



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 27, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 27, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the annual reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for the year 2010-2011.

[*Translation*]

This document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

* * *

[*English*]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of State (Democratic Reform)) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act.

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

* * *

HOLIDAYS ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-337, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Flag Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the 50th anniversary of our Canadian flag occurs. As I have raised before in this House, it is vitally important that we have a national holiday to celebrate the Canadian flag, a flag that unites us from coast to coast to coast.

I have introduced this bill in the House previously. I am hoping that, in this 41st Parliament, we will finally have the opportunity to vote on this bill and bring forward a national flag day in February. In many provinces in this country, we now have civic holidays that fall on the third Monday in February and this particular bill would do

exactly the same thing. It would extend that civic holiday nationally in honour of our nation's flag.

[*Translation*]

In 2015, the 50th anniversary of our national flag occurs. What a great idea to have a national holiday to celebrate the Canadian flag.

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

* * *

[*English*]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-338, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (termination and severance pay).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to introduce my severance protection bill.

As we found out, since 2008 a lot of companies are struggling, which means that a lot of workers and their families are struggling. When companies close their doors, what happens to workers in this country is that their severance pay is unsecured when those bankruptcy proceedings occur.

This is a very simple, straightforward bill with only one clause and it would elevate the status of those payments from unsecured to preferred. My old bill from the last Parliament, Bill C-501, has now been taken over by my friend from Hamilton. I am very glad that the pension part will also be taken care of. This is the severance part.

I want to let everyone in the House know that this is not a political statement. It is a measured and effective proposal that could help workers who are owed money during bankruptcy proceedings. It would do so without disrupting capital markets or negatively affecting the borrowing costs of struggling companies. It would also fulfill a promise that I made to workers from Buchanan Forest Products and others in my riding and, indeed, workers right across this country, that we would protect their severance when their companies go bankrupt.

Government Orders

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

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition wherein the petitioners object to the closing of the marine rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petition is signed by a number of residents of the area of St. John's and residents from other parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, such as Portugal Cove, Musgrave Harbour and Twillingate, and even by some residents of New Brunswick. The petitioners oppose the decision to close the marine rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's.

The petitioners urge the Government of Canada to acknowledge that the closure will mean services will suffer and lives will be put at risk.

They cite in the petition that the Newfoundland and Labrador region has the highest proportion of distress incidents in Canada. The Coast Guard Operations Marine Centre responds to an annual average of over 500 incidents involving 2,900 people, saving the lives of an estimated 600 people in distress each year. The St. John's rescue centre is responsible for 900,000 square kilometres of ocean and nearly 29,000 kilometres of coastline.

This is something that is of grave importance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The petitioners want the decision reversed because it needs to be reinstated.

CANADA POST

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the manner in which the government took action against our postal workers was not fair or right, and it has not been forgotten. The people who have signed this petition are calling upon the House of Commons to review the role the federal government played in denying the workers of Canada Post the ability to have a negotiated labour contract based on a free collective bargaining process.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, southern Alberta and the Calgary region. These are individuals who believe that Canada should be providing visa-free requirements for visitors from Serbia to Canada.

As members know, Serbian Canadians have played a terrific role in the growth and development of Canada. In fact, in British Columbia, they could be considered to be among the founding people, because Serbian immigrants to British Columbia were there and present when British Columbia entered Confederation. Of course, in my riding, I have a very strong and vibrant Serbian population, including the presence of a Serbian community centre.

As members know, 25 European states have waived visa requirements for Serbian visitors travelling throughout the European Union. These Canadians in Calgary, southern Alberta and the Lower Mainland believe that Canada should offer the same visa-free travel requirements from Serbia to Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

BILL C-19—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, not more than three further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on the third day allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1 there will now be a 30-minute question period.

• (1015)

[English]

I would invite all hon. members who are interested in participating in this 30-minute question and answer period to stand in their place so the Chair has an idea of how to best allot the time.

We will try to keep the questions and comments to about a minute and a half and the responses of a similar length. As in previous periods such as this, the Chair will give preference to members of the opposition to best allocate the time. Although government members will be recognized in the rotation, the preference will be given to the opposition members.

I will recognize the House Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we are faced with today is really interesting. Back on October 1, 2002, the current Prime Minister made this statement with regard to the Liberal government of the day. He stated:

The government has used closure and time allocation more frequently than any previous government.

Government Orders

The interesting thing about that is that, at that point, October 1, 2002, there were 212 sitting days in the 37th Parliament and the Liberal government of the day had moved time allocation nine times over 212 days. The current Conservative government has now moved time allocation for the fifth time in 35 days.

Is the House leader trying to match the record set by the previous Liberal government or is he willing to look at his practice and say that it is wrong for democracy and give us more time for debate?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the numbers that the opposition House leader provided are rather misleading because most of the legislation to which he referred that have been the subject of time allocation motions have been before the House in several previous Parliaments and have cumulatively been debated by the House for literally hundreds of days. As a result, there has been abundant debate on all these issues.

We ran an election on May 2 and told Canadians the things on which we would deliver and the commitments we were making. They responded to those commitments by providing us a majority mandate to deliver on those commitments. We are, right now, ensuring that we are delivering on the commitments we made in the last election and doing what we said we would do.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader is wrong. He tries to give the impression that the government has done due diligence and has allowed for a good, healthy debate on issues. This is now, as has been pointed out, the fifth time. The last time the government did it was on the Canadian Wheat Board and, within hours of the debate getting under way, moved time allocation. That was the first time that bill was actually being debated and those time constraints were instituted.

In recognition of the importance and respect of the chamber, in which we all want to represent our constituents, by not allowing ample opportunity for members of the opposition, even government backbenchers, to provide comment on bills is not a healthy environment. The government House leader has the responsibility to work with and negotiate with House leaders. Time allocation should only be brought in when the government has failed to negotiate with opposition House leaders.

Has the government House leader given up negotiating in good faith with House leaders to the degree to which the government now feels obligated to bring in time allocation as a standard procedure nowadays in the House?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that everyone in the House recognizes that our House leader is a reasonable, indeed, patient person and has demonstrated patience and reasonableness on numerous occasions.

In respect of Bill C-19, we need to be clear. This debate has been going on since 1995. There have been countless days before this Parliament and past Parliaments in respect of this issue. The issue here is not a complex one. It is a straight up and down question: Do we want to continue the long gun registry or not? Almost every member, prior to the last election, made a clear statement in respect of their position on the long gun registry.

We are clear and we are providing a rather generous four days as compared to past Liberal governments that only provided one day in order to ram through very complex bills. This is not a complex bill. This is a straight up and down question.

• (1020)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the government House leader talked about the clear mandate the Conservatives received and therefore they are going to put time allocation on this legislation. All we have had is 34 minutes of debate on this legislation. There is no indication that anyone wants to carry this debate on forever, yet they brought in time allocation immediately.

It is one thing to say they have formed a majority government, and I think we acknowledge that, but to suggest it is a strong mandate from all Canadians to do everything the Conservatives want to do and to ram it through Parliament is another question entirely. It was not only government members who were elected in the election, but our party is the largest official opposition party the country has had in 30 years. Members deserve an opportunity to participate in this debate. There are more than 60 new members in our caucus alone who have not had an opportunity to participate in this debate. The minister is saying that they will not be allowed to participate because the government has brought in time allocation.

Does the minister not recognize that is not just the Conservatives who were elected? They got a majority government, but there is a very strong opposition, and in fact, 60% of Canadians voted for parties other than the Conservative Party.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I would reiterate that this is a very clear question. It has been the subject of numerous debates not only in the House and in the other place, but also in the public generally. This has been a matter of debate in every riding prior to every election.

Three days are being allocated for the further discussion of this bill. It has been very clear what the opposition coalition of the Liberals and New Democrats want. Those members have indicated that they simply want to retain the long gun registry and will take every step to delay this process.

Those members do not want this matter to come to a vote for another reason as well, which is that their members are divided and they do not want the public to see the division between their members. That is why they will use every procedural trick in the book, as we have seen in the past little while, to delay the meaningful debate on the bill.

Three days of debate on this simple question gives a meaningful period for debate.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, the positions may be clear, but the goal of a debate is not only to describe a position but also to explain why one espouses it. Although this debate has been going on for a long time, as the minister pointed out, many things have changed. For example, the government did not say that it would destroy the information in the registry instead of transferring it to the provinces. That had not been said before and is new information. Now, we should have the opportunity to discuss it.

Incidents continue to happen and new statistics on crime in our communities are published. We should have the right to talk about them.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, this is an amazing argument that somehow the government said it would not destroy the data. Our government has been very clear and our party has been very clear. We are getting rid of the registry. We are scrapping the registry.

What is the registry? The registry is data. There is no distinction. Like a Philadelphia lawyer, the member opposite says we said that we would destroy the registry but not the data. The two are inseparable. It is similar to a farmer saying to his neighbour, "I know you wanted to buy my farm. I am willing to sell you the farm, but I'm keeping the land".

•(1025)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to respond to the statement that the data is equivalent to the registry. That is not so at all.

The registry is a process in a system for ensuring that there is a record of guns. It is a requirement. It is a regulation. It is an understanding. It is a process for putting that understanding in place that the government will actually track these weapons that are used in so many tragedies of suicide and domestic violence.

There is data collected, but the registry is actually an information technology system. It is a system for tracking, registering and providing information. That is what the registry is about.

The government has gone beyond the ideological elimination of something that the police, citizens, women and victims' spokespeople say is an important tool for saving lives and protecting people. It has gone well beyond that with the elimination of the data.

Why is the government going beyond ideology and slapping the faces of those who might want to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I would invite the member to review her question and her comments. That is one of the most unintelligible comments I have heard in this House: we are not dealing with data when we are dealing with the registry; we are dealing with information. I would ask the member to tell us what the distinction is between data and information. She indicates that the registry is more than information or data, that it is a process. It is a process to do what? It is a process to collect information and data.

Our government said that we would get rid of the registry. We are getting rid of the registry, which is a process that collects data or information. That is what we are doing. That is what we promised the Canadian people.

Now members are saying to tell the Canadian people that we are getting rid of the registry but we are keeping the data. That makes absolutely no sense at all.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to provide a historical perspective on this issue.

Some of the opposition members may not be aware of the fact that we have debated this now for about 15 years. The comment by the member from Newfoundland that we have only had 34 minutes of debate on this issue is absolutely absurd.

In fact I was here yesterday after those 34 minutes, and it was the NDP that decided it was not going to have any more debate on this issue. It was that particular opposition party that shut this down. It is a bit hypocritical for the NDP to complain that it needs more time to debate.

We just finished the Canadian Wheat Board debate, and I was here for most of that as well. After the first hour, not one new element was presented. After those 34 minutes, and after the opposition gave its first speech, not one single piece of new evidence came forward.

We have been debating this now for 15 years. In the last Parliament we debated it ad nauseam. I am not sure how many hours we debated it.

Does the minister think there is any new data coming forward that we might wish to consider? If so, would three days be enough time to present that data?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his very hard work on this file over the last 15 years.

Rather than provide my own comment, I will go right to what the Canadian Police Association said about this issue:

The Government received a clear mandate from the last election to proceed with their proposed changes to the long-gun registry...We respect the message that voters have sent on this issue.

The CPA has indicated that I have consulted with them regularly on issues affecting public safety and front-line officer concerns. It concludes:

We're quite satisfied with the efforts the government has made to work on behalf of front-line police officers, specifically with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation [Bill C-10] that has been a priority since the last election.

The police are saying that this debate has gone on long enough. Let us get on to substantive issues that actually deal with public safety.

•(1030)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is an outrageous abuse of Parliament that we are seeing from the government again.

There were a lot of commitments made in the spring. The government said it would be moderate. The Conservatives hauled out the sweater vests during the election campaign and said that they would be listening to the public and respecting Parliament.

Government Orders

We have seen, as our House leader, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, has pointed out, a more excessive use of closure, a more excessive use of the sledgehammer in this Parliament than by any preceding government in Canadian history. We have seen a government that has an appalling level of arrogance, unparalleled in Canadian parliamentary history.

That is not what the Conservatives promised. What they promised was to actually listen to Parliament. They promised to respect Canadians.

Let us set the record straight. The actual debate that we have had since I have been in Parliament is the following. There was one hour on a government bill back in June 2007 and then the government withdrew the bill. There were two hours of debate on a private member's bill. That was it, until last night when the Minister of Public Safety spoke for half an hour putting out facts that clearly are contradicted by the reality, and then there were four minutes of debate from the opposition. That is the sum total of the last five years: three and one-half hours of debate and four minutes of opposition discussion on the bill itself. And now the government has brought in closure.

I just want to ask very simply why the Conservatives promised moderation, when on the floor of this Parliament they have delivered everything but.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, what is clear is that there has been excessive debate on this, not only debate, but also committee hearings in respect of this matter.

Bill C-391 in the last Parliament was defeated by various NDP members turning tail on their commitment to their constituents and voting to retain the long gun registry.

The interesting thing is the NDP will allow its members to vote their conscience provided it does not interfere with party lines. The NDP knew that the long gun registry would be defeated and allowed only so many members to vote in favour of abolishing it, because the NDP knew it would have no effect.

As for the 34 minutes of debate, I stood up yesterday to speak and the NDP opposition members immediately shut down debate. That is what has prompted this time allocation motion. They are not interested in the debate. There is an ideological bent on the part of most of them to ensure that this matter does not come to a vote, and if it ever does come to a vote and is passed, they will move to reinstate the long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Madam Speaker, as an elected member from the province of Quebec, I am outraged today. The Government of Quebec recently took a clear stance. It made demands of the federal government, but the federal government decided to simply ignore these demands, which are very reasonable in my opinion. And now the government is trying to silence the opposition, which is made up almost entirely of members from the province of Quebec.

Why is this government silencing not only the Government of Quebec but also the members of Parliament from this province?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, our government made it very clear when we went into the last election, the unnecessary election, that we would be bringing in legislation to abolish the long gun registry. That is nothing new. It is clear.

We have limited the bill to a very clear question: "Do you want the long gun registry or not?" If we do not want the long gun registry, that involves a destruction of the records, records which relate to law-abiding Canadian citizens who were compelled by the Liberals and the NDP to put that information forward for no valid public safety reason. What we are asking the House on this particular bill is: "Do you want the long gun registry or not?" There is not a member in the opposition who has not already made up his or her mind. It is clear. We all know where members stand.

Now it is time for this matter to come to a vote. We are allocating three days of debate. If there is any opposition member who wants to speak, members will have that time within the context of those three days.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, what is fundamental in this debate is that Quebec is clear. Quebec's public safety minister did not know that the data in the firearms registry would be destroyed. The minister can tell us today that we should have known, but Robert Dutil, his Quebec counterpart, just found out and has said that he is officially and strongly against the destruction of this data.

In addition, Quebec's minister of Canadian intergovernmental affairs, Yvon Vallières, has said that Quebec also paid for the firearms registry. We paid for that data, in part, of course. If Quebec and the other provinces want to retrieve the data, I do not understand why the minister is stubbornly refusing to allow them to do so.

The minister is telling us today that he does not respect the provinces' wishes, that he does not respect the wishes of Quebec, which were clear: the registry belongs just as much to Quebec as it does to the federal government. The federal government does not have to keep the registry, but it also does not have to destroy it. Why is the minister not listening to Quebec today?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, when the federal Parliament passed Bill C-68, which brought about the long gun registry, it compelled ordinary Canadians to provide information for a specific purpose with respect to a specific piece of legislation. The government cannot say now that it will ignore the privacy act or the commitments it has made in Parliament and transfer that information with the intent to use it in a non-authorized manner.

I have a lot of respect for the public safety minister in Quebec. He is certainly a dedicated public servant. However, I find it hard to believe that when the government said it would destroy the registry he did not realize that meant the data.

Government Orders

As I have indicated in my prior comments, there is no distinction between the registry and the data. The registry is the process of collecting information, which is data. To make that kind of distinction is making a mockery of the English language and the French language.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two points to make. First, we are talking about the guillotine. For the fifth time since this Parliament began, the guillotine is being applied to important measures, namely, extremely critical debates that were central to the last federal election. For this reason, these debates must happen. The Conservatives are saying that debate is being limited because we have already debated these issues, but I disagree. The election was fought on these issues. As representatives of our voters and ridings, we must debate these issues in Parliament.

The only time I can understand using the guillotine is to put an end to debate on dilatory matters, where the sole objective is to waste time. That is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about key issues that are fundamental to the fabric of Quebec and Canadian society. I do not understand why the government wants to limit debate on the pretext that these issues have already been debated.

Second, there are also new elements. The bill talks about destroying the records. The registry is important for the administration of justice, which is an area that falls under provincial, not federal, jurisdiction. How can the Minister of Public Safety prevent the provinces from properly administering justice with the help of the registry?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I am having trouble understanding what new elements have been added to the debate.

When the government said it would get rid of the long gun registry it meant exactly that. The registry is comprised of data that was collected under compulsion of law. We made it very clear that we were getting rid of the registry so there are no new elements that have been added here.

As for the member's reference to the fact that after 34 minutes of debate we are moving a time allocation motion, let us make sure that the people of Canada understand what has occurred. The NDP engaged in dilatory tactics that would shut down debate of the substantive issues. Therefore, because we had made the commitment and the NDP obviously was not interested in debate we moved a time allocation motion and are providing three days of debate.

• (1040)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear members on the opposite side of the House say that not enough time is being provided for debate when most Canadians could probably have the same discussion in an hour over lunch. Three days is more than enough time, let alone the past 15 years.

I ask the hon. minister, what is the number one issue his constituents ask to have changed with regard to our sessions in the House?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, constituents are concerned with a broad number of issues such as health care, defence, et cetera. However, while campaigning door to door asking what should be changed, almost invariably the response was to get rid of the long gun registry.

It is an amazing issue. I ran in the 2000, 2004 and 2006 elections. In the 2008 election I did not put any material regarding the gun registry in my literature because everyone knew where I stood. As soon as I sent out my first brochure without any mention of the long gun registry the phone calls immediately started to come in asking if we had abandoned our commitment.

Bill C-19 is a clear indication that we have not abandoned our commitment. We are prepared to proceed with the bill.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, I want to speak to the minister's inconsistency.

It is not true that the government moved time allocation on the basis that all of the elements have been debated. That is nonsense. When the minister claims that the data is the registry that is like saying the carpets, dishes and plates are the house. The government is saying it does not want to maintain that house or its location. The Government of Quebec believes the contents of that house are important and wants to house them.

It is not only ideological but vindictive to deny other levels of government access to these records. The minister said that these records are part of the registry. The government said it would eliminate the registry. It never said it would eliminate the records. It is vindictive to now deny the province and people of Quebec access to that information.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, Canadians need to hear those kinds of comments because they are typical of the Liberals' views on criminal justice policy. They want a process put in place but do not care whether it accomplishes anything.

The DNA registry is a good example. The Liberal government put so many roadblocks in place that no one could use it effectively for any criminal law purpose. We reformed the DNA registry because it was so bad and only half the people who should have been registered were registered.

The distinction the member is making does not make a difference.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. minister across the way talk about the gun registry and that members did one thing or another in the past. The decision I made at second reading was contradictory to the one I made at third reading because the people of Welland decided that was what they wanted me to do. Therefore, the consistency that we have heard talked about that everyone is in agreement is totally false. Folks out there want to hear what the opposition has to say. They are clear with respect to what the government side wants to do, but they deserve to hear from us.

• (1045)

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, this can be best summarized by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore who indicated that he has opposed the registry since he was first elected in 1997. He said:

Government Orders

The registry itself gives people a false sense of security over gun control and gun safety—

NDP and government members have long since made up their minds on the issue. We are providing another three days of debate on the issue. If the member wants to repeat everything he has said and tell people that what he has said in the past is inconsistent with what he is saying now, that is fine, but let us move on because people want to know the outcome.

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

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1125)

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

(Division No. 47)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)

Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Shea	Shiplee
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Valcourt
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 145	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse

Government Orders

Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel
Valeriotte — 117	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

I wish to inform the House that because of the debate on the time allocation motion, Government Orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

● (1130)

[*English*]

SECOND READING

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to first just repeat the quote that I gave yesterday, from our former leader, the late Jack Layton, on this very issue given in August 2010 because it is an important context in which we make our position clear on the long gun registry and on this bill now before the House.

He said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians...[The Conservatives] are stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down".

This is un-Canadian. This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

That is an important starting point for our position because the long gun registry has invoked debate in this country. However, contrary to what was recently said this morning by the Minister of Public Safety, who said that there was no valid public safety reason for the gun registry or for the information contained therein, there are contrary positions stated by those who are entrusted with law enforcement in this country.

For example, Chief William Blair, chief of police in Toronto and president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said:

The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed.

Chief Daniel Parkinson, president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, said:

Scrapping the federal Firearms Registry will put our officers at risk and undermine our ability to prevent and solve crimes.

On behalf of victims, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Sue O'Sullivan, said:

Though there are varying points of view, the majority of victims' groups we have spoken with continue to support keeping the long gun registry

So what is the solution? We have proposed to make substantial amendments to make the long gun registry more in keeping with the concerns of rural Canadians, in particular, and also aboriginal Canadians. We want to see these legitimate concerns addressed while ensuring that police have the tools that they need to keep our streets safe.

We have been trying to find a way to address the problems with this registry but also further strengthen gun control laws. We want to continue to bring Canadians together and to find solutions, but we are dealing with the wedge politics of the Conservative government here in this House.

The Conservatives have added a new challenge. The challenge before us here is to repair the damage done by this divisiveness and to bring people together. However, we also have a concern as to the new element being added in this legislation, which has been in neither the legislation that private members opposite have brought forward here, nor in a Senate bill last year. That is the element of the reckless and irresponsible destruction of records that are valuable for public safety in this country.

Section 29 of this act would provide for the destruction of records, what we have referred to as a billion dollar bonfire. A considerable amount of public money has been allocated and used in building this information and database.

● (1135)

The RCMP was the holder of the existing underlying database, meaning description of the firearms, the serial numbers and the owners' names and addresses for currently registered, non-restricted firearms. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police wrote to the Minister of Public Safety asking that it be transferred from the firearms registry to the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre, still within the RCMP IT infrastructure, and be available to Canadian police as a searchable resource through the CPIC and NPS network.

They regard this as an extremely important piece of information that would support their efforts to fight crime and to trace firearms. They also say that one of the things that has been omitted from this legislation is a requirement for businesses to keep records of the sales of firearms.

Government Orders

We see, when we watch police shows from the United States, how police trace that information by going to the business owners who sell guns to try to find guns that have been involved in crimes. We need that information to be available as well.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has proposed that businesses keep a record of sales of non-restricted firearms from the importer right to the first retail sale, and that it be reinstated. It was there before the firearms registry went in, and the government is not only recklessly getting rid of the information it has but is also not making it a requirement to keep track of guns in the future.

Another thing that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police also points out is that this base of records is extremely valuable to Canada to allow it to live up to the obligations it has taken on in international agreements and arrangements to facilitate crime gun tracing, particularly with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The association also wants to ensure that the firearms import and export regulations also be brought in line to ensure that these records are available in the tracing centre.

This is being ignored by the government. It is taking a slash and burn approach. It is slashing the protections that are there and is making no effort to improve the system that has caused some concern and irritation to rural and aboriginal Canadians, but it maintains the licensing system, because I think even this government recognizes that gun control is an important public good and that Canadians want to maintain it.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the New Democrats want to ensure as well that we have a strong connection between the transfers of firearms to ensure that when firearms are transferred from one person to another, they are certain to be given to someone who is a valid licence holder.

We put forth a number of recommendations in the past, and we will be putting them forth in the form of amendments to the bill. We put forth suggestions to address problems with the registry while maintaining its value as a public safety tool.

We want to ensure that there is a legal guarantee for aboriginal treaty rights so that aboriginals are not treated contrary to their aboriginal rights. We want to prevent the release of identifying information about gun owners, except to protect public safety or by court order or by law, and we have had instances.

The Conservatives complain about the privacy issue, but they were the ones who released the data in 2009 for public opinion surveys, contrary to the notions of privacy that most Canadians have. We would want to make that illegal.

A continuing irritation of people is the criminalizing of the behaviour of law-abiding Canadians. We would propose not to make the failure to register for a first-time registration an offence, so that people who register their guns do not have to worry that by registering a gun, they will expose themselves to a criminal charge because they have not registered in the past. We would decriminalize the first-time registration of long guns, making this a one-time exemption so that guns could be registered and we would have a proper registry.

● (1140)

These are some of the things that have been serious concerns of Canadians over the last 10 or 15 years in dealing with gun registration.

The cost was also a factor, and the government has made regulatory changes to make registration free. We would want to ensure that it is in legislation so that no cabinet could change it without bringing it to the House. We would enshrine it in legislation so that gun owners would never be charged for registration of their guns.

I mentioned the issue of protection of privacy. We would also deal with the question of inherited guns. That issue has been raised on a number of occasions. People inherit guns through the death of a gun owner; family members inherit guns either by a will or through the administration of the estate. Sometimes it takes a long time to go through that process, so we would have a grace period for inherited long guns.

We also have concerns about making sure that only long guns that are used for hunting or sport would be classified as non-restricted. There are certain kinds of guns that manage to get through the system because of a loophole in how the new guns are now classified, so changes have to be made to protect Canadians.

The Ruger Mini-14, which was used at the Polytechnique in Montreal, was allowed to be classified as non-restricted. We want to make sure that the onus is put on gun manufacturers or importers to prove that the new guns are only for the purposes of hunting or sport shooting if they want them to be classified as non-restricted.

There are also loopholes with respect to business importation. We have the Canada Border Services Agency not sharing detailed information about guns imported under business licences with the registry, with the effect that guns end up on the black market.

Let me talk about the reckless and irresponsible decision by the government to destroy the information about guns. That information has been collected lawfully by the government, police forces and firearms registries across this country, and we are told by the chiefs of police that it would be valuable. We are told by the Province of Quebec that it wants this information to be used for public safety purposes in Quebec. It has said loud and clear that it has concerns about what the government is doing. This information has been collected with a great deal of taxpayers' money, and it is information that it wants to ensure is available for public safety purposes.

This is extremely valuable, useful information. On the other side some will argue that it is not complete. No, it is not complete. It is not complete because there has been a whole series of amnesties while the government did nothing to solve any of the problems that existed or to deal with the concerns people had. Instead the government used it as a political football, a political fundraising activity.

Government Orders

We want to see public safety protected. We want to see that the gun registry is improved. We want to see solutions that work for Canadians and we are opposed to this legislation. We want to ensure that any problems are fixed. We want to ensure that the information and the underlying data behind the registry are protected. We want to see amendments made to this legislation to try to bring Canadians together, instead of providing opposition, providing division, providing more concern by Canadians about their safety from guns.

We are at the point where we have the lowest rate of homicide in the country in 45 years.

I want to make an amendment before I finish. I move, seconded by the member for Gatineau:

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

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, because it:

- a) destroys existing data that is of public safety value for provinces that wish to establish their own system of long-gun registration, which may lead to significant and entirely unnecessary expenditure of public funds;
- b) fails to respond to the specific request from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police for use of existing data in the interest of public safety; and
- c) fails to strike a balance between the legitimate concerns of rural and Aboriginal Canadians and the need for police to have appropriate tools to enhance public safety.

• (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to a few of the comments made by my friend, the hon. member for St. John's East.

He talks about decriminalizing first offences for non-registered firearm owners. I am one. I own a non-registered firearm. I have said it in the House before. I have been fighting Bill C-68 since 1995, when I appeared at the Senate committee on Bill C-68 when it was in Manitoba.

If the government is going to decriminalize the possession of long guns, then it is no longer the the jurisdiction of the federal government. If there is a non-criminal element in owning unregistered firearms or to have them registered as property, it becomes provincial jurisdiction and no longer falls under the Criminal Code. If NDP members are going to say it is going to be a non-criminal charge, there is no role for the federal government to play, since it will not apply to the Criminal Code.

However, if the member is suggesting that it is only a small window for someone who is a first-time offender, whether or not it is someone like me, who has never registered, or someone who has just come into possession of a firearm through an inheritance, how would the member define what is a second generation?

Members in his caucus have said all along that they support abolishing the long gun registry, so the real question I have for the member is this: how will he allow those caucus members to vote?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, we are talking about trying to find solutions to strike a balance between individuals who have a particular point of view, such as this member, and the need for public safety.

We are looking at finding a solution. What we are saying is that for the first time, non-registration of a long gun would not be a criminal offence. We are looking at finding a legislative way of doing that through an amendment. It is not for me to answer the details of that right now.

We are dealing with situations in which people feel they cannot come forward to register their guns because they would expose themselves to a criminal offence if they registered for the first time. We are saying that we would not seek to do that. It could be a matter of discretionary use of the charges or the possibility of charges. There are various ways, administrative and otherwise, of doing that. The point is that we would allow people to come forward and have their guns registered.

If people are discovered with unregistered guns, they could be subject to a penalty if they did not register their guns within a certain period of time, but they would not be given a penalty for being discovered with an unregistered gun. That is simply what we are talking about.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do not understand the Conservatives' position. They are insisting on destroying the information that has been collected over the years. The Conservatives have been opposed to the gun registry for many years now, saying that it was an extremely expensive endeavour. Now that the registry is working well and many hunters have told me that they had no problems complying with the registry, the Conservatives want to destroy it all. They want to take it all away and throw the baby out with the bath water.

How can the member for St. John's East explain the Conservatives' desire to completely destroy the registry, including the data that has already been compiled at great cost to Canadians?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I find it hard to explain what the government is saying or why it is saying it. The destruction of records was never part of the other bills that were brought before the House. The irresponsible nature of the government's approach to this is a new element and it is one that has invoked an incredible backlash across the country.

The minister went so far as to say this morning that there was no valid public safety reason to have this data. This is in the face of millions of Canadians who support the registry. Also, the police chiefs say that this is important.

We know there are problems. We know they have to be fixed. However, the government opposite has taken the position that there is no public safety interest in having this kind of gun control.

I find it astounding and reprehensible that it would go so far as to not only do that, but to say to a province like Quebec that it will insist that it destroys those records. The Government of Quebec has said that it will not comply. Now we will get into a federal-provincial fight by a failure to respect the wishes of the people of Quebec as described by their government to ensure that they have a greater measure of gun control than the Conservative government is prepared to support.

Government Orders

It is reprehensible and irresponsible. I think there will be a very strong reaction in the country to the government's plans.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question which was previously posed. Will the NDP allow a free vote on this issue? As we know, many NDP members have stated that they wanted to abolish the registry. It is a simple question. Will the NDP allow a free vote in the House, yes or no?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, what is clear is that New Democrats want to see an end to the divisiveness that the government has engendered. We want to fix the gun control system and we want to ensure that public safety is foremost. That is where the New Democrats are united on this issue. We are determined to ensure that the government respects the need for public safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member mentioned the tragic events at the École Polytechnique. They are etched into the collective memory of Quebecers and, for many, they are one of the reasons this registry was created in the first place. This registry is extremely important to Quebec and, mere days ago, the Prime Minister stated that his respect for the provinces is one aspect of good governance. In light of that, I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that, despite what the Government of Quebec wants, the Conservatives are going to destroy the data we paid for with our taxes.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, clearly, the destruction of this data is an irresponsible act and contrary to the public safety needs of Canadians. In particular, the province like Quebec is saying that it feels so strongly about this that it is going to refuse to destroy this information because it believes it has been collected by taxpayers, including the taxpayers of Quebec, and that it wants to ensure that it has a higher degree of public safety and that the cost effectiveness of trying to duplicate this is prohibitive.

The Conservatives are showing a great deal of disrespect for the people of Quebec and the Government of Quebec. That is reprehensible and it is contrary to the kind of federal-provincial co-operation in which we expect all governments in Canada to get involved.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has the floor for a very brief question. Only one minute remains.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to make a quick comment. There is a registry that everyone is familiar with—the driver's licence registry. It is not a catastrophe. Everyone is registered and no one makes a fuss about it. It makes sense. When you drive a car, you think about safety and you have to register. The registry allows us to know where people live, where they are. There is nothing catastrophic about it.

This is a fundamental issue. Quebec has spoken with a strong voice. The National Assembly unanimously voted to keep the

registry. I would like to ask the hon. member how the government will defend this position.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, the registration of guns in an acceptable legislative framework enhances the accountability of gun owners to take responsibility for what can be in the wrong hands a dangerous and fatal weapon. Responsibility is engendered by the registry and that is why we should improve it and keep it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member for Mount Royal, I am pleased to take part today in the debate on Bill C-19, the government's bill to abolish the long gun registry. Like many Quebecers, Montreal residents have indicated their support for the registry and their opposition to its abolition at meetings and political forums.

[*English*]

The government's justification for abolishing the long gun registry is not unlike its support of Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act. It has a mandate to enact this legislation. The disposition speaks for itself and all contrary evidence is therefore but an inconvenient truth to be ignored. Yet, ironically enough, the government's legislation to abolish the long gun registry betrays the very principles invoked by the government in support of Bill C-10, the omnibus crime bill.

Indeed, the two bills provide an interesting study and contrast that illustrate the incoherence and inconsistency in the government's approach to crime and justice, save for one common feature, the ignoring, marginalizing and mischaracterizing of the evidence.

Accordingly whereas the organizing motif of Bill C-10 is the protection of public safety, which we all support in the House regardless of party, the legislation to abolish the long gun registry would endanger that very purpose of public safety.

Whereas Bill C-10 purports to speak in the name of the victims, this legislation ignores the very voices of the victims themselves who oppose the legislation.

Whereas Bill C-10 purports to rely on the support of police associations, which the Minister of Public Safety yesterday in the House invoked in support of the safe streets and communities act, this legislation is opposed by those very same police organizations.

Whereas Bill C-10 was intended to combat violent crime, this bill ignores the evidence that the long gun registry protects precisely against such violent crime. In particular, it protects against domestic violence, community violence, workplace violence and violence against women.

Whereas 272 members of the House, including many government members, recently rose in support of a motion to adopt a national suicide prevention strategy, this legislation ignores yet again the evidence respecting gun-related suicide.

Government Orders

Whereas Bill C-10 would offload costs of the safe streets legislation on the provinces that must enforce it, this legislation seeks to eliminate all the data, to erase all the evidence that would enable the provinces, such as my province of Quebec, to initiate its own registry, an enormous waste of public investment by a government that professes concern about the registry's waste.

Whereas Bill C-10 purported to consult and consider the concerns of the provincial and territorial attorneys general prior to its introduction, when one reads the letter from Quebec justice minister Jean-Marc Fournier to the current Minister of Justice, it is clear that Quebec's views were not incorporated.

This legislation has been tabled without appropriate consultation with provincial and territorial attorneys general. So much for the open, vaunted, covenantal federalism which the government has professed.

I organized my remarks seriatim around each of these points and principles, the whole anchored in and inspired by the very facts that run counter to the government's proposed legislation.

First, in a manner protecting public safety, despite the government's claim that the long gun registry is a waste and does nothing, as it has been quoted as saying, it is checked by police officers across Canada an average of some 16,000 times a day. Therefore, the question is whether these police officers, the very people the government asks us to heed, are simply wasting their time when they tell us that it is a valuable asset again and again.

The fact remains that having such a database has been a valuable asset, to quote police again, for protecting and promoting public safety. Indeed, in Canada deaths by gunshot are at their lowest level in over 40 years. There were 400 fewer Canadians who died of gunshots in 2007 compared to 1995, the year the Firearms Act was introduced, and estimates directly credit the registry with a reduction of 50 homicides and 250 suicides annually.

Since the first introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns, as Statistics Canada data shows. Most important, behind every statistic is a human life saved. How can the government look at this evidence and still maintain that abolishing the registry is beneficial to public safety?

Second, in the matter of protecting victims, we need only listen to Sue O'Sullivan, the federal ombudswoman for victims of crime, who said on the occasion of the introduction of this legislation:

Our position on this matter is clear—Canada must do all it can to prevent further tragedies from happening, including using the tools we have to help keep communities safe, like the long-gun registry.

● (1200)

[Translation]

She added that “the majority of victims' groups we have spoken with continue to support keeping long-gun registry.”

[English]

In my own province of Quebec, a similar indictment of this legislation has come from family and friends of the victims of the École Polytechnique massacre, as well as from the Dawson College student association, both of whom I have met.

It is clear that victims groups are against this legislation, particularly in my province of Quebec. If we scrap the long gun registry what lessons, if any, can the government expect to have learned from the Polytechnique massacre, the Dawson College killing, and other similar tragic events.

Indeed, one of the most compelling statements in regard to victims and reflecting the voices of victims and the lessons learned comes from Janet Hazelton, the president of the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union, who said:

Nurses and doctors, particularly those who work in emergency rooms, witness first-hand the horrific injuries and tragic deaths that result from firearms. We meet the victims who fall prey to long-guns and attempt to save them. For those whom we are unable to save in spite of our utmost efforts, we meet their families whose lives are shattered by long-guns. We also treat patients on a regular basis who are suicidal or victims of domestic abuse. A rifle or a shotgun in their homes increases their chances of being victimized. We often work with the police, who accompany these patients to hospital, as they can access the registry to determine if a gun is registered to the home, allowing us to devise a safety plan for our patients. The RCMP has stated that dismantling the registry will save less than \$4 million a year, a trivial figure when compared to the costs of gun injury and death.

What does the government say in response to Ms. Hazelton, or is her voice and that of the victims for whom she speaks, to be ignored or mocked yet again as an inconvenient truth?

Third, in the matter of support from police, for the year period ending September 30, 2011, the registry had been accessed more than six million times. Again, this speaks for itself. If it were useless and wasteful, as the government contends it to be, and all these wrongful things that the government purports the registry to be, then why would our first responders rely on it day in and day out? Why would they continue to characterize it as a valuable asset? Simply put, as the police associations themselves have affirmed, the registry is an essential tool for taking preventive action; for enforcing prohibition orders; for assisting police investigations, as when the police recover a gun from a crime they can trace it to the rightful owner; for allowing police to differentiate between legal and illegal firearms; and for allowing police to trace firearms easily.

As Windsor Police Services chief, Gary Smith, put it:

...but it can save lives. Often we would search a registry before we dispatched an officer on a call and if you tell them there's a firearm registered, they're a little cautious, depending on the type of call. My detectives would use it quite often, anytime they applied for a search warrant or an arrest warrant.

● (1205)

[Translation]

As for the specific issue of the destruction of data, Denis Côté, president of the Fédération des policiers municipaux du Québec, said, “I am shocked that they are destroying the data.”

[English]

Fourth, there is the matter of protection against violent crime, in particular, domestic violence and violence against women.

Government Orders

[Translation]

For example, the RCMP estimated in 2002 that 71% of spousal homicides committed in the preceding 10 years involved long guns.

[English]

According to Statistics Canada, in 2009 there was a 74% reduction for spousal homicides involving firearms, from nearly three homicides per million spouses in 1980 to less than one homicide per million spouses in 2009.

Indeed, Pamela Harrison of the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters says:

The rate of spousal homicide by gun has gone down 69 per cent and we attribute most of that to the impact of the gun registry. Without question we need it in Canada.

Accordingly, while women are a small percentage of gun owners, they account for a high percentage of victims of gun crime. The long gun registry is the only way to know how many of such weapons need to be removed from a dangerous spouse.

Since 1995, the rate of women murdered with firearms by the intimate partner has decreased, as I noted, by 69%.

[Translation]

In addition, Paulette Senior, chief executive officer of the YWCA, added that “the threat of a rifle is often a significant reason that women don't risk leaving to seek help.” The government has to do something about this.

[English]

Simply put, the number of homicides involving long guns since the introduction of the Firearms Act in 1995 has decreased by 41%, a figure that can be traced in part to the long gun registry.

Fifth, I will turn my attention to suicide.

Recently, the government stood with opposition parties to denounce the incidents of suicide in this country and vowed to take action. This statement of solidarity and support from the government is directly at odds with the bill.

Since the Firearms Act was introduced in 1995, firearm related suicides are down 23% as of 2009, and we know that firearms are a weapon of choice for those attempting suicide. Indeed, the number of firearm related suicides in 2004 stood at 475, which is 5.4 times the number of suicides with handguns. Again, if the government were serious in its commitment on suicide and the importance of having a national suicide prevention strategy, which I think it is, then it would not scrap the long gun registry.

Sixth, with regards to destroying records, this is particularly troubling for me as a Quebecker.

[Translation]

It should be noted that the National Assembly is debating the creation of a registry for Quebec as we speak.

[English]

The government's move to destroy records prejudices the work of the provinces that realize the registry is a valuable tool that saves lives. Indeed, that is at the core of what we are talking about, a valuable tool to protect public safety and human security.

In summary, what we have here, regrettably, is yet another Conservative policy that is ideologically inspired with a wilful and reckless disregard for the evidence. All the facts, the quotes and the statistics that are provided appear almost as a kind of inconvenient truth for the government, but they remain a compelling truth nonetheless.

As I said before in this House, whenever the government talks about having a mandate for the safe streets and communities act and a mandate for the abolition of the gun registry, the point is that it needs to be reaffirmed that all governments and all parties have a mandate for safe streets and safe communities. However, the question is on the merits of the means chosen, whether it be with respect to Bill C-10 or to the abolition of the gun registry.

The abolition of the gun registry, with respect, is without merit and an affront to the very victims whose voices the abolition of this gun registry purports to represent. These voices, however, are speaking for the retention of that gun registry to support the purpose of public safety, to give expression to their concerns and to save lives.

• (1210)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague to know that I hold him in great respect in this House but I do have some concern with his language. It really shows what the Liberal government had intended when it set up this long gun registry.

In the part of the bill that talks about destroying personal records, he called that destroying evidence. When do governments or police forces gather evidence? They gather evidence when there is a crime committed.

However, gun owners are not criminals. They are law-abiding citizens in Canada who believe in the right to own personal property, and their personal information and records are not evidence. It is extremely upsetting to Canadians who are abiding by the law and who put their records out there to respond to the law that is on the books today to be treated like criminals.

Why does the member view law-abiding gun owners as criminals and their personal information and records as evidence?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not characterize law-abiding owners as criminals. I am saying that the registry, which gathers information, has been relied upon by police associations and has been characterized as evidence that they can then use, not with respect to incriminating gun owners or law-abiding people, but with a view to enforcing prohibition orders, with a view to preventing the commission of criminal offences, with a view to tracing firearms to criminals who may hold them and with a view to protecting the public safety of all Canadians, including the law-abiding gun owners who fully respect the law.

We are concerned with the manner in which the abolition of this registry would end up without, for example, my province of Quebec having the capacity to engage in the proper information gathering that can then be used as evidence against the real criminals who are committing the offences.

Government Orders

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague from Mount Royal could comment on the statement by the Minister of Public Safety this morning who, in his capacity as Minister of Public Safety, expressed the view that there was no valid public safety reason for maintaining the records, which are now contained in the registry, when, as was indicated in the member's speech, the National Assembly of Quebec and the Government of Quebec want to maintain these records in the interest of public safety. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has said the same thing.

How can the member square the statement of the Minister of Public Safety and these other factors?

•(1215)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I cannot square the minister's statement with, as I said, the evidence that has been adduced by the police associations themselves, who the government otherwise invoke in support of Bill C-10, and yet disregard their statements when it comes to the abolition of the gun registry.

All the police associations, which I have cited, state and concur that the long gun registry is an essential tool used by police when taking preventive action, enforcing prohibition orders or used to ensure the firearms are removed from an individual's possession when the situation warrants it, particularly in matters relating to domestic abuse, suicide related issues and the like.

The registry assists police investigations. When police recover a gun at the scene of a crime, they can trace it back to its rightful owner. All members of the House will recall, for example, that two men were identified and convicted as accessories to the murder of RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, in part because a registered gun was left at the scene of the crime.

That is why I talked about the use of information for purposes of evidence that then can be used with regard to apprehending the criminal and the prosecution of that criminal. It allows police to differentiate between legal and illegal firearms. Without information about who owns firearms legally and what firearms they own, police cannot charge individuals with illegal possession. This is to protect law-abiding people and distinguish them from non-law-abiding people and hold the non-law-abiding people to account.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague on his continued work on behalf of all Canadians and, in particular, for his work on this issue.

One of the issues that gives me difficulty is the vindictiveness, and I do not know what else to call it, of the government to choose to destroy all of the information that the registry has gathered. I find that the most vindictive part of all of this. I can accept where it is going with its ideology, but I do have a problem with the government denying the provinces, if they choose to go forward, their right to do that.

We have already heard from the province of Quebec on this issue. The hon. member is a Quebecker, and I would like to hear his thoughts on that.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question because it relates to the overall approach of this legislation.

The government says it has a mandate with respect to the abolition of the gun registry. The minister extends that abolition to eliminating the information and erasing the data.

My own province of Quebec has publicly objected, and the Quebec National Assembly, as we meet, is seeking to initiate a registry and rely on the information that is in the long gun registry for purposes of public security.

I do not know if the Conservative government ever got a mandate from the people of Quebec or anywhere else not only to abolish the gun registry, but in particular to eliminate the data in that gun registry. The government said it went before the people of Canada in the election, but that question about eliminating the data and erasing the information was never put to the people of this country. It certainly was never put to the people of Quebec. The people of Quebec object to it, and repudiate any notion that the government has a mandate to abolish the gun registry and in particular to eliminate the information in it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member who just spoke, I wonder if he has been closely following the debate over the last 10 years or so.

Some of the statistics that the member is quoting are totally inaccurate. He quoted many things, but because of time I will give two examples.

The member said that it is accessed millions of times, and he used an astronomical figure. That has been shown to be a completely bogus defence of the registry. Those claims that it has been accessed 17,000 times a day or whatever, include every policeman stopping someone, maybe for speeding or whatever, and using the CPIC database. When the policeman puts in the person's information, it immediately counts as a hit to the firearms registry. Even though the policeman is not aware of it and he is not interested in the information, it counts as a hit to the firearms registry.

Policemen stop people many times in the course of their day. That number is completely without merit.

He compared 1980 statistics to 2009 statistics. The registry did not come in until 1995. The trends the member talked about were trends that were in place long before the registry came in.

Those are just two examples of how bogus those statistics really are.

•(1220)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to consult with the police associations that he has been invoking in support. They have been providing the data that I have been relying upon today. They have been talking about the number of times they access the registry.

I did not say that for every single time the registry is accessed there is a consequential relationship to the whole question of protecting public security. I am saying in terms of the overall use of and instrumentality of the gun registry, it is accessed, some will say 11,000 times a day and others will say up 17,000 times a day. We can pick whichever figure, but both come from various police associations and depend on the measurements they use.

Government Orders

The point is the purpose is to access it to protect the safety of the public. The purpose is to access it to save lives. The purpose is in order to understand whether we have to trace a particular criminal proceeding. The purpose is to protect against domestic abuse, to protect against suicide through long gun connections.

The access has to be seen with respect to the purpose. The information has been provided by the police associations themselves.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

I would like to take a moment to thank those who helped make this legislation a reality: the right hon. Prime Minister, for his leadership on this issue; the hon. member for Provencher, Canada's outstanding public safety minister; the member for Portage—Lisgar, for recognizing my many years of work on this important file and especially for allowing me the honour of taking her speaking spot in this debate; and indeed all of my caucus colleagues who have supported me over the many years that this issue has been before us.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my wonderful wife, Lydia, who has been by my side every step of the way for the last 18 years as we have dealt with this issue. She has made the most sacrifice. I thank my staff, past and present, in Ottawa and in Yorkton—Melville, who have worked tirelessly on this file for the last decade and a half. I thank the many organizations and stakeholders who have provided valuable insight and support.

Finally, I thank the thousands of farmers, hunters and sport shooters for their patience and support over the years. Throughout the years they have packed meeting after meeting from coast to coast to ensure their concerns about Bill C-68 have been heard loud and clear.

As my hon. colleagues may be aware, this is an issue that has been of deep interest to me for quite some time. In fact, I would like to tell a story about how this first came to my attention.

In January 1994, before the Liberals had even put the long gun registry in place, I was invited to a meeting by a number of concerned gun owners in my constituency. I remember how cold it was. It was -39° outside in the town of Preeceville, Saskatchewan. I got out of my car, walked through the parking lot and into a hall packed with people. I could not believe how full the hall was. I remember so clearly being overwhelmed by just how many concerned citizens had taken the time to come out on this issue. Obviously I felt it was something they thought was very important to them. It was not really something I had thought too much about before that time.

I was asked by the folks in the room what I thought about the long gun registry that the Liberals were proposing. I had not thought much about it and I said something like, who would not be in favour of gun control, because that was what it had been portrayed as. Right then and there they put a challenge to me. They challenged me to look below the surface at what the proposed long gun registry would do and what it would not do. They challenged me to look at what the purpose actually was and who it would actually help. In short, they challenged me to look at the facts.

I made the commitment that I would look into this issue and I did. I ended up doing a complete 180 on this issue. I had to completely reverse my position once it became incredibly clear to me that it was going to be a totally ineffective long gun registry. It took a bit of time to uncover the facts, but as I looked at it with my helpful staff, I realized this was not going to accomplish what it was purported to do.

Since that time I have worked for years to see the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry scrapped once and for all. It has taken a long, long time. I have talked to thousands of people and have attended meetings on this issue from Vancouver Island to St. John's, Newfoundland. I have lost track of how many meetings I have attended.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many concerned citizens, police officers, hunters, farmers and sport shooters who have told me their stories over the past years. They have shared their experiences. They have been honest and forthright with their opinions on the long gun registry.

● (1225)

It has been a long haul, but in the end, through working for positive change, we have been able to make a difference. This bill, Bill C-19, is proof of that.

I am also very proud to be part of a government which, after working so long to deliver on its promise, is making good on its commitment to end the long gun registry. Despite opposition stalling, blocking and obstruction, we held steadfast in our determination to end what has grown into a \$2 billion boondoggle.

There are millions of law-abiding gun owners in Canada. These include the good, honest and hard-working men and women from my constituency of Yorkton—Melville, and across the province of Saskatchewan, and from regions all across the country. These are law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters who feel it is fundamentally unfair they are being persecuted for their way of life. More than that, they feel as though they have been criminalized. They feel criminalized because they own a firearm. They feel criminalized because they may not have done all the paperwork. They feel criminalized because they think that even if they have done everything according to the law, they might have done something wrong.

I hear from farmers in my constituency, farmers who work hard every day and have long guns on their property. They use them in the course of their day. It is a tool. I am talking about doing such things as shooting gophers or other rodents and coyotes that may be going after their livestock. These long guns are tools that farmers use to protect themselves and their business. It is not right that they feel they are doing something wrong just because they have a firearm on their property.

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I also hear from young people who are interested in getting into sport shooting, which is part of Canada's rich outdoor heritage and one of our traditional activities. We have enjoyed it for more than a century. These young people feel discouraged from getting involved, again because of the stigma associated with the long gun registry. Healthy outdoor living is nothing to be ashamed of. We should be encouraging young people in these respects. These young people are missing out on participating in healthy outdoor activities because they are not sure what they need to do or how they need to do it. That is a real shame.

Of course, I have heard from many aboriginal Canadians. Hunting is a fundamental part of their way of life. They also feel they are being deeply stigmatized by the long gun registry. This is a way of life. That is no more deserving of stigma than any other honest way of life across this country.

For too long, law-abiding Canadians who own firearms have been made to feel like second-class citizens due to this long gun registry. They have been made to feel that they should be held apart, considered to feel like second-class citizens due to this long gun registry. They have been made to feel that they should be held apart, considered more dangerous and made to endure burdensome regulations. They have not committed any crime. They have not acted in any way unlawfully. Yet they are viewed with suspicion and made to register their long guns as though they had.

Time and again, we see how this long gun registry needlessly and unfairly targets law-abiding Canadians. It does this while doing nothing to reduce crime or strengthen our efforts to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

I could quote statistics to support every single thing I am saying.

I will digress for a moment and give a short example. Ninety per cent of the handguns in Toronto that are confiscated by the police are unregistered, and we have had a handgun registry since 1934. That gives an example of how the registry does not affect the criminal. It does not do anything to reduce crime or strengthen our efforts to keep guns out of the hands of the drug dealers, the criminals, the gangs. Our government has been saying this for years. That is why we have been working to scrap it for years. I stand here today to talk about this important issue. I am hopeful that we will soon see the failed long gun registry scrapped once and for all.

● (1230)

I have heard just about every argument for and against the registry that one can think of. I mentioned that earlier today. However, I have no doubt that there will be some interesting debate in the House with our colleagues across the floor. I am sure they will continue to bring forward points to try to demonstrate that it is a useful tool. When the previous speaker did that I pointed to a couple of examples of how what he had cited is not really true.

The facts speak for themselves. The long gun registry does not put meaningful consequences in place for gun crimes. It does not address gun-related or gang-related crimes in Canada. That has nothing to do with law-abiding gun owners who register their firearms. The registry does not prevent crimes from happening. The opposition places the gun registry and crime prevention side by side as though there were some connection between them. The registry does not

prevent crime from happening. I could not be more blunt. The creation of a list of law-abiding long gun owners does not prevent a criminal from picking up a firearm or any weapon and using it to harm an innocent person.

Over the past number of years I have spoken with many front-line police officers, the men and women who put their lives on the line for the safety and security of Canadians every day. Time and again they have said that the registry information is not accurate. Police officers know that it is not accurate. They know that when they walk through the door of a house they always assume there is a firearm located there. They do not trust the information in the long gun registry and certainly would not bet their lives on it. A tool that does not do its job is a tool not worth having and should be destroyed. That is what we are doing. These are good reasons to scrap it.

As an aside, the Auditor General stated in a report several years ago that 90% of the registration certificates contained inaccurate information. A staff sergeant in my riding tells his officers when they come on staff not to consult the registry before responding to a domestic dispute as it may put their lives at risk.

To add to all of this is the registry's sheer size and the waste of resources associated with it. When the Auditor General released her report several years ago and that was exposed, in the entire country there was only one editorial writer who still supported the registry, and even that person had reservations with respect to it. At that time, a survey was taken and 72% of people wanted to get rid of the registry. When the Liberals introduced it they told us it would cost \$2 million. Later on it was upward of \$2 billion.

There is no evidence that the long gun registry prevents crime, protects Canadians from crime or that it protects the well-being of front-line officers. What other government program has gone 1,000 times overbudget? That is unbelievable. It is bad policy. That is why I have fought long and hard over the past decade and more to see it scrapped.

I ask the opposition members what if that money had been better used to address the root causes of crime in this country? Surely, they would not have been opposed to that.

I will now speak to what Bill C-19 means as well as to what it does not mean.

First and foremost, Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill, removes the requirement for Canadians to register their unrestricted firearms, such as rifles and shotguns. In short, that means that law-abiding hunters and farmers would no longer be compelled to register their long guns and no longer be made to feel like criminals in the process.

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Second, Bill C-19 would ensure that the records that have been gathered through the long gun registry over the past years would be destroyed. This is a particularly important point. Not only are the details of millions of law-abiding gun owners in this country which are contained within the records inaccurate, they are also a means by which a different government, whether provincial or federal, could attempt to reinstate the long gun registry a few years down the road. The commitment of this government is firm. We would not allow that to happen. That is why we are committed to destroying those records. They would not be shared, nor sealed and kept. They would be destroyed.

● (1235)

As well, Bill C-19 will maintain current regulations for restricted and prohibited firearms. Those firearms will continue to be registered as they have in the past and licensing requirements will remain in place. However, long guns will no longer be required to be registered.

I will touch on another point as well. I spoke earlier about how for many of my constituents owning a firearm is a way of life. I recognize that is not common in many parts of Canada. For people living in large urban centres, the meaning surrounding firearms can be altered. It has become less about a lifestyle and more about what we see in the media.

In many of our urban centres there is a lot of talk about gun crime in the media. That can make some people nervous. I cannot emphasize enough that the Conservative Party believes in keeping Canadians safe. We are delivering measures to ensure families feel safe in their homes and communities. We are delivering better tools for our law enforcement officers and holding criminals accountable for their crimes.

Year after year, that is the promise we as a government have made to the law-abiding Canadian families we stand for in all areas of the country, both rural and urban. That is why we are in support of gun control measures that work, and why we are against measures that do not work, such as the failed long gun registry.

I will mention some of the actions we have taken over the past five years to keep Canadians safer and hold criminals more accountable for their crimes.

Our previous comprehensive legislation, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, has serious penalties for gun offences. Those measures include: longer mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes; tougher new rules for bail for serious weapons offences; mandatory minimum sentences for drive-by shootings; tougher laws to combat organized crime; and, mandatory minimum sentences for using firearms in the commission of an offence. These laws target real criminals.

I have said it before and I will say it again that criminals are not in the habit of obeying the law and they certainly are not in the habit of registering their firearms. They are the sort of individuals who use illegal weapons that have either been stolen or smuggled in from the United States or elsewhere. They have absolutely no respect for the law or the well-being of their fellow citizens.

It is those individuals who bring the good names of law-abiding gun owners into disrepute. They are the people who do harm to our

homes and communities. They are the people this government is targeting with its tough on crime measures. They are the people against whom we are taking action in an effort to stop them by using tougher laws, by providing better resources for police officers, and by holding them accountable for their actions.

That is how the government believes it should tackle criminals. It is the right way, the effective way and the sensible way. That is why we are in favour of scrapping the failed long gun registry. I hope all hon. members will support us in getting rid of it once and for all.

I challenge members to do the same as I have done, scratch below the surface and look at the facts. If they do I believe they will come to the same conclusion that I did, that the registry is not a cost-effective way of controlling crime or making our lives safer.

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech, although its content did not surprise me.

I have many questions about our Conservative friends' position, particularly in certain contexts, for instance regarding Bill C-10. I am a member of the committee examining this bill, and we are currently hearing from witnesses called by the Conservatives, including some representing victims groups, to support the government's position on Bill C-10 on law and order, public safety and so on.

However, when the time comes to hear from victims associations that are calling for the firearms and long gun registry to be maintained, considering how vital and important it is, the government refuses to listen to them. Are their fine words only good for one side and not the other? Some people have explained how it feels to be a hunter, for example, and I understand that the legislation can cause some inconvenience. I understand why some people might feel as though they are being treated like criminals because they have a long gun. But does public safety not make up for these inconveniences?

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, many of the groups that appear to be opposed to what we are doing believe some of the statistics they have been given, such as it is reducing crime and is a useful tool for the police. When it is pointed out to them that is not the case they of course will change their minds. They will change their minds as well if they are given the same opportunity as we have had today to look at whether it is cost-effective at reducing crime.

Many people believe some of what the opposition is saying but nothing could be further from the truth. Therefore, I challenge all of them to take a closer look at this.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the arguments made by my hon. colleague. If he were to apply those arguments to the handgun registry and the licensing requirements to purchase firearms, would he come to the conclusion that he is in favour of eliminating those?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member is trying to divert attention away from it but the discussion we are having today is on the long gun registry. That is what was put in place in 1995. The handgun registry was put in place in 1934.

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Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Yorkton—Melville who has fought against the gun registry since its inception. He was often the only voice in the wilderness, so we have come full circle. During that time he was the go-to person. He sent out publications and people brought cases to him.

I ask him to share with us some of the issues that people brought to him concerning the gun registry that they will no longer have to face.

• (1245)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I would have had more time to assemble all of them, but I will provide a couple of examples.

In one case a farmer inadvertently did not comply with the paperwork and reported a crime to the police. The police officers discovered that he had not accurately filled out the paperwork to register his gun. The gun was one he had in use at the time. He was waiting for a coyote that was harassing his livestock. That farmer was charged by the police for not completing the proper paperwork.

We must remember that registering one's gun through the gun registry simply means it lays a piece of paper beside it. Yet that has created a huge bureaucracy. Approximately seven million firearms have been registered out of probably more than twice that many in the entire country. The farmer felt violated. He felt like he was the criminal, not the people he was reporting who had committed a crime. That is just one example of how this has targeted the wrong people.

We need to go after the criminals in this country. We do not need to go after law-abiding people who are asked to do a bit of paperwork.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member say that the opposition parties are making claims that are not true about the fact that the RCMP and police rely on the registry. There has been evidence that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the RCMP have said they find it reliable.

I have had a personal experience with it which I am hesitant to mention because I am still somewhat fearful. I have had the sorts of communications which some people in public life get, and that made me fearful. I went into my local RCMP detachment and the officers checked the long gun registry and took into account that the individual had registered long guns. That informed their decision making and helped me protect myself.

I know members feel passionately on both sides of the House. However, I also know from personal experience that the RCMP officers rely on the registry. It lets them know when people might have guns in their homes. Obviously, most long gun owners are law-abiding and responsible citizens, but unfortunately, not all are and having the registry makes sense.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, and I have a lot of respect for the member, but that claim is totally false. The RCMP does not rely on the registry. In fact, RCMP officers are told that if they go to a home for a domestic dispute, they do not know whether that home has a firearm in it or not. An officer cannot

rely on the registry. People move and 10% to 15% of the data goes out of date every year because of this.

We have to realize that there are over 200,000 people in this country who have been prohibited from owning firearms. Their rights are such that they do not have to tell anyone when they move from one place to another. However, for firearm owners, they have to report their change of address within one month, and some inadvertently forget to, or be subject to jail terms.

The police do not rely on this data. It does not change their procedures in regard to attending a domestic dispute or something like that. I dispute that basic claim from the member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague referred to people who are being treated like criminals. Yet people will pay for licences to drive their boats and they will pay registration fees. They do the same thing for their cars. Those people do not feel like criminals. People use those things in their everyday lives.

A lot less people use firearms in their daily lives. Why is it acceptable to have to pay fees and be registered in a system for vehicles, but not for firearms?

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, this has been answered many times, but I will do it again. This is apples and oranges. When we are dealing with the registration of a car, that is under provincial jurisdiction and it is not part of the Criminal Code. However, if people do not register their firearm, they are immediately a criminal. It is part of the Criminal Code. It is a totally different situation.

• (1250)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to echo the sentiments of my colleague, the member who kept the flame alive for a number of years when the previous government was forcing this on Canadians. I would like the member to differentiate for the opposition once again the difference between the registry and licensing. It seems to be lost on the opposition. Perhaps he can explain the difference because it seems seem to be mixing the two together.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had lots of time to answer that question.

A licence is required and it involves doing a criminal background check, taking a safety course, jumping through various hoops and hurdles in order to obtain it. Once the licence is obtained, according to the previous legislation passed in 1995, individuals must lay a piece of paper called a registration certificate beside every one their firearms. That is the part of the legislation that was totally new. There had been an FAC-type licence in place since the 1970s with similar requirements, but the registration was what caused this thing to spin out of control and cost billions of dollars to taxpayers.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this extremely important debate. For us in particular—not just for us, but for many of my colleagues from Quebec—this is a rather sensitive issue. Why? Because a big part of this debate centres on events that occurred in Quebec.

Everyone remembers this, or perhaps not. Sometimes I say that we must never forget the past, so that we do not repeat it. As you know—we commemorate this event every year—on December 6, 1989, a young man named Marc Lépine entered the École Polytechnique and, for personal and anti-feminist reasons, decided to shoot a group of women. Fourteen women died: 13 students and one secretary.

This is the first opportunity I have had to talk about this and I want to take advantage of the time I have to say that, indeed, we all have our own experiences, but sometimes we have to remember that the firearms registry was created because of the events at the École Polytechnique in Montreal.

I would like to read out the names of these women, because we do not talk about them enough and we must not forget them: Geneviève Bergeron, Nathalie Croteau, Anne-Marie Edward, Maryse Laganière, Anne-Marie Lemay, Michèle Richard, Annie Turcotte, Hélène Colgan, Barbara Daigneault, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Leclair, Sonia Pelletier, Annie St-Arneault, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz. They lost their lives that day. It is important to remember that.

I understand what the hon. member who spoke before me is saying. He is speaking in this House on behalf of a group of individuals who are targeted by the bill in question and by the firearms registry as a whole. However, there are also people who are targeted by the implementation of this registry. We all agree that the registry was not set up very well and that it cost a fortune. Nevertheless, despite what I hear about Bill C-10 every time I am at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I realize that when it comes to the victims, no price is too high. Sometimes in life things are expensive and we deal with it, but that is not how we should look at things.

On this side of the House, we are trying to piece together all these versions and views. What I find unfortunate in the debate on the gun registry—as with many debates here in this House—is that the government is trying to polarize the debate. It claims that its position, the position of the hunters, is the right one and that others are completely wrong. Some people claim that the victims' position is in the right and that the hunters are completely wrong. But sometimes, reality and truth are found in the middle, somewhere in between, and on this side of the House, that is what we have tried to bring to the debate and will continue to do. Yes, I can understand the frustration of the hunters or of some aboriginal peoples who feel that this registry forces them to do things, but we must look at what the original objective was.

I will admit that there are some good arguments on the other side of the House. Sometimes there may have been some information that was taken wrong. Perhaps the registry is not completely wonderful. That is partly their fault as well, because in light of the amnesties granted, the registry has stalled a bit in recent years. It is perhaps not as up to date as I would like it to be, but the information in it is very important.

We know that, for very ideological reasons, the Conservatives have turned the firearms registry into a big issue, an issue of money or all kinds of things. Once again, the victims have been forgotten in all the noise. The government has forgotten that while it is talking to us and we are discussing this, we receive emails and messages from all sides. I am sure that all members in the House receive them, including the Conservatives. They will probably rise at some point and say they do not get them, but maybe that is because they do not look at them.

● (1255)

I receive messages from hunters, victims' parents and victims advocacy groups. They are asking that we not eliminate the registry. For a number of people, it has become symbolic. Some might say it is an expensive symbol, but we are being told by groups like police associations that, on the contrary, this registry is being used. Whether the hon. member who spoke before me likes it or not, and even if the Conservatives say it is not true, I tend to believe our police officers. If our police chiefs are saying they use the registry, I do not see why we would suddenly say they are lying. I do not think that is the case.

I was looking at the background of this registry and I discovered something odd. It has been used quite a bit to divide the two sides of the House, with one side being right and the other side being completely wrong. It is a major source of political division in Canada. Some have tried to pit rural Canada against urban Canada. At first I was interested in this issue as a person who spends a lot of time with groups that protect women who are victims of violence. These groups have taught me a lot about the firearms registry. Perhaps they saw this registry as symbolic, but they also saw it as a possible solution to many domestic tragedies. At the very least, it provides a sense of security because of the additional tools it provides to our police forces to help women in specific circumstances.

In trying to do my job properly, without being too entrenched in my own view, I have learned, since the registry was created, to listen to others' views, including that of the hon. member who just spoke. It is true that there has been endless talk over the years and that the same ideas keep resurfacing. But I am not convinced that the members on the other side of the House have listened closely to the arguments coming from this side or from victims' and police groups. And that upsets me.

Now that it is in a majority situation, the government is saying that it can abolish this registry. But before, the government knew that this move was not possible and did not represent the views of the majority. I have no choice but to point out, once again, that this government only represents 39% of the population. This is an important statistic. Approximately 60% of Canadians decided that they did not share the Conservative vision.

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I find it unfortunate that the Conservatives are trying to say that people voted for them and that since they are the majority, they are authorized to destroy the registry. This time, they have decided not just to cancel the registry, but also to destroy it. That is a major problem. The government does not seem to be aware of it this morning, but I get the feeling that the next few hours will be difficult for it. I can feel a storm brewing. I do not want to be alarmist, but since seeing the reactions—and particularly that of the Government of Quebec, the province where I was elected to represent the people of Gatineau—I have various concerns because I get the impression that a major problem is arising. Why? Because the federal government wants to destroy everything. It wants to do more than just block access to the information; it wants to destroy it. It will be shredded or thrown away—like pressing “Delete” on the computer—to ensure that the data will no longer be available anywhere.

The Minister of Public Safety was extremely clear and unequivocal: that is exactly what the government plans to do. It wants to make sure no one ever has access to that information. Yet the Conservatives have been reminding us since the registry was created that gathering that information was very costly for Canadians.

● (1300)

Everyone here in the House can agree on that. Everyone knows that creating the registry was very costly. The Conservatives keep reminding us that it cost \$2 billion, but they forget to mention that most of that was spent at the beginning, when it was first created. When the registry was working well and running smoothly, it was costing between \$2 million and \$4 million, depending who one asks. Even taking the higher amount, \$4 million, no one would say that that is a waste of money, except our Conservative friends across the floor. Furthermore, our police forces and victims associations are telling us that the registry is useful. I will never convince the members opposite, because they begin with the premise that police chiefs are lying when they say they use the registry, that victims associations do not know what they are talking about, because the registry does not prevent any crimes. The problem is that we may never know if the registry did in fact prevent crime. We could go round in circles on this for quite some time.

When a crime is committed with a registered firearm, the Conservatives immediately say to us that the fact that the firearm was registered did not prevent the crime. It may not have prevented one crime, but perhaps other crimes were prevented at some point. A police officer told me that he felt safe when he knew beforehand that there were two rifles in a home. When the guy comes out and throws a rifle on the ground, the police officer knows that there is another one in the house. The registry helps police officers to be better prepared. Police officers truly believe that the registry protects their lives, whereas the member who spoke before me firmly believes the opposite.

Finding ways to reconcile all these positions is possible and we can do it. If we used our talents and our energy, not as my colleague who spoke before me did in an attempt to destroy the registry, but rather to find solutions that reconcile everyone's positions, we would all benefit from this experience. But that is not happening. On the contrary, the Conservatives like to divide and conquer. They will tell hunters that the Conservatives are their saviours; that hunters are no longer criminals.

I direct my remarks to all hunters watching us. I have never believed that a hunter is a criminal. I do not think that anyone in this House has ever believed that a hunter, an aboriginal person or anyone who has inherited a rifle is a criminal. If mistakes in the legislation have given this impression, it is up to us, the legislators, to correct them.

As the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas said earlier, we fill out forms and provide information on our cars and boats. This comment may seem simplistic, but it is true. We must eliminate the irritants. This has always been the position of the NDP, both the people who want to keep the registry and its opponents. I want to emphasize that I believe in this registry and that, if there are irritants, then we must work to eliminate them.

The destruction of data presents extremely serious legal problems. The hon. members may find me tiresome but my time at law school has proven useful. I am thinking, for example, about access to information. There are things that are unclear in the current legislation. The Government of Quebec has already announced its stand on the matter and other provinces may do the same. I do not want to focus exclusively on Quebec, but it is my province. It is the province that immediately stood up to protect its people and said that it was prepared to continue the registry. This information belongs to the people of Quebec. The registry contains information that is relevant to them. The federal government does not have the right to destroy data that belongs to all Canadians and that cost a lot of money.

I have said this outside the House and I am not afraid to repeat it in the House. I am not afraid to say things outside the House. I find the Conservatives' position to be extremely mean-spirited. It seems there must be a way to find time.

● (1305)

The Conservatives will succeed in abolishing the registry since they have a majority, but if the provinces and territories want to continue to use it, I think that our Conservative colleagues could consider that and allow these governments and territories to offer the service to law enforcement agencies and organizations in their jurisdiction who need it and believe that they need it.

There is no problem with removing the irritants and I do not think that the province of Quebec will want to get into long debates about hunters or aboriginal nations. But there is a way to keep this data without simply destroying it, throwing it in the trash or taking a match to it.

I think that this is a good time to think about it. This would be the time to have a mature discussion about the gun registry. We must stop focusing solely on the absolutes on each side. Maybe we should think about the victims of the events that led to the creation of the gun registry.

It is not a matter of casting judgment on hunters, aboriginals or people who inherit rifles and other guns, but as legislators, this is our way of respecting people who are going through very difficult situations, like the events at Dawson College. People will tell me once again that the guns involved in this tragedy were not registered, but that does not matter when we know that one of the victims of the Dawson tragedy is still walking around with a bullet in his head. This victim told us, as legislators, that the gun registry is important. If we listen to these victims when studying Bill C-10, maybe it would also be a good idea to listen to them when studying Bill C-19.

We must stop focusing solely on our ideological speeches and on absolutes and try listening to what the others are saying. Women's groups feel safer with a gun registry. It does not solve the problem. I will not claim here in this House that it is a solution to domestic violence or violence against women, but it is a symbol of safety.

Once again, if we eliminate the irritants that are causing the Conservative government to be so insistent on destroying the long gun registry, I do not see why we cannot reach a consensus.

In conclusion, at times, we remember people and we express our respect for them. I am thinking of our leader, Jack Layton, who passed away this summer. In a moment, I will tell the hon. members what he was always telling us about this issue. I know that I will likely have to answer a question from the other side of the House about whether the official opposition intends to force a vote. The hon. members will see that the NDP's position is extremely logical and consistent with what they have heard in this chamber.

The NDP's position is unanimous: we believe that there are ways of reconciling all the positions in a respectful manner in order to take into account the rights of victims and the rights of those who seriously object to the registry because of certain irritants.

I would like to end by quoting my leader, because I think it is important to remember him. He said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority [for me and] for rural and urban Canadians.

There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians.... [The Conservatives are] stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest.

[The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down". This is un-Canadian.

This kind of politics, which seeks to divide and pit people against one another, resembles the poisonous political games in the United States. This is not part of our country's political tradition, and I think that all Canadians demonstrated this when Jack Layton died. This is not the kind of political game we want to play.

● (1310)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 40th Parliament, when this came before committee, we heard witnesses from the police association. We also heard from individual chiefs from across the country. Some of those chiefs believed that the long gun registry served no specific purpose. Although the police association was involved, chiefs in other areas of the country said

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that it was not the case in their jurisdictions. Also, front-line police officers, in their basic training, have said that they are told to assume that there are guns inside every door when they go there.

Therefore, the unreliability of information that is not current or updated actually does the opposite. It puts some police officers, were they to rely on the information, in harm's way in terms of this information going forward.

How would the member respond to those chiefs and front-line officers who find no value in the long gun registry?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Based on the information I have, one person did say that to the committee. This comes back to what I just said: we can play the statistics game ad nauseam. We can decide that a given percentage of people or that a certain number of victims believe in it and a given number of others do not. However, I cannot help but think we should err on the side of caution to ensure public safety. Every day we hear that public safety is one of this government's top priorities, but when it comes to the registry, suddenly it decides to take risks.

No one would say that the registry did not contain any useful information, so they are going to knock on someone's door and go in for a coffee. Come on. Officers have to assume there is something there and they must be careful. Furthermore, any information, whether it is 100% reliable, or only 95% or 90%, is still useful information. As the saying goes, information is everything.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the classic argument we hear so often: we have a majority, so we can do what we want. However, I think it is pretty rare for a person to vote for a party and agree with every single aspect of the party's platform. So that is not a very strong argument. There are some nuances to be made.

My colleague from Gatineau brought out many nuances in her speech. I wonder if she could elaborate on other possible alternatives, instead of saying that, well, since it is not perfect, let us scrap it all together.

● (1315)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, who, I know, is very interested in this issue, like the rest of us.

These are serious decisions, and we take our role as legislators seriously. So instead of having preconceived ideas, we try to see both sides of the coin and determine where the truth lies.

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What could be done to take the sting out of this registry? There are so many ideas and I have so little time. For one, we could decriminalize the impact this registry has on hunters. This process could be greatly simplified and related offences could be kept out of the Criminal Code. That may have been a mistake when the registry was created. That is one of the dangers of creating something in the aftermath of a dramatic event. Sometimes things move quickly and we do not think about the consequences. I am sure that the legislators in 1995 did not think that people could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code. However, that can be fixed.

Instead of clashing and being in constant conflict, and instead of using the gun registry issue to raise money, we should be trying to find solutions to fix the registry and make everyone happy.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke of domestic violence against women and that somehow women would feel safer because of the registry. I am trying to understand how many of the domestic violence incidents were specific to long guns and if the long guns were registered, how that might actually reduce domestic violence. I would like some clarification on that please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, according to statistics released yesterday, there has been a 30% decrease in such crimes. Having said that, I am not claiming that the long gun registry has necessarily solved the problem. However, these are statistics that should concern the government. It should take a deep breath and rethink its strategy. It could also be a hero to the hunters in our respective ridings by going back to them and telling them that it has removed the irritants. At the same time, it could go to Montreal or Toronto and tell the people there that it has considered their views and that it has found ways to help them with regard to crimes committed with firearms and long guns.

There is a way to balance the positions, but it seems that only the Conservatives are refusing because they are wilfully looking the other way to avoid facing reality.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Gatineau for her balanced approach to this issue.

I note she quoted the figure of \$4 million, which is the figure given by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who run the registry, not the \$1 billion which is wasted and gone.

A couple of things in the RCMPs report on the whole firearms program are interesting as well. It stated:

Without registration there is a failure of accountability on behalf of the owner, and it is registration that drives accountability. Without registration, anyone can buy and sell firearms privately and there would be no record...Registration further helps to reduce the general proliferation of firearms. This is very useful in investigating licensed owners in the trafficking of firearms to unlicensed users. Without the registry it becomes almost unenforceable.

While it is not a magic bullet that will prevent all crime, there are obviously uses for it. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is interested in public safety in this country, says the government should listen to that. Would the member care to comment on that?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that was pretty eloquent in itself.

[*Translation*]

I would like to draw the House's attention to a very interesting article by John Geddes that appeared today:

[*English*]

Among the arguments against the long-gun registry, I think the most compelling, at least superficially, was the indignant assertion that gun owners are, by and large, law-abiding citizens who present no danger to society. I know that's true. Why impose a registration requirement on them? I'm inclined to respond with smart-alecky questions about similar impositions. Why audit taxpayers when most dutifully pay up? Why ask drivers to blow at those RIDE checks when most are sober?

So let's stick to the registry for a moment. Since criminals didn't register, was the system useless? In 2009, Statistics Canada reported that in the previous five years police recovered 253 guns used in murders and, in fact, about a third were registered. Some had been stolen, some used by their owners, some were owned by the victim. In any case, registration records figured in the police investigations and trials.

They do use it.

● (1320)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being a former member of the RCMP, I know that most of those records are found on CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre. If guns are stolen and used in a crime, they are entered on CPIC. With regard to the registry, most of those guns are not found there because they are not utilized through that process. They are used through CPIC.

I wonder if the member could respond to the use of CPIC as opposed to the gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has a good point.

That is why I am saying that we all need to come together to find the right solution. Some people use the registry and others do not. Why prevent some people from using a tool they find useful, with the irritants removed? That is the real question. But the government does not want to consider an alternative because that would mean admitting that it has fought consistently to scrap and even destroy the registry.

We were unaware that that was the goal. This is no longer just about scrapping the registry; the government wants to destroy the data. The government should be forewarned. I have the feeling that this will not save a great deal of money. I would like to see the cost of the upcoming court cases between the Government of Quebec and the federal government, for example.

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[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

On Tuesday, the hon. Minister of Public Safety tabled in the House this very important legislation that would end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. This was, and will be, an important moment for so many Canadians across the country who have been waiting so very long to see this happen.

It is also an important moment for every government member who has fought so hard against opposition blocking, obstruction, games, false accusations, and so many other sad attempts to stop ending the long gun registry. I am so proud of our government members, my fellow members of caucus in the Conservative Party, who have stood up long and hard against some of these terrible tactics in their commitment to their constituents to end the long gun registry.

I am especially thankful to our police caucus. We are very proud to have at least seven, I think now 11, members of the police force, either active or former police officers, as part of our caucus. They have also stood with us, shoulder to shoulder, in ending the long gun registry.

Today, I stand here proudly, a Conservative member of Parliament, representing the riding of Portage—Lisgar, together with my fellow colleagues to see this bill passed and to see the long gun registry finally ended.

With this new legislation before the House we will all have the chance to do the right thing and vote against the long gun registry. In the past, we have seen members on the opposite side who have made very strong commitments to their constituents, publicly, in some of their ten percenters, some of the mailings they have sent out and in newspaper articles. There are members across the way who have made firm commitments to their constituents to vote against the long gun registry, and I trust that when this bill comes forward for a vote that they will honour those commitments to their constituents, do the right thing, and vote to scrap the long gun registry.

Like my colleague, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, I do have a deep and very strong interest in this issue. I want to say why this is an important issue to me.

I am not a gun owner, I am not a hunter, and I have only shot a gun a few times. However, I grew up in a rural community in Manitoba where guns were used by the people that I lived with. I live in a very strong Mennonite area and there are a lot of farmers and people who grow crops and have livestock. I know it might be difficult for people who live in large cities to relate to, I can understand that, but I want to describe where I live. In my neck of the woods, if I walk onto a farmyard and see a farmer carrying a shotgun or rifle, I would have no fear of that individual at all because he may be trying to shoot a rodent or a skunk. He may need it because there are coyotes attacking his livestock. He needs it as a tool. Just like many of us in this room use our BlackBerrys every single day as a tool, there are farmers who use it as a tool to do their work.

I grew up in an area like this. I grew up where individuals went hunting. They used guns for sport shooting. A lot of my brothers and my cousins loved to go shooting. It was a great activity for them to do with other family members.

When I decided to run for office and I had the honour of becoming the member of Parliament for Portage—Lisgar, ending the long gun registry was one of the top issues that my constituents brought forward to me. They saw the incredible waste of money, almost \$2 billion, that was spent on the registry and they knew that they were being blamed, as rural Canadians, for the horrific crimes and the horrific tragedies that were happening in big cities. It was wrong then when it was introduced, and it is wrong today.

I am very proud to stand up for gun owners in Canada. I am proud to stand up for sport shooters and hunters, and I am proud to stand up for taxpayers today to speak against the long gun registry and in support of Bill C-19.

Throughout the debate on ending the long gun registry there have been so many myths that have been perpetuated. I am going to take a few moments to go through some of the key ones and try to bring some clarity on these issues.

First, there is the myth, and it has been talked about a bit today, that police officers use the registry and the numbers have gone from 8,000 times a day all the way to, I am hearing now, 16,000 times a day. The myth is that they are using it in their tactical decisions, when they go on calls, and to actually look at how to approach a home or a situation.

• (1325)

Sometimes the facts do not always tell the truth of a situation. The fact might be that the long gun registry in the Canadian firearms database is touched or is hit 8,000 to 10,000 or 11,000 times a day. However, the truth is officers are not purposefully going in and checking the information, as the hon. member, who is a former RCMP officer, already mentioned.

Even if a police officer pulls over a vehicle and punches in a vehicle licence plate, an automatic hit is generated on the firearms database, and many times it is generated and specific queries are looking at the name and the address of the person being searched. A specific serial number or certificate number is not being looked at, which is what is associated with the long gun registry.

To sum this up, police officers are not specifically going in. The reason they are telling us that they are not doing it on their own, and that it is only happening automatically, is they cannot count on the information contained in the databases. The long gun registry is inaccurate in that there are thousands of wrong addresses, thousands of wrong names associated with the wrong serial number of a firearm. The majority of the time, police officers find that whatever the registry says is not actually true if they go to confirm it.

These are well-trained professionals. They are not going in specifically to look at the registry. It is automatically making a hit on the registry and counting in this so-called 11,000 to 15,000 hits a day.

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I want to quickly read a letter that was just passed to me. The Minister of State for Finance just received this email yesterday from a front line officer. His name is Gary. The riding is Macleod, so it is in Alberta. I will not give any further specific information.

Gary wrote:

I am a serving Policeman and have been for over 23 years. I am a front line cop whose career has been dedicated to hunting and capturing society's worst. For the past 12 years, I have worked exclusively on a big city (SWAT) Team and have arrested countless rapists, armed robbers, armed drug dealers, violent gang members, and murderers, including one who was on the FBI's 10 most wanted list.

I know very little about running a Police department, writing traffic tickets, lifting fingerprints, or investigating shop-lifters...I do know about hunting armed violent desperate men—and I do it very well.

The long gun registry does ZERO to help me do my job. 99% of frontline cops that I know feel the same way.

I have received hundreds of emails from front line police officers. I have not received one email from one police officer who said he or she wants us to keep the long gun registry. I would challenge any opposition member to show me an email from a front line officer who is on the streets arresting drug dealers, arresting violent criminals. The reason is that it does not help them. They do not use it.

Now, they have told us what they do want us to do to help them do their job. We are working very hard with our Tackling Violent Crimes Act that we passed, and other measures, and so, I do want to talk about that.

I also want to talk about another myth, and again it was discussed a bit today; that is, that the long gun registry protects women and specifically protects women against domestic violence.

I come from a family of six girls. I have daughters. I have nieces. I come from a family of a lot of very strong women, my mom being one of the strongest women that I know. I can tell members with all sincerity that if I ever thought that I was ending a process or ending a registry that would help women, I would not do this. There is no way that I could do this. There is no way I could go to sleep at night if I thought that I was taking away something that would actually protect women. That is because I have looked at the evidence as to what the registry does and what the registry does not do.

The long gun registry is not gun control. The long gun registry does nothing to stop people from getting guns who should not have guns; for example, men who are going to harm their spouse or harm their family. The registry does not stop them from getting a gun.

Let me explain what would stop them. The licensing process, of which we are strong believers. Gun owners are strong believers in the licensing process. That is where individuals will go through a background police check. They will have to take a safety course. Many times, their spouse is actually spoken to and asked, "How do you feel about your spouse getting a firearm? Are you concerned?"

• (1330)

I fully support that process. If we can flag it, and there are times we cannot, but if we can stop it, that is where we can stop individuals from getting guns who should not have guns. However, once they have a licence to own a firearm, actually counting their long guns, it might make those of us around here feel better. Maybe we think we

are doing something but we are not doing anything by counting their guns.

There are we things we can do, like licensing. There is also a lot of things we can do regarding prevention, working with families that are going through crisis and ensuring there are women's shelters, which we have done so much work on, but counting long guns of licensed gun owners does not stop them from using them.

I would urge the opposition members, if they are not aware of all of the issues surrounding the registry, to become educated, because when they understand what the registry does and does not do, they will see that even if costs, whether it is \$4 million or \$100 million, it is a waste of money and a waste of resources that could be used elsewhere to help stop domestic violence and violence of all kinds.

I do want to mention very briefly that there are things that we are doing to fight violent crime in Canada. We have introduced a number of pieces of legislation. Any individual who commits a crime with a gun should receive a mandatory minimum sentence, which is exactly what we put in our tackling violent crimes legislation. Some would say that it should even be longer. Our legislation has mandatory minimum sentences of four years. If it is a gang-related gun activity, it will be five years.

I hear from some people who say that maybe we should have even longer sentences than that, but the bottom line is that, in Canada, if people commit a crime with a gun, they need to be in jail and there needs to be a minimum time that they are in jail. I am very proud that we have done that.

We have also introduced our safe streets and communities act, which is another good piece of legislation that would help us in tackling drug crime. The majority of the time, drugs, gangs and guns are completely inter-related and, sadly, when we are seeing crime in our city streets, so many times those three factors are part of it.

We have also brought in tougher bail provisions for those who use weapons in the commission of a crime. We have delivered mandatory minimum sentences for drive-by shootings and we are helping to stop crime before it happens. This includes investing in the youth gang prevention fund. Our government is very proud of that.

We have also delivered on our promise to provide more police officers across the country. Police officers come up in discussion so often and I am very happy that we have a very strong, open dialogue with the Canadian Association of Police. We talk to police chiefs across the country all the time. We meet with front-line officers who tell us that if we put someone in jail, we need to ensure they stay in jail. One of the most frustrating things for police officers is to arrest a drug dealer or arrest someone who has committed a crime with a gun and then they get out of jail before they do their time. I am very proud that we are doing that.

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Ending the long gun registry is part of keeping the focus on making our streets safer, not on policies and laws that do not actually prevent crime. That is really the point we have been trying to make all of these years.

Another very interesting statistic on licensed gun owners in Canada, according to a Simon Fraser report by Professor Gary Mauser, is that if people have a licence to own a firearm in Canada, they are 50% less likely to ever commit a crime with a firearm.

It would be interesting to go around the chamber and each of us give thought to that. If there are licensed gun owners in the chamber today, they are 50% less likely to ever commit a crime with a firearm because they are law-abiding citizens. The reason the long gun registry has been so flawed is that it does so much to focus on them and to penalize them for being gun owners.

I now want to talk about the third myth that has been talked about a lot, even today it was talked about, and that is the ongoing cost to keep the long gun registry.

• (1335)

I think we all agree that it costs almost \$2 billion to register just over seven million long guns. Right now, there are just over seven million long guns in the database, and that costs about \$2 billion. We can all try to guess why. Only the Liberals would be able to tell us what was really going on during that time. We do not know. That was also during the time of some other scandals, and we are certainly concerned about where the \$2 billion went.

There are at least 16 million long guns in Canada, which means that not even half of all the long guns are registered. Can members imagine the cost to register the other seven million to eight million long guns that are in the country, as well as trying to get this inaccurate information up to date? I cannot imagine, if we did not end the registry, the cost of trying to make it up to date, current and a database that could be counted on. I fear to think of what it might cost.

The Liberals said that it would cost \$2 million and it cost \$2 billion. Now they are throwing other figures around. We have heard \$4 million. I really cannot count on any kind of Liberal or NDP figures.

As we look at the actual cost today, for example, if we look at the government estimates, it is costing about \$22 million right now just for the federal government portion of the prohibited, restricted and non-prohibited, non-restricted firearms registry. That would be long guns, handguns and short guns. We know that the majority of those are the seven million long guns. We know that it is costing approximately \$22 million right now.

When the Auditor General testified a few years ago, she talked a lot about hidden costs. Her estimation was probably around \$70 million. From the work that we have done with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and in talking to other groups that are called upon to actually enforce the long gun registry, the municipal and provincial police who are not receiving any direct funding from any government but who must use their funding for their policing, the hidden costs that are being passed down to different agencies is huge. I would say that there is evidence that to maintain the long gun

registry just as it is would probably be over \$100 million a year. Then we would also have to talk about re-setting it up.

The bottom line is the cost. Some people say that it is \$4 million and some say it is \$100 million. I guess we could discuss it forever. We continue to stand with law-abiding citizens in saying that is money that could be spent elsewhere. I think all of us would have great examples of where it could be spent, on deterring crime, on prevention or on treatment. There are many great ways we could spend that money, other than on the long gun registry.

I am extremely pleased that the government bill includes the provision to destroy all of the records. That would have been the intent of the bill that I introduced but it was not laid out specifically. I am pleased that we were able to see it included in the bill that the government introduced.

The fact is that law-abiding gun owners should not have any of their information gathered and kept by any level of government once the long gun registry has ended. I am very pleased that we can look them in the eye and commit to them that their information will never be passed to any other level of government, any other party that would like to try to use it to create a registry, nor will not be passed to any polling group. That information will be destroyed and it will never return under our watch.

I am grateful for the men and women across this country who have stood with us, supported us, sent us emails of support and said that they will stand with us, as they have. Some of them helped us get more Conservatives elected to help get the majority in this House. I thank the men and women of Canada, hunters, farmers, sport shooters and their families who have stood with us. I am very proud that we are delivering on our commitment. We will end the long gun registry.

I call on all opposition members to look at the facts, do not look at this with emotion or political skew, and support this legislation to end the long gun registry.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not congratulate the party opposite on the speech I just heard. If Pinocchio were standing in her place, his nose would be so long it would touch the bench across the way. First, the hon. member talked about myths, and she suggested that police officers do not use the registry. I invite the hon. member to read the article in today's issue of *Le Devoir*, which says: "This data is useful to police officers—who consult it thousands of times a day—and was paid for by taxpayers", and it should go back to the provinces. It was the *Fraternité des policiers et policières de Montréal* who said that. They know what they are talking about.

Government Orders

I would like to talk to the hon. member opposite about violence against women. The mother of a friend of mine was killed by my friend's father with a shotgun. Okay. It is important to have gun control. I would like the hon. member to talk about safety. If we are talking about safety, a firearm is a firearm. Firearms kill. That is not to say that everyone who has a firearm kills, but someone might get killed. We have to be careful what we say.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have been fairly concerned about decorum in the chamber and ensuring that we are respectful when addressing each other in the House. For the member opposite to accuse someone of being Pinocchio and that his or her nose is growing is implying that the individual is a liar, which is completely unparliamentary.

I ask that you discipline the member and that she retract that statement, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair will review the blues on this matter and, if needed, will come back to the House.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, I have been working on this issue for many years. I am not sure what expertise the hon. member has but, if I were her, I would not refer to *Le Devoir* as a source of expertise.

In terms of violence against women or anyone, the member referred to a firearm that was a long gun. The registry does not stop any crime from happening. It does not stop a long gun from being used in a crime, just like a registry for bats, knives or any other instruments that can be used as weapons. A knife can be a weapon but a registry of knives will not stop the knife from being a weapon. Most women who are killed in Canada are killed with knives, followed by beatings and strangulations. If we want to look at registering weapons, it would need to include knives and people's hands. That is ridiculous, but I guess that is what the NDP thinks.

• (1345)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke a lot about her own feelings and emotions and those of her family and friends. I would like to present some facts.

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians had this to say:

—it is clear to Canada's emergency physicians that the gun registry has, in fact, worked and the number of deaths from inappropriate firearms use has dropped dramatically.... So we will now all be unwilling participants in a social experiment that will undoubtedly place Canadian lives at risk.

The Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses stated:

It is actually in rural communities that the rates of firearm death and injuries are higher. And because of their availability, rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in violence against women....

The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime said:

—the majority of victims' groups we have spoken to have made it clear: Canada should maintain its long-gun registry.

The RCMP and Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have stated:

—the long-gun registry: contributes to community and police officer safety and provides preventative and investigative value to law enforcement and the communities...

Why would the government want to eliminate all of the data that is absolutely needed by these people to do their work?

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite interesting that the two women in the chamber who have asked me questions have made personal attacks toward me. I would like to assure everyone that when it was stated that I talk about emotion and feeling, it was not done in any kind of positive way. It appears to me that the member seems to be copying the methods of the former member for Ajax—Pickering who is no longer here. I would suggest that may not be a very beneficial tactic to take.

In answering the question, we are ending the long gun registry. There seems to be some confusion, and it may be that the way the opposition approaches commitments is different from the way we approach commitments. When we say that we are ending the long gun registry, that means the data. The long gun registry is not some idea. It is the data that has been collected on law-abiding Canadians in this country. I am very proud to say that we will destroy it. It will be gone. It will not be passed on to any provincial government. It will not be passed on to any agency. It certainly will not be left for the opposition to try to form a registry again.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary has travelled all over this country, across western Canada and as far north as Yukon Territory. Speaking outside of her own personal experience and emotion on this, maybe the parliamentary secretary could let us know exactly what she heard from Canadians from coast to coast to coast having been in those ridings herself.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, I am going to be very frank, and the opposition might not want to hear this, but I heard a lot of emotion from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I had hunters, grown men, walk up to me with tears coming down their cheeks. Some may make light of that, but it is not to be made light of.

These are men and women who have been targeted. They know they are not criminals, they know they have been protecting their way of life, they know they love their families and they work hard. Across this country, long gun owners have been coming up to me and saying, "Thank you to your government, thank you to your Prime Minister, thank you for finally scrapping this", because they are tired of being blamed for the crimes and the horrific things that have gone on in cities. They are tired of being blamed and having their family members blamed simply because they own a long gun.

I was very pleased to be able to go to Yukon. I actually had a chance to do some sport shooting with some fantastic individuals in that area. The message is consistent, and I am pleased that we can finally stand up for them.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this speech was filled with the same main points that are emblematic of this government's approach. Issues are always black and white. There is never any middle ground—we are always either for something or against it.

I heard the wonderful speech by the member for Gatineau. She spoke about the NDP's efforts to fix existing issues that are causing frustration. These issues are completely understandable. Our police authorities, who are represented by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, feel that the registry is important to their work. I hear from police officers, shelters and transition houses in my riding, and they say that this registry is essential. Changes need to be made to fix the problems, but the registry should not be abolished. While it is true that the initial investment was excessive, the registry does not cost a lot now. It could be of great use and of great benefit to the provinces, which are responsible for the administration of justice. I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on this.

• (1350)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points. I realize the member was not in the last Parliament when we were initially discussing this issue and the NDP brought forward some of its suggestions.

We have not seen any kind of response to one of the challenges, which is that if anyone tries to decriminalize the long gun registry, it is impossible. The whole reason that it had to be part of the Criminal Code was that otherwise it would have infringed on individual property rights. One cannot just ticket people for a property; Canadian law said that it had to be in the actual Criminal Code of Canada, so unfortunately that would not work.

I also want to remind my hon. colleague of another aspect, which is that police officers would continue to have all the information regarding who has a licence to own a firearm. That means name, address, phone number, licence number and the kinds of firearms they are allowed to own; therefore, if police officers went on a call, there would still be a good indication of whether there was a firearm on the premises. Again, they will approach every situation as if it is a dangerous situation and ensure that every weapon is cleared out.

We do see this as a black and white issue. We do believe it is focusing on the wrong people. As legislators, when we see bad policy, policy this flawed, we have to stand up and have the courage to end it, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been involved with this file since I became the justice critic for my party in 2003, a little over eight and a half years ago. It is the one file that I can point to where there is very much misinformation, and I have to say that almost all of it is coming from the Conservative side of this chamber.

Any number of other countries have taken the same route that we have. Over a period of time, we have moved from total non-regulation of firearms to significant incursions into the right to own a firearm and how a firearm could be used. It has been a progression.

Today, if the bill becomes law, we will be going through a regressive stage. It would be a regressive stage for this country and a regressive stage in the international arena.

I will start my comments today by describing how irresponsible this move by the government is on the international stage.

We have signed an international treaty through the United Nations that requires us, starting in 2012, to report annually all of the small firearms in the country. If the bill becomes law, we would have absolutely no way to meet that requirement. We have also signed an agreement with the Organization of American States that binds us, again, to issue a report each year on the number of small arms in the country. In both cases, this is an attempt by the international community, and I think a reasoned and progressive attempt, to bring the trade in small arms weaponry under control.

We see what happens when it gets out of control. We do not have to go off the continent; we simply have to look at the massacres occurring in Mexico at the current time. Weaponry is being smuggled in from the United States and, in one case, transferred by a government agency.

We are seeing regular massacres, but these weapons could be controlled. The United States has come online with the agreement and signed it, and so has Mexico. We are going to see some reasonable attempt to control the use of small arms on this continent because of these treaties.

However, we would not be part of that if the bill becomes law. Again, it is grossly irresponsible. I have yet to hear anything from the government as to how it is going to deal with this problem. The government not only would not keep the records, but it would totally destroy the records. There is absolutely no way we would be able to meet the international requirements that I assume we signed in good faith.

I will go on to what the member for Portage—Lisgar terms the “myths” that have grown up around the gun registry.

It is false to attribute the figure of \$2 billion entirely to the registration of long guns in this country. That is grossly overinflated. In 2006-07 the Auditor General had a figure of \$900 million to develop not only the long gun registry but the registry of handguns and prohibited weapons and the licensing of individuals for the right to own a gun. It was a package. At that time the cost was around \$900 million.

• (1355)

By 2010, that figure was moving toward about \$1.2 billion.

The \$2 billion figure actually comes from one of the proponents of this legislation from the Conservative side. He has, in effect, made up numbers, making some gross assumptions on police expenses for using the system. It is a fallacious type of analysis in terms of any meaningful economic analysis of the use of the system. That is where the figure comes from, and again, it is grossly fallacious in terms of what it has actually cost.

Statements by Members

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety said we cannot believe any figures, but I am prepared to believe the \$4 million figure on what it is costing now on an annual basis. That figure came initially out of a report from the Auditor General. It was confirmed repeatedly in annual reports from the RCMP.

The parliamentary secretary sat in the same hearings I did over the last 18 months. She heard the RCMP officials give that figure on a repeated basis. She never was able to challenge them with regard to that \$4 million figure, nor has anyone else. Officials know how the system works. They know how much it is costing, which is \$4 million annually for the registration of long guns in this country. That is the current figure. That is all we are going to save if we get rid of the long gun registry, \$4 million. The \$4 million figure is from the RCMP, and it is valid. No one could challenge the RCMP on it at committee.

One of the costs the Conservatives never talk about is how much it is going to cost to destroy the records.

I spent a fair amount of time working with the people who work in the registry. They described to me what they are going to have to do. One of the costs in that \$1.2 billion figure over the years occurred when we merged the two systems. We used to have one system of registration of handguns and prohibited weapons and another separate system for the long gun registry. We eventually merged them around 2005. As we were doing that, we created a single system. That is where some of the problems were: when we did that, we identified a number of dates of registration and other information, such as addresses, that were not correct. That situation has been progressively corrected over the last five years.

We merged those two. To now take them apart is going to require an estimated two to five persons per year for a two-year period, and it will cost millions of dollars, because we cannot just destroy the whole system, because doing so would destroy the registration of handguns and prohibited weapons. It would have to be done on an individual registration basis, and it is going to take that long and cost that much.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh at this time. He will have 11 minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the first phase of Canada's economic action plan, we made a commitment to protect Canadians from the worst effects of the global downturn with a massive investment in Canada's infrastructure. It has been a huge success in creating jobs and improving communities across Canada.

To ensure that all these projects were completed and delivered the maximum results, we worked constructively with communities and showed flexibility where needed, extending certain deadlines.

I am pleased to say that all of the numerous projects in my riding are near completion and many are under budget.

I thank all my municipalities, their leaders and staff for their co-operation and diligence in partnering successfully. Working together, we have stimulated economic activity, created thousands of jobs and the projects funded will provide lasting benefits for our communities.

This program and these projects are a win-win for our municipalities and for Canada.

* * *

MALVERN COLLEGIATE WAR MEMORIAL

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a week tomorrow I will be attending the rededication ceremony of the Malvern Collegiate War Memorial in my riding of Beaches—East York. This cenotaph bears the names of the 25 boys of Malvern, boys who graduated from this high school and went off to fight and die in the First World War.

This cenotaph, originally dedicated in 1922, represents stories of incredible courage, irrecoverable loss and the enduring value of peace.

In my view, there can be no better place for such symbolism than perched, as it is, above the student population of a high school. May the lessons that emerge from the fate of the boys of Malvern not be lost on today's boys and girls of Malvern.

My thanks to, and admiration for, all those who organized and all those who donated to the war memorial restoration campaign.

If the 25 boys of Malvern are watching next week's ceremony from on high, may they know that they have not been forgotten and that they did not die in vain.

* * *

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced legislation to end the long gun registry, bringing to a close a decade-long irritant for law-abiding farmers and hunters. We are closing the door on a \$2 billion boondoggle and fulfilling our campaign promise.

Our government is following through on its commitments: cutting the GST from 7% to 5%; supporting choice in child care; fixing the broken immigration system; passing laws to make our streets and homes safer; rebuilding our armed forces; re-establishing Canada's place on the world stage; introducing a low-tax plan for jobs and growth; and guiding Canada through the worst global recession since the 1930s.

Our government is fulfilling our commitments, delivering results and getting things done for Canadians.

**PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING
EXCELLENCE**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure members in this chamber can remember a teacher who played a critical role in their life, someone who taught them how to think, helped them feel good about themselves and encouraged them to continuously strive to do better.

I would like to congratulate Vancouver Quadra constituent Laurie Cassie and her colleague Rebecca Robins for being that kind of teacher and for winning the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. That is like winning the Nobel Prize for teaching.

Laurie and Rebecca are passionate about innovative and collaborative teaching techniques and about using digital media to help their students excel. Here is how a parent at David Livingstone Elementary School in Vancouver put it:

Laurie...and Rebecca...have been instrumental in transforming our son's world-view. School is no longer a torment, but a rich adventure, where he feels his contribution is valued and his ideas respected.

That is what great teachers do.

It gives me immense pride to congratulate Laurie Cassie and Rebecca Robins on a job very well done. On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to extend my thanks to them.

* * *

• (1405)

CANADA-UKRAINE PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAM

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program for 21 years of excellence.

Thirty-five young emissaries, including Stanislava Tsarkova, embracing the highest ideals of achievement and community service, have journeyed to Canada to gain valuable perspective and experience Canada's most important democratic institution, the Parliament of Canada.

They bore witness to two issues in Parliament this past week: a debate on democracy and a foreign affairs committee meeting exploring the political chicanery in Ukraine.

Ukraine's youthful ambassadors, Ukraine's future, must return with this message: Canada and Ukraine are inextricably linked by prior migration.

Canada was there for Ukraine, recognizing independence in 1991. I was there for the Orange Revolution, giving support to Ukraine's wish for electoral democracy.

Once again democracy is on trial. The people of Ukraine must not let the world-renowned example of democratic resolve of the Orange Revolution slip away.

* * *

PANTELIS KALAMARIS

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some 50 years ago, a young Pantelis Kalamaris had the courage to leave his family in Greece and come to Canada for a better life. His

Statements by Members

new life was not easy. With only a basic education, Peter, as he came to be known, found work doing anything from picking tomatoes to doing dishes. He saved enough money to support his family in Greece, get married, buy a house, earn his Canadian citizenship and bring his siblings to Canada.

In 1961 he opened Peter's Barber Shop in Weston. Thousands of people have sat in his barber's chair: actors, hockey players, politicians and everyday people. They listened to his stories of Greece and hockey. His shop became famous, with appearances on both national and local media.

Often referred to as hockey's other hall of fame, Peter's Barber Shop will host the Stanley Cup in honour of the shop's 50th anniversary, this Saturday, October 29.

Sadly, he will not be there to see this. On October 3, Peter, at age 76, passed away. The Kalamaris family has lost its patriarch, Weston a local legend and Canada a remarkable citizen. Godspeed, Peter Kalamaris.

* * *

CANADA-POLAND YOUTH INTERNSHIP SOCIETY

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2009 I personally met with the Canada-Poland Friendship Group in the Polish parliament when I was in Warsaw. The feedback from those meetings indicated that there was a definite willingness to create a bilateral intern exchange program between our parliaments.

Today I rise to bring attention to the creation of the Canada-Poland Youth Internship Society, created for the purpose of establishing a youth parliamentary internship exchange program between Canada and Poland. This internship will offer young Poles a unique first-hand public service experience in the office of a Canadian lawmaker in order to learn about the Canadian parliamentary system of governance, about Canada and Canadians.

Similarly, Canadian youth will get to experience a one- in-a-lifetime opportunity to work in the Polish parliament.

I would like to thank the membership of the Canada-Poland working group, now the society, for volunteering its time and energy to get this program off the ground. I extend special thanks to our chair, Tony Muszynski; our vice chair, Teresa Berezowski; and members Jerzy Barycki, José Semrau, Ludwik Klimkowski and Danuta Tardif.

I know I can count on all parliamentarians to help work toward building closer political, economic and cultural ties between Canada and Poland.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

EXPORAIL

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Montérégie, October is dedicated to museums. Our museums are going through some tough times, and I would like to point out that Exporail in Saint-Constant is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. This museum has the largest collection of railway equipment in Canada. Through these collections, Canadians can learn about and understand the important role that the railway played in the creation and history of our country.

I would remind the House that a motion was adopted in February 2007 calling on the government to grant this museum national museum status. However, the heritage minister refused to grant this recognition, claiming that he did not want to set a precedent, that is, to create a national museum outside of Ottawa. Nevertheless, he had the nerve to recognize two other museums in the ridings of his Conservative colleagues just a few months later.

It is the duty of this government to correct this injustice and grant Exporail national museum status so that it can ensure the future of its collection.

* * *

[English]

BAY OF FUNDY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

Where the tide rip swirls
And ducks do whirl
And old Neptune calls the numbers

I know that Stan Rogers would agree that the Bay of Fundy
Is one of the world's seven wonders.

Twice a day in the Bay
The low tide leaves ships dry at the dock
And if you venture out to the flats you have to keep an eye on the clock

Because when the tide turns and the water churns...it moves with massive speed
and great power.

When the highest tides in the world flow into the Bay it fills in less than a half
hour.

So we ask all of you who sit in this legislature

To go to myfundy.com and vote for a new seventh wonder of nature.

Again, that is myfundy.com to vote for a piece of Canadian heaven

Or if you wish you can vote on your phone, text FUNDY at 77077

The Bay needs your vote any time any place
You can vote Monday through Sunday

Together we will win the day
Mr. Speaker, please vote for the Bay of Fundy.

● (1410)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members say they listen to Quebecers' opinions, but that is not true. A recent poll by Léger Marketing shows that the majority of Quebecers feel that our justice system focuses too much on rehabilitation and 77% believe that crimes are not being adequately punished. More than 75% of Quebecers would like our justice system to be harsher with adult criminals and nearly half of all Quebecers want harsher sentences for young offenders.

Unlike the opposition, our government is listening to Quebecers and has once again kept its promise by introducing the bill entitled Safe Streets and Communities Act. In the meantime, the opposition continues to claim the contrary. Clearly the NDP is not fit to govern this country. Our Conservative government, as always, is listening and keeping its promises.

* * *

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last weekend I attended a meeting in Serpent River First Nation where stakeholder groups, such as the East Algoma Chiefs, Mayors and Reeves, the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains and Transport Pontiac-Renfrew committed their efforts to saving a critical stretch of rail in eastern Ontario. While CP has started lifting tracks between Pembroke and Smiths Falls, there is still hope to save the line from Pembroke eastward, preserving northeastern Ontario's freight and passenger link to Ottawa, Montreal and the eastern seaboard in the process.

East Algoma Chiefs, Mayors and Reeves passed a resolution in support of saving the Mattawa to Pembroke line and will be contacting other municipalities to encourage them to do the same. Serpent River First Nation Chief Isadore Day has been appointed as its delegate to raise this issue at upcoming municipal meetings on Ontario's northern growth plan.

Trains are an effective transportation option that is important to our economy and quality of life. Trains are also environmentally beneficial.

[Translation]

I encourage this government to work with the many groups involved in order to help preserve this crucial infrastructure and our transportation options.

* * *

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand and tell my constituents that our government has delivered on another one of our commitments to Canadians. Today the Minister of State for Democratic Reform introduced Bill C-20, the Fair Representation Act.

Statements by Members

During the last federal general election, we promised to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair to all the provinces. We committed to increase the number of seats for faster-growing provinces and to protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

This bill is principled and fair and it will move every province closer toward representation by population. I am proud to say that this bill will deliver on our Conservative government's long-standing commitment to Canadians.

* * *

LIBYA

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and commend the outstanding job done by Canada's Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard in Libya. He has given Canadians great cause for pride, not only because he was entrusted by the international community to command NATO's forces in Libya, but also because of his skill in prosecuting the mission.

As we learned throughout the conflict, the Lieutenant-General was rigorous and unwavering in his concern to avoid civilian casualties and to protect innocent people. For this, he garnered the trust of the NATO members and, most importantly, the people of Libya.

Lieutenant-General Bouchard's rigour was matched by the discipline of our air and naval officers. Their contributions to the success of the Libya mission equalled that of the Lieutenant-General in their compassion and concern for the lives of the Libyan people. Hopefully, it will stand as a model for future military interventions.

* * *

• (1415)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to comments the Prime Minister made in Perth today to business leaders from around the Commonwealth. As Europe appears to have reached a plan for dealing with its sovereign debt crisis, the Prime Minister described this crisis as “the most immediate and imminent threat to global recovery”. Our government is cautiously optimistic about these new positive steps from Europe.

Meanwhile, here at home our Conservative government remains focused on the priorities of Canadians, and that is jobs and the economy. Since July 2009, Canada's economy has created over 650,000 new jobs. However, our work is still not done. There are still far too many Canadians out of work. That is why we are implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and its job-creating measures like the hiring credit for small business.

Our low-tax plan for jobs and growth plan is working very well.

* * *

DISTINGUISHED COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the recipients of the Quebec Community Groups Network's 2011 Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award.

This year, three exemplary women, Ms. Joan Ivory, Ms. Gemma Raeburn-Baynes and Ms. Aline Visser, were recognized for their lifetime of selfless service in volunteerism to the cities and regions of Quebec. These distinguished women are a shining example of how anglophone Quebecers have dedicated themselves to the vitality of their communities and the richness of Quebec society.

The award namesakes, Sheila and Victor Goldbloom, have themselves demonstrated their passion for giving for much of their 63 years together. They, and many other anglophone Quebecers who work alongside their dedicated French counterparts, make Quebec the most special and unique part of Canada.

I congratulate these individuals and the QCGN for their tireless work throughout Quebec and their success at building bridges among their neighbours. Their work recognizes the fact that as Québécois and Québécoises, we are all one, and that through their efforts and such dedicated individuals and organizations, we can celebrate the beauty, passion and strength that is Quebec.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the disunited NDP does not agree on much. Those members are all over the map on the Wheat Board, shipbuilding, bilingual judges, and joint nomination meetings with the Liberals, but Canadians can rest assured they are still united on a major issue.

Given the chance, the NDP would raise taxes on all Canadians. Last week senior backroom strategist and big union leadership candidate Brian Topp called for higher taxes on the wealthy.

This week the NDP interim leader clarified who the NDP think are wealthy when she proposed raising taxes on so-called wealthy Canadians with tax-free savings accounts, 6.7 million Canadians of whom more than 80% are in the lowest two income brackets.

The NDP wants to hike taxes on all Canadians and opposes Canadians who save their hard-earned money.

The NDP's opposition to Canadians saving their hard-earned money is yet another worrying example that the NDP is not fit to govern.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD**

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister has time, I suggest he tour the Australian wheat board. This once-proud single desk marketer benefited family farmers for decades before a reckless conservative government dismantled it. How did that work out? Wheat growers lost leverage, countless family farms failed, and the defunct board was sold off to an offshore big agri company.

Why is the government repeating that failed experiment?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is we are focused on the Canadian Wheat Board.

The truth of the matter is, Canadian wheat growers for years have sought freedom to market their own product.

It is unfortunate that the NDP is trying to use undemocratic measures, dirty tricks and intimidation.

What western wheat farmers want is freedom. That is what they will get with the Conservative government.

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*[Translation]***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly of Quebec has supported the firearms registry on more than one occasion. Today, we have learned that Quebec opposes the Conservatives' plan to destroy the data. The National Assembly is saying "no" to this government because the police need this information to keep our communities safe. That is what the police want and that is what the Government of Quebec and the provinces want.

Why is this government going to war against the police and the provinces?

• (1420)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the requirements for obtaining a firearm licence, including a criminal background check, are still in place. The long gun registry was costly and useless and did not protect Canadians. That is the reality. That is why our government is finished with the firearms registry.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the police and the provinces are saying. The homicide rate in Canada is the lowest it has been in 45 years, mainly as a result of fewer gun-related deaths. It is important to note that this decline is related in part to the firearms registry, which is consulted by police 17,000 times a day. The elimination of the registry is a problem, but the destruction of the data is even worse.

Why prevent the police and the provinces from accessing the data currently found in the firearms registry?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The bill also provides for the elimination of inaccurate and unreliable data. This situation is only getting worse

with time. The police are entitled to their opinion, but the reality is that this registry does not work.

[English]

We have seen there is no connection with the lowering of crime rates; the lowering of these statistics has no correlation with gun registration.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear from that answer the government does not have one good reason for blocking the provinces from protecting their citizens. It is not just provinces that find the government reckless; it is also law enforcement. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police says that the complete loss of the firearms database would severely reduce the ability of police to trace guns in this country.

Why is the government, in face of overwhelming evidence and opposition, moving forward with this reckless anti-police agenda and destroying life-saving data?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the front-line officers have spoken very clearly on this matter. They recognize the mandate our government has received from the Canadian people and they are quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made on behalf of front-line police officers.

What they are asking that member and his party to do is to support Bill C-10, which contains measures that in fact are targeted against criminals and those who would abuse Canadian victims.

It is time the member stopped picking on farmers and sport shooters and hunters and started standing up for victims.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's reckless move is already creating chaos, stripping a life-saving tool that is used 17,000 times a day by police. Provinces are already saying they will not comply. There is mounting opposition from police, mounting opposition from provinces.

Why does the government not recognize the mounting opposition, transfer the data to the provinces and, as have the police have asked, to the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre? What does the government have against our police forces?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the figure he just mentioned is misleading. In fact, if he actually wants to hear from a government that believes the long gun registry accomplishes nothing, he should go to the provincial NDP in Manitoba which said that it does not care about the data destruction because it does not support the long gun registry because it is not effective.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the spokesman for the government could indicate clearly whether the Prime Minister will be telling his colleagues in Perth at the Commonwealth conference that as far as Canada is concerned, human rights include gay rights and the Prime Minister will be using precisely that language to describe the situation.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly assure the questioner from the Liberal Party that on every occasion that the Prime Minister engages on the international scene, particularly on occasions where he is speaking with other leaders as he is doing in Perth, the issue of human rights is always there. The issue of human rights is something closely associated with our country and with our government. It is something we are very proud to put forward both internationally and here at home.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence still does not appear to be able to use the word “gay”. That is the question I am asking and that is what I am relating to. I would like—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence regarding Sri Lanka. Apparently the Prime Minister is going to be taking a position with respect to the human rights record of the Government of Sri Lanka. The government opposite has not always been consistent on this question. With respect to the situation in Sri Lanka, as the minister is being prompted by his colleague next to him, I would ask him very directly, can he tell us that it is the position of the Government of Canada that there need to be minimum standards for membership in the Commonwealth?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary of what the interim leader has just said, the reality is the Prime Minister has been crystal clear on the international scene. He has made statements definitively with respect to Sri Lanka and our desire to see that country reconcile the very appalling human rights record we have seen over the last number of years.

That is a situation the Prime Minister will address at the Commonwealth. That is a situation on which the Prime Minister has already very firmly advanced a position.

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[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is twice now that the Minister of National Defence has not answered my questions directly. I will give him a third chance.

With respect to the selection of the Auditor General, yesterday his colleague said that they had chosen this candidate for the position because he was the most meritorious, despite the fact that the government itself insisted that the candidate should be bilingual.

Is the position of the government that there was no candidate who was both meritorious and bilingual?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, our government's position was very clear. The government looked for bilingual candidates. After an exhaustive process, the most meritorious candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson is

an extraordinary person. He wants to learn French and has already started taking lessons.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the government was embarking on an almost half a billion dollar offer on a new satellite system. The program is already delayed and wildly over budget in the U.S.

Could the minister confirm that he is going ahead with the Canadian version of this program anyway, and in terms of transparency and accountability, why is this the first that Canadians are hearing about it?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our efforts in Afghanistan and Libya have proven that the ability to exchange information between headquarters and deployed elements is critical to the success of modern military operations. This government intends to meet this requirement while ensuring the best value for taxpayer money. As such, we have sought an agreement with our allies that provides the Canadian Forces with access to an international constellation of satellites.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister will appreciate that Canadians are nervous about the government getting us into yet another big, expensive, sole-sourced boondoggle: the Chinooks, the F-35s, the Cyclones.

We have been here before and it has cost taxpayers billions of dollars, and this sure looks like another boondoggle in the making.

What will the minister do differently this time to make sure that it does not happen again?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, space continues to be an important part of the global security environment. The Canadian Forces space-related activities are an essential component of a robust defence for Canada and North America, wherein are the F-35s and the other assets that we are providing for our men and women in uniform to do their work, and also to maintain Canada's sovereignty.

● (1430)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past week the Minister of National Defence has refused to say whether any bases will be closed as a result of Conservative cuts. He even claimed the whole story was made up by the opposition, despite the fact there is a directive from his department saying this is so.

My riding is home to CFB Esquimalt, and people want to know how far these cuts will go? Will the minister stand in the House today and assure the sailors and families at CFB Esquimalt that support for our Pacific fleet will not be cut?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca that CFB Esquimalt is a very important base for the Canadian Forces, for the Royal Canadian Navy.

Oral Questions

With respect to his question, he would know that this memorandum, this directive, he is referring to makes no reference whatsoever to base closures.

I repeat to him, as I said to his friend from Hamilton, that the only people talking about closure of bases are members of the NDP and one Liberal senator.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Corporal Stuart Langridge was found dead in his barracks. He had suffered from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

After three flawed investigations, the Langridge family is now facing huge legal bills as high as \$200,000 in their attempt to find out why DND failed their son.

Will the Minister of National Defence comply with the recommendation of the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, do the right thing, and help this family with their legal bills?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly, our sympathies go out to the Fynes family, and the death of Corporal Langridge was indeed a tragedy.

With respect to the Military Police Complaints Commission that is looking into this matter, it has announced that it will hold a public interest hearing into the investigation related to the death of Corporal Langridge.

I think the hon. member would agree it would be inappropriate to comment on a process that is now in place with regard to the recommendation that the Fynes family be funded for their representation on the public interest hearing. Again, it would be inappropriate to comment at this time.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth is at the crossroads with respect to human rights. The next meeting is scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka, where the United Nations has confirmed that there are credible allegations of atrocities committed during and after the war. The Commonwealth must not condone this.

Will the Conservatives show leadership and ensure that the next Commonwealth meeting does not take place in Sri Lanka unless it accepts an independent UN investigation of alleged war crimes?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has spoken out very loudly and clearly on this important issue of human rights. He has certainly relayed the Government of Canada's position to both the high commissioner and directly to the minister of foreign affairs of Sri Lanka, as well as his counterpart in Sri Lanka.

Canada will continue to speak loudly and clearly on behalf of human rights around the world, and especially Sri Lanka.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the Commonwealth meeting in Australia, the Canadian government must take a firm stance against impunity. However, a

unilateral boycott of the next meeting in Sri Lanka is far from enough. Instead of isolating itself, Canada must be a leader within the Commonwealth.

What initiatives will this government take to ensure that other countries agree to hold the meeting elsewhere, unless Sri Lanka agrees to an independent investigation of alleged war crimes?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada's position is very clear. The Prime Minister has stated it, and he has stated it very clearly in Perth, Australia, at the Commonwealth Conference.

He has said he would like to see Sri Lanka move forward to address the allegations of human rights abuses. If there is no credible movement toward addressing that issue, he will then rethink his attendance at the next Commonwealth Conference in Sri Lanka.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has taken any opportunity he can to criticize Europe for its inaction on the economy. The truth is, Europe is acting.

However, despite the fact that the Governor of the Bank of Canada says our economy "is slowing to a crawl", this out-of-touch Conservative government refuses to act now and create jobs in Canada. Canadians are tired of the government's continued inaction.

We believe in action on this side of the House. We put forward a plan. When will the government finally implement our plan to create jobs and kickstart the Canadian economy?

●(1435)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is quite an action plan, standing and voting against anything that the government puts forward that actually will help create jobs. Canadians should be very fearful if that is the action plan from the NDP.

We have continued with a plan, a jobs and growth plan from the government. It is working. In fact, so are nearly 650,000 more Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that everything is going well, but the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, who has a bit more credibility, said this week that the Canadian economy was weakening considerably. The government is not taking action to stimulate job creation. In the meantime, other countries are taking action. It takes hard work. Canadian families have seen enough inaction from this government. It is as simple as that.

When will the government get to work to ensure that people have jobs?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I forgot the other component of the NDP plan, and that is to tax Canadians by another \$10 billion. We do not think that is a good plan. It was in the NDP platform that it campaigned on.

I think that is why we have a majority Conservative government: because Canadians expect a plan that will help Canadians get back to work, that will help balance the deficit, and that will help all Canadians. That is what we are going to do.

We hope that the NDP might see the error of its ways and actually support us on that.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada's Dartmouth office is slashing 18 to 43 staff, devastating vital research on toxic substances, having the impact of axing studies on important environmental impacts of salmon farms and on poisonous mercury fallout from U.S. coal-fired power plants.

Our environment cannot stand the government's death by a thousand cuts. When will the minister stop sending these skilled workers to the unemployment line and start doing his job of protecting our environment?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every assumption in my hon. colleague's question is absolutely and totally wrong.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is taking boutique tax credits to a whole new level.

Millions of lower-income Canadians want their children to play hockey or take piano lessons, or would like to volunteer as firefighters. Under this government, millions of lower-income Canadians, who do not earn enough to pay taxes, will not get the tax credit.

Why is the government leaving lower-income families out in the cold with their noses pressed to the window looking in?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure why that hon. member would ask for more tax credits for Canadians, because every time we put that forward the Liberals vote against it, including, as we just saw, the firefighters. They actually voted against a tax credit for volunteer firefighters.

The other thing they voted against, which I still cannot quite understand, is an increase in the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, the largest increase in GIS that we have seen in 25 years. They voted against it.

Oral Questions

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is not to the minister but to the chair of the veterans affairs committee.

Public hearings about the cuts at the Veterans Affairs department were terminated today, cancelled without hearing from one veteran, the ombudsman, or even the Royal Canadian Legion.

Veterans fought and paid the ultimate sacrifice for the right and freedom to be heard, and to be heard in public. Secret meetings to avoid accountability are anti-democratic and a slap in the face to veterans.

Why the secrecy?

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know a chair must be fair and neutral, but the bizarre behaviour of this member forces me to answer with what he has been trying to do in the last number of days.

Our committee has been looking very carefully at the accusations he made about great cutbacks and loss of opportunity for veterans. That was proven by the witnesses to be absolutely wrong. Our government has made major commitments to veterans and will continue to do so because it is so important.

The fact that the member continues to disrupt the committee is something he has to look within himself for. The committee membership—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

* * *

•(1440)

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government claims to defend—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the government claims to defend victims and taxpayers. We have heard it all before. However, it is clear that it is turning its back on victims by eliminating the firearms registry.

Victims themselves are saying this, and they have the support of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. But the government does not care about taxpayers either, including Quebecers who paid their fair share for collecting the data contained in the registry, data requested by Quebec's National Assembly.

Why is there so much contempt for the rights of taxpayers in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we made a very clear, very specific campaign commitment to destroy the registry. The registry is made up of data and information. We will be destroying the information because the information is the registry. We will fulfill our campaign promise and will continue to fight crime so that our streets are safer for Canadians. I invite the NDP to join us and vote in favour of these bills.

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[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has audited all federal government operations in English and French. Would our previous Auditor General have been able to uncover the Liberals' sponsorship scandal if she were not bilingual, a scandal that rocked Canadian politics?

The government's own rules are clear: the AG must be bilingual. Why did the government propose a unilingual candidate? Why is the government breaking its own rules?

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague already mentioned, the government sought bilingual candidates. Upon completion of a rigorous process, the most qualified candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson wants to learn French and is already taking courses.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he spent four years in New Brunswick and never learned French. The government has chosen a unilingual person to serve as Auditor General and has the nerve to say that the decision was based on merit.

The position description in the *Canada Gazette* clearly stated, and I quote: "Proficiency in both official languages is essential." The criteria are clear.

Why is the government ignoring the criteria established for an officer of Parliament? Why this slap in the face for francophones? What will the government—

[English]

The Speaker: Order. There was far too much noise from other hon. colleagues during that question.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board has the floor.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the interim New Brunswick Liberal leader, Victor Boudreau:

—what Mike Ferguson will face in Ottawa as opposed to Fredericton will be simply a few extra zeroes at the end of the numbers. The same skills and the same types of experience will count in both jobs. And Mike certainly knows all about bureaucracy and government financial systems.

We agree with that comment too.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously condemned the appointment of a unilingual Auditor General. The disrespect shown to francophones in Quebec and throughout Canada is even greater because this government's own requirement was that candidates be bilingual. Quebecers and Canadians are wondering how a unilingual candidate could have been appointed, given that bilingualism was one of the prerequisites.

What were the real criteria used to choose the new auditor general?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we said, Mr. Ferguson will learn French and he was the most qualified candidate.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the idea that in this country there is not one bilingual anglophone or one bilingual francophone capable of doing the job is an insult.

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne is also outraged by the appointment of an Auditor General who does not speak French. This decision was made barely one week after a unilingual judge was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The message that this government is sending to francophones in this country is clear: they are not part of the equation.

Are we to understand that the government is giving up on Canada's linguistic duality?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): That is completely untrue, Mr. Speaker. This government in the previous Parliament led the way with a brand new initiative for linguistic duality in this country. We are very proud of that report. We are proud to have initiated that and to implement that report.

Mr. Ferguson is the most qualified candidate, and we have said that he is already learning French. He will do an excellent job. We encourage members on the opposite side to support him as well.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians living in our fastest growing provinces and cities have become significantly under-represented due to population growth and an out-of-date seat allocation formula.

Under the current rules, a majority of Canadians will not only remain but becoming increasingly under-represented. This representation gap must be addressed.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform update the House on the steps our government is taking to provide fair representation to Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I introduced Bill C-20, the fair representation act. The bill would deliver a principled and reasonable update to our seat allocation formula, providing fair representation for Canadians living in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. It delivers on our commitment to maintain the seat counts of smaller provinces and ensure that Quebec is proportionately represented.

Canadians rightly expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. The fair representation act would deliver on this expectation.

I strongly encourage the opposition to work with us in passing this principled and reasonable legislation.

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INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Edmontonians are stunned and angered at the government's sudden eleventh-hour backtracking from the new Royal Alberta Museum.

With no explanation, the government again pulled the rug out from under Alberta's capital city to the tune of \$92 million. The project is shovel ready. Millions have already been spent by the province and city.

Would the Conservatives explain why they left Edmonton out in the cold again?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that no funding has been withdrawn from this project by the federal government. We committed \$30 million to this project. It was announced the day the project was announced. We are still committed to that funding. We have not withdrawn any funding from this project.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the \$30 million was promised by the previous government.

The Minister of Public Works expressed concern that a provincial Alberta minister went public on her decision to withdraw support for this important project. She called him a rookie.

The Conservative government committed money to Alberta under the building Canada fund.

Do any other Edmonton MPs share my concern? Will any of them stand up for Edmonton and demand this funding be restored?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the funding that the member is speaking of was never allocated. Our commitment was for \$30 million and it stands. We are not withdrawing those funds from the project. We cannot withdraw funds that we have never given.

I will explain for the member that out of the \$30 million, the Government of Alberta has only accessed \$10 million, so there is still \$20 million there for it to access immediately should it be needed for the project today.

[*Translation*]

MUSEUMS

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government brags about its efforts to acknowledge the War of 1812, but in the meantime, our museums and our history are in jeopardy. The Canadian Museum of Civilization had to lay off a number of its historical interpreters as well as support staff because of the government's cuts.

When will this government realize that our museums are integral to culture?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. In the global economic crisis, which began in 2008, Canada—our government—was the only government in the G8 to make one key decision: it did not cut or maintain its investment in culture, but increased it. That is our heritage. We have made investments and will continue to make the targeted and significant investments our culture needs.

• (1450)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maintaining services with fewer resources is another fine contradiction of this government. Our museums are the latest victims of these major cuts. They are the guardians of our collective history, in addition to being a significant driver for the tourism industry and our economy in general. The Conservatives are in the process of putting our cultural reputation at risk.

When will this government stop making cuts to arts and culture?

[*English*]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in both questions, my hon. colleague mentioned the issue of museums. Our government is the first government in Canadian history to create a national museum outside of the national capital at Pier 21 in Halifax. We also created the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. We passed the legislation. We provided the funding for it. The Liberals talked about it, but we delivered.

When it comes to museums, we have offered more support for small museums than ever before. We are the government that is delivering for culture in a fiscally responsible way that serves the interests of both culture and everyday taxpayers.

They promised the Canadian Museum of Human Rights; we delivered it. They are all talk; we acted.

*Oral Questions***CANADIAN AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last September, a crown corporation evicted the Canadian Air and Space Museum. While the volunteer-run museum showed its good faith and developed a viable plan to meet its financial obligations, the reason stated for eviction was for non-payment of rent. However, other tenants who were evicted at the same time were told that they had to go so that Downsview Park could implement its vision.

Would the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tell us what this vision is that will lead to the closure of a museum that has proudly preserved Canada's aviation history?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in a similar question from a member of the NDP on this very subject, even though it is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum, the fact is that it is a private museum with a private collection. It is not owned by the Government of Canada. By the way, this is an organization that had a fundraising campaign that was not nearly as successful as it had hoped it would be. It has not had the number of visitors it had hoped it would have.

However, I have instructed Mark O'Neill, the president of the Museum of Civilization, to reach out to this museum to talk and work with it about the collection it has and see if there is something we can do to preserve the collection.

The decision made by Downsview is an independent decision that was made in the best interests of taxpayers. I am sorry the Liberals do not agree with that.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are huge areas of open space that house this museum. Downsview Park has chosen to destroy these heritage buildings, which once was home to de Havilland Canada, in order to build a hockey rink.

If the government truly cares about heritage and military history, as the minister is indicating, then what is he doing to save, not only the artifacts, but also these historic buildings that are important to the people of Toronto and to all Canadians?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly recognize the importance of the collection, which is why I have taken the action I have described in the first question. I do not doubt my hon. colleague's sincerity. What I do disagree with though is the this or that proposal.

We can have strong, fantastic, brilliant national museums that protect our heritage, and we are doing that. At the same time, however, Downsview Park has a responsibility to do what is in the best interests of taxpayers, and that is what it is doing.

If the idea is that we cannot have a sports complex, new rinks or support sports and at the same time protect the collection of this museum, I think we can do both. I think we will do both, and we will do so responsibly for taxpayers.

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G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Muskoka minister said that if he were caught setting up a parallel

process that kept the Auditor General in the dark that he would turn himself over to the cops.

Local mayors were told that all projects would be vetted by civil servants, but he broke that promise and set up a parallel process run by the three amigos: the mayor, the hotel manager and the minister. He then hid the documents in the office, which meant that the Auditor General was left in the dark.

When will he do the right thing and check himself into the old crowbar hotel?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts have not changed. As a great Canadian once said, "the facts have not changed". They have not changed since yesterday and they will not change tomorrow. The minister of infrastructure made the decision. The Auditor General has thoroughly reviewed it. We know where every dollar went.

Now, while the facts have not changed, that member's position has changed. He has broken his promise. By standing up and talking about broken promises today, he now appoints himself the House's high priest of hypocrisy. Why does he not stand in his place and apologize for breaking his word to his constituents?

• (1455)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am hurt because I think we all know what we are really dealing with here, which is the wasteful, inefficient and ineffective President of the Treasury Board.

After 140 days of dodging the facts, the facts have indeed not changed, because the infrastructure minister did not choose the projects. He rubber-stamped the list that was handed to him by the Muskoka maverick. The reason he cannot get up now is that if he stands up, he is busted for explaining why his fingerprints are all over the file.

Will he stop hiding behind the backbench, get up and be accountable to Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former minister of infrastructure has been clear. He approved all of the projects, 32 of them. We know what they are. If the hon. member would like to go to the website for Infrastructure Canada, he could review those projects himself. Every dollar is now accounted for. The projects came in either on or under budget.

That cannot be said about the \$2 billion Liberal long gun registry, against which that member fought for years in his effort to be re-elected in his riding.

Will he now be consistent with the position that he has always taken and announce that he will vote for scrapping the long gun registry?

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in many parts of the world, the rights, the safety and even the lives of girls and women are threatened by violence that has its source in perverse and distorted notions of honour.

Regrettably, Canada has not been immune from such abuses.

Therefore, I ask the Minister for Status of Women to advise the House as to what the government is doing in response to this domestic threat.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, honour-motivated crimes are nothing more than cruel acts of violence. Over a year ago, I called on community and religious leaders to outright condemn these acts of violence.

I also asked women and girls who experienced this violence and intimidation to please speak out. We have held round tables, we have done outreach, and it has resulted in the funding of a project by the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, called the "Elimination of Harmful Cultural Practices". This initiative will empower girls and women and engage community organizations, the legal community and law enforcement to better respond to the issues of abusive cultural practices.

Our government continues to ask girls who are intimidated by this kind of violence to please speak out.

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INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Prime Minister is once again giving the people of Edmonton the back of his hand.

First, there was the broken promise on the portrait gallery, then the Conservatives denied funding for the Edmonton folk music festival and then they failed to back Edmonton's bid to host the World Expo.

The Conservatives have no trouble finding 50 million bucks to build gazebos in Muskoka, but when it comes to funding Edmonton's Royal Alberta Museum, it appears they are weaseling out of their previous commitment.

Why does the government continue to show such disrespect for the capital of the province of Alberta?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should just correct the record. Our government has been proud to support the Edmonton folk music festival with funding. Again, I reiterate that our government has not withdrawn any funding from this project.

We committed \$30 million to the Royal Alberta Museum. We are very proud to do that. That funding commitment stands and we have not withdrawn that funding.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the transition to digital signals remains problematic for thousands of Canadians, including many people in my riding of Rivière-du-Nord. Thousands of households, many of them among the poorest, are getting fewer channels than before, even with a digital converter paid for out of their own pockets. In some regions of the country, Canadians cannot even get the CBC, even though it is our public broadcaster.

Do Canadians now have to pay to watch the CBC? Is this the government's logic: no money, no *National*? What does the government plan to do to correct the situation?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the transition is being done independently by the CRTC, as my colleague must know. The CRTC worked with our government and with the CBC to ensure that taxpayers who pay out of their own pockets could continue receiving CBC programming. The process will continue next year. It is ongoing. We are aware of the concerns expressed by the member, but this process is definitely an improvement.

* * *

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a long history as a country whose extractive industries have contributed to Canada's prosperity and economic growth.

We know that many developing countries are rich in natural resources but do not have the capacity to manage these resources to benefit their people and help lift them out of poverty.

In the last Parliament, the Liberals introduced an ill-conceived corporate social responsibility bill that would have punished the mining sector.

What is our government doing to help these countries ensure their natural resources ultimately contribute to economic growth and benefit their local population, including those living in poverty?

● (1500)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada can help developing countries rich in resources to also realize strong economic growth to benefit their people.

This morning, our Prime Minister made a significant announcement: the creation of the Canadian international institute for the extractive industries and development. The institute would help developing countries harness and manage their resources to generate a strong, sustainable economy and, thereby, reduce poverty.

This builds on our government's commitment to make a real difference in the lives of the poor—

Business of the House

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. [Translation]

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans made a recommendation for the government to create a task force to look into the management of the snow crab fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We know that the Conservatives are not the best at taking advice. If they were, they would be examining the management of the fishery as a whole. That is fair enough. Perhaps we could look at one fishery problem at a time.

Will the Conservatives listen to the committee and create a task force to look into the management of the snow crab fishery?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member should know, this was a record year for Atlantic snow crab prices. I congratulate the fleets on a successful season. The long-term economic prosperity of the snow crab industry is my priority and the priority of my department. We are committed to ensuring that snow crab stocks are managed sustainably and we will work in close collaboration with the industry.

* * *

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are ignoring Quebec's requests by introducing a bill that will diminish the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons.

By so doing, they are deliberately ignoring the unanimous resolution of the National Assembly that, as a nation, Quebec must be able to enjoy special protection for its political weight.

Does the Prime Minister understand that if he goes ahead with this bill, which has been unanimously rejected in Quebec, he will prove that his government's recognition of the Quebec nation was simply a ruse to hide his indifference toward Quebec?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have resolved some very important issues with the Quebec nation, for example, the Old Harry deposit and the harmonization of the GST and the QST.

That being said, our position on representation in the House of Commons has been clear for a long time. We made a clear commitment and we are going to keep it. Under our fair, reasonable and principle-based bill, Quebec's representation will correspond to its population. This bill will move every Canadian province toward representation by population.

[English]

The Speaker: I understand the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has the usual Thursday question.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to ask the Thursday question. However, I am less pleased to see the government once again showing its undemocratic tendency by using the Standing Orders to restrict debate here in the House.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the rules are here to guide all of us. They have to be used judiciously and that is not what is happening.

This will be the fifth time in 38 sitting days that a time allocation motion has been imposed. That is coming close to setting the same record that the Liberals set, which was heavily criticized by the current Prime Minister when he was sitting on this side of the House. The Conservatives are well ahead of the record that was set by the Liberals back in 2002. They will match it over the next few weeks at the rate they are going.

Perhaps the government House leader could tell the House exactly what formula he is using to determine what is enough debate, because we heard that from him and the Minister of Public Safety yesterday and again this morning.

We have had extreme limitations imposed on the ability to start the debate on this side of the House before it is cut off by a time allocation motion from the government. I could go through those, but I will not use up the time today.

We did not even have the opportunity to commence debate on the bill that is before the House today. Before our justice and public safety critic could stand on his feet, the government moved a time allocation motion. That is the kind of abuse we are seeing. We have not had a lot of debate on the bill, which has new provisions with regard to destroying records. We had two hours of debate on the long gun registry in the last Parliament, but it was a different bill because those provisions were not in it.

I ask the government House leader, how soon will he be moving a motion for time allocation on Bill C-20, which was tabled today? How much time will we be given? We on this side of the House want to know what the government considers a reasonable amount of time for debate. Perhaps I should put it this way: how little debate does the government think is reasonable before it slams the door shut and does not allow us meaningful democratic debate in this country?

Government Orders

● (1505)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issues we have been discussing in the House of Commons through this fall, for which we have brought in time allocation motions to clarify how long the debate will last, are issues that have been discussed at length over the past five or six years. They are issues that have been debated at length in elections. They are issues that we have made commitments to Canadians on in the last election. Canadians responded to those commitments by giving us a majority and asking us to deliver on those commitments. Those issues have been debated in the public forum, the most extensive and important forum possible, where Canadians pass judgment and ask us to deliver on our commitments. The government is doing what it said it would do and will continue to do that.

My approach with regard to time allocation is to move a motion as early as possible so that everyone is clear how much time will be available for debate. It is not to bring a motion at the very last hour to suddenly end debate. Rather, it is to allow people to plan for the debate.

When people at home are listening, they think that the concept of four days of debate is a lot of time, as in the case we are dealing with. In their workplace most people do not debate an issue for four days before they decide what to do. They debate it and they make a decision. In this case, there is enough time to make a very clear decision on an important question.

With regard to our agenda, next week will be democratic reform week in the House. We will focus on measures aimed at integrity and accountability, which the Conservatives committed to during the last election. The cornerstone bill will be the fair representation act, which was introduced earlier today. This important bill fulfills our government's long-standing commitment to move closer to representation by population in the House of Commons. It is a principle as old as the country, and at the core of the original drafting of our country's founding documents by Sir John A. Macdonald.

[Translation]

With that in mind, I have scheduled debate for this bill to begin next Wednesday and to continue on Thursday, after the opposition caucuses have had a chance to consider the bill. I trust that all parties will see that this is a good bill, and that they will support it. I look forward to this debate.

I am also looking forward to the introduction of other legislation on democratic reform next week, and perhaps some other measures. I hope that there will even be time to continue debate on the Senate reform bill at some point next week.

[English]

Before we get to Wednesday, we will continue to debate the ending the long gun registry bill this afternoon and tomorrow. The fourth day of debate will occur on Tuesday.

Key to integrity and accountability is the principle that a government should keep its commitments by repealing the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We are doing what we said we would do. We are keeping our commitments to Canadians.

[Translation]

Finally, next Monday will be the fourth allotted day.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the government House leader did not answer my question as to when he will move a motion for time allocation.

Can I conclude from what the government House leader said that we will only get one day of debate on the seat redistribution bill? That sounds like that is what he will do, move to the reform of the Senate bill after one day of debate on the seat redistribution bill. I would ask him to confirm that.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to confirm that is not the case. I apologize if I was not clear. I said in French that we will be debating the seat redistribution bill on Wednesday and we have also planned to debate it on Thursday of next week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has 11 minutes left.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I was in the midst of my address to the House before we broke for question period, I was discussing the costs of the ongoing operation of the gun registry and saying that after all the years I have spent on this file and all of the information we have received, I was quite prepared to rely on the credibility of the RCMP and the figure its officials gave us, which was \$4 million for the ongoing cost of the operation of the long gun registry. The handgun registry, the prohibited weapons registry and the licensing are of course additional costs above and beyond that, but that was the figure the RCMP gave us, and I accepted that figure.

While I am talking about the RCMP, I want to raise another issue: the effectiveness of the long gun registry. Quite frankly, I was disturbed today when I was listening to members from the government side claiming that it was totally ineffective, in particular the member who said that he was a former RCMP officer and that he believed the same thing.

That brought back to my mind the use of the long gun registry in the Mayerthorpe incident, an incident that stands as a historical tragedy in this country. We had not lost four RCMP officers in one event at any time in our history. While conducting military operations in the 1800s, the RCMP lost more officers in one battle, but this was the first time in the history of the country in over 140 years that we had four RCMP officers murdered in one event.

Government Orders

The perpetrator of that crime killed himself in the same incident, but we knew that he could not have committed the crime without assistance from at least one other person and perhaps more. It took the better part of a year and a half before officers were able to identify those two other men who had assisted him. They broke that case. The investigation was finally successful because they were able to use the long gun registry and were able to identify the owners of one of the guns used in those murders.

There is no recognition on the part of the government and the Conservative members of that fact. That is one example of our police forces across the country using the long gun registry in an investigation to identify culprits, bring them to trial, and ultimately achieve convictions and sentences.

Conservatives refuse to acknowledge that, and that is a scandal if one believes, as I do, in the important role that the RCMP has played historically in our country and the crucial role that our police officers play in protecting us.

That is what this registry is about. It is about protecting our police officers. It is about protecting our society as a whole. Is it perfect? Believe me, I know the failures of the system, but it is a tool that can be used and is used repeatedly by our police officers.

Conservatives stand in the House on a regular basis and accuse members of the opposition of making up facts and creating an atmosphere that is totally away from reality, but the reality is that the vast majority of police officers in this country support the use of the gun registry once they are trained in using it.

In the last round, when we were fighting the private member's bill on the same topic, out of hundreds of police chiefs, only three could be identified by the Conservative Party and their cohorts as being opposed to the registry. All the other police chiefs in this country were in favour of keeping it, because they knew—not believed, but knew—that it protected their officers.

● (1515)

Is it perfect? No, it is not perfect. Would it prevent every single police officer from facing a gun attack? No, it would not; it would be absolutely naive to think so. However, that is the standard that the Conservatives have set: if it does not work every single time, then we should get rid of it.

If it saves 10% of the lives of police officers, it is worth keeping. If it saves one life, is it not worth keeping? Is \$4 million a year not worth spending, if we save one police officer's life? It is my absolute belief that it saves a lot more lives than that.

When the Conservatives stand up in the House and when they go across the country to talk to people, they never talk about Mayerthorpe—never. They refuse to talk about police chiefs, other than every so often, as we saw with some of the proponents of the private members' bills, denigrating our police chiefs and accusing them of conflict of interest. Such accusations are imaginary at best and perhaps paranoid at worst. They are grossly unfair to the role our police chiefs play in protecting our society and protecting their own officers. Quite frankly, those accusations made against our police chiefs were shameful.

With regard to the cost of dismantling the registry, I want to repeat that the Conservatives do not have any idea of what it would cost to dismantle it.

When we look at the reality, we see that the Province of Quebec has now come forward to say very clearly that it will take it on. If the federal government will not take on the responsibility it has to protect members of society in Quebec, the Province of Quebec has said that it will do it. The Province of Ontario is giving serious consideration to doing the same thing. I believe that in B.C. our party, the NDP, is thinking the same thing. After the next election we hope the NDP will be in government and will take on the responsibility if the bill passes.

If that happens in all three cases in those three provinces, it would represent more than 75% of the population of this country. The governments representing them are saying they want to keep the registry. They know it works. They know it protects their citizens.

I want to touch on facts, not emotion. In the period of time the registry has been in place, these are facts: there was a 30% reduction in domestic violence involving long guns, roughly a 10% to 15% reduction in suicides by long guns, and a more than 10% reduction in the number of accidents from long guns, whose victims were mostly children under the age of 14.

That is why the medical associations have come out so strongly in favour of supporting the registry: it is because they saw that guns owned by people who should never have owned a gun were being taken out of circulation over the years. These people were not the regular hunters or farmers who use them responsibly, but people who did not handle them properly, did not store them properly or did not transport them properly. I suppose only the divine knows why they bought the guns in the first place. When we heard of the accident, the suicide or the violent crime, very many of those times it involved a gun that had not been properly stored or taken care of by someone who should never have owned a gun.

● (1520)

I have great sympathy for the argument the Conservatives make with regard to responsible actions by long gun owners. The vast majority of them are law-abiding citizens, as they say so often. When I talk to them, a majority say that they understand why the registry is here. They say it is because of those other people, the people who did not handle guns properly and put this country in a mess.

At the end of the day, if we are serious about performing our fundamental responsibility as members of Parliament to protect our citizens, this bill should be voted down.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for his comments, but I am shocked and dismayed that he would cite Mayerthorpe as an example of the success of the long gun registry. He challenged members on this side of the House to talk about Mayerthorpe, and I am going to talk about it.

Government Orders

Mayerthorpe is an example of the failure of the long gun registry, because four brave Mounties died that day and the long gun registry did nothing to protect them. In testimony to the public safety committee when the private member's bill from the member for Portage—Lisgar was before the committee, police officers admitted to me that because the long gun registry is so inherently inaccurate, they cannot rely on it when they go into a situation, and it is inaccurate because criminals such as Mr. Roszko do not register their guns.

How can the member stand up and cite Mayerthorpe as a success of the long gun registry when four brave Mounties died that day?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member is pointing to selective evidence in that committee. When I questioned the people who came before it and gave that kind of evidence—not with regard to Mayerthorpe, which I will come to in a minute, but with regard to its not being effective—repeatedly it was quite clear that they never used the system.

I remember one officer from a community in the west that I will not identify. I was shocked at the police officer's ignorance of the system. He did not have any idea of what the system was like. He had not used it in 10 years. A bunch of training has been done by the RCMP over the last two to three years, and as police officers were trained on how to use the system properly, it was being used much more. Every time the trainers went into a city to do the training, police officers would take the training and the usage of the registry would go up dramatically and effectively.

Coming back to Mayerthorpe, the reality is that we would never have caught those two associates had it not been for the long gun registry. It is true. The investigators were completely stymied until they were able, through the registry, to identify the owner of one of those guns. The two people who were then subsequently accused of aiding and abetting in those murders were primarily convicted because of it. That is the reality.

I have one final point. The police knew Roszko had guns. Had they been enforcing that, the crime might never have happened.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the hearings were being held, I made it a point to get to as many as I could in order to take in the information first-hand. It escapes me how, through the course of those hearings, anybody could say there was no value in the registry or no point in maintaining it, because witness after witness indicated how it does provide a great deal of pertinent information in many cases.

The Conservatives continue to hide behind statements like “This won't solve gangland killings”. It was never purported to solve that kind of crime, but there are so many other areas. Given the domestic violence and suicides in this country, I am at a loss as to why the Conservatives want to take this useful bank of reference information and cast it aside. I know my colleague sat in on many of those discussions. Would he share that same opinion? I am just at a loss as to why they would want to flush this information that has been compiled.

• (1525)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the east coast is absolutely right. There is no logical, reasonable explanation whatsoever as to why we would get rid of all this data.

From a purely partisan standpoint, I understand their fear, because they know very well that after the next federal election, the likelihood is that they are not going to be on that side of the House and we are. If the database still existed at that point, it would be a lot easier to reinstate it, so that as a government, the NDP could provide a sense of security and guarantee, as much as it could, that it would do the utmost to protect our citizens from violent crimes. The only rational reason they would want to get rid of it would be that they are afraid of the outcome of the next federal election.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today, as a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to remind the member that the Conservative Party has 11 members who were former members of police forces across the country, many of whom attended the funeral in Mayerthorpe in full uniform.

Could the member please tell us, because he did not answer the question the last time it was asked, how the registry would have prevented that occurrence in Mayerthorpe? We would point out that that incident started from a grow operation. I do not understand why the NDP is voting against important crime legislation that would reduce grow operations in this country and deal with harsher crimes, such as sexual assault and a host of other crimes that Mr. Roscoe committed before that event occurred. That is a true crime prevention strategy. I would like the member to please answer how the registry would prevent that occurrence.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, it is a question of enforcement of the registry. The police forces in that area knew that Roszko had weapons and that he was not supposed to have weapons. One of the weapons that was found and used to ultimately convict the two members who aided and abetted him had a registered weapon. They found it at the site and were ultimately able to track him. That was on the investigative side.

The reality is that had they charged Roszko for breaching the long gun registry, they could have convicted him of that because they had very clear evidence that he had weapons. That may very well have prevented the incident from ever happening.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question to ask the hon. member since I have just received a message from someone who is watching us live. He is asking if the government's contradictions can be publicized. He is saying that the government is spending billions of dollars on the army, war efforts and border closures. He says that the government wants to lock up offenders and spend money on prisons but it will not allow us, the people who have invested over a billion dollars in setting up the firearms registry, to take that data and manage it ourselves in Quebec.

What does the hon. member think about that?

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, what the government is doing is clearly inexcusable. It is not just all the money that it is spending on the military but also what it is doing with our prisons. Putting people in prison is not going to help us prevent crime. The Conservatives—it is not us—are prepared to spend billions of dollars on prisons but that does not really do anything to protect people and society.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Yukon.

I, like many of my colleagues before me, am very pleased to rise in this House this afternoon to support Bill C-19, a bill to abolish, to completely do away with the long gun registry, just as we promised in the election campaign. This is very important to me because I am a politician who keeps his word, and I am glad that my government is also keeping its word.

As you are aware, this registry is useless and costly. The reason so many Conservative members are so adamant about dismantling the registry is because they have listened to years of consultations with our constituents about the registry. A number of my colleagues, including the member for Yorkton—Melville, have held countless meetings throughout the country. They have listened to Canadians tell them what they think about the registry. We have heard from honest firearm owners, including hunters, farmers and sport shooters, and we have also heard from people who believe that the way to fight crime is to have tougher laws.

We have also listened to the victims of tragedies such as the ones at the École Polytechnique and Dawson College. I would like the victims and their families to know that we share the same goal, the same objective in the fight against crime, and that is to ensure that these heinous crimes do not reoccur.

It is a shame that these crimes were committed with registered firearms. Registering a weapon—and by that I mean hunting weapons, rifles and shotguns—does not help to combat crime. I have a strong conviction that together we can convince our opposition colleagues to support this bill.

I have heard many of my colleagues talk about the cost. Yes, it was disastrous. The cost of setting up this registry in the late 1980s and early 1990s was astronomical. Why was it astronomical? You will recall that it was the first Liberal scandal. Some say that the registry cost over \$1 billion, others that it cost up to \$2 billion. Those are the figures the CBC came up with following a number of investigations that were conducted at the time under the Access to Information Act. So we all agree that it was a waste of taxpayers' money. We are still trying to determine where this money went.

Then there was a second Liberal scandal, the sponsorship scandal, mainly in my own province. More billions of dollars were spent, and they were spent to keep a party in power that was corrupt at that time. This was an intolerable waste. I agree with the opposition. At the time, they should have invested that money in crime prevention. How many crimes could have been prevented with rehabilitation programs for criminals, with tougher laws to make sure that criminals are not tempted to commit these crimes?

The truth is simple and clear, and people do not want to hear that truth. There is no proof that the long gun registry helps to prevent

crime. It must be pointed out that the bill covers only the long gun registry. This is one section of the registry, which has four sections. One section relates to handguns, and that will be retained in full; another section relates to prohibited weapons, and that will be retained in full; and a third section relates to licences for individuals. That registry has the name, address and contact information for individuals who want to obtain a firearms possession and acquisition licence.

● (1530)

In this registry we have the names of honest citizens: farmers, hunters, people who use their rifles for sporting purposes. These data are going to stay in the registry. It is important to point that out. What is going to be done is very precise: the registry that relates to long guns is going to be destroyed. The registry is made up of data. The registry is composed of information about those weapons. The data are part of the registry and the data will be destroyed. That is very clear in the bill.

Some people say that statistics show there has been a decline in homicides and suicides in Canada. I agree with the people who talk about those statistics. That is the statistical reality. However, what they are not telling us is that this is nothing new. The decline in homicides and suicides in Canada does not date from the creation of this registry in the mid-1990s. It is a trend that goes back a long time, to 1979 to be precise. There is a perfect declining curve for suicides and homicides. It has been declining since 1979. That is what has to be pointed out. The statistics cannot be interpreted to our own advantage. We have to look at the statistics overall and see what they tell us.

What strikes me most about this registry is how it treats honest citizens as potential criminals, forcing them to register their guns. These people abide by Canadian laws, and this registry was introduced under the Criminal Code. That needs to be said. Firearms need to be registered every year; it is a tax grab. Each year, you have to pay to register your firearm. Yet if ever an honest citizen, an honest farmer or hunter, forgot to register his gun, it would be a criminal offence. He would become a criminal. We do not want to treat these honest people like criminals.

This registry has affected rural areas in Canada and aboriginals as well. Their culture and way of life have been changed by the requirement to register their guns. They are simply asked to take a firearms safety course. And they are asked to take a test. Then, the RCMP does a criminal background check and, if necessary, a background check for violent offences. The RCMP does detailed checks on people who apply for a gun permit. That will stay; it will always be there. The RCMP will continue to investigate these people. And people will agree to those investigations because they know that they are honest and have done nothing wrong. They are prepared to do that. The RCMP does it because they want to protect the public and ensure that a person who has the right to a permit has been investigated.

Government Orders

It should also be said that this permit is good for five years. If something happens during that time, the permit can be taken away. That needs to be said. These measures are in place to protect society and prevent crime. We are taking other measures in this Parliament, such as Bill C-10 to implement tougher sentences. And I think that is the direction we need to be moving in. We drafted a bill that ensures that a Canadian who commits a gun-related crime will be given a minimum sentence. It is important for Canadians to know that.

I am extremely disappointed to hear that kind of demagoguery concerning the registry. Some people are suggesting that we want to destroy all of the information in the registry, which is completely false, because the registry has four sections, as I said earlier. We want to destroy only the section that has to do with the registration of long guns, because that information is not in line with this government's priorities.

• (1535)

Any government policy must always be examined based on its effects, not its intentions, and in this case, the registry has had no effect on crime prevention.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, police forces across the country are saying that they need this registry. It strikes me as very odd that a law and order party would do something that is clearly not requested by the police forces.

When in the future, after the long gun registry has been scrapped, a police officer enters a situation, in which he would have known there were long guns, and is subsequently killed, what will the government say to the family of that slain police officer?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, I am glad someone asked that question. We are told that police officers consult the registry several times a day, which is true. When a Canadian is stopped for speeding or something like that and the police officer enters the licence plate number into the system, the computer links automatically to the registry. That is why it is used so often. In their daily activities, when police officers are looking for information on someone's licence, the registry automatically opens. Yes, this information is very useful to police officers. What is important for police officers to know is whether an individual has a possession and acquisition licence. As I said earlier, police officers responding to an emergency call will still have access to that information, namely, whether a Canadian has a possession and acquisition licence. If that is the case, the police officer can take the necessary precautions when responding.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question that has been bothering me because, quite frankly, it is quite a conundrum. I just cannot quite wrap my head around it.

The New Democratic Party was all over the map on the gun registry prior to our forming government. A large group of its members, who represent rural ridings, voted in favour of the gun

registry. Then when the votes really mattered, when we had an opportunity when we first formed government, NDP members turned their backs on that previous vote and voted against the gun registry.

Now that we have a majority government, their votes still matter in the House, but they will not matter when they are tallied up on this bill. I wonder how many New Democratic members will now change their mind again and vote against the gun registry.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, I have the same question.

We are here to listen to the public and make decisions in order to protect the public, and that is what we are doing. It concerns me a bit to see the opposition parties, the NDP and the Liberals, take an ideological position. Why is it an ideological position? It is simple. They are not looking at the facts. This registry has not prevented heinous crimes from being committed in my own province.

They are taking an ideological position and misinforming the public when they say that registering a shotgun will reduce crime. Canadians have common sense and they know that registering a gun does not reduce crime. The members opposite are taking an ideological position and misinforming the public. I am a little disappointed to see that the NDP is unable to face the facts.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have a question that is troubling me, a conundrum as the hon. member across termed it.

Accepting that the federal government does not want a long gun registry, what I fail to understand is why the government will not respect the wishes of democratically elected governments at different levels, such as at the provincial level, that act on the advice of the police and respect the decisions of the voters of that jurisdiction?

Why will the government not provide the data that already exists to those jurisdictions?

• (1545)

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple: the data and the section of the registry on long guns do not reduce crime in Canada. That is the first reason.

The second reason is that the data are inaccurate. We cannot deny it. In 2002, the Auditor General said that the data were inaccurate. They are inaccurate because at the time, hunters said they were frustrated at being treated like potential criminals and having to register their firearms in addition to having their possession and acquisition licence. They agree with taking the necessary tests to get their licence and they comply with that. They understand the reasoning behind such a measure. However, a number of them have not gone so far as to register their firearm. This registry is inaccurate and is not a suitable tool to give to the provinces.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell Yukon citizens, trappers, hunters, athletes, sport shooters, collectors and first nations who rely on long guns to protect their heritage, culture and traditional way of life that the bill has, as promised by our government, been introduced into the House.

Long guns have been a staple tool in Yukon since its beginning, before it was designated as its own territory. It is indeed true of Canada itself. We have a long and proud history founded on a trapping culture, a fur-trading culture, a first nation and aboriginal culture and on a farming culture in which the long gun has played a vital role in basic survival.

Today, in many parts of our nation, long guns are essential tools of basic and day-to-day routines of life. They represent tools that allow aboriginal and first nation communities to hunt, harvest and teach. Long guns raise Canadians to the top of podiums in Olympic and international competitions in trap shooting and biathlons. Long guns put food on the tables of Canadians. Fundamentally, the long gun registry has unfairly and without reason targeted the wrong people.

When we talk about the long gun registry we are not talking about criminals, we are not even talking about the sorts of guns that criminals are likely to use. More than \$2 billion has been wasted and it is not coming back no matter how long we continue throwing good money after bad. That is \$2 billion wasted on a program that was supposed to cost about \$2 million, which is a staggering difference.

Our government has invested in prevention programs such as youth gang prevention funds because they are tangible, effective measures to help reduce crime.

The long gun registry placed unnecessary and costly barriers in front of law-abiding Canadians. It generates more paperwork, which is not something that is in generally short supply nowadays. Canadians spoke loud and clear in their objections to this.

I have outlined for my riding that I aim to learn from our past, guard it from neglect, improve the present and perfect our future. Reducing the barriers and red tape will ensure that innocent Canadians are not punished and that they are supported in the activities that define a Canadian lifestyle enjoyed by rural and urban citizens.

I have a couple of examples. I also want to quickly touch on something I heard that was a bit disturbing to me.

As a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and belonging to a government party that has 11 former members or retired members of police forces across the country, we have the strongest voice of front-line police services representation in our government today. Therefore, to hear the member for Windsor—Tecumseh bring up the Mayerthorpe incident and then blame the RCMP for not enforcing the act as a direct result of that tragic event is absolutely astounding. I find that shocking and very disturbing.

The member then questioned the value of building prisons. He stood in the House and voted against legislation that would increase sentences and sanctions to make it tougher on criminals who were involved in those kinds of grow-ops, an operation in that case that pre-empted the entire event itself.

To suggest that had the RCMP enforced the long gun law that Mr. Roszko would not have committed that crime is erroneous and insulting to the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. If we follow the line of thinking that the NDP positions day in and day out in the House, Mr. Roszko may have been captured with an illegal firearm, but he certainly would not have gone to prison if the NDP had anything to say about it. He would have gone to a daycare, which is not where that gentleman belonged.

I will leave that topic and speak to another experience I have had as a member of the law enforcement community. As a former conservation officer in the Yukon territory, I and my colleagues worked every day in remote and isolated regions of our territory and we did so having hundreds of interactions with law-abiding hunters.

● (1550)

Conservation officers across Canada deal with people carrying firearms every day, numerous times, and have absolutely no access to a registry. This does not put them in any greater danger than the law enforcement community because what they have found, as I have found, is that firearm owners are trained. They are safe, responsible, ethical and socially and environmentally conscience individuals. They are not criminals.

As a father, I have taught my son responsible and safe use of firearms. It provides us an opportunity at different times in our lives during busy schedules, both his and mine, to get out on the land and enjoy quality time. Firearms are not about getting out and killing things. They are about time in the wilderness, time in our great environment and teaching, learning and growing together. I would hate to teach my son that that activity is something we should worry about being criminalized because of the ineffective and irresponsible use of legislation introduced by the Liberal Party.

As the Yukon MP, I committed to taking action and voting to get rid of the registry. I campaigned on this, I was supported on this, and our government is delivering on its commitment. The issue then is a little bigger than the abolishment of the registry itself. It is about restoring the faith of our constituents that we will do as we promised, that we listened to the common person and that we remember who put us here and why they put us here. I have no doubt at all about the mandate I have from the Yukon people in respect to abolishing the long gun registry.

We also look forward to moving along from a 15-year long debate and progressing with more effective programs and government business. By scrapping the registry and the data, we can put this unfortunate part of the Liberal legacy behind us and move forward.

Government Orders

I am looking forward to seeing the results of the vote. I am very curious to see how the member for Western Arctic casts his vote when he understands the importance of this for the heritage, culture, history and day-to-day life of aboriginal people, first nations communities, the lives and activities of all northerners, the people of the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut and, indeed, across all rural and even urban regions of our country.

The introduction of the bill represents a promise made and a promise kept. Our government, as did many individual members in the opposition, assured the citizens of our ridings that we would vote in favour of getting rid of this wasteful and ineffective registry.

As Robert Service wrote in *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, “a promise made is a debt unpaid”.

We are making good on this and all other commitments we made in a well led plan for Canada's near future during the May election.

I urge members of all parties to support this legislation and make good on the promises they made to their constituents in their ridings when they were seeking election to the House.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear the comments from the member for Yukon, a place where I lived and still have fond regard for.

The government is fond of talking about how it stands up for victims but, frankly, what we need is a government that stands up to prevent victims of crime, to prevent victims of illegal use of long guns. It is fond of saying that people who carry long guns, the farmers and fishermen, do not cause harm, that it is the criminals, and yet we have this record of many people killed by long guns.

The biggest concern the emergency doctors have expressed is the numbers of suicides by long guns. They have been one of the greatest proponents of this registry.

The government also talks about waste and yet it sat on its haunches for six years. When a backbench member tabled a similar law, it never stepped up to the plate, as the government, to table the same law. The government allowed moneys to be expended over six years on a registry that it is now saying was a waste of money.

Could the member address the fact that my police chief, who very strongly supports this registry, is on my side? We want to prevent the victims of crime, not worry about them after the fact.

• (1555)

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, our government is very concerned about the victims of crime. We present that every day in legislation in the House and the opposition continues to vote against those initiatives.

I can say this about having people in our corner. I travelled from community to community while I campaigned and during the summer and I spoke with front-line police officers in my territory. Having been one and having 10 other colleagues in the government caucus who were front-line law enforcement officers and having a police chief in our corner, this is not the reality of constituents and it is not the reality of what is going on, and the needs, wishes and desires of front-line police. I can speak to this issue, as can my law enforcement colleagues in our caucus, because we have talked to front-line police officers. We have been front-line police officers. We

know what they want and what they need and we will deliver on that. They support the bills that get tough on crime. They support our safe streets and communities act.

I would ask that member to support that kind of legislation if she and her party are that concerned about victims of crime.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, common sense needs to be applied to this full discussion.

Whether one is for or against gun registration, most people will look at it from a province of Quebec perspective. It will cost Quebec tens of millions of dollars to recreate the same data bank that the Conservative government is going to delete. Rather than spending money on the re-creation of this data bank, it could be spending that money on community policing, policing initiatives and health care needs. Instead, the government is mandating the provinces to create their own data bank because it will hit the delete button on the information in the registry.

From a common sense perspective, does that make any sense to the member?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarification. Our government is not mandating any province to re-create the registry.

From my constituents' perspective, and I think it would be safe to say it would be the same for people across the western part of our country, they would not be in favour of having information, which they have provided to a federal body under federal legislation, turned over to the province of Quebec. If I tried to tell my constituents in Yukon territory that their information would be housed on a data base for the province of Quebec to use at will, that would not fly. That would not fly in any other part of the country. Quebec is more than welcome to start its own registry at its own cost for its own purpose, but that will not work with our constituents.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three stories to tell you today, but I will warn you, they are not very happy stories.

The first story took place on December 6, 1989, in Montreal. At 4 p.m., a young man, 25-year-old Marc Lépine, arrived at the École Polytechnique, which is part of the Université de Montréal. He walked around the school for about an hour. People saw him all over, in offices and so on. At about 5:10, a little more than an hour later, he went into a mechanical engineering class where there were about 60 people. He then took out a .22 calibre semi-automatic rifle and told the women that because they wanted to become engineers, they were feminists, and he hated feminists. He then told the men to go to one side and the women to the other. People thought it was a joke, so they did not do it. That was when he fired a shot in the air. People started to take him seriously then, so the men lined up on one side and the women on the other. He then told the men to leave the classroom. So the men did. And what happened next was that he fired on the nine women who stayed in the classroom. Six of them died.

Government Orders

It went on like that for 20 minutes. Twenty minutes can be a very long time in circumstances like that. He continued to walk around the school, shooting at women and men, because the men were helping some of the women. In all, 14 women died, and 10 women and four men were injured—men who were helping the women, of course. Most of these people were in their early twenties. They were university students, and there was also a female university employee.

Marc Lépine killed himself. So that makes 15 deaths. After talking to the journalists outside, Pierre Leclair, who was the public relations director for the Montreal police, went into the building and, sadly, found the body of his own daughter, Maryse Leclair, one of the students who died that day. She had been killed by a firearm, and also stabbed, even though she had begged the murderer not to do it.

Obviously the police investigated, and during the investigation a letter written by the murderer was found. In the letter, the murderer repeated that he hated feminists, and there was even a list of 19 feminist women he said he wanted to kill. They included a journalist, a television personality, a politician and six police officers.

The consequences of Mr. Lépine's act do not stop there. After that event, several students at the École Polytechnique committed suicide, and at least two of them left letters saying it was the anguish caused by the killings at the Polytechnique, the Montreal massacre, that prompted them to kill themselves. So the connection here is obvious. There is no doubt about the connection. That is my first story.

My second story took place on September 13, 2006. It was 12:42 p.m., and another young man, 25-year-old Kimveer Gill, arrived at Dawson College. So again this is in Montreal. He had with him three firearms, one of which was a semi-automatic. He started shooting outside. Then he went into the cafeteria. Remember that it was 12:42, which is lunchtime, so there were a lot of people in the cafeteria. Twenty-eight minutes later, a young woman, 18-year-old Anastasia De Sousa, was dead.

•(1600)

There were also 16 people injured, including a young man who will have to spend the rest of his life with one bullet in his head and another in his neck, because it is too dangerous to remove them. Kimveer Gill, the murderer also died.

My two sons, Alec and Nicholas, could have been there. They went to that school; they were students at Dawson. Several people that I know were there and could have been victims. I am not talking about a cops and robbers movie. I am talking about my life, and what happened to my friends and me.

I have a third story that is even closer to home. I warned my colleagues that these would not be happy stories. This time it was in my riding, Hochelaga, and a member of my family was involved. It occurred on July 14, 2009, in Montreal, at the Jardins de l'Aubade, an independent and assisted living residence for seniors. Marlana Cardoso was a 33-year-old nurse and the mother of two young children. Everybody describes her as jovial, dedicated and likable. She was well liked and nobody, of course, wished her any harm. She was at work that day and at about 2:30 p.m. had a conversation with Celso Gentili. He was an 84-year-old man in a wheelchair. She thought he looked sick and wanted him to go to the hospital, and she

told him so. Mr. Gentili misinterpreted her remarks, became angry and went back to his apartment. The apartments are for people who are losing their mobility or live alone. Nobody had searched his apartment, just as no one searches our apartments when we move in. Once in his apartment, Mr. Gentili retrieved his 12-gauge shotgun and, without warning, shot Ms. Cardoso.

My younger brother, Guy, who had been working there for a few weeks, arrived on the scene and saw Ms. Cardoso on the ground in a pool of blood; there was blood everywhere. The owner's son was trying to overpower Mr. Gentili and disarm him, while Mr. Gentili was attempting to reload his rifle so he could continue to shoot. My younger brother had both hands on Marlana's gaping wound in an attempt to stop the blood and save her life. He was talking to her all the while, telling her to stay with them. He saved her life. I am very proud of him. He was trying to keep her alive, but while he was doing that, he too could have died because Mr. Gentili was attempting to reload his rifle. If no one had stopped him, he could have shot my brother. Once again, it was not a movie; it happened in my riding, to my family.

Marlana Cardoso was fortunate enough to survive in the end. But she and some other employees were so traumatized that two and a half years later they still have not returned to work. My brother is strong, but he still cries today when anyone talks about the incident. Mr. Gentili, the 84-year-old man, is facing seven charges. It is all very sad.

The Conservatives say that the long gun registry targets law-abiding citizens rather than criminals. In the three cases I referred to, none of the people involved were hardened criminals.

•(1605)

The aggressors did not have a criminal record, and the crimes were not committed by criminals. The registry identifies firearm owners and assists in keeping track of the circulation of weapons, which may be sold. Abolishing the registry would therefore make it easier for potentially dangerous people to get a hold of weapons, whether or not they have previously committed a crime. That makes the lives of police officers harder and puts them in harm's way. The Conservatives say that the registry is a waste of taxpayers' money. Have the Conservatives ever calculated the cost of violence due to long guns? One single investigation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I made a small mistake. You have 10 more minutes.

•(1610)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Right, I will slow down.

A single murder investigation costs about a half-million dollars. In addition to that there are the costs of hospitalization, long-term care and imprisonment, which could continue to grow, so we are talking about millions and even billions of dollars, and of course that is not counting another very significant cost, the psychological cost to the families of the victims and the victims themselves.

Government Orders

The Conservatives also want to destroy all of the information accumulated for the long gun registry. Police associations, which query the registry an average of 17,000 times a day, are completely against it, as is my province, Quebec. If the registry were unfortunately to disappear, at least the provinces could use the information, not information from all the provinces, but from their own, to protect the people there, because the federal government seems to be refusing to do it.

The murders at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989 that I referred to earlier prompted a lot of people to think about ways to at least try to prevent that kind of tragedy, as much as possible. Out of that came the firearms registry. Do we really want to move backward? Do we want to tell the families of Anastasia De Sousa, Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz—pardon me, Barbara—and all the other victims that their deaths were ultimately for nothing? Do we want to take risks with people's lives? My answer is clear: no. The way we can really protect lives is by strengthening gun control. In my opinion, even one life is worth it.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a short time ago in the House, the member for Yukon spoke, and he quoted Robert Service. I am sure the member opposite is familiar with Robert Service, a bard of northern Canada. However, he did not quote from another poem of Robert Service:

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty, and loaded for bear.

The reason I quote that is because here is someone who was out in the cold and the dark, and came into the warmth and the light.

I appreciate the hon. member's passion for this subject, but I do not understand how everything that says registration is good, when in reality we are registering licensed gun owners.

As a hunter and a gun owner, if I get stopped for running a red light, the RCMP would put my name through the database. They would get the same results today as they would have gotten prior to the elimination of the registry because I am still a licensed, registered gun owner, so the safety aspect that we talk about is still there. To say it is not is just contrary to logic.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I know that the law is not perfect and that there are ways to change it. Before we can change it, however, we have to keep it. We must not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Suppose there are changes that could be made when it comes to the north, for example. In order to be able to make those changes, we have to have this law on the books. If we vote with the Conservatives and abolish it, there is no way to improve it.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that one of the names that was not mentioned by my hon. colleague was that of Heidi Rathjen, who was one of the lucky ones who was not killed that terrible night. The hon. member mentioned stories close to her home. Heidi Rathjen was a woman who grew up in my home town. I went to elementary school with her sister Claudia. I know the family very well and I know how that act of violence deeply touched that family in particular.

Ms. Rathjen has been very vocal over the years about the preservation of the gun registry. I am wondering if my hon. colleague could elaborate on the consequences if the registry is scrapped and Ms. Rathjen's fear that gun-related tragedies will increase as a result.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. There are a lot of crimes committed with shotguns, long guns. There is talk of removing these weapons from the firearms registry. Imagine a police officer who responds to a call from a family—a husband and wife—and he has information from the registry. Neither party is a criminal. And yet, if the police officer knows, based on information from the registry, that there are firearms in the house, long guns, he can respond differently and protect the lives of the people in the house as well as his own life.

Moreover, many people have said that having a registry really improved things. For example, I would like to quote Pamela Harrison, provincial coordinator for the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, an organization that provides emergency services to women who are victims of violence and abuse:

[English]

The long-gun registry has made a significant difference in the safety of women in Canada since its inception in 1995. The rate of spousal homicide by gun has gone down 69 per cent and we attribute most of that to the impact of the gun registry.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her very heartfelt presentation and for sharing her direct experience with the need to have a registry to track the illegal use of long guns.

This matter has been reviewed in previous Parliaments and presentations have been put forward by a vast array of people. The Canadian Association of Police Boards, the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Medical Officer of Health of Toronto, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the National Council of Women of Canada all support retaining the gun registry.

I am told that the officers were able to locate and try to convict the two people involved in the Mayerthorpe, Alberta killing of the RCMP officers because of the gun registry. That is only one of many examples given to me by the police and the police chief in the city I come from. I am told that yes, there is a handful of police officers who have private collections and do not like having to register, but generally speaking, the police of Canada support the use of this tool.

Government Orders

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, that is quite accurate.

Moreover, in Canada, only three police chiefs disapprove of the registry. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is totally in favour of the registry and does not want to see it scrapped. So what my colleague said, and what my other colleagues also intimated, is exactly what we just heard: police officers are against the abolition of the long gun registry. That says a great deal.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech that was given by my colleague across the way. These stories are very heart wrenching and our hearts go out to the victims of these tragedies. To link the registry with these, however, is disingenuous. Experts who examined what happened at École Polytechnique admitted that the registry probably would have had no effect on what happened. The member cited the Dawson College tragedy. In fact, the gun was registered.

It does not make any difference to have a registry. It would be much better to take the billions of dollars that were spent and target the root causes of these things and try to find these individuals in society and deal with them. We will not solve these types of problems with a gun registry.

I wonder if the member has any comments about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, it is true that having a registry will not completely wipe out crime. I am very aware of that.

Moreover, the crimes were committed with weapons that were registered. I know that. However, do we really know how many crimes were prevented as a result of the registry? We know which crimes were committed with registered firearms, but what we do not know is how many were prevented as a result of the firearms being registered.

I am now going to read out another quote. Sue O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime stated that the majority of groups representing victims want to keep the registry. That is also telling. She said:

[*English*]

Our position on this matter is clear—Canada must do all it can to prevent further tragedies from happening, including using the tools we have to help keep communities safe, like the long-gun registry.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fundy Royal.

I congratulate the Minister of Public Safety, the member of Parliament for Provencher, for bringing forward Bill C-19. This is an incredible day. Finally, there is a government bill before the House for debate. After all the long years that I have been advocating against the long gun registry, finally we have this opportunity not only to debate the bill, but to vote on it and successfully remove the long gun registry.

I also want to thank the member for Portage—Lisgar, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, for all the work she has done on the gun registry and for bringing forward Bill C-391 in the last Parliament which we had hoped to get through the House until it ripped my heart out to see it defeated by one vote. However, I know that she has continued to fight for the removal of this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. She has travelled across the country to hear from Canadians from coast to coast to coast about the horrors of having to deal with such a bureaucratic process, one that made criminals out of law-abiding citizens.

Finally, I have to thank my friend, the member for Yorkton—Melville, for all of the work he has done right back to 1993-94 when this registry was first floated by Allan Rock, the minister at that time, and the Liberal government. The member for Yorkton—Melville has been one of the stalwarts. He has fought against this ineffective and wasteful use of taxpayer money and has ensured that we do the right things in fighting crime rather than penalize citizens who happen to own long guns, whether they are farmers, hunters, or sportsmen.

I was fighting Bill C-68 going back to 1995. The Senate committee was travelling across the country taking testimony on Bill C-68. I appeared before that committee when it was in Manitoba, in Interlake in my riding.

People in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake have long opposed this gun registry. It created a huge stir. There were public protests. Organizations were set up. I joined the Manitoba Firearms Coalition. People wanted to fight this huge impediment to their freedoms and their rights as citizens. Unfortunately, Bill C-68 has pitted rural Canadians against urban Canadians.

Maybe it is not fair for me to say that urban Canadians all support the gun registry, because there are plenty of hunters and sports enthusiasts who live in urban centres who also oppose this long gun registry. Over the last few years as we have been out campaigning, we have been hearing from Canadians in urban centres. They know it is not working. They know the registry has not reduced crime. They have seen gun violence and gang violence in the streets rise. They know the registry is a waste of money. They want more resources put into policing services. They want more money put into gang prevention. They want more money put into youth at risk. They know those will be the right investments, rather than wasting money on a bureaucracy, on a registry that has no impact whatsoever in reducing crime in this country.

I am a licensed firearms owner. I acquired a PAL, a possession and acquisition licence. I took my hunter safety course in 1976 when I was about 14 years old. The hunter safety course is what actually prepared me to get my PAL. I am a licensed firearms owner; however, I have never registered a firearm. I do have a firearm, but it is not registered. I have made that statement before in the House because, as a matter of civil disobedience, I have always said this is a wrong thing. That firearm does not have any impact on the safety of people. It is the people who handle the firearm that are the issue.

Government Orders

If we want to look at reducing crime or reducing accidents that happen from handling firearms, we need to do more in the areas of safe storage, safe handling, in training the people who are going to be using firearms. That is where we would get the biggest bang for our buck.

We know from the statistics that since the late 1980s we have seen a reduction in accidental shootings. We have seen a reduction in misfired guns. We have seen a reduction in suicides that have been caused from long guns.

We have seen reductions in those events because people are practising safe storage. Those firearms are under lock and key. Ammunition is stored separately under lock and key. It is more difficult for children to access those firearms. It allows time for cooling off in instances of heated debates between friends or family members. It allows people to think about what they are doing as they are reaching for a firearm they may want to use in an illegal way.

• (1625)

Much misinformation has been propagated by opposition members and we really need to set things straight. They talk about policing services accessing the gun registry thousands of times a day. They are not actually accessing the registry. They may be checking an address or licence plate and that automatically goes into the firearms registry. If they are looking at a serial number of a gun, it accesses the licensed firearm owner. That is not going to change. There still will be a complete list of everyone who has a licence to possess a firearm in this country. That will not change. We know that police officers on the front line can still enter an address or licence plate number into a computer and they will be told whether an individual is a licensed firearms owner.

Police officers will have to deal with every individual as if he or she owned a firearm. We do not want to give them a false sense of security. They have to assume in every situation they go into that there are firearms present. We know that criminals do not register firearms. We know that criminals do not get licences under the current legislation. Criminals do not have possession and acquisition licences for firearms. We know that to be a fact. In every situation for their own self-interests, police officers have to enter a premise or approach a vehicle as if the individual had a gun.

There is all this talk about homicide rates dropping because of the gun registry. We know that homicide rates have been on the decline since the early 1970s. Since the registry came into being in Canada, the rate has stabilized at just under 1.9 murders per 100,000 people. There will not be a huge impact, because homicides have been stable on a percentage basis for the last dozen years or so since the registry has been in place.

If we look at the population of licensed firearm owners, the murder rate is only .38 per 100,000 owners of firearms. These are the most law-abiding citizens in the country. These are individuals who have gone out of their way to become licensed firearms owners and to get the training they need to own firearms. They are the ones who respect the laws of the land. Why are we targeting these individuals when there are so many other people who are involved in gangs, drugs and illicit crimes? Those are the individuals we need to invest in finding, tracking and getting off our streets to make our neighbourhoods safer.

Professor Gary Mauser has said that of all the murders that have been committed since 1997, less than 2% of them have been committed by licensed firearm owners and the guns that were registered to those individuals only represented 1.2% of homicides. The question then becomes, was that a good use of taxpayer dollars? Over \$2 billion was spent to track 1.25% of those who committed homicides in this country and owned long guns. That is ridiculous.

In Vancouver in 2003, of all the guns that were taken off the street, 97% of them were illegal handguns that were smuggled in. We have to start looking at the big issue. Let us quit focusing on one group in society that we, unfortunately, made into criminals because they did not register their firearms. Half the guns on the streets today are still not registered. Let us do the right thing and get rid of the long gun registry and invest in front-line policing.

• (1630)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite the same kind of question I posed earlier. Since he freely admitted his guns are not registered, should his residence be broken into and it happens that a police officer discovers the break-in and chases after the criminals but has no idea that there are guns on the premise and is subsequently killed, what will he say to the family of that police officer?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, police officers enter every premise under the suspicion that there is a firearm present. They have to. Otherwise they would be taking unnecessary risks. They do not go in all guns ablazing, but at the same time they go in there in a defensive mode.

I have met with policing agencies. I had them come to my office when we were debating Bill C-391. I have talked to officers in my riding and they tell me time and time again that at the front line level they have to approach every situation as if that individual has a firearm whether it shows up in the computer database or not.

At the same time, we will make the investments to ensure, and we have already done this since we formed government in 2006, we make things better to help our police officers. We are working on the tackling violent crimes act. We are working on tackling auto theft and trafficking of property obtained by crime, ensuring we are getting that off the streets. We are creating a new offence of drive-by and reckless shootings. We are also standing united, without hesitation, on why the long gun registry should be scrapped for law-abiding citizens. We are going to put in place laws that help police officers get criminals off our streets and we are not going to make criminals of law-abiding citizens.

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•(1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue a line of questioning that I have put to other members. Municipal jurisdictions always want to co-operate, as much as possible, and build relationships with Ottawa. However, in this case the province of Quebec has told the federal government that it sees value in retaining a gun registry for the province of Quebec.

By Ottawa saying no, that it cannot have access to that data bank, would the member then agree that Quebec is now going to have to re-establish its own data bank, thereby spending a lot more money than it would have had to as opposed to just getting a copy of the data bank from Ottawa? The biggest loser is likely to be the taxpayer.

Would the member agree with that assessment?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg North for stating the obvious. Every province has under the Constitution the right to register property. That is why cars are registered provincially. That is why land titles are held provincially. If the province of Quebec wants to register firearms, it can do that. That is within its constitutional jurisdiction.

However, the registry that was started and created by the Liberals, their legacy which we are going to destroy and which I am quite proud of, is a federal registry. This is an opportunity for us to respect the private rights of individuals and to destroy that information so it never gets out in the public again.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake for all of the work he has done and the members of our party who have for many years tried to work with the police community and with victims to bring about what we believe is a more fair and just system.

I know that he, like many members of the party and many members involved in this debate, have spoken to front-line police officers and police chiefs. There is a bit of a misnomer that somehow the police have been crying for the continuation of this registry and that simply is not the case. I have spoken to people like Sergeant Duane Rutledge and Chief Chisholm in my home community of New Glasgow and they tell me that they approach every call, particularly where there may be violence, as if there will be a weapon involved. There is this idea that the registry is necessary, that it will provide fair warning, but police officers already approach every call as if there may be impending danger.

Could the member comment on that scenario?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of National Defence for that great insight. As I said in my speech, police officers have to approach every situation, and they are trained to approach every situation, as if there is weapon present.

The one thing I did not get to in my speech is that the front-line police officers are wasting all sorts of time and valuable resources in administration on things like the gun registration, when we should be giving them the time to go out and investigate actual crimes.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Fundy Royal to speak to what I think is a very important debate.

Because it took a long time to get to this point, I would like to thank a couple of people, one of whom is the member for Yorkton—Melville. The member led a long, detailed, very thorough fight for the rights of everyday hard-working, law-abiding citizens, the type of citizens who live in my riding of Fundy Royal. He is to be commended. As members of Parliament, we are dealing with the aftermath of this Liberal boondoggle that was created in the 1990s by individuals who, by all accounts, had an agenda. I recall the then minister of justice, Allan Rock, saying that he came to Ottawa with the firm belief that only police and the military should have firearms. That is truly an out-of-touch point of view. It gives us a perspective on the driving motivation behind the registry. Not only is it truly scary for our country, but it truly targets the wrong individuals.

I want to personally thank the member for Yorkton—Melville for standing up for my constituents as well as all Canadians during those days, finding out all the problems and attacking the cause of the many issues that were foisted upon law-abiding citizens. This is a culmination of that work.

I have a few questions that I think responsible parliamentarians have to answer when discussing any changes to the law. On the firearms registry, I have a few of questions. Who does it target? Does it work? Are taxpayers getting good value? I think those are some fundamental questions, and I will look at a few of those in my remarks.

Who does it target? As has been said by the previous speaker, as members of Parliament, whether we are in urban, suburban or rural areas, we know that the gun registry targets the law-abiding gun owner. It is the person who will send in the forms by email or hard copy or who will wait in lines.

When the registry was brought in, I remember seeing many of the law-abiding good people in my region lining up for hours at the McAllister Place Mall to go through the process of registering their firearms. Meanwhile, the Hells Angels, organized crime, gangs from the west coast to the east coast merely went about their business. I suppose some of them might have had a chuckle at the thought of all the law-abiding citizens in our country, many of them senior citizens, lining up to register their firearms, while they perhaps were about to go and buy a smuggled handgun out of the trunk of a car.

The registry was targeting the law-abiding citizen, not the bad guy. That is why, even then in the 1990s, right-thinking people knew that the registry would never work. It was predicted by the member for Yorkton—Melville, for example, that the registry would not work because, for that fundamental issue, it targeted the wrong people. How can we solve a crime problem if we do not target criminals? It has been the benefit of time, the passage of a decade and a half, that we have seen individuals who said all along that it would not work proven completely, 100%, right.

Although I have run on a platform of fighting against the registry in my political career, I would be the first to say that if I and my constituents thought this registry worked, if we thought it prevented crime, if we thought that it saved lives, we would have a different position. However we know, intuitively and with the benefit of the passage of time and the wonderful statistics that we have available to us, that the registry simply does not work because it targets the wrong people.

● (1640)

Does it work? The answer is a resounding no. We have seen this in some of the tragedies that have happened since the registry has been in place. The registry did nothing to prevent some of the crimes that took place.

I will move on to the final question. Even in light of the fact that it does nothing to prevent crime and it does not work, is it a good value? Are we at least paying very little for it? Is it not enough money to really be too upset about?

We know the Liberals have always been good with budgeting. That is one thing we will give them. We know at the time that the minister said the registry would cost net to the taxpayers about \$2 million. Some people might have thought, since it was the Liberals saying this, let us go by a factor of ten and it might cost \$20 million, or even a factor 100 and it might cost \$200 million considering it was a Liberal estimate. In fact, we know, through the work of professors, from the work of the member of Yorkton—Melville in accumulating statistics and from the work of the auditor general, that the estimate for the cost of the registry rose to \$2 billion. That is \$2 billion for a registry that targets my constituents, law-abiding people and does not work.

How can we allow something like that to continue? The short answer is we cannot. That is why I am very pleased that we have a government now that is committed to doing the right thing in ending this abomination to the taxpayer.

In a previous Parliament we had a private member's bill, Bill C-391, that would get rid of the gun registry. Members on this side of the House supported that private member's bill. Interestingly enough, we heard a lot of members opposite, who used to go into their riding, maybe to their fish game clubs or sports shooting federation, say that they were against the registry, that they would fight against it and vote against it. Some members said all of those things, except when it actually counted. When it came time to vote on the bill, the members opposite, in just enough numbers, voted to defeat it.

It was there and then that I and my colleagues came to the realization that the only way to defeat the registry was to form a majority government. That is why I am very glad that on May 2, our government was elected with a clear mandate. It was a mandate to act to protect everyday law-abiding citizens. It was a mandate for safer streets and communities and to end the wasteful long gun registry.

Unlike my friend, I did register my firearms. One of them was very common in New Brunswick and coast to coast. It was an old .303 Lee Enfield rifle. It is one that our military has used for decades.

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In fact, in the north people continue to use them, but those rifles will be replaced now.

Since those rifles did not have a serial number that would be appropriate for the registry, I received in the mail an orange sticker that had a number on it with instructions from the Registrar of Firearms to affix the sticker to the old Lee Enfield rifle. I never did put it on the rifle, but I kept that sticker as a reminder of all the absurdities that came from the registry and the fact that it targeted the wrong people. I keep that as a reminder to stay dedicated, as we all have, and to keep moving forward in the right direction.

For our part, our government will continue in our battle against crime to target the cause of crime. In our view, that is the criminals. Canadians are with us on that. We will continue to fight for safer streets, safer communities and we will do that by targeting criminals. We are going to end the targeting of law-abiding citizens by ending the gun registry.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleasantly surprised to have been given the floor.

We have heard a great deal of propaganda and political rhetoric on this matter from the other side of the House. But I believe that the worst thing I have heard so far is the idea of destroying all the information collected with the money of taxpayers from across the country in order to prevent the next government, when the Conservatives are inevitably defeated in four years, from handing the registry to the provinces, as several of them would like.

I do not understand how this argument can be used to justify this decision when provinces such as Quebec are calling for access to this information, which they helped pay for, in order to ensure the safety of the people, which is one of their provincial responsibilities.

I would like to know how an ideological decision, such as preventing future governments from reinstating the registry, could be a logical part of its discourse with the provinces.

● (1650)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Public Safety put it well. To understand why we would do that, one would need to understand about keeping one's word, keeping one's commitment and keeping one's solemn pledge to one's constituents. Many members across the way have flip-flopped on this issue, but the commitment that I and my party made in the last election was that we would end the registry. The registry is a collection of a bunch of useless information on law-abiding citizens' property that does nothing to prevent crime.

How can we say that we will end the registry and then introduce a bill that ends the registry, but then turn all that information over so someone else can continue on with it? That, in my view, would be a terrific act of bad faith. We have committed to ending the registry, and that is exactly what we will do.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but notice that a number of Conservative members speak with a great deal of passion on this issue, and I appreciate that. I suspect that some of them might have even built their entire political career on the gun registry issue. I must admit that I felt like I almost had to ask one of the pages to bring a box of Kleenex over to the member.

I suspect a huge vacuum will need to be filled. I am wondering what the next mission will be. Will the next mission be the NRA directive to amend the Constitution so that every man has the right to bear arms? One of my favourites would be to fight for universal health care across the country.

After Bill C-19 is disposed of, what will the member's next mission be going forward?

Hon. Rob Moore: What a sad question, Mr. Speaker. I am glad for the members on this side of the House who came to Ottawa with a mission and a mandate. They came to Ottawa with the view that they wanted to change things, that they wanted to change some of the mess that the member's party left behind, including the \$2 billion boondoggle.

We have no shortage of things that we want to continue to do for everyday, law-abiding Canadians, the people who we represent. I am saddened that the member does not have enthusiasm for any issue. We are enthused on this side. We are enthused about strengthening the Criminal Code so that we can protect our citizens and our communities. We are enthused about strengthening the economy, as we have done. Canada has a leading economy among the G8. We are enthused about ending this registry, which we are about to do. There is no shortage of things to be enthused about.

I hope that the enthusiasm we have on this side is contagious over there and the hon. member can grab on to an issue that he feels strongly about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today because I believe that it is my fundamental duty to participate in this debate on behalf of my constituents who, like me, are concerned, shocked and upset by the very unfortunate legislative step that the Conservative government has taken by introducing its bill to dismantle the firearms registry as quickly as possible, and even going so far as to impose a gag order on this debate.

It is my duty to point out that I am also very disappointed that the government imposed a gag order this morning before the debate had even begun. This debate focuses on an issue that is at the heart of a broader debate on the type of society in which Canadians want to live. I am convinced that this bill, this ill-conceived plan to eliminate the firearms registry, will undermine Canada's public safety in the long term.

My constituents in Lac-Saint-Louis and the Montreal area feel very strongly about the issue of gun control. In the past 25 years, Montreal has experienced three massacres, all at post-secondary institutions. For those who are not familiar with the island of Montreal's urban geography, I will point out that these three tragedies occurred in a fairly small area of downtown Montreal: the

École Polytechnique of the Université de Montréal, Concordia University and Dawson College are all located within several blocks of each other.

Furthermore, I believe that there are only about 10 streets between Dawson College—where I myself taught some 15 years ago—and Concordia University. The École Polytechnique is clearly a little further north on the other side of the mountain, but all of these institutions are located within a fairly small area.

• (1655)

[*English*]

This, at least for me and my party, is not about the integrity of gun owners. The vast majority of long gun owners who I know are sterling citizens. They are community volunteers. Many would give the shirt off their back. They believe in community and in a safe community. They believe in safe streets. Some are first responders and I am proud to know them. That gun owners are respectable, responsible citizens is reflected empirically in the fact that 90% of gun owners have registered their firearms. In other words, despite their sometimes annoyance and, in many cases, strong opposition to the requirement to register their firearms, they register them all the same. That speaks volumes for their character. They are lawful citizens who do their duty. Some gun owners even voted for me, despite our differences on this contentious issue, which speaks volumes about the open mindedness of voters in my riding of Lac-Saint-Louis.

Why does the gun registry work? It is because of gun owners themselves. It is because of their deep sense of responsibility. I believe that gun owners' inherent sense of responsibility is reinforced by the requirement to register their firearms. This sense of responsibility further translates into a heightened sense of the need for proper and safe storage of firearms. There is a logical connection, therefore, in my view, between the registration of any object and the proper care of that object. If vehicles were not registered, people would feel free to abandon their old jalopies in a field somewhere at the end of the car's useful life knowing that no one would come knocking on their door later on to say, "Hey, you left your car on the street there, taking up space. Please cart it away or you'll be fined". I think the fact of registering makes people feel much more responsible for whatever the particular item is.

It is most unfortunate that, over the years, the government, or the Conservative caucus when in opposition, tried to reinforce the notion and create a feeling among gun owners that they should feel like criminals because they were being asked to register their firearms. The government was wrong in its ongoing attempts to convince gun owners that a society that has a requirement to register firearms is a society that sees them as criminals. Even though gun owners are lawful and responsible citizens, the government should, nonetheless, talk straight to them. The government should make clear the legal and constitutional truth about firearms and that there is no unfettered constitutional right in Canada to bear arms. As a matter of fact, in the case of *R. v. Wiles*, the court stated, "Possession and use of firearms is a heavily regulated privilege". The operative phrase is, of course, "heavily regulated".

We have heard from the other side of the House examples of and references to gun owners who are farmers and hunters, gun owners who live in rural areas. The image that is projected is of people who are responsible and use guns as a tool in their daily work, such as farmers and so on. Obviously, that image is correct in many cases, but the government seems to be focusing on that romantic image of gun owners to justify its legislation. As I say, this is reflective of many gun owners in Canada.

● (1700)

I would submit that the type of gun owner we have in Canada is changing. It is no longer necessarily farmers who are working to keep animals that should not be on their land or off their land.

Jeff Davis in the *Edmonton Journal* of October 25 wrote:

The consumer tastes of Canadian gun owners are fast changing, as shooters eschew vintage hunting rifles in favour of the latest "tacti-cool" military-style weapons - many of which appear in movies and popular video games, such as *Call of Duty*. As a new generation of young men become interested in shooting, but not hunting, retailers are trying to meet the growing demand for sleek firearms. Canadian authorities, meanwhile, facing the repeal of the long-gun registry by the federal government, are worried about the trend.

These non-restricted, because they are long guns essentially even though they are replicas of military-style weapons, military-style long guns are referred to as civilianized versions of military assault weapons. In some cases it is possible to modify what are essentially stylized long guns into a gun that is more dangerous and would meet the criteria for being classified as a restricted weapon.

It is entirely possible, and it has happened quite recently, that a long gun is allowed into Canada and it is allowed to be sold as a non-restricted weapon, only for the RCMP on second thought to say, "It is a little too dangerous. It can be modified. We will now classify it as a restricted weapon. We had better get hold of those copies that were previously sold as non-restricted weapons".

To give an example, the Norinco Type 97 rifle was initially classified by the RCMP as a non-restricted weapon, and about 50 were sold in Canada. The RCMP firearms directorate later reclassified the Type 97 as a prohibited weapon. Letters were sent to 50 owners who already had them, asking them to turn the new guns in to their local police stations.

As a matter of basic logic, if these guns are not registered when they are first sold as non-restricted firearms, how would the RCMP send letters to the owners asking them to turn their guns in? In this case, we can see that the registry would be useful.

Rifles and shotguns were responsible for half the police officers killed in the line of duty over the past few years. We have been talking a lot about common sense and intuition. The previous speaker said that for him it was a matter of intuition. I can understand that. There are some common sense arguments in debates like this because we are not dealing with hard science, we are dealing with social science, research in social science studies, so indeed we have to at times resort to a kind of moral intuition.

Let us start with a recent study by Étienne Blais and Marie-Pier Gagné of the University of Montreal, who studied the data and looked at the enactment of Bill C-51 in 1977, requiring gun owners to obtain a firearm acquisition certificate. They looked at Bill C-68 in 1995, which set up the gun registry and so on. They found, in

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doing their analysis, that these pieces of legislation were responsible for a 5% to 10% decrease in homicides committed with a firearm, depending on the province.

Studies have also shown that those who live in a home with one firearm have a higher risk of being victims of homicide. The risk quite obviously goes up if safe storage requirements are not respected in the household.

The Conservatives would say, echoing the rhetoric of the National Rifle Association in the United States, that it is not guns that kill people; it is people who kill people, and that removing firearms would simply cause a one for one shift toward another means or another weapon of homicide. However, this argument has been rejected by solid research, namely by Philip Cook in his 1981 study entitled "The Effect of Gun Availability on Violent Crime Patterns". He said:

A decision to kill is easier and safer to implement with a gun than with other commonly available weapons- there is less danger of effective victim resistance during the attack—

● (1705)

I think we can understand the logic behind that:

—and the killing can be accomplished more quickly and impersonally, with less sustained effort than is usually required with a knife or blunt object.

Let us remember another thing. Homicides committed with a firearm are not, as the Conservatives would have us believe, premeditated acts. They are often impulsive acts committed under the influence of alcohol. This makes the safe storage of firearms and measures like the registry, which are intended to encourage safe storage, all the more relevant, in my view. However, there is an issue that has not really been discussed in this debate to date, as far as I can tell, and that is the issue of firearms and suicide.

We just had a debate on suicide a couple of weeks ago, in which members weighed in with very earnest and well-motivated speeches. However, in this debate on the gun registry, we have not heard much about suicide, at least from the other side. Suicide accounts for nearly three-quarters of all firearm-related deaths in Canada. Last year a Quebec National Institute of Public Health study found that male suicide rates declined notably following the introduction of firearms legislation.

As a matter of common sense, removing the means of suicide will naturally affect the suicide rate and the means of suicide can vary according to country. For example, in China and India death by pesticide intake is more common. Subsequently, the development of strict controls on access to and storage of pesticides and industrial poisons has resulted in a reduction of suicide rates in those countries.

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The government also likes to talk about how it stands up for victims, yet l'Association canadienne pour la prévention du suicide, l'Association des familles de personnes assassinées ou disparues, l'Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, and the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime are all calling for the gun registry to remain in place.

This brings me to another point and it relates to a point I mentioned earlier. We can get into a battle of duelling studies, we understand that. We are in the realm of social science. Sometimes the same set of data yields very different conclusions. Just a couple of weeks ago an emergency medicine academic, Caillin Langmann, published a study. He looked at the major pieces of gun control legislation: the 1977 bill that required criminal record checks, the 1991 bill that imposed mandatory safety training and a 28-day waiting period for purchase, and the 1995 long gun registry legislation. What he came up with as a conclusion was that he failed to definitively demonstrate an association between firearms legislation and homicide between 1974 and 2008. I would mention that the study does not cover suicide.

Members on the other side will be saying, "We told you so", there is a study that says that none of these pieces of legislation work. One of the pieces of legislation that did not work, according to this study, was the legislation requiring a firearms acquisition certificate or, in other words, licensing in order to be a firearms owner. By this logic, the government should not stop at getting rid of the registry. It should be getting rid of the licensing provisions in Canadian law as well, but we know it is not doing that. I believe that, with all due respect to my colleagues on the other side, they are cherry-picking the evidence in some ways.

There are some people in Canada at the moment, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and others, who would like to see gun licensing eliminated and would probably use a study like Mr. Langmann's to justify the cost-saving push to eliminate licensing, which, of course, must make farmers, hunters and law-abiding gun owners feel like criminals, according to the government's logic.

What strikes me the most about some of the arguments I have heard on the other side of the House is the statement that has been made often over the last few months that the gun registry has not saved one single life. That is quite a sweeping statement. Now we are in the realm of government omniscience and absolutism. I could never make a statement like that about pretty much any kind of phenomenon that cannot be measured scientifically.

• (1710)

How do we know it has not saved a life? For example, in the Dawson tragedy the police were able to use the registry to remove firearms from a potential copycat who might have committed the same crime after witnessing what Kimveer Gill did.

Would the government admit that it is at least possible that there is even a 1% chance that the gun registry may have saved at least one life? I believe the members opposite speak in good faith on this issue, and any member in good faith would have to admit that there is a possibility. Then the question becomes, how much is one life worth? Of course, the government does not want to go there because that opens up a whole other can of worms, which is why, I guess, the

government makes categorical statements like, "The registry has never saved even one life".

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot of things and I wish I could comment on every one. Maybe it has to come through a private conversation.

I wonder if the member is aware that in a four year period there were hundreds of breaches of the gun registry. By that, I mean the RCMP, by their own investigations, found that information was accessed and fell into the wrong hands almost 300 times. In fact, there were only about 80 instances where they were actually able to trace where that information went and charge the people. Therefore, when he asks the question, "Has it saved a life?", he also has to ask the question, "Has it cost a life?"

I want to point this out. People have registered their firearms and then have had their houses broken into. They have no way of explaining how that information came into the hands of the criminals who broke into their houses. Those criminals did not do the ordinary thing of taking everything, but searched until they found very valuable firearms, so there is a clear violation of property rights here, as well as the question from the other side.

I have also heard the argument from the other side, and I hope I have time to ask this one. The point was made to not destroy the information. The Auditor General revealed the fact that about 90% of the registration information was flawed. The question I have is, what would it cost to fix the registry? Seven million guns are registered—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have known the hon. member by reputation since before I was elected. I worked here as an assistant when the hon. member first arrived in 1993, I believe it was. I know that this has been an issue that he has been studying for a very long time. I respect his knowledge and experience with this issue.

There are two things I would say. The member seems to be implying that somehow there have been breaches of security at the Canadian firearms centre and that the database has been broken into. That is what I think he is referring to. If that is true, we have a bigger problem here with the security of government records in general.

In terms of imperfect information, no doubt there is imperfect information, but there is a dictum that I sort of live by in politics. I think it is one that is often associated with politicians of conservative persuasion: perfection is the enemy of the good. If one is always seeking perfection, the perfect database, the perfect proof that the registry works, we are not going to achieve the common good. I take the member's point, and it is something I will obviously reflect on, but those are my answers to his points.

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• (1715)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are reminded by Dr. Leslie Tutty, who is with the University of Calgary faculty of social work, that long guns are the firearms most often used to kill women and children in domestic violence situations. She reminds us that the Alberta Court of Appeal has noted that gun control is a women's issue, that women represent a small percentage of gun owners, but that they account for a high percentage of victims of gun violence. She also points out that firearms resulting in the death of women from the use of long guns has substantially been reduced since the introduction of gun control and that while the registry may be inconvenient to the gun owners it is necessary to protect women's safety.

I wonder if the member could speak about why we balance off protection of women versus inconvenience of a gun owner.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the point the hon. member is making. I recently read in the *National Post* that in the past 15 years homicides by rifle have dropped 50% and firearm homicides against women have dropped 30%.

Obviously, fewer homicides mean fewer men and women are killed. I am not familiar with all of the background on the issue as it relates to the rates of homicide for women.

The point at the core of the hon. member's question is whether annoyance should get in the way of doing what we have to do for whoever that benefits in society. In the case of firearms, it is women in many cases. I do not like going to the motor vehicle bureau to get the registration for my car and I know that the people who are stealing cars do not have a registration. It is the same logic that some of my colleagues across the way have used.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech. He mentioned a couple of issues I found rather startling.

The member said he was shocked by the legislation to ban registration of long guns and that the whole thing is ill-conceived. I ask the member why was he shocked and why is it ill-conceived?

There were hundreds of hours of debate. Committees were struck and there were presentations by different people across Canada. It is not something that was done secretly. It has been out there for over a year.

I have one other comment. The *Calgary Sun* states:

So don't believe, even for a second, that police use the registry 17,000 times a day looking for guns.

That's fiction.

We know from our own research and from talking with police chiefs across Canada that police officers attend at domestic disputes figuring there are guns there and they follow their own procedures.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, what I said, and I stand to be corrected, was that many of my constituents are shocked and greatly disappointed that the government has gone ahead with this.

Of course that is no surprise to me. I have been following the issue for many years. All members in the House knew that at the first opportunity the government would use its majority to get rid of the registry.

Therefore, it is not a shock to me. However, many citizens in my province who were used to having the registry as a tool for protecting public safety and who thought it was a permanent thing are greatly disappointed.

In terms of the idea that officers approach every situation with the idea in the back of their mind that there could be a firearm, this is a psychological cognitive issue. When I drive my car I know someone could cut me off at any time and I drive defensively. However, when I see in my rear-view mirror someone who is driving at 150 miles an hour zigzagging in and out of traffic it has a psychological impact on me whether I like it or not.

That raises an important issue as to what the cognitive impacts are of having greater certainty based on the information in the registry.

• (1720)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment in terms of what the ongoing annual cost of the registry is now as well as how much it actually cost to put in place?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, based on what I have read, my sense is that it costs about \$4 million year.

However, one has to look at things comparatively. I am not trying to be partisan but we know the government is liberal when it comes to advertising its budgetary initiatives. We have all heard the ads on the radio stating how wonderful the recently passed budget is.

If we have a choice to make it would be less investment in government advertising and self-promotion and more investment in public security.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

It is a privilege to contribute to the debate and speak in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill. It is a registry that has been wasteful and ineffective and should have been scrapped years ago. It has not prevented crime and has created criminals out of law-abiding farmers, hunters and sport shooters instead of tackling the real criminals.

I will speak to why it is crucial that we finally scrap the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry and will outline some of the important steps our government has taken to help Canadians be safer and deter criminals.

The government has delivered tougher sentences to deter serious and violent crimes, especially gun crimes, and keep dangerous people off our streets. It has provided our provincial and territorial partners with funding to put hundreds more front-line police officers on our streets. It has brought in new measures to fight organized crime, white-collar crime and human smuggling, and has made new investments in prevention to attack the root causes of crime to stop it before it happens.

Government Orders

We are doing what works. We are doing what makes sense, which most certainly includes firearms control. Canadians expect effective measures to prevent and deal with gun crimes. That is what we are committed to delivering. However, that does not mean wasting millions of hard-working taxpayers' dollars to maintain a system that does not work.

Hon. members who followed the committee hearings for Bill C-391 last year know that we heard highly credible testimony from a number of respected experienced police officers who told us that the information provided by the long gun registry was not reliable. Some of these officers have estimated there may be as many as one million long guns that have never been registered. Thousands more have not been registered properly because model or catalogue numbers were used instead of serial numbers, while others have been registered multiple times. The long gun registry is not removing the guesswork; it is adding to it. It does not help anyone. It does not contribute to public safety.

The long gun registry has been in place for over a decade and we have yet to hear of a single instance where it has even been given partial credit for preventing a crime. If that were happening Canadians would support it. All indications are that they do not, and that includes Canadians who live in rural areas. Canadians are spending millions of dollars to maintain the registry with virtually no evidence to indicate it has any effect whatsoever on reducing gun crimes. That is not a good record, nor is it a good investment. It is not making our streets safer.

Our government believes in effective gun control. It believes in measures that work to prevent crime and are worth the money we invest in them, such as the requirement to have a licence before people can buy an unrestricted firearm, i.e., a rifle or a shotgun. Before they can get a licence they have to pass the Canadian firearms safety course. Before they can get a licence to buy and own a rifle or shotgun they also need to pass a background check which involves a criminal record check to ensure the individual is not under a court order prohibiting him or her from possessing a firearm as well as determining whether allowing the individual to have a firearm would pose a threat to public safety.

The Government of Canada is now investing \$7 million a year to make the screening process for people applying for a firearms licence even stronger with the very reasonable goal of preventing crime by working to keep firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them.

I want to emphasize to the House and to Canadians that Bill C-19 does not change these requirements. No one will be able to buy a firearm of any kind without passing the Canadian firearms safety course and a background check, as well as possessing a proper licence.

• (1725)

The bill will eliminate a law that places an unnecessary burden on law-abiding Canadians and on Canadian taxpayers. In doing so, it will free up resources for investment in anti-crime initiatives that will help make our streets safer.

We have to be honest with ourselves and face reality. The long gun registry is only effective and efficient at harassing law-abiding

farmers and outdoors enthusiasts. It does not prevent crime because we know that criminals do not register guns. Illegal handguns are the primary problem. The problem is not the legally acquired shotguns and rifles found in the hands of our farmers, hunters and target shooters. The firearms involved in the majority of gun crimes are not purchased by farmers for the protection of their livestock, are not owned by your neighbour down the road who goes moose hunting every fall with his brother or the aspiring athlete hoping to shine for Canada in the next Olympic biathlon, yet these are the people the long gun registry affects.

We all want to reduce crime, especially gun crime. Therefore, I ask hon. members to support Bill C-19. Let us invest in programs that are effective and eliminate those that are mere window dressing that divert our attention and our resources away from the real problem. It is time to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously for conservation of the registry.

What does the member say to Quebec police officers who use this tool on a daily basis?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, I say to Quebec police officers what I have said to officers throughout Canada, that this registry does nothing to prevent crime.

As I said in my remarks, it is a wasteful resource. As a government, we are investing in resources that will help police officers not only in Quebec but across the country fight crime. The elimination of this particular registry will save millions, in fact billions, of dollars. We can use that resource in a meaningful way to fight crime and get the real criminals.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respectfully ask my colleague the following: does he not believe that the amnesties the government has regularly granted to long gun owners could have encouraged several people to disobey the law and caused some confusion?

[English]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, we encourage all Canadians to abide by the law. We encourage the effective and prudent use of crime-fighting tools. The registry is not a tool that effectively reduces crime.

The licensing of firearms is effective. The registry is a wasteful and ineffective use of taxpayers' money. We can put other resources to good use and fight criminals.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member, my colleague, for the very descriptive and excellent way in which he presented the case in favour of this very important legislation.

Government Orders

We have not heard from a single front-line officer in support of the argument to not scrap the registry. In fact, in the Conservative caucus we have 11 colleagues here in the House who have served in the noble profession of police officer for many years.

I know that this is a very important issue in the hon. member's riding. I would like to know if he has heard from any constituents who oppose this legislation in his riding. I certainly have not; has he?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, I have heard from many constituencies. I ran on this particular issue, and quite clearly the constituents across Nipissing—Timiskaming are telling me to get rid of the registry. It has been useless and has gone on far too long. It is a waste of money and should have been scrapped years ago.

I say to my constituents, "Promise made, promise kept".

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak on Bill C-19, a bill to eliminate the long gun registry. I would like to add my thanks to the member for Yorkton—Melville for his years of work on this file, and to thank as well the member for Portage—Lisgar for her terrific work on it.

My colleagues on this side of the House have spoken very well on the legal, law enforcement and financial downside of the long gun registry. I would like to add a slightly different perspective, that of a hunter.

I represent a vast and beautiful rural constituency in western Manitoba. Farmers, ranchers, loggers, hunters, outfitters, anglers and trappers are many of my constituents. It is a beautiful place with abundant wildlife and, like many of my constituents, I am a hunter.

Hunting is part of my culture and a way of life, as it is for many of my constituents. Interestingly, almost all the homes in my constituency have one or more firearms, yet the crime rate is very low.

Why is that? It is because where I live, we have a culture of respect for each other, our community and the land that sustains us. In fact, one could call it a peaceable kingdom. That is why I found the words of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis somewhat offensive when he assumed that people who had firearms were automatically suspect, or at least that is now I heard it.

My constituents are honest—

• (1735)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have never suggested that for a minute. As a matter of fact, I argued the opposite. I argued that gun owners are law-abiding and sterling citizens.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, my constituents are honest country people who work hard and play by the rules. That is why we find the long gun registry so egregious and so offensive. When gun crimes are committed in far-off big cities, who gets punished? We do.

Parties opposite make a great show of their support for the working people and the "common man". I am particularly reminded of the old NDP versus the new NDP. The old NDP had a modicum

of respect for the people who live on the land, work hard and play by the rules. I am thinking of that party's former leader, Audrey McLaughlin, who, as I discovered after reading some *Hansards* from years back, had some serious doubts about the long gun registry. All parties opposite have evolved into parties of the big-government elites and union bosses, who strive to expand government control over the lives of these same working people that those members purport to support.

I am especially puzzled at the support for the long gun registry by Liberal and NDP members from Newfoundland and Labrador in the Maritimes, where they have such grand hunting traditions, such as the seal hunt in Newfoundland, moose hunting, bird hunting and all of that. I have even travelled to Newfoundland myself and have enjoyed the particular local delicacy called bottled moose. Those from Newfoundland know exactly what I am talking about.

For those of us who represent rural constituencies, and for my constituents in particular, I would say that our innate country common sense tells us that punishing law-abiding gun owners is simply not right.

To the people in my constituency a firearm is a tool, like a chainsaw or a tractor, that obviously must be used with care, but as freedom-loving Canadians, people in my constituency view firearms ownership as a symbol of their Canadian citizenship or a symbol of the trust that should exist between the people and their government.

I am reminded of what George Orwell said many years ago when he was commenting on firearms ownership by ordinary British citizens. It perhaps does not quite apply to us here, but it does have some wisdom. He said:

That rifle hanging on the wall of the working-class flat or labourer's cottage is the symbol of democracy. It is our job to see that it stays there.

Most firearms in Canada are owned for the purpose of hunting. For many of us who grew up hunting, it is a sacred activity that is often difficult to describe, so I will quote the eminent evolutionary psychologist Randall Eaton, who said of boys in particular in his book *From Boys to Men of Heart: Hunting as Rite of Passage*:

The instinct to hunt awakens spontaneously in boys, but the taking of a life opens the heart and tempers that instinct with compassion. If we want to transform boys into men who respect life and are responsible to society and the environment then we need to mentor them in hunting as a rite of passage.

He further notes:

The hunt is the ideal way to teach universal virtues, including generosity, patience, courage, fortitude and humility.

Others may not agree with that, but I am describing a true, honest and active culture in this country that is very important. Members opposite may laugh, but to many of us, and to me in particular, it is important.

I used to be the hunting columnist for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and I remember interviewing a young man who had just taken his very first deer. In his own words to me, he said:

Even though it was just a doe, that deer was better than any fantasy I ever had, and it was even better because my dad was there with me every second and I could share my excitement with him...I could no longer understand how people could be against hunting since it was now something that was so dear to me and it is a passion that I can share with my dad and will share with my children when the time comes.

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What happens as well is that people who hunt and have a relationship with wildlife and the land often take up careers in conservation, myself included. I caught my first fish when I was 4 and I got my first ruffed grouse when I was 14. I have had a wonderful 35-year career in conservation, and it started there. These experiences with my dad affected me profoundly.

• (1740)

There is a vast array of grassroots conservation activities in my own constituency. I went on at some length about hunting because without firearms we cannot have hunting, and the long gun registry is actually an attack on a culture and on an innocent, productive and wonderful way of life.

Bill C-19, the bill to get rid of the long gun registry, represents a real and tangible victory for those who cherish the particular way of life that I have described. It is a way of life that understands where our food comes from, reveres nature and values hard work and family traditions. Quite simply, this culture makes our country what it is.

Over and over again in the campaigns I have been in over the last year, my constituents have told me about how important the issue of the long gun registry is. In my constituency we have many issues that deal with agriculture, health care, rail service, and so on; however, the long gun registry came up as a particularly egregious affront to the innate country common sense that is represented by my constituents. The communities in my constituency have a very deep and profound relationship with the land. They are confident people who work hard and, as I said, value the fact that they play by the rules. Those are the people in this country whom we should be rewarding, people who work hard and play by the rules.

For me as an MP, those people are my top priority. Many of them are employed in the natural resources industries of farming, ranching, mining, energy production and so on. We know the importance of the natural resource industries and of our rural communities, and it can almost be said that the people who work and thrive in our natural resource industries are carrying the country. They, in effect, make our country what it is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how will the government respond to the honest, hard-working police chiefs, police officers and other front-line workers across this country, including youth protection workers, ambulance attendants, paramedics and nurses, in cities and in rural areas, who say that the registry is useful in the context of their duties or that it makes their work environment safer?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleagues have gone a long way to answer that question, but I would like to quote the Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), the member for Beauce, who said very succinctly that it's very important to measure results, not intentions.

I will grant that the members opposite, in their desire to keep the long gun registry, have good intentions and actually care about public safety, but what counts is results. As one of my colleagues said, we have a number of police officers on this side of the House,

and to a person they say that the long gun registry is useless to them. All of us have had contact with police officers in the street and in their cars, and I make a point of asking them. I have not come across one front-line police officer who says the registry is of any use whatsoever.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always difficult to have a discussion with people who think that what they are saying is right and true, and whatever anyone else says is wrong or is false. I will not fall for that ideology.

I have friends who are hunters. No one is attacking hunters. We are talking about protecting human life by ensuring that weapons are registered. We need licences to drive our cars. When people go hunting by boat, they need a licence. So it is only normal to have to have a licence for a firearm.

Now, what is even worse is that I can already hear the shredders. Not only are they going to scrap the firearms registry, but they also want to shred and destroy the registry. The people of Quebec want the registry. The Quebec government wants to have that information to create its own registry.

If the government respects people so much, why are the people of Quebec not entitled to respect so that Quebec can create its own registry? In the meantime, in spite of the Conservative cult, we will take care of our own affairs in Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, as was noted earlier, every province is free to create their own long gun registry. However, in order to eliminate the long gun registry, which is nothing but information, the information itself has to go as well. If Quebec wants to spend millions on an ineffective long gun registry, I suppose that is its right.

I notice that the members opposite never present any real evidence about the registry actually affecting crime rates. My colleague from Fundy Royal made the point that if it were so incontrovertible that the registry worked, then I think people's views on this side might be different. There is not a shred of evidence that it works. We need results on crime control, not pious good intentions.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a lot about tradition in his riding.

In my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, people participate in a variety of sports. We have farmers and many of them use long guns. Hunting is a way of life. I also have had a chance to visit a number of ranges in my riding where people are taught to respect firearms and to use them safely, not to be scared of them. I think there is a lot of fearmongering that we should be scared. That is one thing that will be taken away. One of the concerns that those people had was that we were intruding on their ability to teach their kids the responsible use of firearms, as well as to hunt and everything else.

Government Orders

Could the member comment on some of that tradition and why people feel so insulted by the existing law?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I know that others do not see the connection between hunting and firearms. To me, it is pretty obvious. If we take away the tool that is needed to hunt, we actually kill hunting.

In terms of the member's comments about safety, there are three shotgun sports not related to hunting. There is trap shooting, skeet shooting and sporting clays. They have been practised for decades around the world and, because of the safe handling that my friend talked about, there has not been one accident in those sports despite the millions and millions of shotgun shells that have been fired. That is a testament to responsible firearm ownership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with some brief comments. The member for Nipissing—Timiskaming said that by passing the bill that is before us we will save \$2 billion. I would very much like to understand how he is going to save \$2 billion by scrapping the firearms registry. The money has already been spent and it will never come back. It is virtually an insult to tell Canadians they are going to save that much. What is going to be saved is \$4 million. Four million dollars a year to save lives; I think that is worth it. Honestly, I think Canadians deserve it. Four million dollars is not too much, even if it saves only a single life. The statistics tell us there has been a significant decline in deaths and attempted murders in spousal violence situations since the firearms registry was established. The registry is working; it is saving lives.

I cannot believe that the Conservatives really want to abolish our firearms registry. The Parliament of Canada should continue to do everything it can to protect the women of this country. It should do everything it can to protect gay people and members of cultural communities. We are all affected by violent people, by acts of aggression, by violence. We have had enough.

We have the tools in front of us that can protect us, that help us and that can save lives. At a cost of \$4 million a year, I honestly think it is worth it. The bill to abolish the registry today is a slap in the face to Quebecers. Quebecers who want the firearms registry are being told too bad, they will pay twice for the same registry. The Conservatives think that by abolishing it, they will save \$2 billion dollars. That makes no sense. Quebecers are being told tales. They are being told to believe that it is worthwhile to destroy it. But what is really being done is to make Quebecers pay twice for a firearms registry that cost an arm and a leg, as we know.

I want to hear that Parliament is going to continue to protect people who are disadvantaged, who are hurt, who are attacked, and that it certainly does not want to abolish the firearms registry. I want to keep this registry.

I would like us to remember how the firearms registry came about. My colleague reminded us that Heidi Rathjen was very much involved in the creation of the current registry. On the evening of December 6, 1989, there was a massacre at École Polytechnique in Montreal. I was there on the evening of December 6, 1989. Fourteen women were killed when Marc Lépine went to the Université de Montréal with the intention of killing feminists. After firing into the

air, he convinced all the men in the classroom to leave. Only the murderer, Lépine, and his victims remained in the classroom.

Nobody wanted to believe that the lives of these people were truly in danger, but today, we do believe it. Of the nine women he shot at in the classroom, he managed to kill six. He then went along the corridor to the cafeteria. He went to another classroom. He managed to kill 14 women in less than 20 minutes. I was there on the evening of December 6. I remember my colleagues' faces, the shock, the sadness, the anger. I remember my many colleagues, Montrealers, women, who made their way to the Polytechnique. I remember the vigil and the questions we were all asking: How? Why? What happened? Fourteen women are dead? Is it true?

● (1750)

Were they dead because one man felt emasculated? Since that day, everywhere in Canada, on December 6, women and all Canadians remember the acts of violence committed against women. We remember the massacre at the Polytechnique in Montreal. We remember Marc Lépine's anti-feminism. Let us remember the reason for the massacre. Marc Lépine wrote on the day of the massacre:

Know that I am committing suicide today...not for economic reasons...but rather for political reasons. I have decided to send feminists, who have done nothing but ruin my life, to their Maker—to the kingdom of the dead.

That event led to the creation of the registry we have today. Since then, there have been other massacres in Montreal. We remember Anastasia De Sousa who died from bullet wounds at Dawson College in downtown Montreal. We remember how shocked people were, and the laws that have since been passed to protect our students against men and women—especially men—who cannot help themselves and who commit acts of extreme violence. Our firearms registry is there to defend those students.

We remember Valery Fabrikant, who killed four professors at Concordia University on August 24, 1992. He was successful in killing the departmental head, Phoivos Ziogas, professors Matthew Douglas and Jaan Saber, and the professor and president of the teachers' union at Concordia University, Michael Hogben, a martyr of the union movement. Mr. Fabrikant killed those people. Why? Because he thought that they had not done enough for him.

● (1755)

[*English*]

Valery Fabrikant believed that he was being wronged by the university structure of Concordia University. He hounded the members of the staff. He tracked the members of faculty. He would stalk people at their homes and at their meetings. He would follow them in the halls and the corridors.

This man turned out to be armed and he turned out to be dangerous. If we had the registry in place at that point, I have no doubt that the police would have realized the risk all of those university professors were in.

Private Members' Business

He claimed that he was provoked. That was his defence. The man is now in jail and I hope he stays there for a very long time.

A memorial is now in place at the university commemorating that event. I want us to remember the union members who were shot dead by Valery Fabrikant and the fact that the registry may very well have helped.

[Translation]

Today, it is my moral duty to condemn the Harper government for what it intends to do to the firearms registry. Once again—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I remind the member that he may not use the name of other hon. members in his speech.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry.

I have a moral obligation to denounce the Conservative government's decisions on the issue of the gun registry. Once again, this government is forcing a bill through without any debate. The Conservative government will surely break the record for the lack of debates in the House. Not only does the Conservative government seek to avoid compromise with the large part of the public that is very concerned, it seems to worry about things that, honestly, many people do not understand.

The government is removing the requirement to register non-restricted firearms. It is also fearmongering. It is clashing with a large part of the public and also with police, who are responsible for ensuring public safety. This government brags about wanting to make people safe and sending criminals to jail, yet they are depriving law enforcement authorities of a valuable tool.

As of September 30, 2011, the Canadian gun registry was used more than 17,000 times each day. In my riding, police in the Gaspé have said that they use the registry every day. Officers in the Sûreté du Québec consult the registry every time they respond to a situation.

• (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am sorry, but I am going to have to interrupt the member. It being 6 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize that the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure plays a vital role in the creation and protection of jobs, and that infrastructure is a strategic asset that supports vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities; (b) act immediately to counter the crisis of crumbling infrastructure and the very real risks it poses to the economy, security, and the quality of life of Canadians; (c) develop a legislative framework, with clear targets, to provide sustainable, predictable and long term infrastructure funding agreements with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis

communities; (d) cooperate with stakeholders to encourage the use of sustainable and innovative infrastructure design models, and to develop sustainable building codes that favour energy and water conservation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and take into account changing demographics and evolving rural-urban linkages; (e) index the Gas Tax Fund to economic and population growth and increase the existing gas tax transfer by one cent per litre, and consider other alternative funding mechanisms to ensure municipalities, large and small, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure; and (f) acknowledge its exclusive financial responsibility for, and immediately announce its intention to replace, the Champlain Bridge.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important moment for me and I appreciate your taking the time to read the whole motion en français.

It is with great enthusiasm that I present this motion on infrastructure, but let me first set the stage. Infrastructure has been part of our history. The railroad that goes from coast to coast is part of our history and our heritage. It has also been the backbone of our communities and our economy.

Modern Canada has built infrastructure keeping in mind the needs of the changing demographics and the needs for a modern economy. We have built highways. When our rivers were becoming polluted, we rose to the challenge and built water treatment facilities. We have built housing for different communities' needs. We have built schools and community centres. All of that infrastructure is making our communities vibrant and prosperous. It enhances the quality of life of many Canadians. From coast to coast to coast, infrastructure of all kinds helps our communities prosper.

Over the years, the Government of Canada in partnership with the provinces and municipalities has invested to make sure that we have good infrastructure that responds to the needs of different communities.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s we saw the building of much of our modern infrastructure which we continue to use.

• (1805)

[Translation]

I am someone who really likes to go biking. For several years, I have lived in Montreal and enjoyed biking. I have been noticing for a number of years that a lot of infrastructure is aging and is in a bad state. The current level of investment in our aging infrastructure network does not seem to be keeping pace with demand. It is certainly not meeting the demand in terms of highway infrastructure and, more specifically, bridges and overpasses, are being more heavily travelled.

[English]

I present this motion thinking of the future, thinking also that we have to change our way of building infrastructure. We must think of the challenges of the 21st century, the challenges presented by our environment and by our different commitments to communities to make sure that we have not only buildings, but also roads that respond to the needs of the community. We have to think also of the way we plan infrastructure to make sure that we have infrastructure that responds to and integrates itself in living environments.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Infrastructure is the foundation that supports our vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities. Building and maintaining infrastructure play a key role in creating and maintaining jobs. According to a professor from the École des hautes études commerciales in Montreal, infrastructure is a strategic asset that contributes to the Canadian economy.

And yet our infrastructure is collapsing and crumbling. We see this is happening. On September 30, 2006, a section of the Concorde overpass collapsed, taking the lives of five innocent victims and affecting their families and friends. This summer, part of the tunnel above the Ville-Marie highway in Montreal collapsed. Fortunately, there were no victims. In Toronto, a cement block from the Kipling bridge came crashing down on the Gardiner Expressway, in the middle of rush hour. These and many other incidents remind us that the public infrastructure of our cities is in a critical state. And I am not even talking about the infrastructure of our smaller Canadian communities.

According to a Léger Marketing poll conducted in August, nine out of ten people responded that they were worried about using Montreal's highways. Approximately one out of every five drivers avoids certain highways because they do not trust the highway infrastructure.

And what should one make of the lack of drinking water infrastructure in some communities when in 2010, 1,200 boil water warnings were issued in Canada?

Our aging infrastructure will cost us a lot if the Canadian Federation of Municipalities is to be believed. It will cost \$123 billion to maintain and restore our decaying highways, bridges, sewers and water treatment systems, not to mention other types of infrastructure. On top of that, an additional \$115 billion will be needed to build the infrastructure of tomorrow.

And yet what are we seeing? Over the next three years, a significant portion of the federal infrastructure funding programs will expire. Canadians, however, who use the bridges and overpasses every morning to get to work know all too well that the revitalization work on our infrastructure is just beginning. The tens of thousands of people who drive over the Champlain Bridge every day can attest to that. And just as the federal government's major investments in infrastructure are due to expire—investments that were also supposed to kickstart an economic recovery—another recession is looming in Canada.

Instead of demonstrating foresight and ensuring that the economy is running smoothly, this government is irresponsibly rushing to impose fiscal restraint on Canada. The government is making its departments prepare scenarios for budget cuts of up to 10%. Will cuts be made to federal assistance for infrastructure? Will these budget cuts result in the loss of skilled workers at the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities?

It is in this context that my motion asks the government to recognize that the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure plays a vital role in the creation and protection of jobs, and that infrastructure is a strategic asset that supports vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities. We are also asking the government

to take all necessary action to counter the crisis of crumbling infrastructure and the very real risks it poses to the economy, security and the quality of life of Canadians.

• (1810)

I truly hope that the federal government will be an active partner and work with our provincial, municipal and community partners throughout the country.

I am asking the government to develop a legislative framework, with clear targets, to provide sustainable, predictable and long-term infrastructure funding agreements with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

In politics, we are not really used to taking the long view. We often only think as far as the next election. This legislative framework, in co-operation with the provinces and communities, would depoliticize infrastructure, an expression that I borrowed from the magazine *Les Affaires*. Instead of reacting, we should undertake long-term planning so that infrastructure projects will serve all communities that sorely need them.

The infrastructure deficit has built up over the span of 40 years. Agreements will have to be negotiated with our partners to make up for long-standing investment deficits and also to build the roads, bridges, sewers, treatment plants and other infrastructure that will ensure the prosperity, vitality and health of our children's communities and those of generations to come. Clearly, agreements on federal funding for infrastructure will have to extend beyond 2014, when 40% of federal investments will cease.

My motion also calls on the government to show vision and to negotiate building codes with our partners that will result in sustainable infrastructure. Infrastructure renewal could result in a proactive policy to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by including, for example, plans for comfortable, affordable, reliable, non-polluting public transit. I am talking about infrastructure that promotes water and energy conservation. These green technologies could become an economic driver and be exported.

This infrastructure has to be funded with ever-smaller budgets. We know that gas tax revenues are going to go down by nearly 60% because of demographic changes and inflation over the next 20 years. I urge the government to consider indexing the gas tax to the changes in our population and increasing the gas tax transfer by one cent a litre in order to secure stable infrastructure funding for the long term. We have to consider alternative funding mechanisms to ensure that the municipalities, small or large, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure.

This motion was put on the order paper before the announcement about replacing the Champlain Bridge. I want to thank the government for answering my call. I would like to reiterate that the Champlain Bridge sees 60 million crossings and facilitates \$20 billion in international trade a year. What is the government's plan for public transit infrastructure? How will this be coordinated with the transit in the greater metropolitan area? This is why we need a national public transit strategy, as proposed by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina?

Private Members' Business

• (1815)

The reason I have been speaking about the Champlain Bridge and infrastructure in Quebec is because I represent the people of LaSalle—Émard, a riding in the Montreal area, and my constituents, like many Montrealers, are suffering the consequences of the deterioration of our infrastructure. But I realize that public infrastructure is deteriorating all over Canada.

I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of the motion I moved on behalf of the people of LaSalle—Émard and all Canadians. It is time to get to work.

Together, let us build the future.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has made unprecedented infrastructure investment, such as the \$33 billion building Canada fund. We have increased the gas tax and created the economic action plan. If infrastructure work is so important for the NDP, could the hon. member explain why it always seems to oppose our Conservative actions?

She also mentioned indexing the gas tax. Will she first commit to supporting our legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent?

• (1820)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the Conservative government is looking into ways to fund infrastructure on a long-term basis. What I said is that we are hoping that this investment will continue, if not increase, until 2014.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some of the most dynamic and wonderful developments that we have seen in the province of Manitoba have been projects like The Forks development, Portage Place, The Wellness Institute, the streets, roads and underpasses, and the highways being developed. This all happens because there is a sense of co-operation among different levels of government. The federal, provincial and municipal governments sit down, recognize there is a need to establish a pool of funds that will take care of infrastructure needs. It is estimated that Manitoba alone requires hundreds of millions of dollars.

To what degree does the member feel that it is the responsibility of the federal government to work hand in hand, not only to provide money but to provide leadership in ensuring that all the stakeholders are brought to the table to develop the vital infrastructure projects that must go forward in order to build communities and, in fact, our nation?

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for stressing a point that was very important in my presentation and for bringing it forward so eloquently. It is very important that we work as a partnership.

[Translation]

I have often heard here in the House that this is a provincial jurisdiction. We really must work together, since we all represent the same people. I think it is very important to have these partnerships so that we truly understand the needs of our constituents.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate and compliment my colleague from LaSalle—Émard for a fantastic speech, outlining something that, for most people, is really boring. They do not think a lot about what happens when they turn on water and the importance of their life being safe while driving down highways.

Would the member underscore the importance of this as a life-saving issue, not just pretty things in a community but actual infrastructure that supports ordinary life and families living in our communities?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I love my colleague's passion when he talks about important things. These are basic needs. As I mentioned, we built important infrastructure over the years, but it has been neglected and abandoned. Now, we must identify these basic needs and make sure that our infrastructure is safe, whether we are talking about drinking water or waste water treatment. Words escape me.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard for bringing the motion forward. The member for LaSalle—Émard raises an important subject that matters to all Canadians and one that is often taken for granted. I commend the member for raising this issue in her motion.

I believe that all members in this House recognize the importance of infrastructure. It was not so many years ago, in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, that the community of Summerland was suffering from a serious water shortage. Water had to be diverted from a local stream to provide water for the residents but this threatened fish habitat. At one point, the mayor of Summerland was facing potential jail time. Not far away, Lake Okanagan was a floating bridge.

In order to comply with the federal Navigable Waters Protection Act, the bridge was required to rise to allow marine traffic passage below. The bridge was well over 50 years old and would fail, causing the bridge deck to get stuck in the up position, causing chaos. Ambulances and other emergency service vehicles could not get by.

Those are just a few examples of the problems created by decades of infrastructure neglect.

Fortunately, our government has taken strong action, which is why I am rising today to speak to the motion.

In budget 2007, it was our government that announced the seven-year \$33 billion building Canada plan, the first ever federal long-term plan for infrastructure. In fact, the building Canada plan is the single largest, most sustained federal government commitment to public infrastructure in Canadian history.

It did not end there. In budget 2009, in response to the economic recession, our government announced Canada's economic action plan. Through the economic action plan, our government worked in partnership with the provinces, territories and municipalities to deliver timely, targeted and temporary investments that created jobs and helped boost our economy. In fact, we invested in over 28,000 projects all across Canada and, in many cases, these projects upgraded and rebuilt infrastructure that had suffered from decades of neglect under former governments.

In my home province of British Columbia, we had a B.C. NDP government that promised to build a new bridge to replace that same 50-year-old lifting bridge across Okanagan Lake. However, it did not. Much as it also promised to upgrade Highway 97 and much as the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam told us yesterday, the B.C. NDP did not build the Evergreen Line first proposed in 1993.

What the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam did not mention was that our government, working in partnership with the provincial government, had already made a \$600 million commitment to that important project.

Another project in my home province of British Columbia that was not mentioned is the Canada Line transit project from the Vancouver airport in Richmond to downtown Vancouver. The project involved a \$450 million investment from the federal government. And, to be clear, the Canada Line is a P3, a public-private partnership. That is why the NDP and CUPE were opposed to the project.

However, today, the Canada Line is a huge success. Average ridership today exceeds 100,000 a people. This is well ahead of all the projections. This infrastructure project has been a huge success and that success has also involved the private sector.

In municipalities across the country, from the southern expansion of Edmonton's light rail transit system, to a wind turbine to provide clean, powerful waste water treatment in Kensington, Prince Edward Island, or, in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, the partnership that resulted in the new Okanagan College Centre for Excellence. This building is one of the most environmentally innovative structures of its kind in North America.

The latter examples illustrate how these infrastructure investments are supporting the government's broader goals in relation to energy, water conservation, air quality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

● (1825)

These are just some of the examples of the \$33 billion invested into important infrastructure projects across Canada. In fact, more than one-half of the building Canada plan, more than \$17 billion, is going directly to municipalities through the gas tax fund and the goods and services tax rebate. Those funds help build our infrastructure.

As members of the House I am sure are well aware, our government has recently tabled legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent, at \$2 billion per year, and the NDP stood in the House and voted against it. This will provide Canadian municipalities with significant, stable, predictable and sustainable funding for their infrastructure priorities. I know from my time as a city councillor,

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this is the type of funding that local governments need to carry out major infrastructure projects. This is why we now have 28,000 infrastructure projects all across Canada in which our government has invested. There has not been a government in Canada, for over 30 years, that even comes close to matching what our government has done since 2007.

The government recognizes the vital importance that modern, world-class public infrastructure plays in virtually all aspects of our lives. Ultimately, this is the reason why I am speaking against the motion. We must recognize with all of these 28,000 infrastructure projects, all have occurred without the added expense of more Ottawa-imposed bureaucracy, as would result from what is proposed in Motion No. 270.

Canadians do not want, nor need, more bureaucracy and red tape or legislative frameworks from Ottawa. What Canadians need is action and, more important, results. From coast to coast to coast, the results from the leadership of the government are clear: upgraded water systems; expanded sewer systems; new recreational facilities and walking paths; and in fact much more. From city to city we can see the results from our government's infrastructure program. There are 28,000 projects that speak to the success of the government's economic action plan. I view each one of these projects as cause to speak against this motion.

With regard to the motion's reference to the Champlain Bridge in Montreal, the government has always taken its responsibilities for this important infrastructure asset. In the past few budgets we have invested a total of \$380 million in the Champlain Bridge to maintain it and ensure its ongoing safety to the next decade. Then on October 5 this year, the Minister of Transport announced that our government would proceed with building a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River.

I would like to thank my colleagues for taking the time to hear my comments today. I would also like to thank the member for LaSalle—Émard for raising a very important issue. However, I believe this government's record for results and success in creating an unprecedented 28,000 infrastructure projects all across our great country speaks for itself and negates the need for any added Ottawa bureaucracy or administration, as Motion No. 270 contemplates.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to congratulate you on reading the motion entirely in French. Bravo. If the position of Auditor General is still available, I am sure you would meet the bilingualism criterion. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

I listened to my NDP and Conservative friends speak. I have been here for 15 years and everyone naturally tries to take some credit: because of me, it was me, my government is better than yours, the mean provincial governments led by opposing parties, it is terrible. In reality, Canadians, Quebecers and people in Montreal, in my riding, need infrastructure renewal. That is the reality.

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I could have said that in 1993, when the Liberals came to power and inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservatives, we decided to invest heavily and create what is now known as the infrastructure program. I could have spoken about that, but I want to look to the future. I do not want to look to the past.

We have clearly always wanted investment in infrastructure. I think that in 2007, there was a minority government. Yes, that is right. A majority was needed, and the Conservative Party did not have enough elected members. So I imagine that all parliamentarians—at any rate, those in the Liberal Party—voted with the government because it was important to invest in infrastructure for the people.

However, this is 2011. We are now faced with a certain reality. Every time we have gone through a recession, infrastructure has been the basic economic building block, not only to improve people's quality of life, but also to create jobs. It is a vital partnership program. While respecting all jurisdictions, we must ensure that the Canadian government acts as a facilitator, taking the needs of municipalities and provincial control into account, and that it invests the money needed to meet the needs of Canadians.

We are in favour of this motion. Of course, we have been talking about the Champlain Bridge for quite some time. I have been talking about it for quite some time. We talked about it during the last election campaign. The announcement has finally come. I do not know who will cut the ribbon, but we need a new Champlain Bridge. In the meantime, along with the original announcement, we also definitely need to know what will happen to the existing bridge. The government has always refused to hand over the inspection reports. If you talk to engineers, read the studies and follow the news, you know that the bridge is in bad shape. When engineers tell me not to drive at the edge when crossing the Champlain Bridge, but rather to stay in the middle, that is serious. I would really like to believe that a bridge will be built within the next 10 years, but that means we have to continue using the existing bridge for nearly 10 years. We therefore need to have the straight goods on the condition of the bridge.

Clearly, we need to find a new way of doing things. As a Montrealer, I think the municipalities are the key to the future of this country. So we need to have a new partnership.

•(1835)

[*English*]

We need a new deal with municipalities, a deal that will have a balanced approach with the rural and the urban, a deal where we will be able to ensure that we have a true diversity for those who have a car, or for those who have a bicycle, or for public transit. Public transit does not just mean buses; it also means trains. We need a rail policy between the cities.

[*Translation*]

We can talk about HSR in the Quebec-Windsor corridor. We can talk about basic infrastructure, whether interprovincial or between Canada and the United States. But very definitely, infrastructure is the future. The basic policy of a government, both for the economy and for quality of life, depends on its infrastructure. We have to protect the existing infrastructure while ensuring that we are able to build more. And this motion meets that need well. What we like

about this motion is that it is all about diversity. It does not talk only about rural and urban, it also talks about aboriginal communities, the first nations, the Inuit and the Métis.

I am a former minister of sport. I remember that when we created the infrastructure program, there were three components. Component 3 was particularly important, to my mind, because it was a way of being able to invest in sports or recreation and tourism infrastructure. Infrastructure also serves as a prevention and development tool. An arena was built in Iqaluit, where there were young people with problems. The sports infrastructure improved the young people's self-esteem, with the result that people like Joé Juneau in Kuujuaq are creating programs for youth. This infrastructure means that we can restore young people's dignity.

That is good both for the environment and for the quality of life in municipalities. It is an important development tool for our own people. We have a motion and we have a Conservative government. The member for LaSalle—Émard is going to be a bit disappointed, because she got a little handshake from the Conservative member opposite who said the blues were going to vote against it. But it is important that we keep talking about it. Yesterday, we talked with the member for Trinity—Spadina about her private member's bill on public transit.

Today, we are talking about infrastructure. At the transport committee, we are doing a study of a national public transit strategy. Except now, we can no longer separate a national public transit strategy from infrastructure. We have to have a strategy that includes both these aspects. In terms of governance and funding, it is essential that any public policy take both these aspects into account; one will not work without the other.

We agree with the funding measures. Mr. Martin, who was the prime minister at the time, is the one who first put forward, in cooperation with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the idea of putting a tax on gasoline that would be given to the municipalities for funding. The current government made this gas funding permanent. We must look at new funding methods. If the municipalities are telling us that this tax is no longer sufficient, we must find more money. If this money currently serves only to maintain existing infrastructure and we want to build more infrastructure, we will have to find money somewhere else.

We must look at indexing and see if we can find additional funds in the current gasoline excise tax. An additional tax does not mean an additional tax for the Canadian public. It means that we will take an additional amount and send it to the municipalities. We will no longer have any choice, and we all agree that such is the case.

First, a public-private partnership is imperative if we have smart regulations and the right type of support. It is not additional bureaucracy. Our role is to ensure that people have a decent quality of life and, as a result, it is up to us to provide the framework. Second, the Liberal Party has always advocated for a fund devoted to infrastructure. We therefore need an amount of money that is stable in the long term. Given the fragile state of the world economy and our fairly high level of debt, we must immediately start investing more in infrastructure. It is basic economics. Thus, we must set up a fund devoted to infrastructure.

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● (1840)

And so, we will support this motion. This is an important debate. We do not agree with what the government has said. We recognize that investments have been made thanks to the efforts of all parliamentarians, but now we must move forward. We support the motion of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have a problem with municipal infrastructure. Our roads and bridges are crumbling, there is massive traffic gridlock, there are drinking water warnings, and thousands of people are on waiting lists for affordable housing.

Traffic gridlock costs Canadians billions of dollars. They spend almost 32 working days a year, that is more than a month, commuting to and from work because the public transit system is inadequate. The daily commute time in the largest urban centres of Montreal and the greater Toronto area is 75 minutes. That is the worst ranking among 23 global cities. That is a bad sign.

Then there is policing, and I would like members to consider this. Municipalities pay more than 60% of total policing costs, including \$600 million worth of downloaded federal policing duties, such as border security and international drug trafficking. In terms of municipal budgets, policing makes up more than 20% of local spending. In some communities, policing costs are rising faster than the costs of health care.

Then there is housing infrastructure. Across Canada, 175,000 families are on social housing waiting lists and more than 40,000 Canadians, including young children, are sleeping in emergency shelters every night, including tonight.

There is a problem in terms of municipal infrastructure. The deficit is in the billions of dollars and there is a shortfall. Why? It is because municipal budgets are really not set up to deal with all of these challenges. Eight cents of each dollar of tax goes to municipalities while the rest of it goes to provincial governments and the federal government. As far as municipalities are concerned, lots of money is being taken out of urban cities and small towns but very little is being put back in. The shortfall is severe. What is happening?

Without a share of the income and the sales tax generated by new growth, communities are being forced to raise property taxes and cut core services. Most often infrastructure repairs are put off. The resulting infrastructure deficit is bad for families, businesses and our economy.

There is a unique opportunity in front of us because the building Canada fund of \$1.2 billion per year expires in 2014. The affordable housing and homeless program of \$380 million per year expires in 2014. The police officer recruitment fund of \$80 million per year expires in 2014. The public transit capital trust of \$300 million per year that was set up through the Martin-Layton partnership expired in 2009. With about 40% of all of the infrastructure programs due to expire, there is a unique opportunity in front of the House to renew these commitments to municipalities.

There is also one more area that I did not talk about and that is rural, remote and northern communities. These communities account for more than 50% of Canada's exports, including energy, agriculture and natural resources. On average, however, the rural household income is \$10,000 less than other parts of the country.

● (1845)

The costs of adapting the roads, bridges and public buildings, because of the Arctic temperature rising, would more than double the north's estimated \$400 million infrastructure deficit. Northern communities too are in a desperate situation.

That is why we must look at the infrastructure funds and it is extremely important to have a legislative framework. Canada needs a national vision. We need to ask ourselves, what will our cities look like in five years time or 25 years time? We must look ahead to a vision of our cities because we know that 80% of Canadians are living in cities. We must set a national vision. That is why we must have a legislative framework.

We also need to include cities at the table when the federal government is talking to provincial and territorial governments, not just passing the buck, "Municipalities are not federal responsibilities". I heard that yesterday and I heard it a few minutes ago from my Conservative colleagues. I may hear it again in a few minutes when my Conservative colleague stands up, "Let us pass the buck. Municipalities are really not a federal responsibility".

If the Conservatives say they are not a federal responsibility, they should include them in the discussions with the provincial and territorial governments and ensure they have a seat at the table, but that is not what is happening.

That is why we need to have a legislative framework. We need to set clear targets. We need to ensure there is sustainable, predictable and long-term funding.

It has to be green. Canada has a building code. We cannot just say that it is up to the municipalities to decide on the building code or it is up to the cities to decide how they build. Actually, there is a Canada building code and we must ensure that the infrastructure that is being built meets state of the art building standards.

I was just in some northern communities and I saw a house being put up with very thin boards. This was a northern community. Firefighters are saying that if we build it in a way that is very thin, it is dangerous to firefighters. Other people are saying that if we build it in a way that is not energy sustainable, then we are losing all that heat during the winter and we are burning more and wasting money.

That is why we need to be innovative, have the best technologies, and ensure that any infrastructure that is being built would be built in the greenest way.

Private Members' Business

We need to ensure that it creates a lot of jobs because every billion dollars being spent on infrastructure creates 11,000 jobs. That is much better in my books than giving corporate tax cuts because corporate tax cuts certainly do not create thousands of jobs.

After all of these positive reasons and all the municipalities saying that they need to have a sustainable long-term plan, why would the Conservatives refuse to do so? Part of it is probably because they are out of touch with reality. They do not want to support a legislative framework because they do not want to be accountable.

Right now there is no clear funding formula on how money is allocated. It is a closed door decision. There is no paper trail in some instances. We saw that \$50 million gone to Muskoka. There is no accountability and no criteria.

It is, in fact, a lot easier to just dole out money to friends behind closed doors than saying that there is a legislative framework and there is a funding formula.

Where is the grading system? What percentage of the funding goes to state of good repair? We do not know what percentage goes to new projects. That is not clear at all. It is all about short-term funding arrangements and that is not acceptable.

• (1850)

That is why we need to index the gas tax. We need to increase the gas tax transfer by at least one cent so that we can create jobs now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. I wish to inform the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that I will have to interrupt his remarks at the top of the hour as this is the end of the time period.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today to discuss the NDP motion, Motion No. 270.

Let me begin by saying that of the six points enunciated here, five are either statements of the obvious and which there is great consensus and no reason to debate, or statements of existing government policy and action.

One section, however, stands out as a glaring exception to the others. That is section (e). It says:

(e) index the Gas Tax Fund to economic and population growth and increase the existing gas tax transfer by one cent per litre, and consider other alternative funding mechanisms to ensure municipalities, large and small, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure;

The motion calls for an increase in the gas tax fund transfer to municipalities by one cent today and then, going forward, anywhere between 2% and 5%, depending on what the nominal GDP growth is. This is a massive, year after year increase in expenditures by the federal government.

The problem with that proposal is that nowhere in the motion does the New Democratic Party explain from where that money will come. We do not know its origins. So, we are left with only two options to explain how the NDP would finance such an increase.

One is through a real time increase in taxes, starting now; that is to say, the federal government would have to go out and find a tax to increase on Canadians so that it could pay for this massive and growing new expenditure that the motion would impose upon the Crown.

The most obvious tax that the NDP would have us raise is the gas tax itself. After all, the proposed spending increase is in the area of the gas tax fund and it logically follows that such an increase would, therefore, be paid for, by NDP logic, through an increase in the gas tax itself.

Now, that increase would not only raise the price of consumers fuelling their vehicles, it would also increase the cost of every transported good we can imagine: food, clothing, or any other retail item that is brought to us in a truck. This would leave Canada in a position of accelerating inflation at a time when the world could potentially face inflation problems as it is.

Let us keep in mind, and I remind the members of the NDP again, no government has money of its own. Only taxpayers have money. Every time politicians propose a spending increase, they are necessarily proposing to take more money from taxpayers in order to finance it. In other words, the government cannot give us anything without first taking it away. One way to do that would be an increase in the gas tax, but I am sure that our colleagues across the aisle would have numerous other suggestions on how they could take money from taxpayers to fund a proposal of this kind.

The second way that we could finance the proposal contained in Motion No. 270 is by borrowing more money. Members across the aisle might notice that there is a global recession that came to Canada from abroad but, due to its impacts, has left this nation, like almost every other nation in the developed world, in a deficit position. That means there are no surplus dollars sitting around or hidden beneath the cushion on the government couch from where we can take the money to pay for the proposal of increased spending that the NDP brings today. So, either the NDP is going to raise taxes or it is going to increase the deficit, which is a way of raising taxes, tomorrow.

• (1855)

Deficits are nothing more than deferred taxation. Of course they have to be repaid one day, when taxpayers are presented with the bill by the lender. Worse than that, not only would this bill force an increased deficit that we would be repaying in the future, but taxpayers at that point in time would also be stuck with a permanent and growing obligation, year after year, in program spending that they would have to meet above and beyond the repayment of the deficits incurred at the outset from this proposal.

As I said earlier, governments do not have money of their own. Winston Churchill once said that the idea that a nation can tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing inside a bucket and trying to lift himself off the ground by pulling on the handle. For obvious reasons, it does not work. Put differently, one economist once said that for people on the economic left, government is the grand fiction whereby everybody lives off of everybody else. Again, it is a mathematical impossibility.

When we look around the world at the devastating consequences of these types of socialist policies, constantly increasing spending, we see that nations are on the verge of default. They are writing down debt. There are people in the streets protesting the massive social services cutbacks that have been necessitated by the terrible financial positions of their governments and the devastating tax increases that are putting people out of work and families out of their homes. Those are the kinds of consequences that we, in this country, are successfully avoiding and will continue to work to avoid by enacting fiscally responsible policies that can be funded under the existing tax base without putting our next generation deep in debt. That is why I oppose this motion.

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. parliamentary secretary will have three minutes remaining in his speech, if he so chooses, when the House next resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[Translation]

Pursuant to order made on Monday, October 24, 2011, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 7 under Government Business.

[English]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

COPTIC CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 7, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the Chair)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold. Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments.

[Translation]

The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

[English]

Pursuant to the order adopted Monday, October 24, 2011, the Chair will receive no dilatory motions, no quorum calls and no requests for unanimous consent.

We will now begin tonight's take note debate, accordingly.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of the ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and their institutions.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister and

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Minister of Foreign Affairs could not participate in this debate because they are out of the country. However, this is a very important debate happening tonight.

It is my great pleasure to rise and speak on this issue. Over this year we saw tremendous excitement and hope as we saw the revolution unfold in Egypt, following the revolution in Tunisia, and subsequently moving to Libya and elsewhere, what is popularly known as the Arab Spring.

Watching the Arab Spring, there was a tremendous amount of hope and expectations. In fact the world was awed by what was taking place in the streets of Egypt. Most importantly, the world was impressed by the thousands of Egyptians who came looking for their own rights. They wanted democracy, freedom and their rights.

The world watched in great awe as this event was taking place. Subsequently, as we saw, the president of Egypt had to resign. Those who were rulers accepted the fact that the changes were taking place and that they had better address the wishes of the Egyptians.

What is even more impressive, more important, was that in the streets of Egypt, in Tahrir Square, there were Muslims, Coptic Christians, and all Egyptians standing in solidarity, working for their rights, and calling, "We are all Egyptians". That statement was made on the streets and brought a tremendous amount of hope and expectation to the international community that the new Egypt that was coming out would take care of its minority rights, as well, not only the rights of the majority of Egyptians, but all Egyptians, from whichever region.

This in itself was extremely impressive, and most Canadians held their breath and said there is a new dawn era coming down in Egypt. Of course there was a concern over a period of time that some violence had taken place against the minority in Egypt, which is the Coptic Christians, the burning of their churches and violence. We have also seen in other parts of the world, where minority rights have been trampled by the majority.

Egypt, by itself, has been a leader over the years in providing strong moral leadership in the African world, as well in the Arab world. Egypt's standing has been recognized around the world and respected.

But when a nation's rulers and law do not respect the rights of its minority, then the shine comes off. Of recent, we were horrified to see that shine come off, most specifically when the security forces fought with the Coptic Christians who were asking for their rights and over 27 people died.

We would like to express our deep condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in this unnecessary violence.

For a long time Canada has stood for human rights. The cornerstone of this government's policy is upholding human rights. We have taken our stand very strongly at the United Nations against Iran and against any other regime that we find is abusing the human rights of its own citizens.

This is one of the reasons the government had no problem joining the UN Security Council resolution on Libya, because it was there to protect the people of Libya.

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●(1905)

The government's cornerstone policy being human rights, we have spoken and will continue to speak on the international stage about the human rights of citizens, most importantly of minority religious rights.

Recognizing this as being a very important cornerstone policy, the government said in the throne speech that it would open an office at the Department of Foreign Affairs to keep track of religious freedom. We have what we would call the office of religious freedom around the world to let our voice be known on the international stage whenever there is a violation of the human rights of minorities. In today's world, this is extremely important.

Today in Perth at the Commonwealth summit, the Prime Minister made a very strong statement to the Commonwealth that it should recognize human rights as one of the cornerstone policies of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Once human rights start to be taken away, it is very difficult to stop it and, without stopping it, the world would not be a better place to live.

It is up to Canada, it is our responsibility to stand up and speak to this in the international forum, as we do at the United Nations. Therefore, I am delighted that we are having this debate here in the House tonight to express our deep concern for the events that have taken place in Egypt following the violence against the Coptic Christians.

As members know, Coptic Christians have been living in Egypt since the 5th century. They are not new immigrants. They are part and parcel of the country, culturally, religiously, and in all aspects. They are Egyptians, pure and simple. Therefore, it is with great sadness that we see even the security forces take action against the people of Egypt, those whom they are supposed to defend no matter what religion.

The Government of Canada, in today's motion, has stated very clearly that it is extremely concerned. We call upon the Egyptian government to bring justice and for those who have attacked and broken the law, that they bear the full weight of the law.

There is no point in having laws to protect religious minorities when a blind eye is turned to extremists breaking the law. There is no point in having the laws because they do not give the confidence that is required. The Government of Egypt must take very strong action against these individuals who have committed these horrendous crimes against the minority. This is one of the key elements in what the Government of Canada is calling upon the Egyptian government to do, and hopefully it will.

Egypt is now on a new path to a new constitution and parliamentary elections. This is the time for Egypt to put its stamp on the world and to say that it is a democracy that respects human rights and the religious freedom of everyone.

We will also look to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to conduct an open and transparent investigation into the plight of the Egyptian Copts and to make its report public. This would show the world community the sincerity of the Egyptian leaders in addressing human rights issues in their country.

●(1910)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I heard the comments of my colleague with great interest. He talked about what is going to be done, or what maybe has been done. I am going to ask and answer some questions for him.

There is a question that was put at the external affairs committee on Tuesday. The question, which was with respect to the persecution of the Coptic community, was around what has Canada done at the United Nations. The member said, "It seems to me that the United Nations is essential in providing some investigation and some sanction, not the terms of traditional sanctions, but some ability to draw the international community and our allies in the region together to express in a concerted way the concern of the international community".

The answer came from a department official, who said, "Thank you for that question. I'll ask Marie if she's in a position to respond with respect to the UN. I don't know".

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire replied, "I am not aware...".

We passed the motion last Monday. There was unanimous consent. The minister stood there and made the motion stronger, and to this date nothing has been done at the United Nations.

My colleague spoke about the UNHCR. It was the same question again about the UNHCR, in the same place.

Mrs. Barbara Martin answered, "This issue, in terms of the UN context, would normally come up in the environment of the UN Human Rights Council, which normally meets in the spring. Jeff, do you know if it came up in the last session of the Human Rights Council?"

Jeffrey McLaren, director of Gulf and Maghreb relations for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, said, "I do not believe that it did in the last session. Every few years each country comes up for an intense review of its human rights. I do not believe Egypt has been on the schedule this year".

There were human tragedies in Egypt in 2000, 2008, 2009 and 2011, the last three of them under the—

●(1915)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. As a reminder to the member, we are in questions and comments. There will be other questions, so when there are many members who want to put questions and comments, I would ask members to keep it to about a minute or a minute and a half. The person who last spoke will respond for about the same time.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I want my colleague to know that I am giving him the full context and the full history.

The government, for the last four or five years, has done absolutely nothing. It has not brought up the request from the community to go in front of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The motion could be not explicit.

Government Orders

My question, through you, Mr. Chair, is to the parliamentary secretary. What is the government waiting for? You had your marching orders. Why are you not marching? As a matter of fact, you gave the marching orders to yourself. Why are you not marching?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I remind members to direct their comments and questions through the Chair.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I would like to remind the member that there is a process of how these things happen. Of course, he has not been involved in foreign affairs, so he would not understand the process. The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the United Nations, during his speech at the UN General Assembly—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I ought to know what I have been involved in or not been involved in, and those remarks from the member are not appreciated.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: That is more a matter of debate.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, this matter is very important. This is about human rights and about issues, so I do not want to debate on this. As I said in my speech, Canada has expressed its concern. The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated at the UN that we will continue working with our allies, but we will also continue working on the international stage and we will be speaking very strongly about human rights. That is what this government promises.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Chair, I share many of the concerns of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I too am very concerned about the situation and how it is evolving. Things are not getting better; they are getting worse.

Having travelled to Cairo myself and having spent some time in the Coptic community and having been very welcomed, I am particularly concerned about friends that I have there. It is a truly wonderful community. At the same time, I felt hope with the changes in Egypt, as well as great disappointment when the situation got worse. I agree with the parliamentary secretary that it is a characteristic of any modern democracy that one of its litmus tests is how it treats its minorities, whether they be linguistic, ethnic or religious.

I am sure our government has been in touch with certain powers in Egypt and I would like to know, very specifically, what the government is doing in its communications with representatives of that military government in order to push this issue forward and keep further massacres from occurring.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs brings his concern to the UN General Assembly and makes a public statement, it is a very strong public statement issued by this government to the Government of Egypt to say it is concerned. Having said that, we are in constant communication with the Government of Egypt and have expressed our strongest concern on this issue.

The debate tonight, and all the things I have just said, are a message to the Government of Egypt that there is an expectation from the international community for it to uphold human rights, and if it does not, then there are values that we just talked about which will come out, but we hope and understand that as the Government of Egypt moves forward it has said it will do it. We will wait and see if it has done it. If it has not, then it will have to answer first to its own people, second to the minority in its own country, and third to the international community.

• (1920)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I was in the foreign affairs committee meeting the other day when the member for Scarborough—Agincourt blustered in for 10 minutes, made his statements and blustered out. He did reference, in his question to the parliamentary secretary, issues that took place in Egypt in 2000.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt was in a majority government at that time, yet nothing took place to address the problem.

I wonder if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs could speak to the House about how these issues and incidents in Egypt have pushed our government—

Mr. Karygiannis: To do nothing, absolutely nothing.

Ms. Lois Brown:—to put forward an office of religious freedoms and what impact these issues are having on the creation of this office.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, this is a very crucial debate about human rights. I think the member on the other side should give respect to others. We all are concerned about this issue. That is the key thing, instead of trying to play partisan politics here.

Mr. Karygiannis: And you have done absolutely nothing.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: This is not about partisan politics. It is about the human rights of a community that is facing threats.

Mr. Karygiannis: Which you know nothing about.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That is the key element, and I can assure the member when she is talking about it that this government is going to stand up. We are opening the office of religious freedom. It was not his government but our government that did that.

Mr. Karygiannis: Three massacres, and you have done absolutely nothing. You have not even taken it to the United Nations.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: We have stood up in the international community and have spoken about it. When we talk about an issue as important as human rights and see this blustering coming from the other side, stopping the debate, it does not do justice to this Parliament.

Government Orders

Let us talk about the issue so that we can send a message to the Government of Egypt that parliamentarians of this country are seriously concerned. As parliamentarians in this country, we are all standing in Parliament speaking about it. That is why there is unanimous consent for the motion: because all parliamentarians are concerned about this issue in Egypt and want to send a message to the Government and the people of Egypt that what Canadians expect out of this revolution is the upholding of human rights for minorities. That is the key message we need to send tonight.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we go to resuming debate, I would just remind hon. members that the rules for a take note debate certainly allow a little more informality in the chamber, and members are welcome to sit in seats a little closer if they wish. Members do not have to be in their usual seats to be recognized to participate in the take note debate.

I invite members to do as they wish, as they do not have to be quite so far apart. It often improves the nature of the debate as well.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, the NDP very strongly supports the debate we are having today. As Canadians, members of all political parties are very concerned about what is happening in Egypt. Because we had that presentation from the Coptic community to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, we saw that it was very timely and really critical that we debate this as Canadians. It does not matter which political party we belong to; we absolutely value our fundamental belief in freedom to practise our religion and our belief in democratic structures.

In that light, we stand strongly with our brothers and sisters in the Coptic community as they face persecution and attacks in Egypt.

We are very concerned about the ongoing violence and the role that the military has played in that violence. We are demanding an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killing of protesters on October 9.

My colleague across the way gave a very eloquent history of the Coptic affiliation with Egypt: how they were there 600 years before the Muslim community arrived, how they make up 8% to 10% of the population of Egypt and how they are the second-largest religious group in that area. As such and as residents of Egypt, whether they have been there for a long time or whether they have just arrived, in a free democratic society they deserve to have the freedom to practise their religion without any persecution. It is absolutely imperative that we get that on record.

We will continue to support democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people. I want to remind people that when there was a rising against Mubarak's rule in Egypt, Coptic Christians and Muslims stood side by side in saying that it was time to fight for democracy, an ongoing democracy. They stood side by side. Even though today in Egypt some clerics may be inciting violence and asking people to defend the military, we also know that there are Muslim clerics who are standing with their brothers and sisters, the Coptic Christians, and saying this is not acceptable in the Egypt of today.

It is very clear to me that a solution rests within Egypt, and that is where solutions are often best found. However, Egypt needs some assistance during this time, and as Canadians we have a proud history and lots of expertise in helping with constitutions. As Egyptians move forward toward their elections and their constitution, we need to make sure that enshrined in that constitution is protection for minority groups and for those of different religions. Religious freedom has to be protected; it is imperative for that principle to be there.

To ensure that occurs, we also have to ensure that all the different groups play a real part as a constitution is constructed. Then we move into the electoral process, but women must also be fully included in that political process so that we have a real democracy in its full terms. I am not hearing any argument from the other side on this one.

We want the Government of Canada to establish a non-partisan democracy agency. It promised to do so in 2008, because Conservatives support democracy around the world as well. If we do that, having such an agency would be of real assistance as we face challenges like this.

● (1925)

The Prime Minister made that announcement in 2008 and no action has been taken on it yet. It is time for us to take some strong steps on that.

With regard to Canada's aid to Egypt, Canada is known for the nation building, humanitarian work and developmental work it does around the globe. Right now our work in Egypt is focused on economic development. In light of the political developments and the persecution taking place, it is time for us to redirect and refocus our aid so we are there to promote democracy and build the kind of civil society that is not just tolerant but accepting and inclusive of different religions and ethnic minority groups. Without that, it would be very difficult for a democracy to be established and survive. That will be very critical during the next phase. We have to pay special attention to that.

What we want are very simple things. I am hoping there will be agreement on this from all parties in the House. We want the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties, including religious freedom for all Egyptians. We want an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killings of the protestors. This investigation should be conducted by independent judicial authorities and not by the military itself.

We call for a free and fair electoral process in the upcoming parliamentary elections. We want the Canadian government to continue to urge the Egyptian government to overturn a ban on international election monitors. It is important that Canada and other nations have a very strong presence during the next electoral period. Without it, there will be a lot of dissatisfaction.

Government Orders

Another concern is that during this transitional period Egyptian women have largely been excluded from high-level constitutional talks. There are those who think that women cannot possibly participate, but let me assure everyone that women have a lot to offer. Any constitution that is put together with the full input of women will address a lot of the problems in society today. We would like the Canadian government to urge Egypt to ensure that women are equal participants in the democratic development process. After all, we have that commitment under UN Resolution 1325 and we are obligated to it.

We want the Government of Canada to establish the non-partisan democracy promotion agency, as it promised to do in its 2008 throne speech. I know the Prime Minister is committed to doing that, but he became busy doing things. I am sure when he returns from his trip he will give it his full attention.

We also heard recently about a new office of religious freedom. We do not need more new offices of religious freedom. That would be best addressed through our foreign policy.

The reports we are hearing about Egypt are not just stories being told to us by our Coptic brothers and sisters. Human Rights Watch is very concerned about what is happening in Egypt and the role the military has started to play. It has seen evidence of excessive force. Recently, Human Rights Watch wrote:

The only hope for justice for the victims is an independent, civilian-led investigation that the army fully co-operates with and cannot control and that leads to the prosecution of those responsible.

It is not just us saying there should be an independent investigation; Human Rights Watch is saying the same thing.

• (1930)

It is very easy to put people in silos, but I want to emphasize that there are Muslims in Egypt who are speaking out and standing up with their brothers and sisters in the Coptic community. We want to foster that civil society so that the solutions can be found in Egypt for Egyptians with freedom for one and all, with everyone included.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the subject we are discussing today is very dear to my heart. I will try to speak as quickly as possible to say everything in the minute or minute and a half that I am allotted.

As a Greek Orthodox Christian, I sense the pain of the Coptic Orthodox people all over the world with the tragedy of what is happening in Egypt. The Coptic Orthodox Church can trace its roots back to our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact a couple of years ago when I visited Egypt, I went to Old Cairo. I visited a historic church in which Jesus Christ himself was hidden by our Virgin Mary in the basement of what is now a church that had been built above where he was kept. It was a very emotional, historic time, and a very important symbol of Christianity right there in the heart of Egypt.

I want to refer to what our government has done and is doing. We all know the position our Minister of Foreign Affairs has taken. I want to ask the member opposite a question specifically as it relates to the office of religious freedom.

The first meeting was held with over 100 religious leaders right here in the nation's capital on October 3 of this year. This office was initially allotted a \$5 million budget. We have religious freedom in

Canada and it is really to promote religious freedom in other nations, like Egypt, regarding this very problem. That office has been put under the auspices of the foreign affairs ministry. That in itself says a lot. Can the member see the merit in that?

• (1935)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, we have a very robust foreign policy. We are very active internationally. We have religious freedom right here in Canada, and we value that greatly.

I am not sure spending \$5 million on another office would actually get us where we need to go. I would like to see those resources put toward a non-partisan agency that would promote democracy.

The NDP and I are very committed to religious freedom. There is no magic agency that is going to fix this.

As we fight for religious freedom, it is an integral part of what we mean by democracy, what we mean by inclusion. It is integrated with not only the historical context but the current context and where we are going in the future.

I would like to see it left as part of the foreign affairs policy division. Let us now focus our energy on supporting in Egypt and other countries around the world civil society to build a strong allegiance to democratic society. Only when there is a truly democratic society that values freedom of minority groups, that values ethnicity, that values religious freedom can we say that there is a democracy.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thought the hon. member's speech was excellent. I appreciate and agree with much of what she said.

One of the generic problems with majorities that persecute minorities is that they spend a whole whack of energy persecuting the minorities. As a consequence, the minorities end up leaving the country, taking their talents and wealth with them, or it ends up in a low-grade civil war, and sometimes it is not such a low-grade civil war, or it ends up in acts of terrorism. It is all because the majority does not see fit to accept either the religious or ethnic beliefs of the minority.

Does the hon. member see that in this instance Egypt may well cease to prosper and enjoy its rightful status as a leader in the community of nations, if it persecutes particularly 10% of its population and does not let them fully participate in society?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, there is no doubt in my mind that democracy suffers when the tyranny of the majority persecutes the minority.

I have lived in a minority setting from the age of 10, for most of my life, both in my ethnicity and religious background. I come from a family where almost every religion seems to have been practised over the years through different marriages and different directions. As I look at my children and grandchildren, I want them to grow up in a country that values diversity and not only tolerates, but absolutely accepts and celebrates different religions.

Government Orders

I think Egypt has to receive a very strong message, especially with the assistance it is receiving from Canada and other countries. We have to support Egyptians to find solutions that will suit Egypt. We have to nurture the kind of civil society groups that will lead them down a path of inclusivity rather than persecution.

• (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his very interesting speech. I think that everyone in the House denounces the violence going on in Egypt.

I would like my colleague to confirm whether I understood correctly: there could be two very important steps.

First would be to have an independent investigation so we can truly understand what happened there. I would like to know how Canada could specifically collaborate on creating an independent investigation.

I would also like to get back to the idea of a non-partisan democracy promotion agency that could, once the investigation is complete, provide concrete support over the medium and long term as Egyptians work to develop a democracy that would respect all minorities, as well as the status of women, of course.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, one of the key things to look at for the protection of minorities is the constitution. Canada can play a role as can other nations as their constitution is written and things are put in place. We have a further role to play in helping Egypt rebuild. We should focus our resources on supporting civil society groups that will take the building of a democratic state forward in a positive way. I absolutely believe the will is there in Egypt.

When Mubarak was there, the Coptic Christians and Muslims stood side by side. They stood side by side right after. Maybe it is a case of the military having been there too long. The transition is taking a long time.

Right now there are groups within Egypt that are very upset by the persecution and attacks on the Coptic community. It is our responsibility as the outside world to speak in support of civil society groups to take on those issues. We do that by building capacity in Egypt. We do that by building capacity in women. We do that by building capacity in different ethnic groups.

When we are talking about our Coptic brothers and sisters, we are talking about a highly educated group of people: doctors, lawyers, nurses. We are not talking about people with a low level of literacy. They are very well educated and have run many institutions. Here in Canada they play a valuable role in our communities.

I believe the solution is there, but we have to put on some pressure. Our CIDA funding is one way to do it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mount Royal.

People are watching this debate in the gallery and around the world. They are looking to us to give one clear message to Egypt, and that is the international community will not tolerate this anymore and that the Government of Canada will act not tomorrow, not 10 days from now, not next year or after the next massacre but immediately.

There has been massacre after massacre, whether it be the killing of the people in Nag Hammadi when they were coming out of a church, or the blowing up of the church on Christmas Eve last year, or when the army in armoured vehicles ran people over, people who were demonstrating, looking for justice, human rights and religious freedom. Yet Egypt has told the world it really does not care what other countries are saying time after time, be it under the old regime or the current one.

The international community has to tell Egypt that enough is enough and it will not tolerate it anymore. There are places that we can do it. There is the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the Hague, all kinds of international courses that we could take and Canada must be at the forefront.

We passed a motion. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was the person who actually strengthened the motion even more. That was almost two weeks ago. Yet to this very day, nothing has been done. To this very day, the Prime Minister has not picked up the phone to call Ban Ki-moon or to tell the United Nations that Canada is not pleased. We have not sent a message with our ambassador asking for an emergency debate. We have not sent a message to the UNHCR asking for an emergency debate. We are scared to do it maybe because we have no clout at the United Nations or we are scared of the UN.

A good friend of mine, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said the government does not want to do that because we know who controls the United Nations. Whether it works or not, it is up to us. If it does not work, then we will have to find other avenues to address it. The United Nations right now is the avenue where this should be addressed.

The government has a moral duty to the Coptic Christian community of Canada to act. It has a moral duty to take steps. At the end of the night, when all is said and done, I will have probably not even heard if something concrete to this day has been done. We cannot wait any longer. We cannot afford for one more single person to be killed, be it Copt or non-Copt, be it in Egypt or anywhere else. The perpetrators who use extreme violence, beat people, run people over, bomb people or machine gun them down must be held accountable. They must pay the full weight of the law. There is no country in the world that will give guns to their citizens to shoot people. Everybody says that cannot be done.

Government Orders

Everybody says that they have religious freedom. Even in the constitution of Egypt, article 1 says that there is religious freedom. Article 2 says it is all Sharia law and that takes precedence. If people want to build a church in Egypt, they have to get permission. If they want to renovate a church, they have to get permission. If someone wants to be a member of parliament in Egypt, God help that person. There are only two who are Copts. If someone wants to run for office, God help that individual. If a person says he or she believes in Jesus Christ and the other person does not believe in the same thing, the one who said it will get beaten up.

I would leave this message for my hon. colleagues across the way. Members and the government cannot afford to wait one more day. Measures have to be taken. Tomorrow morning the Prime Minister has to send a clear message with our United Nations ambassador to call an urgent meeting on this matter, to talk about it and ensure that the Egyptians, as well as the others perpetrating these acts on citizens, know that we will not tolerate it anymore.

● (1945)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would remind hon. members that we have a five-minute question and comment period on this when it is a split time. In the last round, we were a little long on questions and comments. Therefore, try to keep them to one minute question and one minute response and then we can get more in for the hon. member.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the member is right. The persecution of the Coptic people has been going on for many years in Egypt. We have spoken out about it for several years now. I know he was a member of a government for 13 years.

Could he explain, in some detail, how many times he brought this up to the minister of foreign affairs of his government and what exactly did that minister of foreign affairs and that government do with respect to the plight of Coptic people in Egypt? Perhaps if the Liberals had done something then, we would not be here tonight debating this.

● (1950)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in 2003 I had an opportunity to visit Egypt. When I came back, I spoke to our minister of foreign affairs and relayed the information to him. However, since 2006, since Conservatives have formed government, there have been three massacres.

We are here tonight debating after three. Guess what, folks: three strikes and you are out.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a really simple question for my colleague. I know he has a lot of passion about this. What are his thoughts on the office of religious freedom?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, if we say we want an office and if it is to work, we need to give the office muscle and \$5 million is certainly not muscle. The \$5 million would probably just cover the salaries of the people who would sit there writing reports and probably their trips once a year. It is absolutely nothing.

If we want to give this thing teeth, we should tie it in to ensuring that these people not only investigate, that they are not only there, that it is not only an office that makes paperwork, but that the office gets in touch with the communities, not only during the election but throughout the whole year. That would be my advice for the government.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to pose a question related to the member's reference to the impotence of the government to effectively be able to deal with this.

The member referenced the United Nations. If Canada had a seat at the United Nations Security Council, which we do not because Canada squandered its international reputation and its position among nations for the last several years, we could have made a difference. However, we lost a wonderful opportunity to make that difference in this world.

Canada had a seat at the United Nations Security Council, which the current government lost. If we did have that seat, would Canada be able to make a more effective contribution to the solution to the tyranny that is being imposed on the Coptic Christians?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in a very long time in the history of the United Nations, Canada does not have a seat at the United Nations inner office, if I can call it such. This is the fault of the government. The government lost the seat and it went to Portugal, a country that is virtually about to go bankrupt. The Conservative government does not care and has absolutely no passion.

If we had a seat, we would have been able to call an emergency debate. If we had the seat, we would have been able to do something faster. We do not have it. We were not there because the government let it lapse and it did not do everything it could in order to get that seat.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to set the record straight and read from an address by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to the United Nations General Assembly on Monday, September 26, 2011, when he said:

As citizens of the global community, we have a solemn duty to defend the vulnerable, to challenge the aggressor, to protect and promote human rights and human dignity, at home and abroad:

Women, Christians, Bahá'í and other victims of persecution in Iran.

Roman Catholics priests and other Christian clergy, and their laity, driven to worship underground in China.

Christians being driven out of Iraq by Al Qaeda—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. We have to give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, the parliamentary secretary can get up and read all the speeches she wants, mention all the names she wants and say what the minister has said. However, the facts speak for themselves. This motion was adjusted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He stood and said that I did not know what I was talking about. That was a week and a half ago.

Government Orders

When officials came to the foreign affairs committee meeting, the question was put them simply. They were asked if the government had done anything. The answer was “I’m not aware”. That is the real answer. That is where it is. The government has done nothing—

• (1955)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mount Royal.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to share my time with the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt. I commend him for both his advocacy and passion in support of this compelling case and cause.

I am pleased to support the motion which states:

That this House stand in solidarity with those religious minorities around the world and strongly condemn the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions; call on the Egyptian Government to ensure that the perpetrators of the attacks be brought to justice and bear the full weight of the law; and, ask the United Nations Human Rights Commission to conduct an open and transparent investigation into the plight of Egyptian Coptic Christians and issue a public report on its findings.

While we speak and stand in solidarity with religious minorities around the world, a shocking case of religious persecution and discrimination has been passing under the radar screen. What makes it so shocking is not only the extent of the persecution and discrimination but that it goes largely unacknowledged and unaddressed. I am speaking of the fact that approximately 165,000 people are killed each year simply because they are Christian. In total some 200 million Christians worldwide live with the constant threat of persecution, threats, physical abuse, torture and death solely because of their faith. I would be remiss this evening if I did not highlight this unspoken tragedy.

I will turn now to the *raison d'être* of this take note debate which is contextualized by the persecution of Christians, to which I have just referred, and addresses the specific pain and plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt, which is a standing blight on the Arab spring.

Who can forget the Tahrir Square revolution, the struggle of the Egyptian people for freedom, democracy and human dignity, which is one of the most inspiring moments of the Arab spring.

Who can forget Wael Ghonim, the young Egyptian expert in social media who ignited the people's revolution? Who can forget that Muslims and Christians stood together in a common cause? Who can forget the young men and women who joined together in the struggle for equality? Who can forget the moving calls for social and economic justice? Who can forget the calls for an end to state sanctioned censorship and the call for an open and free media? Who can forget the calls for an end to the culture of impunity and that the perpetrators be brought to justice?

Simply put, who can forget the call for a plural democracy, constitutional reform, civilian control of the military, the repeal of the emergency laws, and the hope that the army would be the guarantor of the democratic transition that would oversee the birth of a democratic constitution whereby every Egyptian would be equal before the law and enjoy equal protection and equal treatment under the law?

It is often said that the test of a just society and democratic policy is how that state treats its minorities. In that sense, the Coptic

Christian community is a test case of Egyptian justice and that justice is wanting.

The history of violence against the Coptic Christian minority is not new. It began to accelerate in the 1990s when from 1992 to 1998 alone Islamic extremists murdered some 127 Copts. In 2000, a massacre left 21 Copts dead. If we fast forward to May 2010, Copts were the standing targets of angry assaults. On January 1, 2011, a bomb was detonated in front of a Coptic Church in Alexandria in the worst violence seen in a decade, killing 23 people and injuring over 100. I have only mentioned some of the sustained attacks.

While the anti-Mubarak demonstrations in Tahrir Square manifested sectarian co-operation whereby Muslims and Christians protected each other from police violence and government thuggery, the Coptic community soon found itself targeted by Muslim extremists who were angered by the building and repairing of churches and the simple acts of religious belief and expression. That exploded into violence on October 9 when a group of Christians organizing a peaceful protest against a recent assault on a Coptic church found themselves assaulted by those obliged to protect them, the Egyptian military, which resulted in 25 killed and over 300 injured.

Who can forget the YouTube videos showing armoured military vehicles driving at high speeds through crowds and into innocent Christian protesters? Who can forget Egyptian TV calling for “honest” Egyptians to rush to the defence of the military, not to the defence of the Copts? The broadcast said that the military was under siege from the unarmed Copts, a scurrilous accusation that incited vigilante attacks against the Coptic protestors who were fleeing from the military vehicles and army bullets.

• (2000)

The Egyptian military asked the government to investigate the violence, stating that all legal measures would be taken against those who organized, incited or participated in the violence. To date, no one has been held accountable.

In the question and answer period, I will set forth some recommendations as to what needs to be done.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I know the hon. member cares deeply about human rights. He is an impassioned supporter of human rights around the world.

He took us through a litany of terrible events that happened to the Coptic people in Egypt over many years. He mentioned one specific incident in 2000, in which I think he said over 20 Copts were killed.

As the hon. member was a minister of the government at that time, could he tell the House what his government did? Did it ask the UN for an investigation into that event? What did it do to ensure that these kinds of events did not continue to go on in Egypt?

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Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, in the year 2000, I was not a minister of justice. In the year 2004, when I was minister of justice, I paid an official visit to Egypt and in my official capacity as minister of justice and attorney general I brought up the plight of the Copts. I brought it up again when I revisited Egypt in 2005. I have brought it up almost every visit since, and I have made about 15 visits to Egypt.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, Human Rights Watch is concerned with the Egyptian military's intention to control the investigation into its use of force against unarmed Coptic Christians as that amounts to simply a cover-up.

On October 25, Human Right Watch said that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces should transfer the investigation from military prosecution to a fully independent and impartial investigation into the killing of unarmed protesters by military forces.

The NDP believes there should be an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killings of the protesters. This investigation should be conducted by independent judicial authorities and not by military prosecutors.

What does the hon. member think of this?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, I have read the Human Rights Watch report. I support and endorse the fact that the government should conduct an independent, open, transparent, accountable inquiry wherein the perpetrators would be brought to justice. However, there are other initiatives we need to take.

The Canadian government must first call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to enter into an emergency session to inquire into and report on the plight of the Coptic community. The United Nations special rapporteur into religious intolerance should also be called upon to look into this matter. The Geneva-based NGO community should make this a priority in its representations to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Finally, the Parliamentary Forum of the Community of Democracies should make it a priority on its agenda.

In effect, I end where I began, that is the promise of the Tahrir spring, the promise of equal justice, the promise of democratic polity, the promise of a constitutional democracy. All this will be tested by how Egyptian justice treats its Coptic Christian minority.

Therefore, whether we will have an Egyptian Arab spring or whether regrettably and lamentably we will descend into some form of Egyptian winter will be tested by how the Coptic Christian minority is treated with full equality before the law, equal protection and equal treatment of the law.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am sure everyone appreciates the honesty, straightforwardness and integrity of the hon. member not only for his words but for his actions.

Is there anything the hon. member wants to add to what he has already spoken about?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, the only thing I would add is that at times such as these qui s'excuse s'accuse; whoever remains indifferent will indict himself or herself.

As my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt, mentioned throughout his speech, we have to appreciate the sense of urgency and we have to act now.

● (2005)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise to speak to an issue of great concern and importance.

Our government believes that religious freedom is a fundamental human right.

We also believe it is the building block for healthy democracies, which is why we continue to strongly condemn the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions. People of faith must be able to practise and worship their religion in peace and security.

Tragically, after sharing in the hope of a new Egypt earlier this year, the violence and persecution against the Coptic Christian minority continues.

The current experience of the Coptic community in Egypt and an examination of its rich history deserves particular attention as part of tonight's debate. I am particularly proud to stand with the government that recognized the importance of this issue and proposed the debate take place.

The Copts are native Egyptian Christians and represent the largest Christian community in the Middle East. The Copts' roots in the rural areas around Alexandria where a bombing recently took place taking the lives of 20 worshippers are indeed deep. Their existence dates back to the 5th century and the days of St. Mark. Christians live throughout present day Egypt, but the Coptic Church in Alexandria is recognized as the oldest in Africa.

Although their struggles were far from new, some Coptic Christians living today still remember when President Nasser led a coup d'état against King Farouk in 1952 and established a republic. Their human rights were sometimes violated under Nasser's overarching policy of pan-Arab nationalism and socialism. The Copts were negatively affected by Nasser's nationalization policies because although they represented 10-plus per cent of the population they were relatively prosperous, holding more than 50% of the country's wealth.

During this period, the granting of permits to construct churches was delayed, Christian religious courts were closed and the regime confiscated land and church properties from Copts.

As a result, many Copts emigrated to Australia, Europe and North America.

Those who remain report significant discrimination in modern Egypt.

Many members of the Coptic community participated in the revolution earlier this year and marched arm-in-arm with Egyptians of other faiths in calling for the end of Mubarak's autocratic regime.

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However, since the revolution Copts have been increasingly vulnerable to threats from extremists. They like other groups have suffered as police forces have struggled to rebuild in the revolution's wake. They have been victim to both petty and violent crimes. They have reported increased incidents of kidnapping and extortion. Local police forces have proven powerless in the face of increased religious-based violence.

On October 9, members of Cairo's large Coptic community participated in a march to protest against the destruction of a church. The exact circumstances that led to violence that night are unclear. Some say that strangers infiltrated the protest and instigated the violence. Whatever caused the initial violence, it is clear that security forces intervened with force resulting in the deaths of some 27 people. More than 300 others were injured.

Since the events of October 9, the death of one young Coptic man has captivated public attention. Twenty year old Mina Daniel was a respected young activist who by all accounts was a bright and dedicated future leader. His death, reportedly from gunshot wounds sustained during the clashes, is a painful example of the tremendous loss suffered by the Coptic community and the whole of Egypt.

Egyptians are painfully aware that their country can ill afford to lose such promising individuals at such a pivotal time in their history.

We note that Egyptians of all faiths have denounced the violence of October 9. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has been at the forefront of these denunciations. We commend his tireless efforts to bridge the Coptic community and the Egyptian leadership to restore peace and unity. We sent Canada's ambassador to meet with him last year to demonstrate our country's solidarity.

We hope that all Egyptians will continue to renew their efforts to promote unity and protect religious minorities in order to prevent such tragedies from being repeated.

● (2010)

There have been a number of positive steps in recent days. Canada will play its part to ensure this continues.

As the process of transition continues to move forward, we call on Egyptian authorities to ensure the protection of Egyptians against all forms of extremism. We also urge the Egyptian people to work to sustain a culture of tolerance.

Copts around the world are joining the movement to bring an end to the violence in Egypt, and I would be remiss if I did not refer especially to the vibrant Coptic diaspora here in Canada. Earlier this month, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I addressed the congregation of Coptic Christians, as did others of my colleagues, at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga, the community adjacent to where I happen to live. I provided our assurances to Coptic Christians in our communities that our government strongly condemns these viscous attacks and calls on the Egyptian government to ensure that the perpetrators of these attacks be brought to justice.

Our commitment is to continue doing our part to protect their religious freedoms and to devote our efforts to prevent harm so that they and their families can feel safe demonstrating their right to practice their faith freely. Outside of Egypt and Sudan, the largest

Coptic communities are in the United States and Canada. In the 60 or so years since the arrival of the first Coptic immigrants to Canada, the community here has grown to number roughly 50,000 today. Canadian Coptic leaders have raised serious concerns regarding the Coptic community in Egypt and our government will continue to listen to them and work with them.

The Prime Minister announced in the Speech From the Throne this year that our government would be creating an office of religious freedom. This office will serve religious minorities who are targeted with violence and persecution around the world. As elected representatives, we must stand up for our friends and neighbours whose families are inflicted with the terrible injustice and contraventions of their fundamental human rights, and we will continue to do exactly that. Likewise, we must show our commitment to protecting the rights of these innocent individuals whose lives are acutely affected by these unspeakable actions. We take the concerns of the Coptic community very seriously, and we will continue to demonstrate our tangible commitment to protecting their right to safety and expressing their beliefs in Canada and throughout the world.

We will continue to effectively engage with this community in an effort to promote and protect the fundamental freedoms of Egyptians. We hope it will usher in a new era of hope and prosperity for Coptic Christians, in particular, as a new and truly democratic Egypt takes shape in the weeks and months ahead.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, the NDP is deeply concerned with the ongoing violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt. The NDP also continues to support the democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people and hopes that the parliamentary elections beginning in November, 2011, will be free and fair.

However, we also know that, in the 2008 throne speech, the government promised to create a new non-partisan democracy promotion agency to support the peaceful transition to democracy in repressive countries and to help emerging democracies build strong institutions.

Could the member opposite please tell the House what happened to this idea and why the government has not created a democracy promotion agency, as it promised three years ago?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I would refer to the statement by the Prime Minister of Canada with regard to the situation in Egypt dated May 9, 2011, where he expressed his concern. He said:

The Government of Canada strongly condemns the violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Canada is a tolerant, multicultural country with a proud tradition of defending religious minorities around the world. We stand behind the Coptic Christian community and their right to practice their faith in safety and security, free of persecution. This is a universal human right and one which our Government is committed to defending.

Recognizing that religious pluralism is inextricably linked to democratic development, our Government has committed to creating a special Office of Religious Freedom to monitor and help ensure religious minorities can practice their faith without fear of violence and repression.

On behalf of all Canadians, I express my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones during these events. Our thoughts and prayers are with all Egyptians as they face the difficult challenges ahead.

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The point is that, from the Prime Minister on down, all of us are extremely concerned and there are efforts under way to deal with this issue in a more effective, more assertive and much more proactive way, and his statement validates all of that.

● (2015)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I respect the associate minister, having known him in his pre-political life. I do not think there is much he said with which I actively disagree. However, where is the meat in what he said?

My two colleagues have asked for immediate action, for the Prime Minister to call the UN secretary-general or to urge a debate in the UN Human Rights Council. I have not heard anything concrete coming out of his mouth. In particular, has the Egyptian ambassador to Canada been called on the carpet in order for him to hear the view of the Canadian government? If so, what has he been told? We have not heard that either, or when.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that diplomatic communications are in fact taking place on this very issue. Our concerns are being addressed directly to the Egyptian representatives here in Canada and beyond. We are actively engaged in dealing with this issue on many different fronts.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, clearly, religious freedoms are human rights: the right to believe and exercise one's belief through faith and religious gathering together, or through no faith and no decisions to gather together. These are fundamental human rights and the oppression of Coptic Christians in Egypt is of deep concern to Canadians.

I want to ask the hon. minister about the other religious groups that are being abused, such as the Baha'i in Iran and the Tibetan monks who are increasingly turning to the desperate tactic of self-immolation. In the context of this debate, what can Canada do, other than creating an office?

I must say that I am skeptical about creating an office. All of our diplomacy should be directed toward human rights, not segmented into one small office.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her bigger picture of the very serious issue of the infringement of human rights.

At the first meeting of the newly structured office with respect to religious freedoms and so forth, which we spoke about earlier, some 100 various religions were represented at the meeting. There is significant engagement of the broader religious minorities in this new office structure that I believe will be very effective in dealing with these issues on a more international level.

The hon. member's point is well taken. There are many disenfranchised, discriminated religions and minorities worldwide. I think this particular office is an effective way to begin to make those kinds of inroads on a united front.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Canadian Coptic Centre, to which the associate minister referred in his comments, is in my riding. I very much appreciate the many members of Parliament, including members opposite, for visiting and showing solidarity with the Coptic community.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister announced our commitment to the office of religious freedoms in the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga. Two weeks ago, as the associate minister knows, we had a very important meeting with the community and talked about these issues.

Could the associate minister share a little more of what he shared with the audience that day in solidarity with the Coptic community of what our government is doing and how proactive we are being on this file?

● (2020)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his support of the Coptic community, which I know is very profound and on a very active basis.

At that particular time, we were all moved by the outpouring of concern and the attendance at that particular gathering. Moreover, we realized full well that, although we expressed concern with genuine sentiment, all of these people either had friends, family or ties directly back to the very place where so much of the discrimination, harassment and difficulties are experienced.

In essence, and not in a political sense but in a conscientious, responsible way, as this issue transcends politics, we shared with them directly that we stand shoulder to shoulder with Coptic Christians not only here in Canada but with their families, friends and communities back home.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, what would the mandate be for the office of religious freedom? What would it produce in terms of reports, policies, recommendations? Who would be hired to work in this office, especially as we are downsizing now and cutting the public service? How would having a separate office of religious freedom fit with the department's overall work promoting human rights?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the promotion and protection of human rights is basically what is, in essence, the scope and the mission of the office. That would transcend into a commitment to and support of individual rights to freedom of religion and conscience. Directly under the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this particular office would engage widely with not only the communities here within the religious freedom situation but also on an international level, such as, as was mentioned earlier, the United Nations, if need be, and, moreover, internationally as circumstances evolve.

In fairness, this is a new thing. It is building as we speak. I want to assure the hon. member that the uptake has just been so remarkable. In the very first meeting, there were some 100 religious representatives in attendance to help us deliver and produce a truly international tool to deal with these issues.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Chair, a wave of anti-Christian violence has once again hit Coptic Christians in Egypt. About 100 radicals stormed a Coptic neighbourhood. Approximately 10 people died and about 100 were injured in clashes between Christians and Islamic assailants. Despite being alerted repeatedly, law enforcement allegedly did not try to disarm or truly oppose the crowds of assailants led by religious leaders. The Christians were allegedly left to defend themselves.

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For years, to justify their hatred for and attacks against Egyptian Christians, Islamists have been spreading a rumour that Coptic Christians were responsible for the kidnapping of two Muslims. Al-Qaeda picked up the story in October 2010 and announced that this justified the killing of any Christians in Islamic lands.

Regardless of the causes, we can take a stand and state that nothing justifies the aggression and attacks that are committed against Coptic Christians and other minorities in Egypt on a regular basis. These attacks are the latest in a long history of persecution and vicious attacks, often committed with total impunity and sometimes even with the passive complicity of the army and police.

Another attack, which resulted in 13 deaths, occurred in March 2011, just after the departure of President Mubarak. There too, radicals stormed a Coptic church and then set it afire.

Never in Egypt's history has inter-religious violence been so intense and threatening. Muslims and secularists are also victims of this climate of hatred. Even worse, far from imparting values of tolerance and citizenship, Egyptian textbooks and public television make a commonplace of xenophobic propaganda that stigmatizes religious minorities. It is therefore likely that the situation will only get worse. Although the Egyptians are being offered the chance to turn the page on past repression, they risk being taken hostage by fanaticism.

That is why it is so important that the dialogue between Egyptians and the self-examination of their own society, which led to the uprising and mobilization of all Egyptian classes and communities, should continue in order to lead the country to a democracy that represents all citizens.

It is important to understand that fanatical movements take power in a climate of political repression and often do so by coups d'état. Such was the case in Egypt, where one family or clan was leading the country according to its own whims for decades. This type of takeover relies on secret preparations with reliable partners. The key solidarity networks—the extended family, the village, the ethno-religious group—provide a sure and effective means of political mobilization.

Until now, Egypt's political and social system was based on a strong, centralist state, controlled by a discriminating minority. These days, we have to do everything we can to support the great transformation the Egyptians are expecting. Canada has to stand up with the Egyptians now when it matters most.

We have to speak out loud and clear on behalf of all minorities in Egypt who now are entitled to a say in the governance of their country. Canada has to support the Egyptian people during the transformation of the systems of government before they are taken hostage again by the empire of fear.

• (2025)

There is a chance now, an opportunity to see an example of the strength of democracy and dialogue at work. However, there is also a risk that violent movements will prevent free expression of the Egyptians' hopes and ambitions. There is a risk that fear will once again take hold of the communities that have been excluded from power for so long.

Do you know the real source of the suffering? It is silence. The silence that is imposed by brutality, the silence of those who lose their voice under the reign of terror, but most of all the silence of those who watch without condemning, and without allowing their humanity to take over. Those who remain silent about others' misfortune are part of the problem.

One thing is for certain: no Canadian wants to see any harm done to the Egyptians. We have a duty—we, as members of Parliament from all parties—to unite our voices in denunciation.

That is why, to counter this devastating silence, we must impose a dialogue. As Canadians, with our imperfect but aspirational democracy, we must continue this dialogue with the Egyptians to let them see what we see, let them see the wealth of their nation and the importance of their actions for the future of the world.

We can never use force. It is unnecessary and unjustified. Above all, it is unthinkable and unacceptable to even consider it. From a distance, there are no identifiable targets in this cultural conflict. Only ignorance, intolerance and silence are at fault. Therefore, military violence cannot help the Egyptian minorities.

We cannot impose an embargo. It would be cruel and of no use to the people who are already being held hostage. It would only feed the discourse of hatred that is already so destructive. However, we can use our voice not only to continue the dialogue with the Egyptians, but also to force all the social, ethnic and religious factions in Egypt to continue the dialogue amongst themselves. It is a prerequisite for democracy.

Canada can speak up and influence its many partners to do so also. The Prime Minister of Canada has the moral authority to unite the political voices throughout the world.

The Prime Minister will surely decide to take advantage of the Commonwealth heads of government meeting, being held in Australia, to unite the voices of allies, and to appeal to the Egyptians and convince them to bear witness to hope and tolerance, not hate, violence and intolerance. As with many of today's problems, education will bring about solutions. These cultural conflicts motivated by prejudice and intolerance feed on systemic disinformation.

We have seen how the Egyptians, through the Internet and social media among other means, were able to develop a vision and see through the local propaganda. We need to do everything we can, as parliamentarians and Canadians, to determine how Canada can support the development of new and independent media and continued dialogue between Egypt and the rest of the world.

Our message must be strong and unequivocal: democracy and the respect of democratic countries cannot be attained without including minorities, or without recognizing the richness of the people, diversity and dialogue.

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I add my voice to all those who wish to build democracy and respect human rights because a strong voice is what is needed for the minorities in Egypt. Last Tuesday at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, we had the opportunity to hear from three Egyptian citizens. They made some suggestions. First, they suggested creating a task force, within the Department of Foreign Affairs, on cultural minorities in the Middle East. They then suggested directly expressing Canada's deep concerns to the head of the supreme council of the armed forces, in person.

• (2030)

The issue of protecting minorities in emerging democracies in the Middle East needs to remain on the agenda of the G8 and other international groups. We need to work with other western countries in reacting to the daily persecution of minorities in Egypt and elsewhere. Finally, we need to apply a strategy that includes dialogue with the Egyptians and support for civil society.

Violence is used to legitimize the seizing of power by minority groups. Egyptians are opposed to violence and oppression, and they are motivated by hope. The recent uprising by a group of Egyptians that expelled terror from their social reality cannot be vilified by the actions of an extremist minority. Force against the Egyptian people is an unacceptable option. It would be unacceptable to make them suffer the consequences of the actions of a few anarchists. Anything other than dialogue and support for civil society would be unforgivable.

In order to quash ignorance, in order to derail prejudice, in order to silence the calls to violence, in order to denounce those who use fear to promote an ideology and to rise to power, Canada must continue to emphasize the importance of education, inclusion and dialogue among the Egyptian people so that the multitude will come forth. They are the true source of wealth for that wonderful country.

• (2035)

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the plight of the Coptic people and the affront on their right to exercise their religious freedom in Egypt is not only an attack on a Coptic community; it is an attack on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, indeed, to all of us living in the free world where we have the opportunity to speak our minds, practice our faith and to live together in unity and harmony with love and respect for one another.

Our Prime Minister has taken a position by condemning the actions in Egypt against the Coptic community from day one. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs has shown leadership in the highest international body, the United Nations.

Indeed, what I have heard from the hon. member, and I appreciated her remarks, was a feeling that we should all be united, in solidarity, with respect, standing side by side with the Coptic people.

I wanted to ask if that is really the message she wanted to get out with her speech.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I agree with my dear colleague. We must stand united to defend freedom of expression and to build a country where everyone has the right to participate. We can think differently, but we must tolerate all ideals, no matter what they are. What we must not tolerate is violence. I completely agree that everything must be done peacefully. There must be discussions, dialogues, to build democracy and to help countries that are emerging democracies. Canada has experience, expertise and the means to do so. We must be there, but we must absolutely not use this violence to impose a violent decision or our own ideals. I agree with my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, like all Canadians, we see the images, whether it is on *CTV News* or any media outlet. We see those horrific images, and it is very difficult. It makes a lot of people very angry. We get very passionate.

Individuals like the member for Scarborough—Agincourt spoke inside the Chamber, as others have spoken inside the Chamber, and I point out my colleague because I have seen him speak out within our caucus, and I have seen him speak out to our Leader of the Liberal Party.

It is very upsetting to see what is happening in Egypt today. I am glad that we are having this debate. I am encouraged by it. *Hansard* does not necessarily show that we have a number of members of that faith who are observing. We have Canadians from coast to coast watching the proceedings today. We recognize that this is something that touches the very soul of all people.

We want and believe in religious freedom. Our hearts and prayers go out to Coptic Christians around the world, particularly those who are living through the persecution in Egypt today.

I look to my colleague and pose this question. What does the member believe could specifically be done today? My colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt has talked about the Egyptian ambassador. Maybe the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Prime Minister could make that call, arrange that meeting.

What would the member like to see happen today that she thinks could make a difference?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, as I said, we need to speak up at every possible opportunity.

Government Orders

But I would like to talk about my own experience. I lived under a dictatorship for 17 years. I am well acquainted with violence. Some of my friends were killed, my brother was detained and tortured, and I myself was injured from being kicked. Yet I have always believed in non-violence. In Chile, we managed to say “no” to a dictator with the stroke of a pencil. I recall that time, when we were able to establish a dialogue. Some groups in my country said that changes could be made using force, but that was the minority. We were able to do something, despite the suffering and everything else. The church was on our side; it was very present. However, everyone came together, regardless of their beliefs. We all believed in creating a new country. We were able to establish a dialogue, even with some parts of the dictatorship. It was incredible. However, we had a mediator. Dialogue is what began the transition towards democracy in my country.

When I talk about dialogue, I am talking about something that I experienced, something that came out of the violence I also experienced. So it is possible.

• (2040)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Chair, we are all here this evening to come up with things Canada can and should do in order to support the people of Egypt in their hopes for democracy.

I would like to know what things we should definitely do, and more importantly, what my colleague thinks we should absolutely avoid doing.

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I would like to put on the table the suggestions that were made by the Egyptian people on Monday.

They suggest that a Middle Eastern cultural minorities working group be created within the Department of Foreign Affairs; that Canada express its serious concerns directly and in person to the leaders of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt; that the issue of protecting minorities in emerging Middle Eastern democracies continue to be put on the agenda of all G8 and other international meetings; and that Canada work with the other western countries to respond to the persecution.

However, what should never be done is to use brutality in a military intervention or impose an embargo on Egypt or place restrictions on the Egyptian people.

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank this member for her very thoughtful speech. I enjoy working with her on the foreign affairs committee, and indeed she did refer to the fact that the foreign affairs committee did a study on this very issue this past Tuesday. She will know that the officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs reported that the Prime Minister of Canada raised this very issue at the G8 summit earlier this year in Deauville, France. He was instrumental in having the plight of the Coptic Christians reported on in the report from the G8 conference.

The member will also know, from the report of the officials at the foreign affairs committee, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs raised this very issue in his maiden speech to the UN General Assembly in September. She also knows that Canada is only the second country in

the world to establish an office of religious freedom, so it will focus on these kinds of persecutions around the world.

Could she tell us what she thinks individual Canadians can do to get other countries in the world to call for that UN investigation, as Canada has done?

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I will once again respond from my own personal experience.

I remember that it was very important to us, during the dictatorship, when a person sent a letter to Amnesty International. That may seem like nothing but it was extremely important. We must speak out, often just via the Internet. It is easy. These are things that each of us can do and little by little, drop by drop, we make an ocean. This approach was successful. People were being tortured and everyone knew it, and finally the dictatorship gave way.

Yes, the people of Canada can get involved in human rights organizations. They can also demonstrate and force us, as members of Parliament, to do something here.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North. I know he has St. Mark Coptic community in Winnipeg. I believe it is on Pembina on the south side. He was there with the congregation the night that things happened in Egypt.

My hon. colleague was in the external affairs committee on Tuesday morning. Does she remember the conversation that took place? I just want to confirm, because some of my colleagues across the way in the Conservative Party might not have remembered. Was there a question posed and an answer given by officials that nothing has been done to date by the government about calling for an emergency debate at the United Nations, and/or the taking up of this cause by the UNHRC? Does she remember those words?

• (2045)

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I admit that I do not really remember. I think we would have to see the documents and the summary.

I really cannot answer that question. If I did, my answer would be based solely on speculation.

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise this evening to participate in this very important debate. I believe that all members, and in fact all Canadians, share my deep concern about the ongoing persecution of Coptic communities in Egypt, which most recently escalated in the tragic October 9 incident in Cairo leaving 27 people dead and more than 300 injured.

Most of the victims of that incident were members of Egypt's Coptic community, a religious minority that comprises about 10% of the country's population. Sadly, this vicious attack was the most violent incident since the fall of the Mubarak regime in February of this year.

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Before speaking to the situation of the Copts in Egypt, I will begin my remarks by providing an overview of the recent developments in Egypt as it transitions into a democracy, one that we all hope will respect human rights and the rule of law.

Egypt is entering a critical period in its transition. Like our partners around the world, the Government of Canada is watching with a keen eye. It was inspiring earlier this year to watch as Egyptian people of all ages, faiths and walks of life courageously demanded a better life. Egyptians brought about transformative change through peaceful protest and not through the infliction of violence or terrorist acts.

What has happened in Egypt has had important implications for other countries within that region. What happens in Egypt has the potential to affect the transitions under way in other countries, and the developments in Egypt over the coming months and years will shape the region and have a profound effect on its stability.

That is why it is important for Canada and all of us as Canadians to remain engaged. I believe all members will recall the attack on Coptic Christians leaving a Christmas mass in Nag Hammadi in January 2010, as well as the devastating suicide bombing of a church in Alexandria during the celebration of New Year's mass.

Canada condemned these events in the strongest terms. And as I mentioned before, the recent clashes that took place in Cairo between Egyptian security forces and Coptic Christian protesters unfortunately and very tragically killed 27 people and injured more than 300 women, men and children. I actually saw a video of that at the Coptic church a couple of Sundays ago, and I was absolutely horrified with what I saw.

Following this latest round of violence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a strong statement in which he urged "all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt".

On Sunday, at the minister's request, Canada's chargé d'affaires in Cairo met with Bishop Youannes, General Bishop and Private Secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's concern and continued support for reform. At that time the chargé provided the bishop with a copy of the resolution adopted unanimously by all members of the House on October 17, which in particular condemned the attacks and called on the government to bring the perpetrators of this heinous act to justice.

• (2050)

Coptic Christians have been an integral part of Egyptian society since around the 5th century A.D. Over the centuries, Copts and Muslims have co-existed peacefully, and the overwhelming majority of Egyptians today support that religious tolerance, but tensions between the ruling military council and the Coptic community have been exacerbated by the most recent incident and the ones preceding it.

These violent attacks originate with extremists who fundamentally do not accept the religious pluralities. It is up to the Egyptian people and their government to prevent this type of intolerance and violence from becoming the way of the future. This is not what their revolution was about; quite the opposite. Egyptians of all faiths,

Muslims and Copts, marched together in Tahrir Square during the revolution under the slogan, "We are all Egyptians". After the clashes on October 9, hundreds of Muslims and Christians participated in a unity march to urge Egyptians of all faiths to work together to end this senseless violence.

Our government welcomed this commitment by the Egyptian government to bring those responsible to justice and the introduction of a new law that toughens the penalties for discrimination. The process leading to a civilian democratic government is entering a very critical stage. It was a positive step last March when 77% of Egyptians voted in favour of constitutional amendments that shortened the presidential term, created a two-term limit and restricted the ability to declare and renew a state of emergency. It is also positive that the ruling military council has committed to a timeline for transition to civilian rule.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled to begin on November 28, to be held in three stages, ending in March of next year. Our government recognizes that there are considerable challenges going forward as Egyptians work to define the political and economic foundations of their new Egypt. Stability will need to be maintained while ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in particular for women. A culture of pluralism and tolerance of diversity will need to be promoted and good relations with regional neighbours maintained.

While we recognize these difficulties, Canada expects the Egyptian government to uphold internationally recognized human rights norms. Our government, led by the Prime Minister, has committed to setting up an office of religious freedoms to combat this type of intolerance and to promote freedom of religion and freedom of conscience as key objectives of Canadian foreign policy.

I know that all hon. members are concerned by any and all reports of violence in Egypt or anywhere in the world. As Canadians, we enjoy the rights and privileges that come with living in a free and democratic society. We will continue to stand up for religious minorities around the world, and I invite all members of the chamber to join our government in doing so.

• (2055)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was at the same meeting my colleague referred to. It was just outside of his riding in Mississauga. We saw the videos of the tragedy. We all took turns and spoke. Yes, there is a video that says two MPs, one mike. I know his colleague rushed over to get the mike from my hand. We all agree that we must do something more. We all agree that we have to get moving.

I want to ask my colleague if he knows whether his government has called the Egyptian ambassador to come to 125 Sussex and to be held accountable, if he knows whether the Prime Minister has made the phone call to Ban Ki-moon, if he knows whether the rapporteur for religious affairs for the UNHCR has been called. I believe she is Asma Jahangir, in Pakistan. If he does not have the phone number, I will gladly give it to him. Does he know if any of these steps have been taken?

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I want him to give a straightforward and honest answer. If he does not know, he can say he is not aware and he does not know. We will not buy mumbo-jumbo. Copts in this country need to know. They need to know that the government is doing something and what it is doing. If the hon. member can honestly assure us that this has taken place, I ask him to stand in his place and present those facts.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, I want to express my appreciation and thanks to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for coming to the Canadian Coptic Centre which is in my riding. I also appreciate the hon. member's attending the march this past Sunday in Toronto. We spoke there. We can agree to disagree on the process and how things work. We can talk about that.

The interesting fact is that the Conservative Party was represented by MPs and the Liberal Party was represented by MPs, but not one single New Democrat MP showed up at either one of those events. I think that says something, which I think is unfortunate. The NDP has lots of Toronto MPs now, and they could have been there.

Having said that, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was the first major minister of any government in the world to speak out on this issue. No other country has asked for an independent investigation. No other country has raised this at the United Nations. Canada has.

I am proud of our Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs for speaking out on this issue.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very happy the member opposite mentioned the important role women should play in the democratic development process.

On this side of the House, we are very concerned that in the transitional period in Egypt women have largely been excluded from high-level constitutional talks. We would like to see the Canadian government urge Egypt to ensure that women are equal participants in the democratic development process, given Canada's obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

We also know that the thematic focus of Canada's aid commitment in Egypt according to CIDA is to help the country generate economic growth. While economic development is crucially important to developing emerging economies, now is the time to focus an equal amount of our resources on democratic development. Would the member opposite agree?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, again, I think it is unfortunate that not one single representative of the New Democratic Party showed up at either of the events, either the one in my riding two weeks ago or the one in Toronto last Sunday, to voice these very concerns. I think the Coptic community would have appreciated hearing from the New Democratic Party on these issues. It is the official opposition, the "government in waiting". Not one single member of that party showed up at either one of those very important events.

Tonight it is interesting to hear the sanctimonious language from the NDP as to what we are supposed to do, or giving us lessons on what we should or should not do.

Here are the facts. This government stands up for democracy around the world. We have the best Minister for Status of Women this country has ever seen. She stands up for women's issues, not just domestically but around the world. We are leaders in that.

Our government stands up for democracy and freedom every single time. We are always the first government to stand up and do that. We will keep doing that, not just on this issue as far as Coptic Christians are concerned, but any time minorities need support in countries around the world, Canada will always be with them.

• (2100)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, something that I do not get to say from this side of the House as the leader of the Green Party very often is that I am also pleased our Prime Minister has raised this. I am also pleased that Canada has asked for the United Nations to intervene.

I am sorry that Canada is the only country so far that has raised it. I think the United Nations and other nations should come to the aid of Coptic Christians. This is a significant issue, and we have seen it all too often. We topple a dictator, be it a Ceausescu or be it a Tito, and then we see ethnic cleansing, then we see sectoral violence, then we hear things being said such as, "We rejoice at the loss of a dictator, but where are the voices of the international community to protect the religious rights, the human rights of women, persecuted Christians, persecuted Muslims, persecuted Baha'i, and persecuted Tibetans?"

Where will the government's relative priorities be in dealing with the new government in Egypt?

We have a new ambassador, a fine person by the way; I commend the government again. Ambassador Drake is a brilliant choice, a person with a terrific background. He is just going to Cairo now to set up shop. What is his top priority: protecting Coptic Christians or protecting Canadian trade?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, I think that was the best question of any I have had tonight. I want to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for being a strong, non-partisan advocate on this because this is not a partisan debate tonight. This is about showing our solidarity for Coptic Christians in Egypt. That is why we called for this debate and it is why we are having it.

I suspect the main role of the new ambassador will be to voice Canada's grave concerns over the way religious minorities are treated in Egypt. Yes, there will be trade discussions, but I am fairly sure the number one message our new ambassador will send is that Canada will not stand for religious minorities in Egypt continuing to be persecuted and attacked. That is the number one priority. That is why we are having this debate tonight. That is the message we are sending to Egypt by members being here tonight. I thank members of the House for being here tonight and participating in this very important debate.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, in that vein, I would like to commend the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville on his very knowledgeable speech on this issue and, like him, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. This should be a debate where we are all speaking as one voice and expressing our outrage, the outrage of Canadians, about this ongoing persecution of the Coptic people in Egypt. I am very sorry that some members of this House have tried to turn it into a partisan political debate.

The member mentioned in his speech that the Prime Minister made a commitment to create an office of religious freedom at the Canadian Coptic Centre in the member's riding earlier this year. I wonder if the member could expand on whether he thinks the fact that the announcement was made at the Canadian Coptic Centre says something about what the focus of this office of religious freedom may be.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been working extremely hard on this issue. Before I was elected on May 2, I had an opportunity to work with the member for Mississauga—Erindale when he was elected in the last Parliament, in working with our Coptic community. We spent a lot of time talking to people and listening to the issues. I am proud to be part of a government that is standing up on this issue.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister came to my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville and made the historic announcement that Canada would be the second country in the world to establish an office of religious freedom. With meat on the bones, this office is going to have clout. This office is going to mean something around the world. I am so proud to be part of a government that takes the persecution of religious minorities around the world very seriously, and is actually going to do something about it. I look forward to the office being established and getting on with the job.

•(2105)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise this evening to speak to this issue because of a particular relationship that I have. St. Mary & St. Moses, one of the few Coptic Orthodox churches in southwestern Ontario is in my riding.

As a country we have a moral responsibility to the rest of the world to speak out on occasions like this and to take what action we are capable of taking. In addition, it is important to realize the added responsibility we have for this particular community.

We have heard some figures this evening. There are approximately 60,000 to 65,000 Egyptians living in Canada as citizens or permanent residents. The vast majority of them, some 50,000, are Christian Coptic Orthodox members. I know from speaking to them, particularly the conversations I had as the demonstrations were taking place in Egypt to bring down the Mubarak regime, the fear and in some cases even the terror that was being felt.

I remember having a telephone conversation in the lobby right outside the chamber with one of the leaders of the community in Windsor. He was certainly aware of the systemic discrimination the Coptic Christians have suffered in Egypt for a good number of years. He was aware of the violence, discrimination and bigotry that had been demonstrated by individual members of the community against his community. He said to me, "It is amazing what is happening. We

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are going into that square as a collective community, Muslim and Christian, hand in hand, arms around each other, to build the strength that we need to bring down the dictator and to begin democracy in our country". His words were very eloquent; I am not doing justice to him. He continued, "We are doing this to achieve religious freedom and democratic freedom, human rights freedom for all Egyptians, but in particular for the Coptic Christians". They have a long history of discrimination.

Then we saw the violence. I have seen a lot of violence over the years, but I was shocked. It reminded me of Tiananmen Square when the tanks rolled in and literally rolled over those students. We saw the same thing happening, the targets in this case mostly being Christian Copts. Several of them were chased down and run over by military vehicles. I am a lawyer by background and I do not want to draw an absolute conclusion of guilt here, but it is hard to draw any other but that those were intentional acts against innocent protestors.

Canada has a leading role to play in this because of the credibility that we still have in the international arena, in spite of some of the things the government has done. We are well known as a country that not only tolerates, but in fact celebrates the diversity of our people, whether that is religious diversity, language diversity, or whatever. We know we can live together in harmony and peace. We know we can be a beacon for that harmony and peace for the rest of the world.

•(2110)

Because we have that unique stature, it goes with a responsibility to speak out and to do whatever we can when we see this kind of, not to use too strong a term, criminal behaviour that amounts to crimes against humanity.

We need that independent inquiry. It is an absolute must. We must do whatever we can as a country, through the United Nations, through other independent international organizations, to be sure that the transition government in Egypt puts that in place in a meaningful way, with a meaningful mandate, dealt with by independent judicial figures, whether they come from Egypt or elsewhere in the world, and that those people who carried out that most recent attack against innocent people are brought to justice and dealt with in accordance with the law.

The other thing we have to look at is our relationship with Egypt, government to government. We have to tell Egypt very clearly that our foreign aid, our willingness to provide assistance in this transition period as it is building its democracy, as the government, whatever it turns out to be over these next number of months, depends on it allowing for that freedom of religion. Hopefully, those elections will be conducted freely and fairly. It would be great to see the government change its position and allow independent observers in. It is hard to imagine that there will be an acceptance, either by the people of Egypt or the international community, if it does not allow that. However, at the end of the day, when those elections are over and the Egyptians are working on their constitution, we have to say that we are there to help, but that we will not provide that help unless there is freedom of religion, unless the discrimination against the Coptic community ceases.

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It is not the first time, and I know there have been several other members of the House this evening who have mentioned this, that we have seen this type of thing happen, that a dictator is brought down, that a brutal regime comes to an end. However, what we see so often is a period of chaos. Again, I know that is not happening in all parts of Egypt, but it is happening in some parts of it and it is happening sporadically. When that happens, the type of massacre that occurred on October 9 happens. We have to tell the Egyptian government, and in particular the military in Egypt, that this is not acceptable. The Egyptians have the ability to impose order. They have the ability to protect Coptic community. Because they have the ability to do so, they have a corresponding responsibility.

We are proud as a nation for the work that we did at the United Nations in developing the principle of the responsibility to protect. However, that is a responsibility, a guiding principle that all governments must abide by, that they do not have a right in a systematic way to discriminate against any part of their population, that they do not have a right, either by direct means or indirect means, to exercise violence against their community or minority communities on whatever basis they might be discriminating.

We have to be very clear that we will not tolerate any lesser standard. This is not imposing our standards on the Egyptian people. This is an international human rights standard to which that all countries must live. Egypt is a member of the UN. It has already signed on to the human rights declaration. That declaration includes the responsibility to allow freedom of religion, whatever that religion is, within their boundaries.

It is quite clear that we have a role to play, we have a responsibility to those people who have come from Egypt, the Coptic Christians in particular, to do our utmost. There are very clear things that we should be doing, both at the UN and directly with the Egyptian transition government. We must do that forcefully, we must do it honestly and we must be consistent in it. It is the only way we will be able to shine the light on that kind of discrimination. Once we shine the light on it, there is a very good opportunity to end it once and for all.

• (2115)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a high regard for my colleague opposite. I have had the privilege of working with him over the last number years and I currently serve on the procedure and House affairs committee with him.

I think all of us here tonight can agree that freedom of religion is probably the most basic freedom that any society can give its people. All other freedoms flow from that, such as the freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.

Our Prime Minister has given great international leadership on this issue over the years, repeatedly speaking out against violence and oppression. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs, just recently on September 10, made the statement:

Religious extremism has no place in modern society and the new Egypt. Canada urges all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and a vital building block for healthy democracies. People of faith must be able to practise and worship in peace and security,

My colleague will know that in our recent throne speech we committed to establishing the office of religious freedom. I think I know the answer, but can I count on my colleague and his party to enthusiastically support this initiative to establish the office of religious freedom?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, in principle, there is no question that we would be supportive of it.

Again, my colleague and I have had a number of experiences working together and we do have great respect for each other. I appreciate that from him and pass it back. However, I am worried about the commitment of the government. Three years have now gone by and an agency that was promised to be established to help promote democracy across the globe is basically non-existent up to this point. I am very concerned that we may see a similar result with regard to this new agency to deal with religious freedom.

I am supportive of both. Quite frankly, it would be better if we combined the two and work at the international level with enough resources to have impact on both helping democracies grow around the globe and, as part of that, that human rights, such as religious freedoms, are incorporated into those democracies.

I have to express some reservation, but we would be supportive of it in principle.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, once again, my hon. colleague has given his usual thoughtful speech on the subject of the day.

I want to follow-up on the question that was just posed with respect to the office of religious freedom.

The only other country that has this office is the United States. I had occasion to be down in Washington a couple of years ago and visited with the director of that office. He is a very bright, capable young man. He told me about the office itself, what it did and what it hoped to do. He said that it was initially set up under the presidency of George Bush. However, under the Republican regime, it turned into a glorified recruitment office for the Republican Party, paid for at taxpayer expense. Under the administration of President Obama, that entire process was circumscribed quite deliberately.

Does the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh have a similar concern with respect to the use and potential abuse of this office in that it might well become a very partisan political recruitment office rather than what I and others hoped it would be, which is an office that would address issues such as we are debating tonight?

• (2120)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, I was aware of the experience of the office in the United States under the Bush administration. I understand the Obama administration has maintained the office but, for lack of a better term, has cleaned it up in terms of partisanship and political patronage. I believe the administration has also downsized it fairly appreciably. I do not know if that will be ongoing or not or if it will build it back up and try to do with it what it was originally intended for and had fairly broad support.

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I will repeat what I said earlier to my Conservative colleague. My bigger concern right now is whether we will just see a repeat of what happened with the agency that was supposed to be established three years ago to deal with encouraging and supporting democracies around the globe. We have seen no activity there at all. I would hope that would not happen. I would hope the two agencies would be put together under foreign affairs and be used appropriately around the globe.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I had the pleasure of serving with my colleague on the justice committee and most recently on the Supreme Court of Canada selection panel where we worked very collegially. I know him to be a thoughtful and reasonable member.

He mentioned the international community's requirement to hold the new government of Egypt, the one that we hope will be elected in the parliamentary elections which will start later this year, accountable. How can we hold it to account, to protect the rights of religious minorities? What can we do to ensure that the new government in its new constitution and through its actions actually protects the rights of religious minorities in Egypt?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, as always, we have the problem of finding that balance of recognizing its sovereign rights. However, again, it is a very clear requirement. The Egyptian government has signed on to the Declaration of Human Rights just like everybody at the UN has. It has to live up to that. That declaration includes religious freedom.

It is our responsibility at the UN, with our foreign aid, to hold the Egyptian government accountable, as we have done with any number of other countries over the years, as we are doing right now. In spite of some of the things he has done historically, the Prime Minister has begun to push the Sri Lankan government. I can point to work that we have done in the past as we fought apartheid in South Africa. I can go down the list.

We need to take strong, consistent positions. The Declaration of Human Rights is there and we have all signed on to it. That government must live up to it. If it expects support and co-operation from us government to government, it has to live up to that standard.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, I was quite interested in the hon. member's comment with respect to Egypt signing on for international human rights obligations and things of that nature.

I am given to understand, however, that any signing on to international treaties, and particularly human rights obligations, is subject to a particular provision in the Egyptian constitution and, in effect, it is an exemption. If it is not apparently consistent with Sharia law then it is null and void or Egypt is exempted from that obligation. That makes it therefore extraordinarily difficult to encourage or develop any kind of human rights dialogue if the entity with which we are entering into negotiations already has a pre-existing exemption.

Was the hon. member aware of that? What would his comments be on that matter?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, I was not aware of it specifically with regard to the Egyptian constitution. I have seen similar provisions in other constitutions of states that have large Muslim

populations and have Sharia law. It sounds like it is a similar clause as in some of those other constitutions.

The first point that I would make with regard to this is that the Egyptian government will be writing a new constitution, we expect fairly soon after the elections are over in the late winter or early spring. We can provide it with some assistance. One of the points we have to make is there are international standards that there can be no exceptions to, such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, I can go down the list.

Our position has to be that we understand the role of Sharia. We have to recognize that there are any ranges of Sharia law, some that are moderate. It would not concern me if the government applied Sharia law of a more moderate nature. It depends on which one is applied.

• (2125)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, we are all here participating in this important debate this evening for many reasons. We must ensure that all Canadians are aware of the ongoing persecution of the Coptic people and other religious minorities in Egypt, including the recent atrocities in Maspero in Cairo on October 9.

We must inform the international community of the repeated failure of the Egyptian government to protect the universal human right of freedom of religion for all of its citizens, and we call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate these most recent killings.

We must, as Canadians and as parliamentarians, say very clearly to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt that we are outraged at the killing of innocent and peaceful protesters in Cairo by members of the Egyptian military and that we insist that they submit to an independent UN investigation of this incident.

We must say very clearly to that Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt that they must accept international election observers to the upcoming Egyptian parliamentary elections, which will commence in November, and we must state clearly, for the future democratically elected government of Egypt, that Canadians demand that Egypt's new constitution protects freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, including the rights of all of its citizens to openly worship and practice their chosen faith without restriction or fear of personal safety.

I believe all members will agree that this is an issue that goes beyond politics and partisanship. As members of Parliament, it is our responsibility to debate and lend our voices to these issues. As Canadians, it is our duty to defend the rights of the vulnerable and to give voice to the voiceless.

The promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights is an integral and long-standing priority of Canadian foreign policy. Democracy offers the best foundation for long-term stability, prosperity and the protection of human rights.

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The Government of Canada has long engaged Egypt and other governments in the region on the need to bring about reform. For many years, we have encourage Egypt to respect its obligations under international human rights law, and the treatment of minorities is a key aspect of those obligations.

Canada has not been silent on the repeated and continual attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, and we will continue to make our views known in speaking out for what is principled and just.

Immediately following the violence of October 9, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing his deep concern and urged all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities could live and prosper together and build a new Egypt. This was not the first time that Canada had spoken out against this kind of violence, which has brought so much pain and suffering.

At Egypt's universal periodic review, undertaken by the United Nations Council on Human Rights on February 17, 2010, Canada expressed its concern regarding the treatment of religious minorities and called for Egypt to remove any categorization by religion on state documents.

I am especially concerned to note that each Egyptian citizen must carry an identity card that discloses their religion, including whether they may have changed their faith. I am told that this forced disclosure of a person's religion is the cause of much discrimination in Egypt.

In January 2010, we condemned the attacks of Nag Hammadi, where innocent civilians congregating for a religious celebration were viciously attacked and killed.

I remember all too well attending what should have been a joyous celebration on that holy Christmas Eve at the beautiful Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Athanasius in my city of Mississauga and mourning the death of innocent Christian worshippers who were gunned down in front of their families as they left Christmas Eve mass. We condemned these attacks and we called on the Egyptian government to immediately bring the perpetrators to justice. Unfortunately, to date, very little has been done to bring justice for the victims of Nag Hammadi.

On January 1 of this year, we condemned the attacks by extremists on an Alexandria church following the celebration of New Year's mass, which resulted in the death of another 21 worshippers. Once again, I found myself standing in St. Mary's Church in Mississauga grieving alongside friends in the Canadian Coptic community when we should have been celebrating the hope of a new year.

• (2130)

Canadian citizens, members of the Canadian Coptic community and their churches have been threatened. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in Canada, it is unacceptable in Egypt and it is unacceptable anywhere in the world.

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister led the inclusion of an expression of concern about vulnerable religious minorities in the Arab Spring declaration of the G8 at Deauville, France.

We have not only spoken words but we have also taken action. At the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada's chargé

d'affaires met on October 23 with Bishop Youannes, the general bishop and private secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's grave concern.

Over the past 18 months, we have made numerous representations to the Government of Egypt about the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights of Coptic Christians. These have been made in Cairo by the Canadian embassy, in Ottawa through the Egyptian embassy, at bilateral meetings between Canadian and Egyptian officials and at multilateral forums such as the United Nations.

On October 16, I attended and spoke at a prayer service regarding the Maspéro massacre at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga. On October 21, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and I met with more than 30 leaders of the Coptic community on Parliament Hill to discuss how our government could help protect Coptic Christians here and in Egypt.

Last Sunday, I marched alongside thousands of members of the Canadian Coptic community with several fellow members of the House and addressed a rally at Queen's Park in Toronto.

The persecution against the Coptic community must stop and it must stop now. The destruction of a place of worship and the violence directed toward a community because of people's faith is unacceptable. People of faith must be able to practice and worship in peace and security. This message was delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs during his first address to the United Nations General Assembly in September, which included a mention of the plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt.

During that speech, he reinforced our government's plan to create an office of religious freedom within the Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to help protect religious minorities and to promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies. He further said:

The long history of humanity has proven that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable.

It was no coincidence that the Prime Minister first announced our commitment to create the office of religious freedom in April of this year at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga.

Our overriding hope for Egypt is that its transition will continue to be based on the clear desire of Egyptians for respect for human rights, the rule of law and the protection of religious freedoms. It will be especially important for the Government of Egypt to ensure that Copts and other religious minorities are protected from violence during the upcoming election period and that they are free to play a meaningful role in the political transition.

Canadians enjoy the rights and privileges that come with living in a free and democratic society in which human rights are respected. We are also keenly aware of the struggles that religious minorities face around the world. It is our common duty to defend the human rights of persons belonging to religious minorities under threat abroad and, through our combined efforts, we are confident that the office of religious freedom can help to do just that.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recently said:

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Our positions will not soften, our determination will not lessen, and our voices will not be diminished until all citizens can enjoy the freedoms and rights we hold to be universal and true.

This is a challenging task but then again Canadians stand for what is right, not what is easy. I have no doubt that we are up to that challenge. We stand ready to support and assist the Egyptian people, including the Coptic community, as they face the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

• (2135)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I wonder if my colleague across the way wants to have a repeat performance and come and grab the microphone over here like he did at the church.

More important, language was used at the meeting that he referred to, that he said that we all know. It was something to the effect of “at the United Nations, who runs them and who rules them”. I am just wondering what he meant.

We all make comments and write press releases to impress the people that we write the press releases for. We all beat our chests and say, “I’m Tarzan and I’m going to do this and do that”. The government has written press release after press release and nothing has happened.

I will quote something and I know that the member knows exactly the father I am talking about. Father Angelos wrote an email to me on Wednesday, October 12, 2010, at 10:10 a.m. He stated, “Press releases from our government is not enough anymore”.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs should be aware of this. Since this happened, October 9 to today, has the government engaged and called on the carpet the Egyptian ambassador? Has the government done anything at the United Nations? Has the government done anything at the UNHRC? Has the government done anything with the special rapporteur of the United Nations on religious freedom and—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there to recognize the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, I can directly confirm for that member that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has raised this Coptic issue directly with the Egyptian ambassador since the events on October 9, and has directly informed him about the resolution of this House. It was just confirmed to me, so I am happy that I was able to confirm that.

The member also mentioned the very Reverend Father Angelos Saad of St. Mary’s Church in Mississauga. I know him very well. He called me the very day that these tragic horrible events happened in Cairo on October 9 and asked me if I could establish, as soon as possible, a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and we did exactly that. He came to Ottawa about a week ago with more than 30 Coptic priests representing virtually every church in the greater Toronto area and also Ottawa and Montreal. They had a very long, productive and successful meeting with both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

They expressed a great deal of support for the office of religious freedom and expressed the hope that the government would use this

office of religious freedom, as we have committed to do, to put a spotlight for the world on the plight of the Coptic people in Egypt. I pledge to members tonight that is what our government will do.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, every one of us, all the parliamentarians, are in agreement that what is happening in Egypt to the Coptic Christians is unacceptable. I do not think there is any disagreement among us.

This week, I had the privilege to sit at committee and listen to presentations being made by representatives from the Coptic community. They were very moving.

I think tonight we should see what is happening here. For the first time, we are here in this august House of Commons; it is now 9:40 at night and we are going to continue until 11 p.m. to debate and to shine the light on a persecution that is happening against a religious minority group in Egypt.

I think we need to take a second to absorb that and say that this is how we bring about change. We do not bring about change by raising our voices, yelling and screaming, and throwing darts and arrows. The way we bring about change that is long term, that is sustainable, is through naming the problem, shining the light on it, speaking out, building coalitions and getting support and then supporting the very community to build strong civil society structures so that community in itself, the Egyptian community, with Muslims and Coptic Christians side by side, can build the kind of Egypt where they can all co-exist and cohabit.

I know that when the government held the meeting with different religious groups, as the member said, and announced this new bureau, so to speak, more than 100 people showed up. However, every one of those hundred people have the privilege, and I think it is a privilege for me, to live in a country that is so inclusive and so accepting.

So, why did we not leave this just tied up with the humanitarian work that we do and, instead, focus on—

• (2140)

The Speaker: Order, please.

I will have to stop the member there to give the parliamentary secretary enough time to respond.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, the hon. member and I have had the recent opportunity to work together on the foreign affairs committee. I would like to congratulate her on her appointment as associate critic for foreign affairs for the New Democratic Party.

She mentioned the office of religious freedoms and the consultations that took place. I can tell members there was representation by people from across Canada of every religion and religious persuasion, many of whom have lived under persecution in other countries around the world. The reason our government has chosen to do this is that freedom of religion and other human rights have always been a focus of Canadian foreign policy.

Government Orders

In our view, in recent years, the persecution of religious minorities has been getting worse. It has been getting worse in many places in the world, especially in places like Egypt. We need to do something extraordinary, something new, something different to shine Canada's light to the world on what is going on with the persecution of religious minorities, because we believe that we cannot have a real democracy without the protection of the most fundamental of human rights, the right to freedom of religion, conscience and belief. It is enshrined in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every member of the United Nations is supposed to adhere to that and protect that in their countries, and yet we know that many countries in the world do not do that. That is why we are putting a focus on it. We are going to make it a principal focus of Canadian foreign policy.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his very passionate speech and his informed responses to the questions that were raised tonight.

Again, it is clear. We are all agreed that the importance of freedom of religion is paramount. And we are all agreed that violence and persecution has no place in any modern society, whether that be Egypt or anywhere else.

However, there are other forms of oppression. There can be oppression that is brought to bear against those who choose to convert from one faith to another. Earlier, my colleague used the phrase in his speech that people must have the right to practise their chosen faith. I think that is key.

I want to ask my colleague to underline whether or not he agrees that freedom of religion must include the right for people to change their faith, to convert to another faith, should they wish to do that and to be sure that they are not subject to other forms of oppression, whether it is violence, economic oppression, social oppression or any of those kinds of oppression.

● (2145)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question. He is absolutely right: the right to choose one's religion is enshrined in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That declaration is agreed to by every member of the United Nations, and the right to practise one's religion includes the right to choose one's religion. It also includes the right to change one's religion.

As I mentioned in my remarks earlier, one of the things that I am particularly concerned about is that I understand in Egypt every citizen must carry an identity card, which not only must disclose their religion but must disclose whether they have changed their religion. That is a cause of much discrimination in Egypt. I would call on the Egyptian government to eliminate any required disclosure of one's religion in any identity document.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very honoured and hopeful as I rise to speak this evening. The riding of Pierrefonds—Dollard is about one-third francophone, one-third anglophone and one-third allophone. This last group is made up of new Canadians and Canadians who are

already active and completely integrated into the community, but who have a different culture.

This diversity in my riding is one of my greatest sources of pride as the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard. I grew up in this riding and this has benefited me greatly. I am bilingual. I had access to a variety of foods and dishes. I do not know if there is a part of the world that is not represented by a grocery store or restaurant in my riding. As a student, a child, a volunteer, a teacher and now a politician, I have had the opportunity to discover the world through the people who live in my riding.

For example, the City of Dollard-des-Ormeaux organizes an event every year, during which people of all cultures are invited to share their food, music and culture with the people of Dollard-des-Ormeaux and to perform for them. It is a day for people to share cultures and educate others.

In addition to discovering the world through my riding, I have been able to get involved in international issues because of this cultural diversity. For example, a benefit dinner will be held soon to raise funds to help a school in Haiti. Many students as well as adults in the riding will be able to participate.

Why am I sharing all this? Why am I talking about my riding? I want to show to what extent cultural communities are integrated into our community and contribute to the life of the community.

I will even give one or two other examples that show to what extent these cultural communities make a contribution to society. Yesterday was Diwali or Bandi Chhorh Divas, and I was invited to a temple. I discovered that the community centre at the temple is open 24 hours a day and that food is provided to anyone who comes to the temple. No matter their religion or origin, anyone who knocks at the door and asks is given food. We also have Anglican churches that provide space to community organizations that fight poverty and Catholic churches that provide free space to Scout groups.

These are but a few examples in my riding. Just imagine what is happening across the country. This lets us see what can be done if we establish inclusive policies, the right to freedom, religious choice, the right to associate and form groups that can become very active and involved in the community, the right to equality before the law, and freedom from discrimination, no matter our origin or beliefs.

Can Canada intervene in a situation that is taking place in another country where a people is subject to discrimination? I believe it can. Of course we still have a long way to go in Canada. Tolerance and acceptance could be improved. Last year, a child was not allowed to wear a turban while playing soccer. He was asked to remove his turban or to not play soccer. In short he had to choose between a religious symbol that was very important to him, and his friends and favourite sport. We still have much work to do in Canada. However, we have managed to establish rights and freedoms that we now take for granted. It is high time Canada took a stand on a number of conflicts, including the one in Egypt that we are addressing today. I will now speak in more detail about the conflict.

Government Orders

• (2150)

Recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Canada stands in solidarity with all religious minorities in all countries, including Egyptian Coptic Christians. He also called on the Egyptian government to ensure that the attacks stop and he asked that a transparent investigation take place.

I do not want to make this a partisan issue, and I want to congratulate each individual for what we have heard so far. We can see that the commitments made and the concern expressed here in the House today are all in good faith.

What the Minister of Foreign Affairs said is, in many ways, exactly what we are also calling for. First, what we are calling for most urgently is an independent, transparent investigation. We want to shed some light on the situation; we want the most objective view possible. That is something we can do, something we can call for, and we can ensure that the investigation is truly independent. We want to know what role the military, the police, have played in this drama and ensure that we understand the scope of the situation. We feel that this is a first step in defending freedom of religion and ensuring that the discrimination and violence in Egypt end as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, allow me to share my concerns. In 2008, a non-partisan democracy promotion agency was promised. Such an organization has yet to be created. Last year, an ambassador was sent to visit, take a certain stand and share our disagreement with the violence that was occurring in Egypt. One year later, this situation has clearly not been resolved. Now, we are taking a stand, we are making statements and we are demanding an investigation. That is promising. What we have heard tonight brings a lot of hope. However, what I truly hope is that the words that have been spoken and the stands that have been taken do not stop there and that we will not still be saying that we are taking a certain stand and that we are demanding a certain investigation one, two or even five years down the road, but that we will have turned these good intentions, words, visits and investigations into action.

Things are happening and we all agree tonight, no matter what party we belong to, that they are unacceptable and we must take action. I hope these good intentions will turn into action very soon and as quickly as possible, in order to prevent these things from happening again. Whatever has been done so far is clearly not enough, or we would not be here talking about it this evening. What is the next step? I am not criticizing anyone, but I am appealing to all parties. I think we are all on the same wavelength here this evening, or almost. I hope that this will continue and that we will work together in order to really improve the lives of those people who are looking outside their country and hoping for help from all sides.

In closing, I hope that our country, which we can be so proud of, will be able to take a stand and influence the situation in Egypt. I also truly hope that an election will be held soon and that we somehow do our part to ensure that the election takes place democratically. The entire population, including women of course, must be able to participate fully.

Thank you for having tonight's debate and thank you for everything that has been said. I hope we will not still be discussing

this a year from now, but rather that progress will have been made because we have taken a real stand and real action.

• (2155)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her very passionate and eloquent speech. It was very well done, and she has expressed much of what all of us feel in knowing that these issues are going to be addressed.

I was at the meeting at the end of September for the establishment of the office of religious freedoms. Over 100 groups were in attendance at that meeting, including people from the Coptic community. The focus of that office, as established by our government, says that we are going to focus on advocacy, analysis, policy developments and programs related to protecting and advocating on behalf of religious minorities under threat, opposing religious hatred and promoting Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad.

Could the member comment on how she sees those being worked into the issue of addressing concerns for the Coptic community?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member.

It is great that she is reminding us that many things have already been done by the government and by all the parties together to try to take a stand and develop tools. Now, we clearly all agree that it is not enough and that we have to go further. I think we should take the time, a bit like we are this evening, to sit down together and put aside our partisan differences. This will enable us to talk about how we can integrate what we hope to do with what has already been done and with the expectations and demands of the people who are currently victims of discrimination.

We have to work together practically. We may not come up with an answer within a few minutes, but we might if we truly work together. We have to continue down the same path and make sure we get results.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this a great and very important subject. We have members from all parties here, and I am just saddened that the Conservative Party has very few members here.

Does the member agree or disagree that this office that has been set up by the Conservatives is an office of smoke and mirrors, with not enough money and not enough teeth, and that it certainly will not be able to do anything?

I am willing to listen to her answer. The three members from the Conservative Party might even tune in.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member.

Government Orders

I get the impression that I have to keep repeating what I have already said. Indeed, intentions have been expressed. Indeed, the positions have been presented verbally. Indeed, a few little things have been done. That being said, it is not enough because if it were, we would not be here this evening. We would not be debating this issue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The member for Scarborough—Agincourt needs to come to order. The parliamentary secretary needs to come to order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, that concludes my response. We truly hope to see more concrete actions. I have hope. We will watch each other very closely to ensure that this takes a concrete form, and we will not settle for what has already been done; we will go much further and respond to this emergency.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for a very passionate and well-put-together speech.

Often when we talk about conflict and persecution, we get caught up with the technicalities and the big picture. My colleague has dealt with children. I want her to talk a little bit about the kinds of impacts this kind of persecution has on children and the kinds of systemic problems it can create, which really point to the imperative nature of our finding a solution to end this persecution.

• (2200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Yes, I used to be a teacher, and what I can tell you about it is that the feeling of belonging to a group that is strong and proud, to what you are and to the culture to which you are attached is hugely important. Obviously this is true for people of all ages, but it is particularly true for children. It does not take extensive studies to see that if you feel that there is nothing in place in your country, you cannot get any help and you cannot be proud of who you really are, that can have repercussions on children and therefore on tomorrow's society. When the children grow up they will be the leaders of that community.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was just Googling the Coptic Christian efforts, and it was nice to see that we have churches here in Canada, in fact in Mississauga, where they are interested in what politicians have to say in regard to this issue.

This evening we are having a good, healthy, challenging debate, and it is nice to see that it goes beyond what is taking place here inside the House. It is also being debated in churches, communities and homes. It is clear that Canadians of all political stripes and different ethnic groups are keeping in tune with a very important issue.

I would like the member's comments on not only the importance of our taking action inside this chamber but also on our continuing to encourage broader education on the importance of picking up the fight and doing the things that are important. Examples would be for the Prime Minister to talk directly to the Egyptian ambassador here, and for people to make calls and write letters to provide support in whatever way we can, including our prayers and so forth, for those Christians who are—

The Speaker: I have to stop the member there to allow the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard a chance to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comment. The reason we are holding a debate so late tonight, which we will hold for as long as possible, is to focus attention on what is happening, the discussions being held and the commitments being made this evening. As many Canadians as possible have to know that tonight the government is calling for an investigation and we are debating it, that all parties agree that we must not only talk about it, we must take action and make demands. We hope everyone will observe the conduct of the country in the next few days, the next few weeks, and will not stand for inaction. We hope this debate will enable people to encourage the government to do that and to applaud it once it has.

It is important to take a stand for the Egyptian Coptic population and for all cultural minorities that may be victims of discrimination. We will not delude ourselves. Discrimination is not going to be completely eliminated from the world because we are taking a stand today on a particular situation. We have to act now, concerning this situation, but our international policies also have to provide that we will fight for freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Egyptian government, in response to international horror at the attacks on Coptic Christians, has passed a law that makes a crime of religious discrimination or discrimination on the basis of gender or nationality, yet I think we all remain very skeptical that this would be anywhere near enough to protect the lives of Coptic Christians in a systemic response of increased religious intolerance.

I ask my hon. friend, the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, what more can we demand of the new government in Egypt?

I hope she would agree with me that we should demand that international observers be present in the elections as they take place.

• (2205)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. Our demands, our calls for an investigation and our public stance are a first step. Undoubtedly, much more needs to be done and other questions need to be raised about our role in similar international situations and the role we will actually play.

Now, this will not happen in the 30 seconds I have left, unfortunately, but since there seems to be a consensus tonight, I imagine that we will be able to sit down together, in a non-partisan fashion, and advance a cause that is obviously important to us.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Egypt felt the warmth of the Arab spring, the Coptic Christians of that land felt an ever colder and darker winter setting in. Let us recount the recent events of the Coptic experience in Egypt.

On October 9, 2011, around 25 people were killed and more than 300 were injured at a protest against attacks on churches in Egypt. The violence appeared to include army gunfire against civilians.

On September 30, 2011, violence against Christians erupted in the village of al Marinab in the southern part of the country. After a group of thugs attempted to demolish a church, they faced protest and turned their attention to the victims, the Christians of that community. Residents then attacked local Christian-owned shops.

On March 5, 2011, a mob attacked Christian homes and set fire to the Coptic Church of St. Mina and St. George.

On January 1, 2011, at least 21 people were murdered and more than 70 were injured in a bombing in Alexandria. This happened just outside a Christian church as worshippers were leaving a New Year's service.

On January 7, 2010, seven people were killed in a drive-by shooting outside a church in the southern town of Nag Hammadi, after a Coptic Christmas eve mass.

These are but a few examples of the many odious crimes that have been systematically carried out against the Christian minority in Egypt.

Why should we care? After all, we are here and they are there. Why is it our problem? We should care because these attacks strike at the heart of the ancient liberty of freedom of religion.

As I have travelled the world and seen the experiences of other lands, I have learned the degree to which we are blessed to live in one of the freest nations on earth. For reasons unknown to us, we in this chamber and across the country were born in this land of liberty. However, liberty is not a gift to be jealously guarded for oneself, but rather to be shared with the peoples of the world near and far.

In quoting J.F.K.'s inaugural address in 1961, he said:

And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

These rights coming from the hand of God and not from the generosity of any state are the birthright of every man and woman around the world. It follows that we who are blessed to possess them must do our best to extend them to those who are not.

What have we done? In May 2009, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration met with key civil leaders, including Coptic Pope Shenouda III in Egypt.

On January 7, 2010, Canada condemned the attacks on Coptic Christians in Nag Hammadi.

On January, 1, 2011, Canada condemned the attacks on a Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt.

On February 23, 2011, there were statements by then-minister Cannon on Egypt and the rights of Coptic Christians right here in this chamber.

On March 15, 2011, then-minister Cannon again speaks out, but this time does so in a visit to Egypt.

On May 26, 2011, at the G8 in Deauville, there is a declaration on the right to practise religious faith in safety and security without fear of violence and oppression. Fundamental freedoms and rule of law are highlighted.

On September 26, 2011, the present Minister of Foreign Affairs addresses the United Nations General Assembly making specific reference to the Egyptian Coptic Christians.

● (2210)

In October 2011, the same minister releases a tough statement on the situation in Egypt.

In October 2011, the House passes a motion proposed by the present Minister of Foreign Affairs condemning the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions.

This gift of religious freedom with which we are blessed in this country was handed down to us by visionary leaders like Macdonald and Laurier at the time of our founding when they rejected sectarianism and ethnic religious violence. Our government understands that that these gifts that were passed down to us from our ancestors but handed to our land from the hand of God, as President Kennedy put it, are gifts which we must do our best to share with the peoples of the world.

I will quote another great prime minister and former occupant of the House, the author of Canada's Bill of Rights, one of the first legislative enactments to enshrine in statute the values about which we are speaking tonight and which we hope will be extended to people around the world. The right hon. Prime Minister Diefenbaker said:

I am a Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, while the events of the recent past have been adequately relayed by the hon. member, what most people are interested in, what I am interested in, what the Coptic Christian community is most interested in right now is specifically what action the Government of Canada is going to conduct to prevent the atrocities which have been well documented in recent history and by the hon. member. What specific action will the government be conducting to ensure that they cease and desist?

These people are very important. They have faced unbelievable circumstances, circumstances which are beyond contemplation by any of us here in Canada, except those who extend the hand of trust and faith within the Coptic community who are now imparting upon us a knowledge and understanding and appreciation, begging us for compassion and decency.

Government Orders

In a world where there is a duty to protect, does the Government of Canada have a specific action plan, beyond words, that would entail interventions of some specific variety which the government could relay to the Coptic Christian community?

• (2215)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we as supporters of religious freedom convert words into action. Actions have been taken by this government. I have listed nine specific steps our government has already taken in addressing the persecution of the Coptic Christian religious minority in Egypt.

Beyond those nine steps which have happened in Canada, in Egypt, at the United Nations and around the world, we have also begun the process of setting up an office of religious freedom. It will have as its mandate to promote the values that we cherish in this chamber and which are of particular importance to the Coptic minority being persecuted now in Egypt. This is due to the good work of the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale, who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is great to have him participating in this debate this evening. We will work with him, with the minister, with our entire government to make religious freedom a paramount, central, guiding principle of our foreign policy put into operation by this new office.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interventions earlier. It shows a clear interest in having a non-partisan approach to resolving issues.

I think we all agree in this House that every step we are taking toward peace in Egypt will have an impact. All of the steps the government is proposing will certainly lead us toward a solution.

There was one aspect that seemed to be omitted in his list of things with which he is willing to go forward. Back in 2008, the Conservative government in its throne speech promised it would set up a non-partisan democracy promotion agency. I am wondering how the government is planning on integrating that within its proposed solutions which it brought forward to the House today.

If we stress the non-partisan part of this series of solutions that we are proposing today, expeditious actions by the House will be much more assured. Although there are several options the government has proposed, I am curious as to why that one in particular, which is so clearly non-partisan, was omitted.

I am wondering if the member could address that particular issue and how that could be integrated within the solutions that we are looking at today toward a peaceful resolution of what is going on in Egypt.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the establishment of democracy promotion as a principle of our government happened the day we took office. It happens in the way we execute our foreign policy every single day.

This was the first government in the world, for example, to cut off aid funds to the Hamas regime in Gaza. We have been consistent supporters of the democratic state of Israel in the Middle East. We have stood for democracy in Afghanistan by helping the people of that country defeat the Taliban and its terrorist enterprise so that Afghanistan would be governed by an administration elected by the people.

We have supported the people of Haiti in their hour of need, not only to rebuild their physical infrastructure and their social requirements in the aftermath of the terrible devastation, but also to rebuild their government.

The people of Libya are also thankful for the intervention by the Government of Canada through our air power to help defeat the Gaddafi regime and bring about a transition toward a democratic state.

These are tangible achievements for democracy where our children will be able to open textbooks in civics class and look back upon what this generation did to enhance democracy around the world.

By the way, I think all of us agree that no one in this chamber should take credit for the vast majority of those deeds. They were undertaken by the most courageous Canadians, those who put on the uniform and put their lives on the line in order to advance democracy around the world. We in this government are very proud to support them, and we will continue to work toward the promotion of democracy around the world.

• (2220)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to hear my hon. colleague repeat that quote from John Diefenbaker. I actually have that on my BlackBerry that I carry with me. Whenever new Canadians come into Newmarket—Aurora, I always provide that to my new Canadian constituents.

The particular statement that I find very moving is the one that says, “This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and mankind”.

I wonder if my hon. colleague could speak to how that part of that statement is being woven into our foreign affairs philosophy and how particularly it will impact the Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, this is a tradition that predates any living member of this chamber. It is a tradition that goes back to our participation in the great wars; our efforts to defeat Nazism and fascism in Europe; our support for freedom against communism in Korea; the courageous leadership of the Mulroney government in helping to bring down apartheid in South Africa; the intervention of Canadian soldiers to fight in the most dangerous place on the planet earth, in Kandahar province, and help defeat the Taliban and install a burgeoning democracy in Afghanistan; and most recently, the successful coordinated efforts to overturn the Gadhafi regime in Libya in the hopes that country will continue a transition toward democracy.

These are concrete Canadian steps that have existed over long periods of time, generations, that have expanded freedom. There are people on this earth who owe their freedom to the courage of Canadian soldiers, and there are children who will be born into this land who will read about that courage and about its positive consequences many years from now, so that our generation will be able to justify its place in its time.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Government Orders

The debate has gone on for some time, it is coming close to an end, and it has become clear that there are certain points on which we seem to be all agreed and others on which we may not agree. I would like to use my time to talk about where we seem to agree on facts, where we are unanimous in agreeing on certain actions that should be taken, but what we may not agree on is whether this is all just words or whether the government is actually doing something to help resolve the situation. My impression is that it is mainly just words and I ask where is the beef.

Before I get to that point, obviously we agree that we deplore the frequent atrocities against the Coptic Christians. Just to mention a few, on January 6, 2010, seven were killed; on January 1, 2011, 23 were killed in front of a Coptic church in Alexandria; and most recently, on October 9, 2011, 25 Coptic Christians were killed, more than 300 were injured and there is evidence of military gunfire being present. There is no disputing those facts, and I have only mentioned a few of the cases.

We all condemn these acts. That is obvious. All of us would call for an investigation into the tragedy of October 9, an investigation that is ordered by the United Nations and clearly independent of the Egyptian military. We all would agree that there should be independent observers at the upcoming Egyptian election. I would be astounded if the motion now before the House did not pass unanimously.

It is not a great achievement to be in agreement on the things I have just listed, because I would imagine that 99% of Canadians would agree with all of that. I believe any reasonable person would agree with the list of recommendations I just described. Therefore, the issue is not whether we agree with these things. The issue is whether the Government of Canada can do anything effective to help bring about these improvements we all want.

We can pass this motion and maybe it will get some attention in the Canadian media, but if that is all that happens, it will not have any impact at all on what happens in Egypt. I am skeptical that the government is doing anything significant to actually help the situation. The previous member said that the Canadian government condemns massacre. What does he expect the Canadian government to do? Any government in the world, except maybe the government of Saddam Hussein or Gadhafi, would condemn a massacre. What does that do? In and of itself, it does not do anything.

I am a bit skeptical, too, about this office for religious freedom. It has a budget of \$5 million. That might sound like a lot of money, but in a \$200 billion government that is small potatoes and, as one of my colleagues said, it might fund a few staff, a few visits and a few studies, but the associate defence minister said this little office could call up the United Nations and get action. That makes no sense. The person who should call up the Secretary-General of the United Nations is the Prime Minister. The other agency that should be contacted is the United Nations Human Rights Commission. We have evidence from a meeting two days ago in a foreign affairs committee that an official said he or she had no knowledge of any such communication.

We can pass all the motions we like, but if they stay in Canada and if the leaders of this country, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, do not get on the phone and speak to those who

might actually effect real change, then it is just talk. Effectively, we all have good intentions, but unless those real actions are taken, then nothing real will happen and that is my concern.

● (2225)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I put this question to the member with some trepidation because I try to maintain as much as possible a non-partisan approach, in particular when we are so unified. But I am wondering what kind of influence we have with the new government of Egypt. We did not play a role in encouraging Cairo Spring. I remember that I was the only leader of any of the parties who said that we should pressure Hosni Mubarak to resign. When he was toppled, the first comment by our Prime Minister was “I guess you can't get the toothpaste back in the tube”.

There was no sense that we were building a strong relationship with that new government. I wonder if the member has a sense that we are building that now. Again, I apologize for bringing back what the Prime Minister's comments were at the time. We certainly took a lead in Libya, but in Egypt we did not. I am wondering if the hon. member thinks that will affect our ability to influence the government to protect the lives of Coptic Christians.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has a really good point. I had forgotten about that, but I do remember that comment by the Prime Minister back then that “you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube”. It hardly seemed an enthusiastic endorsement of the Arab Spring in Egypt. I seem to remember our leader was a little more positive than that, but the Prime Minister is the one who really counts in foreign relations.

One cannot undo what happened in history, but clearly that comment and the lack of enthusiasm that he displayed would not be a positive in our ability to exert influence on Egypt. But we have to work with what we have and do our best even where we are.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to something the member raised in his comments and several other members have raised, and that is with respect to the preliminary budget for the office of religious freedoms. The \$5 million has been quoted, and I need to tell them two things. One is that it is our hope and expectation that 90% of that \$5 million annual budget will be used for programs to protect religious minorities around the world, including Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Second, I would think he would know because he is a wise man, that the U.S. office of religious freedoms has an annual budget of \$10 million and the size of the U.S. economy is roughly 10 times the size of the Canadian economy. Typically any Canadian organization would be about one-tenth of the size. We have already gone five times beyond that, but that is the starting budget. We are working with religious communities across Canada to decide what kinds of programs will actually be effective in protecting religious freedoms around the world.

Government Orders

The member was a minister in a government that ruled this country from 1993 to 2006. The U.S. office of religious freedoms was created in 1998. I would like him to explain to the House why Liberals did not create this office of religious freedoms to protect the Copts—

• (2230)

The Speaker: I am going to have to stop the parliamentary secretary to allow the member for Markham—Unionville a chance to respond.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I expect the reason why the U.S. budget is only \$10 million is because, as we heard before, under Barack Obama they slashed the massive budget of George Bush because his office of religious freedom used it as a Republican hiring tool, we were told.

I know a little bit about money and economics, and the member says that \$5 million will be used for programs to defend religions around the world. Come on, it is going to cost a few million dollars just for the bureaucrats and the travel, and we are left with say \$2 million for programs to defend religions around the world, like about five of them. This does not add up.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here for a few hours now and the last thing Canadians want to see is partisan sniping or politicians fighting in a church over a microphone for the right to speak or such actions like that.

Canadians want to see concrete actions on the international scene to improve the situation. What would those concrete actions be that all three parties should take to improve this situation?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comment that we should not be too partisan. I did not think I was being too partisan. I gave a long list of the points on which we agreed, and I expressed skepticism that anything real would come out of this. This is an honest approach, and I have not heard much evidence that there is much meat coming out of this.

In terms of the impact of this office of religious freedom, I would estimate that the two visits that my colleague from Mount Royal made to Egypt when he was minister of justice would do a lot more than this office of religious—

The Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the hon. member there as his time for questions and comments has expired.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, resuming debate.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting debate. I commend the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for his effort in bringing this debate to the floor of the House. It is an important debate and it is a debate that is timely. I appreciate his efforts, both on the floor of the House and elsewhere. It has been a significant effort to bring this debate forward so that it is in the minds of Canadians and in the mind of the government.

We have watched the Arab Spring with various degrees of enthusiasm, trepidation and discouragement. We have watched people from Tunisia and Yemen embrace a desire for freedom and accountable government.

Canada has contributed in its own small way to the yearnings to throw off the yoke of oppression of a madman in Libya. We can only hope that the people of Libya will not descend into chaos that is worse than before. It was also encouraging to see elections take place in Tunisia.

How all this shakes down is probably anybody's guess. However, we do have a tremendous advantage here in Canada, in that we have diaspora from pretty well all over the world and those diaspora can, in many instances, inform us as politicians and also inform the government and give us a tremendous advantage as to how to interpret the events that are happening in the various countries.

That brings me to Egypt. Egypt is easily the largest and most important of the Arab countries. It has had a glorious past and it may yet have a glorious future. However, for many decades, it has wallowed in a state of despair and despondency which has really never let it take its rightful place in the community of nations.

Just a few months ago, Coptic Christians and Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder to throw off the Mubarak yoke. Unfortunately, that unity of purpose and hope has been fractured by the abuse of some Islamist elements that have used this time of turmoil to settle ancient grievances and assert a form of Islam repugnant to the legitimate aspirations of those Egyptians who risked their lives for freedom.

Equally unfortunate has been the wilfully blind attitude of the military to the abuses of minorities, particularly the Copts.

As the sole remaining protection of the security and rights of all Egyptians, the army has been missing in action. Television images of wilful destruction of churches and abuse of worshippers reflects very poorly on the military. The protection of minority rights and religious freedom should be, if it is not already, a core value of the military and those who aspire to lead the country.

One would have hoped that the army would have been Egypt's guarantor of security as Egypt transitions to an accountable post-Mubarak government.

The treatment of the Coptic Christians will be a litmus test for Egypt's success. If the abuse of people and the destruction of property continues, Egypt will fail. The Arab Spring will become an Arab winter in Egypt and the people will return to a new era of despair and despondency that will look a lot like the old era of despair and despondency.

For those who support the religious persecution of this minority, I say, "You are destroying Egypt's lone chance of success". It is the ultimate in self-limitation. If Egypt does not treat the Copts with dignity, respect and the rule of law, Egypt will fail. No country in the world can prosper if its minorities do not also prosper.

Sri Lanka is a classic example. Sri Lanka has had a low grade civil war for several generations. In 2009, the conflict came to an end without justice for the Tamils. If there is no justice and respect for the religious and ethnic minorities, as it has debilitated Sri Lanka for literally generations, it will also debilitate Egypt.

Government Orders

• (2235)

There is no doubt that Egypt will face serious challenges regardless, but it will inevitably handicap itself if it fails to respect and protect the Coptic minority. The best traditions of ancient Islam protected and encouraged minorities.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is very passionate about the protection of religious freedoms. I have had a chance to serve with him on committees and appear with him on panels. I know that this is an issue that is very close to his heart.

Given his background in the protection of religious freedoms and human rights, I wonder if he could give us some guidance on how the world, the international community and perhaps even individual Canadians can encourage and hold the new Egyptian government to account to ensure that their new constitution and their actual actions protect the rights of religious minorities of all kinds, including the Coptic people in the future democratically elected state of Egypt.

• (2240)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, Canada actually has a huge advantage over many other countries.

I was just talking to someone and saying that there are something in the order of 20,000 Coptic Christians in the Mississauga area. There is an enormous advantage and an enormous opportunity to use that group of people to speak to the community of Egypt. They can speak with a voice that is probably far more powerful than any voice that could be asserted from here.

Nevertheless, they would expect and would hope for some support from their government as they try to influence and shape the debate in Egypt. Indeed, if we have installed a new ambassador there, I would hope that he would take advantage of the opportunity, when he speaks with those who aspire to lead Egypt, to tell them the values that Canada holds dear and that first and foremost is the freedom to practice one's religion. We would expect that the Copt minority be protected and allowed to prosper.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mine is more of a comment than a question.

This past summer, I had the occasion to attend a speech given by the ambassador from Egypt at the embassy. It was rather an uplifting speech, where the ambassador said that his country had quite a bit of work to do and would hope to inspire itself from some lessons learned in Canada, one being our democratic system. The other perhaps being how we handle diversity.

That got me to thinking. One of the aspects of diversity, of course, is diversity in religious beliefs and the pluralism that necessitates. We have, in the riding that I have the honour of representing, St. George and St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Church. We have the St. Peter and Paul Melkite Catholic Church. We have Anglican churches and Presbyterian churches. We even have the East Gate Alliance Church, where the Prime Minister attends from time to time. We have Roman Catholic churches, mosques and synagogues.

We have another institution that I hope would be involved in some of the debates that will flow from tonight and that is the Global Centre for Pluralism which our government started and the current government completed, and I recognize that, and which is headed by

the Aga Khan. I think there is a lot to be learned there and a lot to be applied, not only in Canada but around the world, and certainly in Egypt.

The wealth of pluralism, whether it be a religious pluralism, linguistic pluralism or cultural pluralism, Canada has demonstrated that we are a beacon in that. I would hope that all of the factions in Egypt currently would inspire themselves from that kind of behaviour.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. Those who embrace pluralism do win. Those who distance themselves from pluralism lose. It is that simple.

At this point, Egypt appears to be pushing pluralism away. It wants a monolithic religious experience in that country. There are several potential consequences of that. The best and the brightest will always leave and that is a tremendous drain on the nation. Or, there will be kind of a low grade terrorism that goes on where Egypt will use up all its resources providing security to its people. Or, there will be some form of sectarian strife that goes on and on. We have seen countries that have emerged from sectarian strife, such as Ireland in the past few years, and prosperity comes.

Egypt has a choice. It can embrace diversity or it can shun diversity. If it embraces, it wins. If it shuns, it loses.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to stand this evening and speak to the issue of ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, a subject that has received considerable attention in this House in recent weeks.

On October 17, the House adopted a motion condemning attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and called on the Egyptian government to ensure that the perpetrators of those attacks bear the full weight of the law. The strong and unequivocal language in that motion highlights how important this issue is to all members on this side of the House and to all Canadians.

The promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law is an integral part of our country's foreign policy. As Canadians, we enjoy the freedom to believe and the ability to express those beliefs without retribution.

It is worth noting that Canada's strong relations with Egypt are based on significant people-to-people ties and growing bilateral trade and investment links. For example, it is estimated that some 55,000 Canadians have roots in Egypt, some 100,000 Canadians travel there every year, and Egypt imports some \$630 million in goods and services from Canada. This relationship gives us the right to be open and direct with Egypt and we have expressed our desire to see tangible evidence of transition to democracy, as well as to express our concerns about rising sectarian tensions.

Members will recall that there was an attack on Coptic Christians leaving a Christmas mass in Nag Hammadi in January 2010, as well as a bombing of a church in Alexandria during the celebration of a New Year's mass earlier this year, both of which Canada condemned in the strongest terms. I spoke with our Coptic brothers and sisters and mourned those tragedies.

Government Orders

Last Christmas, I and many members of Parliament went to Christmas mass at many Coptic churches across Canada to celebrate the holiday despite the threats that had been issued against Coptic churches in Canada.

The Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism visited the Coptic community at St. Mary's church in Mississauga to listen to their concerns and then to express support for these great Canadians.

More recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing his deep concern and calling on Egypt to ensure freedom of religion and to protect religious rights. At the minister's request, Canada's chargé d'affaires met with Bishop Youannes, general bishop and private secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's concern and support. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had also requested that Canada's ambassador to Egypt discuss previous attacks with the Pope.

The chargé d'affaires also provided the bishop with a copy of the resolution adopted by the House of Commons that condemns the attacks. It calls on the Egyptian government to bring the perpetrators to justice and asks the UN Human Rights Council to conduct an investigation into the plight of Egyptian Coptic Christians and issue a public report of its findings.

Indeed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs also made reference to the situation of Coptic Christians during his address at the United Nations General Assembly, as well as during public consultations related to the new office of religious freedom on October 3, 2011.

Egypt is entering a pivotal period in its transition to democratic governance and this significance cannot be overstated. It is the country with the largest population in the Arab world. In fact, one out of four people from Arab countries is Egyptian. It is a nation with an ancient civilization and a vibrant and rich culture that has long been a moderate leader of the Arab, African and Muslim worlds. It has a long history of religious diversity and tolerance. What happens in Egypt has important implications for other countries of the region, for the world economy and for international security, including the security of Canadians.

In the context of the Arab Awakening, the outcome in Egypt has the potential to affect the transitions under way in other countries. The developments in Egypt over the coming months and years will shape the region and the world as we know it. Canada's hope for Egypt is that its transition continues to be based on a clear desire of Egyptians for respect for human rights, the rule of law and the protection of religious freedoms. Canada stands by the people of Egypt, including the Coptic community, as they work toward a peaceful and democratic transition.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs recently stated in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, "the long history of humanity has proven that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable."

We cannot ignore the numerous attacks against the Coptic community in Egypt, including the most recent attack on October 9 in Cairo between Egyptian security forces and Coptic Christian protestors. Twenty-seven people, mostly Coptic Christians, were

killed and over 300 were injured in that tragic event. This was the most violent incident since the fall of the former regime.

Immediately following that incident, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing our concern and urging "all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt". Furthermore, we called for a transparent investigation into the violence and for those responsible to be held accountable.

● (2245)

We have seen positive steps by the Government of Egypt to address tensions. For instance, since the events of October 9, the Government of Egypt has committed to conduct a full investigation into the clashes and to bring to justice the instigators and perpetrators of the violence. An investigation is also under way into the destruction of the church in the village of al-Marina in early October, which led members of the Coptic community to protest on October 9.

We will continue to monitor the situation. The Department of Foreign Affairs has made numerous representations to the government of Egypt about the importance of promoting and protecting human rights, including those of the Coptic Christians. These representations have been made in Cairo by the Canadian embassy, in Ottawa through the Egyptian embassy, at bilateral meetings between Canadian and Egyptian officials and at the United Nations.

Looking ahead, we recognize that Egypt's future must be charted by the Egyptian people themselves. The best way to accomplish that is through peaceful, orderly, political and economic reforms that enable all Egyptians to participate in the process and that allow the opportunity for dialogue with all parties.

We recognize that there are considerable challenges going forward as Egyptians work to define the foundations of a new Egypt. This is to be expected as Egyptians seek to find new common ground and define the nature of their society and their government going forward. One of the greatest challenges for Egyptians will be to continue to work together to build a strong culture of respect for pluralism and human rights, including religious freedom.

Even with laws in place to prevent discrimination, the importance of strong social norms that make it unacceptable to discriminate on the basis of religion cannot be understated. This will be a long-term process, the road may be occasionally rocky and we urge the Government of Egypt to fully implement the measures to which it has committed.

We have and will continue to be clear on this point. The protection of Egyptians against all forms of extremism during the upcoming election period is vital to ensure that religious minorities are free to play a meaningful role in the political transition.

As I have noted, Coptic Christians have been an integral part of Egyptian society for many centuries and today the overwhelming majority of Egyptians support religious tolerance.

We continue to urge the Egyptian people to sustain their long history of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Rest assured that the Government of Canada will be watching.

Government Orders

• (2250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to date, Canada has had a very well earned reputation for its peaceful role in international peacekeeping. Today we talked about a number of measures that the government has already put in place to try to improve the situation in Egypt. However, we can see that the situation has not improved enough. On the contrary, discriminatory actions are still taking place and it is high time they stopped. I would like to have some hope. Many things have been done, but it is clearly not enough.

Does the hon. member agree that what is being done so far about the situation in Egypt is not enough? If so, what more does he think should be done to achieve real change?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, Canada has done everything in its power to help alleviate the situation in Egypt. We engage very closely with the Coptic diaspora in Canada. The member for Mississauga—Erindale is a leader on this side of the House in working with that community. We have engaged with 30 Coptic clerics last Friday to help find solutions toward this.

Our diplomatic corps, our ministers, our Prime Minister have stated unequivocally their opposition to religious intolerance, violence and persecution in that country. We will continue to do that.

As I said in my speech, the road will remain rocky. There is a long path to this sort of peace, but we will continue to work very hard and apply lessons learned from other places that Canada has worked very hard to instill freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We will continue to do so in Egypt as well.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have exhausted about four hours in the debate. Thousands of people are tuning in to watch. We had a great representation from the Coptic community here tonight from all across Canada. Members on all sides of the House participated. It was a vibrant debate.

This is due to what is happening in Egypt. The world is watching. The people of Canada are watching. It is not only the Coptic Christians in Canada; the entire nation is watching how we will respond and what is happening.

I listened with great interest to members of the government rhyme off dates and I heard the statements that ministers made and everything else. I am sure that the hon. member and everybody else agree that we can condemn the situation and we can probably call the ambassador of the country about our displeasure, but overall the United Nations and the UNHCR are the organizations that we as citizens of this world have to address this issue, and we have to make it work.

The minister was there in September and made some comments, but we have not yet addressed the issue of what happened on October 9. We have yet to take it to task and address it. A couple of months down the line, this might reoccur. It will not stop. I pray that it does, but it will not. It has happened continuously, yet we will say we failed.

My question to the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre is this: will he make a commitment tonight that when caucus meets next Wednesday, government members will speak to the Prime Minister and encourage the Prime Minister to pick up the phone and call Ban Ki-moon to tell him that enough is enough and we will not tolerate this anymore—

• (2255)

The Speaker: Order. I have to stop the member there to allow the member for Etobicoke Centre a chance to respond.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, we were the first country to call for an inquiry at the UN and we continue to do that through diplomatic means. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and, indeed, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs need take no lessons from anybody on their engagement with the Coptic community. We have worked very closely with them. We have engaged them time and time again. The door remains open. Constructive dialogue is always our mantra, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre for his very thorough analysis of the plight of Coptic Christians.

People should know that before the hon. member was elected to Parliament, in his previous occupation he worked very closely and tirelessly with the Coptic community in the Greater Toronto Area. He is well known to that community. He met with it on numerous occasions and listened to Coptic Christians' concerns. He heard about the atrocities and intervened with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and other members of the Government of Canada to address the concerns of the Coptic community.

Perhaps he could share with us what he learned from members of that community and whether he thinks the office of religious freedom that the government has announced can help address some of those concerns.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, the office of religious freedom will be an outstanding institution that this side of the House will bring into being. It is going to provide a voice for not only Coptic Christians but for all religious minorities and for all religions, period. Through this office they will be able to share their ideas, collaborate and work out differences in a very fair, diplomatic, open and transparent way. Canada is going to be a leader in that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to finish by saying that what has happened here today is a step forward. We do not have all the solutions, but we have managed to shine the light and have a fairly respectful and robust debate about a very important issue that has international implications for what we believe our democracy to be, not only for us but for citizens around the world.

I want to thank Canadians who travelled here and sat through this lengthy debate with us. We thank them for their commitment and commit to them that we will carry on—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there.

The hon. member for Etobicoke Centre has 15 seconds.

Government Orders

• (2300)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, this really is a non-partisan issue. We are highly concerned about the state of Coptic Christians in Egypt. Everybody on all sides of the House has the passion and the desire to see the intolerance and violence end and to see Egypt progress into the future to become a strong democratic state that respects the democratic values of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and justice for all.

The Speaker: It being 11 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53(1) the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 7 reported)

The Speaker: Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11 p.m.)

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