible for a conditional sentence. For instance, fraud, which is an offence punishable by a maximum sentence of 14 years, is a very serious crime that can have a devastating impact on the lives of its victims, yet, according to the definition of “serious personal injury offence”, it is still technically eligible for a conditional sentence.

• (1315)

I should note, however, that a recent amendment to the Criminal Code which is not yet in force provides for a mandatory sentence of two years when the value of the fraud exceeds \$1 million. In those cases a conditional sentence would not be available.

In addition, the current prerequisites to the availability of a conditional sentence do not exclude drug offences, such as the production, importation and trafficking of heroin, unless they are committed as part of a criminal organization and provided that they are punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years or more and prosecuted on indictment.

However, as hon. members well know, this bill also includes the amendments that were proposed in former Bill S-10, which also died on the order paper at the dissolution of the last Parliament. It is proposed to create mandatory minimum penalties for certain drug offences which would make them ineligible for a conditional sentence.

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It is my view that the current conditional sentencing regime fails to categorically make conditional sentences ineligible for many very serious crimes. Permitting the use of conditional sentences for some offences punishable by the highest maximum available in the code sends a message that certain offences punishable by a maximum of 14 years or life are less serious than others punishable by the same maximum. This is not the message this Parliament should be sending to Canadians.

Greater clarity and consistency is needed to limit the availability of conditional sentences and to protect Canadians from serious and violent offenders. In order to address these concerns, the proposed amendments contained in this bill would retain all the existing prerequisites for conditional sentences but would make it crystal clear which offences are ineligible. Specifically, the reforms would eliminate the reference to serious personal injury offences in section 742.1 and would make all offences punishable by 14 years or life ineligible for a conditional sentence.

This would, for instance, make the offences of fraud, robbery and many other crimes clearly ineligible for a conditional sentence. It would also make offences prosecuted on indictment and punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years ineligible for a conditional sentence if they: result in bodily harm; involve the import or export, trafficking and production of drugs; or involve the use of a weapon. It is the opinion of the government that where these circumstances are present, there is a need to emphasize the sentencing objectives of denunciation and deterrence and therefore eliminate the possibility of a conditional sentence.

In order to ensure that all serious crimes are caught, this bill also proposes a list of 11 specific offences prosecuted on indictment and punishable by a maximum sentence of 10 years that would be ineligible for a conditional sentence. These offences are: prison breach, criminal harassment, sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, abduction of persons under the age of 14 years, 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 purposes.

Some hon. members might notice there are three differences from the list that was contained in Bill C-16.

First, the offence of luring a child was taken out of the list of offences punishable by 10 years' imprisonment on indictment because clause 22 of the bill proposes a mandatory minimum penalty of one year on indictment and 90 days on summary conviction. Therefore, this offence would be ineligible for a conditional sentence.

The second change was the addition of a new motor vehicle theft offence described at section 333.1 of the Criminal Code. This addition would ensure consistency with the restriction on the availability of conditional sentences for theft over \$5,000.

Last, former Bill C-16 eliminated the possibility of house arrest for the abduction of a person under the age of 14 by a parent, guardian or person having the lawful care or charge of that person. The intention, however, was to target the abduction of a person under the age of 14 by a stranger. This has been rectified in the bill by replacing the reference to section 283 by a reference to section

281 in the list of offences punishable by a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment and prosecuted on indictment that are ineligible for a conditional sentence.

• (1320)

This government is committed to ensuring that conditional sentences are used the way they were originally intended to be used, and that is for less serious offences. I am confident the more appropriate use of conditional sentence orders will strengthen public confidence in the sanction and administration of justice.

I am the chair of the Conservative Party's law enforcement officers caucus, which is made up of 11 people from both the House of Commons and the Senate who have previous experience in police investigations, in corrections and in other law enforcement agencies. We stand together to support this bill, because we have seen first hand how detrimental these conditional sentences and many of the other aspects of the bill have been to our communities. We have seen the victims of these offences suffer terribly. We have been at the front line to say that we are sorry the system failed them.

We will not stand by and allow the system to continue to fail them. We are the police officers, the corrections officers and the law enforcement officers in this House. They do not exist in any other party. We stand together to support this bill.

I would ask, in fact on behalf of victims I would beg, members of the opposition to please support this bill to make sure that our streets and communities are safe. This is imperative to continue to live in the most incredible country in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer questions from members across the way, and I would implore them to think about the victims as they ask their questions.

• (1325)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the system failing. Ashley Smith was a young girl who entered the correctional system at 15. By October 31, 2006, Ms. Smith was transferred to Nova Institution for Women in Nova Scotia, a federal institution. Through 2007, Ms. Smith was transferred a total of 17 times between eight institutions during 11 months in federal custody. The beginning of Ms. Smith's journey in the criminal system was for throwing crabapples at a mailman.

The government talks about law and order, but how will it prevent the next Ashley Smith case within its correctional service if it does not fund programs for rehabilitation and mental health?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, the case of Ashley Smith is very tragic. As a former member of the public safety committee in the last Parliament, I was very fortunate to travel across this country and to other countries to observe the programs that are available in our corrections system for those who suffer with mental illness and to compare them to systems that exist in other countries.

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Time after time we spoke with people involved in the corrections system, those who were caretakers, those who were involved in the actual delivery of the health care that was being provided, and some of the people who were incarcerated and were benefiting from the program.

I can assure the member there are programs. We invest millions of dollars in those programs because we, too, believe that we have to address some of these problems, such as the mental health situations of the incarcerated, and the addictions of the incarcerated. That is an important priority for the government. That is why we have a national anti-drug strategy that focuses not only on enforcement, but on treatment and education.

We will continue to put that money toward those efforts because we know it makes our communities safer.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone involved in law enforcement, the hon. member undoubtedly knows that the vast majority of conditional sentences are granted in cases that are less serious. Conditional sentences in more serious cases or for more serious offences are extremely rare.

Given the focus of the remarks on conditional sentences, if we were to tighten up on conditional sentences, we would be putting more people on the lower end of the severity scale in jail. These people would end up in provincial institutions, not in federal institutions.

In many institutions across the country the provincial incarceration facilities are absolutely stretched to the max; they are at capacity. If we take away discretion from judges, if we do not trust them to apply this law properly and we tell them they are required to put these people in jail, I would like the hon. member opposite to lay out for the House the compensation package her government has in mind to cover the costs that would be downloaded to the provinces for putting the people in jail who would otherwise be serving their sentences in the community.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, there were several questions and comments in that.

Let me first address his statement with regard to conditional sentences and there being people who would be incarcerated for lower-class sentences. I want to ask the member this. Of the list that we are trying to include as serious offences, what does he think a lower-class offence is? Was it the sexual assault that was benefiting from a conditional sentence? Was it perhaps the kidnapping that was benefiting from a conditional sentence? Was it the trafficking in persons? Was it the motor vehicle theft? Was it the prison breach?

These are offences for which I, as a police officer, spent much of my time chasing the offender while out on house arrest. These are serious offences that must be dealt with and there must be deterrence and denunciation. These must never have the ability of an offender to receive a conditional sentence.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her clarifications regarding criminal law. I know that she has a great deal of experience in this area.

I would like her to provide some examples. We know that opponents of this bill, in Quebec especially, will always pit rehabilitation against deterrence, but these are not exclusive of one another—they are complementary. Once again, I would like my colleague to share some examples from her experience, regarding what she sees in this bill, and of the benefits that this will have for the public in terms of protecting Canadians and Quebecers.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for this excellent question.

As the minister indicated, I do have a great deal of experience in this area. The bill aims to protect the safety of our society and our communities through such measures as the elimination of conditional sentences, because we know that they only cause further suffering to the victims. However, this is not only about victims. When those who commit crimes are incarcerated, they have access to programs that could benefit them and help them become law-abiding citizens. It is important to remember that. Access to such programs is crucial to offenders. Our government is investing its efforts and financial resources in order to support and promote these programs and to give incarcerated offenders a chance to do their best to change their lives, to get out when their sentence ends and to become law-abiding, contributing members of society.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the parliamentary secretary on her admirable defence.

I would like to ask the same question as the person who preceded me on this side of the House, since the hon. member did not answer the question. I know this government prides itself on being a responsible government. I would like to know the additional costs associated with this bill. I also want to know what percentage of the cost of the bill will be downloaded to the provinces.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

As he can see, in the House we sometimes ask three, four or five questions at once and, unfortunately, the person speaking does not always have time to respond to all those questions.

Let us talk about costs. In my opinion, the most significant costs are the costs to victims. Generally speaking, it is the victims who pay. It is said that it is the victims, not the offenders, who pay between 83% and 86% of the costs associated with crime.

The hon. member referred to the cost to the provinces. He was not here when this bill was first introduced in the third session, but crown attorneys and attorneys general from all provinces supported the changes we are proposing. The hon. member is saying that the prisons are full, but that is not true. There is room. We will make more room because victims should not be paying the costs of crime. We will make sure that they are not.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, Bill C-10 perfectly illustrates the government's indifference: indifference to the facts, indifference to the evidence and indifference to a government's obligation to govern effectively.

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The facts are clear. So far, a number of members have reported them and members will continue to do so throughout the debate. According to Statistics Canada and many other organizations, crime in Canada has been steadily decreasing over the past 20 years. We are not currently in the midst of a crime crisis. Yes, crimes are being committed. Yes, we must address the issue of crime. However, we do not need to use a sledgehammer to kill a fly, like Bill C-10. In light of this fact, we see that the government is basing its actions on fiction. Clearly, Statistics Canada includes only reported crimes; yet, the number of unreported crimes has allegedly skyrocketed. However, by definition, unreported crimes are not counted or countable. This is a work of pure fiction created by a government that refuses to see the facts, refuses to acknowledge them and refuses to take them into account. The government is using fiction to justify its bill.

The evidence is also clear. This is nothing but a tough on crime bill. However, minimum sentences and tougher sentences for crime are absolutely not deterrents. I challenge anyone across the way to present a credible study that shows that crime in Canada will be significantly reduced or dealt with because of deterrents. That is not the case.

I think this government is also profoundly indifferent to good governance. The previous question was addressed to the parliamentary secretary, but she did not answer it for obvious reasons: this government has no idea of the exorbitant costs ahead for the federal and provincial governments of the measures it wants to put in effect. That is quite clear. I will come back to the issue of cost because it is central to the NDP's opposition to this bill.

Something else that illustrates this government's indifference to good governance is the Canadian Bar Association's opposition to these measures. We keep hearing about the fact that law enforcement is in favour of these measures, but if we look at the administration of justice side of things, which will have to deal with the consequences of increased measures on the enforcement side, we see a rather fierce resistance.

I would like the government to take into consideration not just what the Canadian Police Association is saying, but also what the Canadian Bar Association thinks of all this. Both are important.

I will read what the Canadian Bar Association said barely two days ago:

The Canadian Bar Association (CBA) has concerns with several aspects of the government's proposed omnibus crime bill, including mandatory minimum sentences and overreliance on incarceration, constraints on judges' discretion to ensure a fair result in each case, and the bill's impact on specific, already disadvantaged groups.

The government must stop talking about law enforcement and start taking other considerations into account, including the administration of justice, which will be adversely affected if this bill is passed.

I was happy to hear the Minister of Public Safety speak this morning. He clarified something very important that we knew on this side of the House but that had always been avoided by the government. I am talking about the fact that this bill has essentially been inspired by the United States. I think that if we look at Hansard, it is clear that this bill was inspired by the United States. Not only was it inspired by the United States, but it was inspired by an

American approach that failed in the United States, because it did not provide any deterrent. The crime rate is higher in that country.

In the United States, this approach also failed to provide security and to ensure public order. Yet the government would have us believe that this bill would do just that. Earlier this morning, my colleague from Ottawa Centre made reference to the advice of Newt Gingrich, whom no one could confuse with a progressive and who had this warning for jurisdictions in Canada and Europe that wanted to follow the American example: it did not work.

• (1335)

We can also see the impact this approach had on a state like Texas, where skyrocketing costs greatly contributed to the economic and tax crisis experienced by the state government. This led to the abolition of measures such as minimum sentences, which did not work and which are extremely expensive in comparison to the impact they can have.

I am also happy that the Minister of Public Safety's comments demonstrated that he was fully under the illusion that the provinces are demanding such a bill en masse and that they are prepared to take on the soaring costs that will result. There are anecdotal examples of provinces that would like more serious legislation, but that is not the case in Quebec, for one. I will quote a motion adopted by the Quebec National Assembly in 2001 that, I believe, would be adopted again today. It states:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Government of Canada to establish within the criminal justice system for young persons a special plan for Québec, namely the Young Offenders Act, to fully take into account its specific intervention model.

The young offender issue means a lot to me, because for two years in a previous life, I worked in a youth centre that deals with young offenders, a centre called Ressources Alternatives Rive-Sud. I worked there for nearly two years and had to deal with young people who had committed crimes ranging from shoplifting to assault. My responsibility was to meet with groups of these youth in order to make them aware of the consequences and the social cost of their actions.

This approach worked, and I will explain why. I gave dozens of sessions to hundreds of youth over the course of nearly two years. I saw only five cases of recidivism, cases in which the young offender came back to the centre. This clearly shows that the approach taken when dealing with young offenders in Quebec is working. This approach is not based on incarceration and cracking down on crime, but rather on rehabilitation and restorative justice for the victims.

By combining provisions for young offenders with eight other bills, this bill is like using a sledgehammer to kill a fly. This bill addresses some serious problems that we might all agree on, but they should have been dealt with individually. The government's irresponsible decision, and that is what it was, was to lump them all together, which means we cannot address the serious, real problems because the bill covers things that are not necessarily problems at all and that undermine solutions that have been successful in the past.

Government Orders

I mentioned the question of the cost. It has been difficult to get an answer from the government on that. According to estimates by Conservative Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, it could cost up to \$2.7 billion over five years. That is a huge amount of money, which the government has not taken into account or confirmed. It has mentioned, however, that this \$2.7 billion is but a drop in the bucket compared to the victims' costs, which it calculated at about \$99 billion.

There is nothing at all in Bill C-10 to ensure that the cost of crime and the cost to victims will be less than \$99 billion. There is nothing in this bill to really help victims. This bill puts forward an approach with a much stronger focus on imprisonment and deterrence, but deterrence does not work.

If the cost to victims is truly \$99 billion, as stated by Senator Boisvenu, I challenge the members of the government to show us how passing this bill will decrease this amount.

Once again, I would like to focus on the issue of good governance, which the government has not adequately addressed.

• (1340)

As members will recall, when Bill C-25 was introduced, we repeatedly asked the Minister of Public Safety about the economic impact of this bill, which dealt, among other things, with the two-year credit for each year of pre-sentencing custody.

After being asked the question repeatedly, the minister finally said that the bill would cost approximately \$90 million. Then, after more questions were asked and more evidence was presented, he had to adjust that figure, and he said that, in the end, it would cost approximately \$2 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer disagreed with that figure as well and demonstrated that the bill would not cost the Canadian treasury \$90 million or even \$2 billion but rather \$5 billion.

This type of approach, where the government tries to shove an omnibus bill down Canadians' throats without regard for the cost, without even calculating the costs and without telling all Canadians what those costs are, is completely irresponsible.

I mentioned minimum sentences. This will be a very expensive measure. We know what happened in Texas, where they have decided to abandon this approach. More and more jurisdictions are dropping this approach because it does not have a deterrent effect. It is not an effective deterrent. At present, the Conservative government does not seem interested in controlling the cost of the prison system. Since the Conservatives came to power in 2006, the cost of the prison system has increased by 86% and, in 2013, it is expected to double compared to the first year. We are talking about \$3 billion more.

What further costs will this bill entail? We have no idea.

• (1345)

[*English*]

The government is trying to use rhetoric as well to bring forth its argument or to try to discredit arguments. Rhetoric is fine, but it has to be accurate at some point.

The government is talking about being tough on crime. It is hard to be tough on crime when it does not concern itself with the facts and evidence and replaces them with fiction. That does not demonstrate good governance. That is not being tough on crime; that is being stupid on crime.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind this government that, in the May 2, 2011 election, more than 60% of Canadians rejected this approach. The Conservatives should not be talking about a strong mandate and trying to shove this down Quebeckers' and Canadians' throats, because more than 60% of Canadians rejected it after the Conservatives made it central to their election platform.

The NDP will respect the message sent by Canadians and oppose this American-style bill, a bill that will not lower the crime rate, that will not reduce the number of crimes committed.

As an aside, I would like to mention the impact that such a coercive and repressive approach has had in the United States. In absolute terms, the United States now has the largest prison population. More than 2.3 million Americans, or almost 1% of the population, are currently locked away in U.S. prisons. That is more than in China, more than in Russia.

Is that really the model we want to adopt? Do we really want to build prisons, as the Americans have done, without any impact on the crime rate, since the crime rate in the United States is much higher than it is in Canada? When we are looking to take measures to deal with crime, we have to adopt measures that are smart and follow concrete examples of good management in other countries, not from countries whose approaches have been proved a failure.

Indeed, we have to fight crime. Indeed, victims need to be supported by Parliament, but offering them a bill like this is completely off target—I know: I have been a victim of crime, including burglaries.

The NDP approach has always been a balanced approach between rehabilitation, restorative justice and addressing the problems in the legal system and the parole system, which would help reinforce what deserves to be reinforced. Again, this bill is all over the map. Instead of addressing this issue more precisely and effectively, the government is taking a scattershot approach and trying to pass something, which in some ways will succeed, but in several other very significant ways will completely change Canada's philosophy of justice.

Government Orders

The government talks about law and order, but it is clear that when it comes to law enforcement, the Conservative government has already made up its mind, as it completely ignores the other side of the law, which will be accepted and administered by judges, lawyers and members of the Canadian Bar Association. I quoted the Canadian Bar Association earlier. Its voice deserves to receive more attention than it has so far.

Other people, other lawyers, others in the justice system have spoken out as well. I would like to mention what Daniel MacRury, crown attorney for Nova Scotia, had to say. Among other things, he said that sometimes judges have no alternative but to incarcerate people who are mentally ill and could be placed in the health care system instead. This is one of the major consequences that is completely ignored by the government in its bill.

Other organizations have already spoken out against this bill. The Canadian Paediatric Society represents more than 3,000 pediatricians—child specialists—throughout the country. They are very concerned about the impact that this bill will have on children. Not only is the society very concerned, but it is proposing that a national youth crime prevention strategy be adopted instead. Such a strategy does not exist at present. We do not have a strategy to prevent youth crime. The Conservatives do not want it and prefer to play hardball in order to please one particular voter base, among others, that they have attracted.

I can also say that the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates opposes this bill. We are debating a bill that is supposed to help victims and take the best interests of children and youth into account. But it obviously does not do so.

• (1350)

[English]

Even the media is starting to get on board with the opposition bill. It actually sees what the bill is about.

I will quote the *Nanaimo Daily News* today, which has some interesting comments and insights into what is going on right now. It states, “Determined to pander to his political supporters, Prime Minister Stephen Harper tabled an omnibus crime bill Tuesday that is both unnecessary—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would just like to remind the member and all other members that you cannot refer to other members in the chamber by their given name, whether you are doing it directly or indirectly in a media quote.

Mr. Guy Caron: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I was reading from the article but I understand the point. I will restart. The article states:

Determined to pander to his political supporters, [the] Prime Minister tabled an omnibus crime bill Tuesday that is both unnecessary and foolish....The bill is foolish because it comes with a huge price. Prior to the last election, the Harper government said it wanted to spend \$2 billion to expand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I know we are just freshly back in September, but I would remind the hon. member to avoid using names.

Mr. Guy Caron: I am getting used to it, Mr. Speaker. I will continue:

The bill is foolish because it comes with a huge price. Prior to the last election, the...government said it wanted to spend \$2 billion to expand and build new federal penitentiaries...[the] crime bill seeks to crack down on young offenders, drug dealers,

sexual predators and Canadians in foreign prisons is under fire from critics, who rightly argue it's a waste of time and money since crime rates are declining in the country.

There are aspects of the proposed legislation that make sense....

However, it goes too far and fails to recognize Statistics Canada data from the past few years that indicate crime is actually going down in this country. It also ignores American studies that say locking people up for longer doesn't help reform them....

The bill focuses on incarceration rather than crime prevention. What is more cost-efficient, jail time after the fact at \$50,000 a year per inmate, or crime prevention and restorative justice programs that cost peanuts in comparison?

The *Nanaimo Daily News* gets it and I would like the government to get it as well. We cannot, as the NDP, vote in favour of something that is so broad and imprecise and would actually impede the way that justice has been working in our country, rather than trying to address those specific issues that are being brought by anecdote.

I am really proud to follow what 60% of Canadians have told us they want us to do, which is to oppose the bill and this mentality.

• (1355)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's ombudsman for prisons says that there is a shortfall of mental health services for offenders. There are gaps in capacity, quality and standards. Criminalizing and warehousing the mentally ill does nothing to improve public safety and burdens the justice system.

What impact does my hon. colleague think the bill will have on the number of mentally ill entering the prison system, the prison environment, rehabilitation programs and violence and lockdowns?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very relevant question.

The Canadian Paediatric Society report, for one, is very clear on this subject. Prevention is absolutely crucial when it comes to dealing with crime and youth crime, and crime which has an impact on youth.

As it stands, this bill make absolutely no mention of prevention, rehabilitation or restorative justice for victims. It just hammers away at one particular aspect—coercion or incarceration. This bill is completely unbalanced. My hon. colleague has every reason to raise this particular point because it demonstrates one of the major weaknesses of Bill C-10, which we should be opposing.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. It is yet more proof that Quebec elected young Quebecers who will help the House of Commons during this Parliament.

Government Orders

I would like to ask my colleague and neighbour a question. Today, we have repeatedly questioned the government about the cost of this bill. All day, the Conservatives have skirted the issue. They have yet to answer the question. Does my colleague know why the Conservatives do not want to answer our question about the cost of this bill?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, we have an initial indication of what this could cost—there is talk of \$2.7 billion over five years. And that is likely a very conservative estimate if we look at other estimates we have been given, such as the one for another crime bill, which went from \$90 million to \$5 billion. If that trend continues, we will be looking at far more than \$2.7 billion over five years.

And yes, the government is refusing to answer this question. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that he does not have the information he requires to be able to make a useful and valid evaluation. I would like to use this question to send a message to the government and say that if it wishes to govern in a transparent way that respects the principles of good governance, they should give us these numbers and costs, not only for the federal government, but also for the provincial governments. And these amounts should also be evaluated by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for a very good, clear and articulate description of the problems that I think all members on the opposition benches have with Bill C-10.

I would have liked to have been able to pose this to a government member but I have not had an opportunity in this round. I am baffled by the fact that virtually every criminologist and expert who has looked at the issue of minimum mandatory sentences has concluded that they do not work. In fact, a recent article in the *Criminology & Public Policy* begins with this sentence:

Mandatory minimums are a classic instance of criminology and public policy marching in different directions.

Every member of this House wants to end crime and every member wants to protect victims.

I would like to ask the member if he has been able to find any expert evidence that would support the government's approach.

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her question.

There is absolutely no proof of this, be it from criminologists, sociologists, academics or anyone else who is concerned with this topic. There is not a single study, Canadian or American, that demonstrates the validity of the approach this government is currently favouring. No studies demonstrate that tougher minimum sentences create a deterrent. It has been seen in the United States in particular, but also is true for Canada. We have no concrete idea of how much this approach will cost, but we know it will be a lot. And there will be absolutely no impact on reducing crime and the associated costs for victims. That is why this bill is unacceptable.

If the government had been responsible, it would have split this bill. That would have allowed the opposition to support certain positive elements in a consensus, as happened with the mega-trials bill in June. But that is impossible in this case.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been in and out of the House, so I have not heard the entire speech. However, I think what concerns many on the opposition benches is whether this would shift us closer to some of the failed experiences in the United States where we have seen republicans who have tried to take a similar approach on justice matters and where we have seen states that have really bankrupted themselves because of the costs of incarceration and the costs of dealing with justice issues such as the ones in this bill.

Does the member see this bill as a dangerous move toward that type of justice system?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I do see this as a step in that direction. I do not think we need to look any further than the statements made this morning by the Minister of Public Safety, who was making comparisons and defending some of the provisions in the bill based on what has been done in the United States. It is clear that this bill was inspired by the American approach. If we look at the facts and at what happened in the United States after several of these measures were adopted, for instance, minimum sentences, it is clear that it has been a completely unmanageable burden for several states, including Texas, which is paying the price today. Once again, it has had very little, if any, impact on crime rates.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague included in his remarks something that is important to us as the official opposition that, in addition to opposing, we also be proposing. One of the items the member referred to in terms of proposals as an alternative to what the government has put forward is the issue of restorative justice. This is a cornerstone of an alternate direction to deal with matters such as we have before us now.

I wonder if the member would be good enough to explain to members in the House and anyone who is watching at home the important meaning of restorative justice as an alternative approach to the sledgehammer we have seen from the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member asked me this question, since this is an issue in which I was very involved during the years I spent at youth centres.

Government Orders

In order to help victims overcome the effects of a crime, it is important to show them that there is justice in their case. However, they also need to be able to confront the person who committed the crime, as the hon. member suggested. We are not necessarily talking about extremely serious crimes, but such may be the case. I have seen certain cases where people who were the victims of a break and enter or an assault were able, under supervision of course, to speak with the offender in order to understand why the offender committed the crime and to be more at peace with what happened. To see the justice system deal with the situation in this manner is much more meaningful for victims and helps them to cope better than if they were not involved in the process and the offender were punished using only coercive justice.

• (1405)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to be here today to speak in support of Bill C-10, the safe streets and communities act. Our Prime Minister, our justice minister and, indeed, our government has led on this important issue and I think we have done a great job on this.

At first the title of the legislation may appear broad, and indeed it is, but for a good reason. The measures contained within this legislation cover a range of provisions that will protect families, stand up for victims and hold offenders more accountable. The safe streets and communities act is part of the government's commitment to deliver on that mandate and meet it effectively and in the best interests of Canadian families.

I will just review some of the proposed amendments in the legislation that would make our communities safer. The first one is by extending greater protection to the most vulnerable members of society, as well as victims of terrorism.

Another one is further enhancing the ability of our justice system to hold criminals accountable for their actions. What a concept, actually holding criminals accountable for their actions.

A third item is helping to improve the safety and security of all Canadians. I am not sure why the opposition would be so opposed to something like that.

The safe streets and communities act would better protect children and youth from sexual predators, increase penalties for organized drug crime, end house arrest for serious crimes, protect the public from violent young offenders, eliminate pardons for serious crimes, enshrine in law a number of additional key factors in deciding whether an offender would be granted a transfer back to Canada, increase offender accountability and support victims of crime, support victims of terrorism, and protect vulnerable foreign nationals against abuse and exploitation. I am not sure why the opposition would actually be opposed to any of those measures as we are trying to work in the best interests of Canadian families.

As we have heard from my hon. colleagues, the provisions in the legislation are comprehensive. There are several measures that fall under Public Safety Canada. These include: giving victims of terrorism the ability to seek justice against individuals that carry out a terrorist attack; eliminating pardons for those who commit multiple serious crimes or sexual offences against children; and putting in

place a system wherein offenders have more responsibility for their own rehabilitation.

It also includes changes to the International Transfer of Offenders Act, which I will return to in just a moment.

It proposes changes to laws that fall under the responsibility of the Department of Justice, including helping to protect children from sexual predators by increasing penalties for sexual offences against children, as well as creating two new offences that take aim at conduct that could facilitate the sexual abuse of a child, such as luring. I know my hon. colleague, the member for Niagara Falls, has done a great job and has been a great champion on these things.

The bill also targets issues such as organized drug crime and, in the use of conditional sentence or house arrest for serious crimes, making amendments to ensure that violent and repeat young offenders are held accountable for their actions. It would also protect foreign workers who are vulnerable to falling into exploitation and trafficking.

These are all bills that Canadians have seen before, some going back as far as 2007.

Our government kept working in a minority government to get these bills passed and now we are taking strong, decisive action in the form of the safe streets and communities act.

I am very hopeful that we will see the support of all the hon. members in the House as we work to keep Canadian families safer.

In the recent Speech from the Throne, we pledged:

Our Government will defend the rights of law-abiding citizens, and it will promote Canadian values and interests at home and abroad.

Canadians know that our government is a government of action, and when we say that we will do something, we do it. We made a pledge that we would reintroduce a comprehensive law and order legislation within a hundred sitting days of the new Parliament and, with this bill, we are following through on that pledge.

The Speech from the Throne also stated:

The Government of Canada has no more fundamental duty than to protect the personal safety of our citizens and defend against threats to our national security.

This statement is at the heart of our efforts to strengthen our law and our court systems. It is the spirit and intent that is woven into this important legislation that we have passed since 2006 that gives our law enforcement better tools and resources, that address violent and gun crimes, that protects our children and other vulnerable citizens and that ensures that offenders serve sentences that match the severity of the crimes being committed.

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•(1410)

The statement also guides our government's decision to invest in crime prevention programs for youth in disadvantaged communities. I know that has been a concern of the opposition, and it has been mentioned that money should be spent on programs. Well, here it is. That is why the next phase of Canada's economic action plan includes the investment of \$7.5 million annually to renew the youth gang prevention fund.

This statement was top of mind when we developed the comprehensive legislation before us today. While this legislation covers several provisions, I will take my time today to talk about a specific element of Bill C-10, the section that will amend the International Transfer of Offenders Act.

Before we go further, let us take a brief look at the history of this legislation.

As hon. members well know, Canada has been a party to international treaties related to transfer of offenders since 1978. By numbers, we have signed 14 bilateral treaties and 3 multilateral conventions with more than 60 countries to allow for the transfer of offenders.

There are many technical factors to take into consideration in transferring an offender. For example, the offender has to be serving a sentence for being involved in an activity that would also be punishable as a crime in Canada. As well, in most cases the offender must have at least six months remaining in his or her sentence, and there must be a consent of all three parties: Canada, the nation where the offender was sentenced, and the offender.

The initial legislation was modernized in 2004, and now, in the interest of public safety, the time has come to amend it again so that we can ensure Canadians feel secure in the decisions the government makes to bring offenders back to Canada.

I am happy to have the opportunity today to talk about what this amendment will and will not do and to set the record straight on a number of fronts. The legislation before us today proposes important amendments to the International Transfer of Offenders Act in order to help ensure that the commitment to protecting the safety and security of Canadians, which I know all of us share, is taken into account when considering the offender's request for transfer.

I would like to underline the two important components of the legislation before us and discuss them in further detail shortly.

Let me first briefly discuss what Bill C-10 will do.

Hon. members will know that under the present rules, the Minister of Public Safety is required to take several factors into account when considering an offender's request for a transfer. These factors include consideration of whether the offender's return to Canada would constitute a threat to the security of Canada; whether the offender left or remained outside Canada with the intention of abandoning Canada as a place of permanent residence; whether the foreign entity or its prison system presents a serious threat to the offender's security or human rights; and whether, in the opinion of the minister, the offender will, after the transfer, commit a terrorism offence or criminal organization offence within the meaning of section 2 of the Criminal Code.

The proposed Bill C-10 keeps those factors in place. The minister will still be able to consider these factors, as well as several others that are itemized in the existing act.

What Bill C-10 does do, however, is expressly stipulate that one of the key purposes of the International Transfer of Offenders Act is to protect the safety of Canadians. It means that the greater good of Canadians, and not first the good of the offender, is given its rightful place.

The bottom line is that Canadians want a justice system that works, and they also want a corrections system that effectively balances the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens. That is what the proposed amendments that our government has introduced will do.

The legislation our government has introduced recognizes that public safety should be a stated purpose in the determination of all offender transfer requests. Under the proposed amendments, the act's purpose would now read:

The purpose of this Act is to enhance public safety and to contribute to the administration of justice and the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community by enabling offenders to serve their sentences in the country of which they are citizens or nationals.

This means that public safety is placed at the forefront of the decision-making process, which is exactly where it belongs. The proposed amendments will also help to protect the safety of family members and children. It will do that by stipulating in legislation that the minister may consider whether a transfer will endanger the safety of a family member or of a child. This would apply in the case of an offender who has been convicted of an offence against a family member or who has been convicted of a sexual offence involving a child.

•(1415)

As well, Bill C-10 would include additional factors that may be considered in assessing requests for the transfer back to Canada, such as whether an offender has participated in a rehabilitation program.

There are omissions in the current legislation as it now stands. That is why Bill C-10 is an important bill. Bill C-10 would protect the safety and security of Canadians by clearly recognizing in the legislation itself that public safety considerations are at the centre of all offender transfer requests.

Under the proposed amendments, Bill C-10 would also give the Minister of Public Safety more flexibility in the decision-making process itself. I have heard reference made to the fact that Bill C-10 provides the minister with too much discretionary authority to consider any factor he or she would like. I would like to remind all hon. members, however, that while it is non-explicit in the existing act, the courts have stated that the minister may also consider and refer to factors other than those listed in the existing section 10 as long as they are linked to the purpose of the act.

Government Orders

I have also heard reference made to the fact that the minister would no longer be compelled in the legislation to consider a list of factors, but “may consider” any or all itemized factors if appropriate. Some have suggested the change from “shall consider” to “may consider” in Bill C-10 puts too much discretion at the hands of the minister. This is not the case. In fact, all decisions would still need to be reasonable and rendered in accordance with the purpose of the act.

As hon. members may well know, the courts have called for more transparency in decision-making. Bill C-10 answers this call by enabling a clear articulation of the pertinent considerations in each case. The proposed amendments clearly articulate the factors that may be taken into account when considering a request for transfer, based on the unique facts and circumstances of each case.

In addition, to ensure that public safety is a principal consideration in offender transfer requests, Bill C-10 would also provide for the consideration of other factors, many of which are in line with other reforms currently under way within the corrections system. These other factors would include whether, in the minister's opinion, the offender is likely to continue to engage in criminal activity after the transfer; the offender's health; and whether the offender had refused to participate in a rehabilitation or reintegration program.

In addition, Bill C-10 notes that the minister may consider whether the offender has accepted responsibility for the offence for which he or she has been convicted, including acknowledging any harm that has been done to victims and to the community; the manner in which the offender would be supervised after the transfer while serving the remainder of his or her sentence in Canada; and whether the offender has co-operated with, or has undertaken to co-operate with, law enforcement.

To sum up, the basic principles of the International Transfer of Offenders Act would remain intact, but the amendments we are proposing today would enhance the act by ensuring that public safety is stated in law as an integral part of the decision-making process for the transfer of offenders. It would put in writing that the minister may consider factors such as the safety of family members and our most vulnerable, our children, before granting a transfer of another offender back to Canada. It would also bring greater transparency and responsiveness to the decision-making process.

These are sensible changes. They are balanced and they are fair. Therefore, I urge all hon. members to vote in favour of the legislation before us today and to work with the government to ensure its speedy passage.

Once again, to summarize what this legislation is about, the proposed amendments are about greater protection to the most vulnerable members of our society as well as victims of terrorism.

● (1420)

It is also important that we look at holding criminals accountable for their actions and trying to improve the safety and security of all Canadians. I do not what hon. members or, quite frankly, Canadians would not support that.

The safe streets and communities act is about protecting children and youth from sexual predators, increasing penalties for organized drug crimes, ending house arrest for serious crimes, protecting the

public from violent young offenders, eliminating pardons for serious crimes, enshrining in law a number of additional key factors in deciding whether an offender would be granted a transfer back to Canada, increasing offender accountability, supporting victims of crime, supporting victims of terrorism and protecting vulnerable foreign nationals against abuse and exploitation.

I heard questions in previous rounds about minimum sentencing, why that seemed to be a problem and that experts talked about that. I do not know why we would oppose minimum sentencing, certainly as it relates to the exploitation of children. I believe minimum mandatory sentencing would be important to keep those violent criminals behind bars.

Once again, I encourage all members of the House to support Bill C-10.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it completely astounding that the Conservatives keep using the idea of the fight against terrorism to justify all of these regressive bills that they are trying to pass.

Does the member opposite not see the inconsistency in proposing to imprison more offenders only to offer them help once they are in prison? That is what this omnibus bill does. Why not make a one-time investment in prevention programs, which would give people the tools they need before they commit a crime? That would help them feel better about themselves and provide them with more appropriate and positive coping strategies to help them avoid ending up in prison.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, this government has struck a good balance. As I have mentioned before, we have money set aside for anti-gang programming to deal with people.

One of the things we introduced in the budget previous to the last one was \$20 million for a program called pathways to education, an incredible program offered across the country. The good thing about pathways to education is that it addresses those very issues about which the member asked.

This program started in Toronto, in Regent Park, and one of the things that was realized was there were some early determinants that could be dealt with, like people who dropped out of high school and did not get an opportunity to go on to university. When our government realized the results of the pathways to education program, we committed \$20 million, and this program continues to be offered across the country.

One of the great things the program does is offer incentives for universities to offer short term incentives and mentoring. A whole bunch of factors go into helping divert kids into a great opportunity to get an education and have a great career.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I realize the majority of the member's speech on the bill was on the subject of international transfer. However, my question is one of a domestic nature, given that the hon. member mentioned, at least a couple of times, that this was about protecting our most vulnerable.

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The hon. member would be well aware that while only 3% of the Canadian population identify themselves as aboriginal, the aboriginal population in our criminal institutions is closer to 20%.

What measures are in this bill or otherwise to deal with those vulnerable members of our society with respect to their involvement in criminal law?

• (1425)

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-10 is about justice. I certainly do not disagree with what the member raises. Some of those programs have been offered through Indian Affairs. Still more can be done and we will continue to work on these issues.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a number of times from the opposite bench about programs that will keep people from crime.

I come from a riding, Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, as part of the greater city of Hamilton, where there has been some significant investments for a national crime prevention centre from HRSDC to keep people from committing crime and for gang prevention. These investments have been made in Hamilton Centre, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and Hamilton Mountain. In fact, all those ridings are held by opposition members. There were millions of dollars spent.

Does the member believe all we should do is just spend money on those kinds of programs, or should we make sure that we protect victims and actually incarcerate very serious criminals, and ensure they are behind bars so they are not committing crimes and victimizing more people?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, our government is trying to take a balanced approach. We certainly understand that some of these things can be dealt with through prevention. That is why we have some programs in place. The member mentions a program that covers a large number of seats held by the opposition, but surrounds both the member's and my riding. We understand that is important and that is why we believe we should do that.

Quite frankly, a number of the programs I talked about, such as pathways to education, are held in opposition ridings. We recognize these as being great programs. We are trying to establish and realize that for too long the rights of victims have taken a back seat to the rights of criminals. Right now it is a balancing act to try to rehabilitate people, but we also understand that if serious crimes are being committed, perpetrators will be responsible for their actions and they will do serious time as a result of serious crimes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says “offender”; we say

“adolescent”. If we had imprisoned every thug in the past, our society might be without some great people today, and these people would have a criminal record.

As for the Youth Criminal Justice Act, this government has received suggestions for amendments to the act from the provinces. But it has refused to consider them. Why is the government not listening to the suggestions from prosecutors and people in the provinces?

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, when we look at protecting society from violent and repeat young offenders, we are not talking about minor offences. We are talking about appropriate sentences based on murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, very serious crimes. We recognize the fact that young people may make mistakes. We are not talking about petty theft, but about repeat, violent offenders.

Once again, we are trying to balance the issues of responsibility for the victim along with the responsibility for those who are committing the offences. That is why we have looked at only those who are violent and repeat offenders when it comes to young offenders.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the member made a point that he could not imagine why people would be against mandatory minimums. I would suggest to him that a great deal of the evidence suggests that putting some people in prison for a period of time under mandatory minimums returns them to society having gone to crime school as opposed to having given them the rehabilitation they needed. I ask for his comments on that.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about mandatory minimum sentences for those involved in child exploitation as one example. It is important to know that if our children are being exploited, then these dangerous offenders should be kept off the street. They should not be caught and released. If they are going to be dealing with our most vulnerable, our children, they need to be dealt with accordingly and they should be kept off the streets.

• (1430)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would first of all like to mention that we reached the five hour point in the debate and from this point forward when the House returns to this matter, we will move on to 10 minute speeches.

It being 2:30 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, September 19, 2011.

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

APPENDIX

Address

of

The Right Honourable David Cameron

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

to both Houses of Parliament

in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa

on

Thursday, September 22, 2011

APPENDIX

Address
of
The Right Honourable David Cameron
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern
Ireland
to both Houses of Parliament
in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa
on
Thursday, September 22, 2011

The Right Honourable David Cameron was welcomed by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, by the Honourable Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate, and by the Honourable Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call upon the right hon. Prime Minister to take the podium.

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Thank you, dear colleagues, Mr. Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Speaker of the House of Commons, Senators and Members of Parliament, Chief Justice and members of the Supreme Court of Canada, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

[English]

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege for all of us to welcome to our Parliament today the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Right Hon. David Cameron.

On a personal note, David, I have seen you recently and often—many times, in fact—both as Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister in Great Britain, and around the world, but it is a special pleasure to meet you here in Canada, where you are joining a distinguished register of British prime ministers who have addressed this chamber.

[Translation]

For instance, most recently in 2001, the Right Hon. Tony Blair addressed this House.

[English]

The great Margaret Thatcher spoke in this place on two occasions. Perhaps most famously, it was right here in 1941, during some of the darkest days of the Second World War, that Sir Winston Churchill made his famous “some chicken, some neck” speech that did so much to rally spirits on both sides of the Atlantic.

Prime Minister, another of your predecessors, Sir Anthony Eden, called appearing before this House an almost daunting experience for the visitor. Let me assure you that he found, as you will, that in the tradition we inherited from your own country, the Commons treats its visitors much better than we do each other.

[Translation]

Once again, we welcome you and we look forward to hearing you speak in just a few minutes.

[English]

First I ask the indulgence of this House to refer briefly to those security matters and economic matters that have brought Prime Minister Cameron and myself together, usually with other world leaders, no less than seven times during the last 16 months. They are matters, I must say, in which Prime Minister Cameron's leadership has been decisive and matters that will continue to demand his firmness of purpose, such as in Libya.

[Translation]

In particular, I am referring to the role played by our two countries, with the assistance of Canada's other mother country, France, in the efforts we have devoted to helping the people of Libya build a better future. Those efforts were driven by certain fundamental convictions.

[English]

We believe, for instance, that “the state was made for man and not man for the state”, as the Right Hon. Harold Macmillan observed in this very chamber.

We also believe that when we help others to be free, it is our own liberty that we also secure. Those ancient rights of democracy and the rule of law that our two countries share are also the common aspirations of millions of people around the world. They are clearly the aspirations of the Libyan people themselves, and our mutual hope is that they will someday enjoy them in all their fullness.

[Translation]

Of course, we cannot forget the very serious problems that are facing the global economy and that bring us together as G20 partners.

[English]

Neither of us will be accused of exaggeration if we acknowledge that the most immediate test confronting all of us is to avoid the devastating consequences of a return to global recession, yet without key countries taking systemically appropriate and coordinated economic measures, without resistance to protectionism and acceptance of more flexible exchange rates, without fiscal consolidation and, above all else, without a will to address growing uncertainty to decisively tackle what are in some cases dangerous and unsustainable levels of national indebtedness—without actions on these matters, the world will not avoid such consequences.

[Translation]

I would therefore like to commend the leadership shown by Prime Minister Cameron on the economic issues of the day.

● (1740)

[English]

First, the strong guidance Prime Minister Cameron has offered to our G20 partners and his determined advocacy for fiscal discipline.

Second, his consequential handling of the difficult fiscal choices confronting the British economy. Truly among our G20 partners, Prime Minister Cameron has been a leader by example.

Prime Minister, here in Canada we have followed your progress carefully and I can safely say that, where it matters most, your thinking parallels that of our own government. To be precise, while deficit reduction is not an end in itself, the G20 fiscal targets agreed to in Toronto last year remain an essential element for rebuilding the economic health of industrialized nations.

[Translation]

Like you, Prime Minister, we are targeting those objectives with a clear plan to stimulate job creation and economic growth. Later this year, G20 leaders will meet in Cannes.

[English]

And, I dare say, when we get there in Cannes, we will have much to occupy us at the G20.

Hon. members, without further ado, it does give me great pleasure to introduce a man of immense resolve and principled action, a great friend of mine and a great friend of Canada, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Right Honourable David Cameron.

Right Hon. David Cameron (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker of the Senate, Prime Minister, hon. members of the Senate and hon. members of the House of Commons, thank you for that incredibly warm welcome. As you said, Stephen, this does remind me of home. It is just a little bit bigger and a lot better behaved.

[Translation]

I thank you for the great honour you have bestowed upon me by inviting me to speak before this historic Parliament.

[English]

Perhaps I should have preceded that with the warning Winston Churchill gave during one of his wartime broadcasts when he said:

[Translation]

“Be on your guard, because I am going to speak in French.”

[English]

Let me begin in this place by paying tribute to Jack Layton. I offer sincere condolences to Olivia and his family. His energy and his optimism were above politics, and I know he will be missed by all those who serve here.

One of the things I am finding about this job is that whichever country I visit, members of the royal family have got there first. I think the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, or Will and Kate as you call them here, have set the bar pretty high this time, but it is a symbol of the importance of the relationship between our two countries and the long-standing affection that our people show toward one another that the young royal couple chose Canada as the destination for their first ever overseas visit and that the people here gave them such a warm reception. Sadly, I will not be landing a helicopter in a lake or wearing a stetson, and I am sure Prime Minister Harper will be disappointed that he will not be able to challenge me at rodeo either.

As the author Brian Lee Crowley has set out, there is a strong argument that the 21st century could well be the Canadian century.

In the last few years, Canada has got every major decision right. Look at the facts. Not a single Canadian bank fell or faltered during the global banking crisis. Canada got to grips with its deficit and was running surpluses and paying down the debt before the recession, fixing the roof while the sun was still shining. Your economic leadership has helped the Canadian economy to weather the global storms far better than many of your international competitors.

The way in which you have integrated people from many different backgrounds into a mature democracy is, I believe, a model from which we can all learn, and Canada is now preparing for a better future. Alberta is the jurisdiction with the best educational results of any English-speaking jurisdiction in the world.

From BlackBerry to Canadarm, the robot arm used on 90 space shuttle missions, yours is a home of innovation and technology. In fact, BlackBerry presented Her Majesty the Queen with one of its smart phones when she visited last year, but, unsurprisingly, Her Majesty had one already.

Canada displays moral clarity and political leadership. Canadian servicemen and women have made extraordinary sacrifices in the defence of liberty and democracy, yet while some countries do a little and talk a lot, Canada is self-effacing and self-sacrificing in its contribution to the fight for a better world, so it is a privilege for me to come here today and to honour what you have done.

It is also a great pleasure to be standing here with my colleague and friend, Prime Minister Harper. I have seen at first hand over the last 16 months his outstanding leadership, not least at my first G8 and G20 summits in Muskoka and Toronto last year. Then, as now, the focus of much of our efforts was on the two issues that concern our people most: keeping them safe and getting them jobs.

This evening I want to focus my remarks on how we can work together to address some of the issues of the global economy, but let me first say something about security.

We have all suffered from Islamic extremism and violence. I have just come from the United Nations, where I argued that the events we have seen this year in North Africa and the Middle East offer a massive opportunity to spread peace, prosperity, democracy and, vitally, security, but only if we work together to seize the opportunity and to support the Arab people as they seek to fulfill aspirations for a job, a voice and a stake in their society.

• (1745)

Our two countries have always been prepared to bear the burden and pay the price to make our world safer and to defend our way of life.

The Peace Tower in this building commemorates the 67,000 Canadian lives lost in the First World War alone. Britain owes an incredible debt to the Canadian armed forces, and I want to pay tribute to them today.

Through two world wars, Canada was there. At Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele and Ypres, Canada was there. At the Somme, when our forces together suffered the worse losses in history, Canada was there. In fact, it was after the Somme that Lloyd George wrote:

The Canadians...played a part of such distinction that thenceforward they were marked out as storm troops....Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line they prepared for the worst.

In our darkest hour in World War II, Canadian naval forces helped to keep the sea lanes open during the Battle of the Atlantic, running convoys across the Atlantic week after week, braving mines, submarines and blacked-out silent ships, all of which proved absolutely fundamental to our ability to survive as an independent country.

On Juno Beach, it was the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the Royal Canadian Navy that achieved such a remarkable triumph on the first day of those vital Normandy landings and which on D-Day got further inland than any of the five other invasion forces.

Today Canada is as vital and influential a military partner as it has ever been. As partners and founder members of NATO, our forces have been proud to serve alongside each other in international operations from Bosnia to Sierra Leone, and most recently from Afghanistan to Libya.

In Afghanistan, it is Canadian and British forces that have fought alongside each other in the south, in the very toughest part of the country, where few other nations would follow.

Today, Canadian personnel are engaged in vital work training the Afghan National Security Forces.

In Libya, it was a Canadian general, Charles Bouchard, who commanded the NATO operation, and brave Canadian pilots who played such a vital role in protecting civilians and helping the Libyan people to liberate themselves.

Amidst all this, I believe there could not be a more fitting tribute to the brilliance of Canadian forces and our pride at standing side by side with them than the recent renaming of the maritime command and air command as the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Prime Minister Harper and I will always ensure that Britain and Canada keep our defences strong, but we also understand the impact we can have to punch above our weight in the world to help achieve freedom, democracy and security. It is not just about military might alone, but about diplomacy, aid, culture, the promotion of our values. Britain is pleased to support the Muskoka initiative on maternal and child health launched under Prime Minister Harper's leadership at the G8 last year, and we are investing in programs to save the lives of 50,000 women in pregnancy and child birth and to stop a quarter of a million newborn babies dying needlessly.

Of course at a time when finances are tight, people question whether we should keep our aid commitments. I say yes. We need to be able to protect military power to protect our security and defend our values, but it is even better to mend the broken states and to act to stop problems before they come to our door, whether that is waves of illegal migration, the spread of diseases or new threats to our national security.

● (1750)

Take Afghanistan: If we had put a fraction of our current military spending on Afghanistan into helping Afghanistan develop 15 or 20 years ago, just think of what we might have been able to avoid over the last decade.

Or take Pakistan: Let another generation of Pakistani children enter life without a proper education or the prospects of a job and a head full of extremist propaganda and what are the risk in terms of mass migration, radicalization and even terrorism?

Britain and Canada have never turned away from the world, so it is right that we have met our aid commitments and I hope you will continue to join me in working with our international development partners, not just for the good of the developing world but for the safety and the security of us all.

Just as Britain and Canada have worked together for the world's security, so we must now work together on the biggest challenge this year: securing strong and sustainable growth in the global economy.

It is important that we are clear about the facts. We are not quite staring down the barrel, but the pattern is clear. The recovery out of the recession for the advanced economies will be difficult. Growth in Europe has stalled. Growth in America has stalled.

The effects of the Japanese earthquake, high oil and food prices have created a drag on growth, but fundamentally we are still suffering from the aftershocks of the world financial bust and economic collapse in 2008. That means families in Britain and Canada are facing a tough time.

I believe that Prime Minister Harper and I share the same analysis of what is wrong and what needs to be put right.

The world is recovering from a once in 70 years financial crisis and is suffering from debts not seen in decades. This is not a traditional cyclical recession, it is a debt crisis. When the fundamental problem is the level of debt and the fear of those levels, then the usual economic prescriptions cannot be applied. It is not simply a question of using conventional fiscal and monetary levers to stimulate growth until confidence and normal economic activity returns.

When households have borrowed too much, when banks are shrinking their balance sheets and rebuilding their capital and when governments are accumulating huge stocks of debt, the power of those traditional levers is limited.

The economic situation is much more dangerous and the solution for most countries cannot be simply to borrow more. Why? Because if the government does not have the room to borrow more in order to cut taxes or increase spending, people and markets start worrying about whether a government can actually pay back its debt. When this happens, confidence ebbs away and interest rates will rise, hitting people with mortgages and hitting companies that want to borrow to invest. We can see this happening right now in some European countries.

Of course there is a crucial role for monetary policy to help support economies in the short term and of course those that have room can use fiscal levers to do the same. Yes, demand matters but boosting it by undermining financial stability is self-defeating and damages the confidence on which economic growth depends.

A long-term solution must tackle the fundamental problem. We must address the problem of excessive debt. Let me say it again, it is a debt crisis.

Only when we properly recognize this can we begin to address banks which are too weak to pass on lower interest rates to businesses and households and consumers and businesses whose fear of debt mean then they do not want to borrow to spend.

Recovering from a debt crisis is both different and more difficult than recovering from a cyclical recession.

Ultimately, there are only three ways to deal with the overhang of debt: rescheduling them, writing them off or paying them back. Highly indebted households and governments cannot simply spend their way out of a debt crisis.

• (1755)

The more they spend, the more the debts will rise and the more the fundamental problem will grow. Instead, we need to confront the problems directly. I believe we need to do three things: get to grips with the debt and restore credibility and confidence; make it easier to do business and create jobs by freeing up our economies; and, in a global crisis, working together across the world coordinating our action, including boosting world trade, starting with the Doha round.

Let me briefly take each in turn.

First and foremost, we need to deal directly with our debts. In Britain, we have learned from Canada's own experience when you were able to take action to pay down debt. When our government took office in Britain in May 2010, we inherited the biggest budget deficit in our peacetime history. We faced the risk of rising interest rates, falling confidence and even questions about our credit worthiness as a country.

So we have taken some really tough decisions to rescue our public finances and we have begun to implement them. How fast we need to go will depend on circumstances. With a deficit that was forecast to be the highest in the G20 and ballooning debt, the U.K. has had to act quickly.

Britain's experience contained an invaluable lesson: it is possible to earn credibility and get ahead of the markets through decisive action. But, by its nature, a global crisis cannot be solved by countries acting alone. In a global economy, we need every country

in the world to show leadership to address its problems. With others, we continue to argue that we need to increase global demand by rebalancing where surplus countries spend more helping deficit countries to increase their exports and grow faster. Of course this is vital and it will help the deficit countries to grow and to repay debt, but more spending by surplus countries will not on its own deal with the debts.

That brings me to the eurozone. I was an advisor in the treasury at a time when our currencies were fixed through the exchange rate mechanism in Europe. It failed, and it taught me that different countries sometimes need very different economic policies. So I do not support Britain joining the euro and I never will. However, Britain has a strong interest in the success of the eurozone, as we all do, because the problems in the eurozone are now so big that they have begun to threaten the stability of the world economy. Why? It is because the euro area is one of the largest markets in world and the euro is the second largest currency. While these problems are not being solved, while they grow, businesses do not invest and confidence is sapped in the euro area itself and increasingly worldwide.

Eurozone countries must act swiftly to resolve the crisis. They must implement what they have agreed. They must demonstrate they have the political will to do what is necessary to ensure the stability of the system. One way or another, they have to find a fundamental and lasting solution to the heart of the problem: the high level of indebtedness in many euro countries. And, whatever course they take, Europe's banks need to be made strong enough so they can help support the recovery, not put it at risk.

At the same time, we cannot put off the fundamental problem of the lack of competitiveness in many euro area countries. Endlessly putting off what needs to be done does not help. In fact, it makes the problem worse and it lengthens the shudder of uncertainty that looms over the world economy.

When we cannot cut taxes or increase spending to boost demand and when interest rates are already low, what is left to government is to take those simple, straightforward steps to boost the potential for growth. And we should remember that in the long term it is not fiscal policy that makes economies grow. It is making us more productive that is essential for our future long-term prosperity. That means making it easier to set up a new company, to employ people, to invest and to grow a business. This may sound simple but that does not mean it is easy to do. You quickly find you come up against all sorts of barriers, obstacles and regulations.

● (1800)

In Britain we are determined to address this. We are creating the most competitive corporate tax regime in the G20, cutting the time it takes to set up a business and reducing tax costs and regulatory burdens for new businesses. We are putting up every regulation on the Internet so people can clearly see what they are and which ones we can get rid of. We have issued a one-in one-out rule for regulation so that any minister who wants to bring in a new regulation has to get rid of an existing one first.

We are prioritizing science and infrastructure, reforming our education system and introducing new apprenticeships to help improve the skills of our young people. I am delighted that we are following in the footsteps of Prime Minister Harper in hosting the new WorldSkills summit in London next month, which will see 1,000 young people from over 50 countries competing to be the best of the best in 46 different skills, from robotics to web design.

I have argued that we need to get to grips with the overhang of debt in our national economies, that we need to make them more competitive, and also, that a global crisis cannot be solved by countries acting alone.

There are those who argue that international action requires new global institutions. I do not agree. It is not new institutions, it is political will we need and opportunities like the G20 to develop a consensus. We can have all the meetings, subcommittees and processes in the world, but if there is no political will, we will never tackle these problems and secure the strong, sustainable, balanced growth we need. That is why the political will of leaders at the G20 summit this November is so important.

Nothing sums this up better than the failure to get a global trade deal. I believe we have to re-fight the argument for free trade all over again. For me, there is nowhere better to do it than right here in Canada, a country built on trade.

The truth is, trade is the biggest wealth creator we have ever known and it is the biggest stimulus we could give our economies right now. A completed trade round could add \$170 billion to the world economy, and yet, too many people still seem to believe that trade is a sort of zero-sum game. They talk about it quite literally as if one country's success is another country's failure. They think if our exports grow, then someone else's have to shrink; that somehow if we import low-cost goods from China, we are failing; as if all the benefits of China's exports go to China alone, when we actually benefit too, from choice, from competition, from low prices in our shops. The whole point about trade is that we are baking a bigger cake and everyone can benefit from it.

I come here to Canada to stand up for free trade, to promote more trade and more investment between our two countries, and with other countries around the world.

At the G20 in Cannes, we need to agree to a credible plan to take to the WTO ministerial in December as a basis for concluding the Doha development round. If we cannot get a deal involving everyone, then we need to look at other ways in which to drive forward with the trade liberalization that our world needs, ensuring the continued work of the WTO, preventing any collapse back into protectionism which would be disastrous, but going forward,

perhaps with a coalition of the willing, where countries like Britain and Canada who want to can forge ahead with more ambitious deals and others can join later if they choose. Let us set an example to the world by concluding early next year the comprehensive economic and trade agreement between Europe and Canada which will deliver a huge boost in jobs for those on both sides.

Let me conclude by saying this. The relationship between Britain and Canada is deep and strong. At the Chateau Laurier Hotel in 1954, with the Second World War still in mind, Winston Churchill put it like this:

We have surmounted all the perils and endured all the agonies of the past. We shall provide against and thus prevail over the dangers and problems of the future, withhold no sacrifice, grudge no toil, seek no sordid gain, fear no foe.

● (1805)

Let us in this new century look to the future, secure in our joint values and seeking new opportunities. We are two nations but under one Queen and united by one set of values. So let us fear no foe as we work together for a safer and better world.

Thank you.

[Applause]

[Translation]

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella (Speaker of the Senate): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, honourable senators and members of the House of Commons, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all here present today, I wish to thank you, Mr. Prime Minister for your thoughtful and generous address to this joint session of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada.

As you have said, Mr. Prime Minister, Canada and the United Kingdom share a long history of friendship and solidarity.

Mr. Prime Minister, your current visit to our Parliament reaffirms the special relation existing between our two countries.

[English]

While the Thames River locates the Parliament of Westminster, the juncture of the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers locate the Parliament of Canada. For a long time, as you have indicated, these rivers carried timber to the ships bound for Great Britain, and those earliest commercial relations that have blossomed over the century.

Today, the United Kingdom is Canada's most important trading partner in the European Union. It is also our second largest source of, and destination for, foreign direct investment in the world.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

The exchange of goods across the Atlantic also extends to human capital. Every year, thousands of young Canadians travel to the United Kingdom to study at your many prestigious universities. Likewise, each year Canadian schools have the pleasure of welcoming eager young minds from the United Kingdom. As with our economic exchanges, the flow of human capital between our countries strengthens and enriches the ties between our peoples.

[*English*]

The common values, as you have mentioned, Mr. Prime Minister, that our countries promote are also apparent on the international stage. Working together in the Commonwealth, NATO and at the United Nations, our countries stand up for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values have guarded our participation in the contact group on Libya, and, of course, these are the values that our countries continue to promote in Afghanistan.

Canadians have the deepest respect and admiration for the efforts and the sacrifices that the brave men and women in your armed forces have made in pursuit of these principles.

On a lighter note, Prime Minister Cameron, you and Prime Minister Harper have a unique commonality in that you each have acquired new feline assistance in your respective official residences. We understand that the furry occupant of 10 Downing Street is called Larry. For our part, Canadians recently came up with the name Stanley for the furry resident at 24 Sussex Drive. Perhaps Larry and Stanley are even related.

Prime Minister Cameron, it has been an honour to have heard your words today. So, on behalf of all those gathered here and those who have been watching at home, allow me to thank you for your presence in our Parliament and to wish you fruitful and successful discussions during your stay here in Canada.

[*Applause*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Speaker of the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Cameron, Prime Minister Harper, all hon. senators and members of the House of Commons, and distinguished guests:

Your presence in this House of Commons, Prime Minister Cameron, is a historic and memorable event, just as your visit to

Canada is an occasion of great significance. On behalf of all the members of the House of Commons, and indeed on behalf of all Canadians from coast to coast whom we represent, I offer you our warmest welcome and our thanks at having made the journey to address us here today.

[*Translation*]

By giving a speech before our Parliament, you are joining the ranks of prominent British prime ministers who honoured Canadian parliamentarians with their wise words and their informed ideas. It is interesting to note that their visits often coincided with periods of global upheaval, such as the second world war, the cold war and the global recession.

[*English*]

Global developments have once again placed challenges, economic and military, before both our countries. While there may be no reprieve from the threat of uncertainty, it is heartening to know that in difficult times Canada and the United Kingdom stand together, shoulder to shoulder, as friends and allies.

What Prime Minister Thatcher said in her first address to our Parliament is as true today as it was nearly 30 years ago. She said:

[Our countries] are linked in so many important ways. We believe in the same high and honourable ideals. We stand ready to defend our free and independent way of life. We agree on the great purposes which we must pursue in the wider world.

Indeed, the common bonds that underpin the great partnership between our two countries are so numerous. Beyond ancestry and heritage, beyond trade and tourism, our two countries share a common belief in the foundational principles of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These principles have been central to our shared history and guide our common world view.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Prime Minister, your presence with us here today is something that my colleagues and I will remember for a long time. I would like to thank you sincerely for visiting and invite you to come back at any time.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for your visit here today.

[*Applause*]

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