



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 042 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, November 2, 2011**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1405)

[English]

**The Speaker:** It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[Members sang the national anthem]

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### TIBET

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament, I rise with pride today and with solemnity on the occasion of marking a vigil that is taking place outside these doors. Canadian Tibetans are in vigil in solidarity with the many Tibetans who are experiencing oppression due to the Chinese government's policies toward Tibet.

The desperation of these people has now led to self-immolation acts, an act of desperation for anyone who understands Buddhist religion and culture. This is the sign that things have become a crisis for those in Tibet. In the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “We must find a peaceful way forward”.

The European Parliament, just days ago, on October 27, passed a resolution calling on China to act. I would urge all hon. members to join with the European Union and help protect religious rights in Tibet.

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### RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS DAY

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, eight years ago Freedom House, a church and ministry centre in Brantford, began a mission called “The Kindness Project” to see if a city could be transformed by good into good by using simple but strategic acts of kindness.

In these eight years, among other things, roughly 20,000 hamburgers have been given away; a free winter carnival, Frosty

Fest, is hosted; a school curriculum is in the works; affordable housing has been provided for those in need; and a local superhero, Captain Kindness, has emerged and taken control of the city. This Friday, November 4, will be the second annual Random Act of Kindness Day in Brantford.

The Kindness Project seeks to uncover the untapped level of synergy in the community as a collective commitment to serving each other. It is people helping people with what we all have in our hands to give.

We hope, together, to make Brantford known as the kindest city in Canada.

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### TIBET

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today Tibetans and supporters from around the world are gathering to take part in a global day of action. From Zurich to San Diego to Vancouver to right outside our doors, people are coming together to seek justice for the people of Tibet.

Ten young Tibetans have set themselves on fire in eastern Tibet since March 2011—in fact, eight since September. These unprecedented and truly desperate acts are a cry to the outside world for help. China has intensified its violent crackdown in Ngaba and across Tibet. Tibetan monasteries continue to be sacked and monks continue to be sentenced without fair trial.

It is time for the government to act. It is time for the Government of Canada to take a lead in coordinating an international response to condemn the Chinese government's repressive measures against the Tibetans. Canada should also work to ensure that the United Nations immediately sends a fact-finding team to Ngaba to assess the situation.

We cannot afford to waste another day.

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### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Iran continues to support terrorism, defiantly pursues nuclear weapons, calls for the end of the state of Israel and systematically tramples the rights of innocent Iranians.

*Statements by Members*

The former head of Iran's state-owned bank, Mahmoud Reza Khavari, is reported to be living in Toronto. According to media, he was able to obtain Canadian citizenship in 2005. A second man connected to Iran's state-owned bank has also reportedly taken refuge in Canada. Mehregan Amirkhosravi is in Montreal.

Their presence in Canada is a cause for concern because Canada, our allies and the United Nations have all stated that Bank Melli is tied to funding Iran's nuclear program as well as terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. Bank Melli has funnelled money to Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

These men must not be allowed to brazenly defy and abuse our generous immigration system, and action must be taken.

I implore the government to pursue all legal grounds to revoke Khavari's reported citizenship and investigate their involvement in crimes against humanity, funding nuclear weapons, supporting terrorism and committing fraud.

\* \* \*

**TIBET**

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 10 young Tibetans have set themselves ablaze, a set of unprecedented and desperate actions, to protest the Chinese repression of Tibetan rights and assaults on the monks and nuns of Tibetan monasteries.

Accordingly, we call on the Chinese authorities to release those imprisoned simply because they exercised their right to freedom of religion and expression, to cease and desist from their assaults on the Tibetan people, and to enter into dialogue with the Tibetan leadership.

We call on the Canadian government, in concert with world leaders, on this global day of action, to stand in solidarity with the Tibetan people, to condemn the repression by Chinese authorities and to nurture dialogue with the Tibetan leadership with a view to protecting the human security of the Tibetan people.

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**OPERATION HERO**

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a group of local Barrie business and community leaders launched Operation Hero last year. Operation Hero is a scholarship campaign to help fund students of military families to attend Georgian College.

Fundraising commenced in April 2010, with a goal of reaching \$1 million. Those who have already generously donated \$1,000 or more have been receiving framed commemorative flags that are now scattered across the riding in homes, schools, offices and businesses.

On October 23, CFB Borden held a 5k, 10k and half marathon in support of this great cause. I was very proud to participate with 1,000 other runners. I am happy to report that donations to Operation Hero have now surpassed an astonishing \$700,000.

Operation Hero's scholarships are helping so many young people better realize their full potential through post-secondary education.

I would like to send special thanks to the key organizers: honorary colonel for CFB Borden, Jamie Massie; base commander Colonel Louis Meloche; and Georgian College president Brian Tamblyn.

For more information, I ask everyone to visit [operationhero.ca](http://operationhero.ca).

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● (1410)

**HOMELESSNESS**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I congratulate the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and the many volunteers from my riding who made Homelessness Action Week a resounding success.

Victorians came together to share information, provide services to our homeless population and distribute more than 600 survival packs of hats and gloves to the homeless.

I participated in Project Connect and listened to stories from Victorians experiencing homelessness and poverty. Many are unemployed because of the recession or are living in poverty because they have disabilities. An increasing number of Victoria seniors are resorting to food banks.

Homelessness is a particularly disturbing aspect of poverty because it could so easily be eliminated. I urge the House to come together to make homelessness a thing of the past. We can, if we want to, make Canada a better place for all.

\* \* \*

**TIBET**

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today Tibetans and supporters have gathered outside this very building in a desperate cry to stop the crackdown of religious freedom in their region.

Canada has expressed its serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including continuing restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association, religion and belief of ethnic Tibetans. We remain concerned about the arbitrary detention and treatment of political prisoners in Tibet and have raised the issue of Tibetans and other religious minorities in China in bilateral meetings and on the international stage, including at the United Nations General Assembly.

Our government takes the issue of religious freedom in China and around the world very seriously. The freedoms of religious belief and practice are at the heart of our principled foreign policy.

We do not hesitate to raise such issues as part of mutually respectful, mature dialogue between our two countries and we encourage substantive dialogue between Chinese leaders and religious minorities.

### WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last weekend, Wilfrid Laurier University in my riding celebrated its 100th anniversary.

For the last century, WLU has provided education excellence and developed and inspired the leaders who have shaped our country and made a positive difference in the world.

From its official opening in 1911 as the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada to the present day, Wilfrid Laurier has grown, evolved and continues to reach new heights. Today, it is one of Canada's top universities, with over 15,000 students leading undergraduate and graduate programs and expanding international initiatives.

This anniversary commemorates the historic achievements of this university and inspires a new vision of progress and optimism for the future.

I ask members to join me in congratulating Wilfrid Laurier University on this significant milestone and wishing it all the best in the coming century.

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### INDIA

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I extend my sympathies on the 27th anniversary of the tragic events of 1984 that targeted Sikh men, women and children.

The New Democratic Party of Canada stands in solidarity with the Sikh community, demands justice for the survivors and an explanation for why and how this community was targeted by organized mobs.

The victims and survivors of 1984 cannot sit idly by waiting for the government to recognize their plight and frustration.

Rehabilitation support for the broken families, especially the trauma the widows and children experienced, must be prioritized. The negligence of the police must be examined. The truth and those guilty must be brought to justice. These are not demands. These are the obligations of a democratic government to its citizens.

Remembrance is the tie that binds us to our past as it guides us for the challenges of the future.

Lest we forget.

\* \* \*

### REMEMBRANCE DAY

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, from Vimy Ridge to Juno Beach, Kap Yong to Kandahar, Canada has always punched above its weight. At home and abroad, our men and women in uniform have always represented and defended Canadian values.

Brave soldiers, like one of my constituents, Mr. Edward Carter-Edwards, who is on the Hill today, were prisoners of war in the Second World War.

### Statements by Members

The courage, honour and valour shown by the Canadian military throughout our country's history is overwhelming. Canada has consistently stood by its friends in their time of need, and our military personnel have proudly led the way. In doing so, many have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I encourage all my colleagues to take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made by these heroes.

In the words of Laurence Binyon in his famous poem, "For the Fallen":

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

[Translation]

### LOUISE GRATTON

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the exceptional work of a biologist who works for an organization in my riding called Appalachian Corridor, whose mission is to protect natural areas. Louise Gratton was the recipient of the Pierre Dansereau award, presented on Thursday by the Association des biologistes du Québec. This award, which was created in 2001, is handed out every year by this organization in recognition of the exceptional contribution of a biologist through research, teaching or communication on biological diversity.

Over the years, Ms. Gratton has acquired a significant amount of expertise in protecting and conserving natural areas, botany and environmental management. In addition, her commitment as a volunteer has been outstanding. The Pierre Dansereau award is just one of many awards that she has received. I congratulate this scientist for working to protect Quebec's natural heritage.

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[English]

### INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I want to recognize a special event that will be taking place at the National Arts Centre.

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK, will be hosting a gala event on November 3 to celebrate its efforts over the past four decades to advance Inuit issues as a national representative organization.

To help commemorate this important milestone, the National Film Board, in collaboration with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, is launching a one-of-a-kind collection of Inuit films.

This collection will give Inuit a lasting record of their vibrant culture and provide all Canadians the opportunity to appreciate how Inuit continue to shape and enrich our country.

ITK is a valued partner of the Government of Canada in our efforts to build a prosperous north and improve the well-being of aboriginal peoples.

*Statements by Members*

I encourage all members of the House to attend the gala on November 3.

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**TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK**

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every year on the first Wednesday of November, thousands of grade 9 students participate in the Take Our Kids to Work program. Now in its 17th year, this program sees over 200,000 students take part in a day-long job-shadowing experience at approximately 75,000 businesses and organizations in Canada.

As part of this year's event, the Learning Partnership, with the support of the Scotiabank Group, held the Ultimate Dream Job contest. The national online photo contest ran six weeks and was chosen by public voting.

I am pleased to announce that Jacob Halloran, a grade 9 student from Guysborough in my riding, has been selected this year's winner.

Jacob will meet today with His Excellency the Right Hon. David Johnston and our very own distinguished Speaker of the House.

More than 40,000 people nationally and internationally participated in this year's contest. Jacob's dream is to become a musician. Jacob's sincerity, creativity, determination and inspiration obviously made an impression.

Take Our Kids to Work is the Learning Partnership's signature program. It connects young people with work. The goal is to give as many young Canadians as possible the opportunity to explore career options and interests.

I would like to commend the Learning Partnership and Scotiabank Group for their continued support—

**The Speaker:** Order. I am afraid the hon. member has run out of time.

The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP's interim leader made a mistake last week when she was talking about jobs and the economy. She was speaking to her friends from the days when she was a union leader. She quoted inaccurate statistics and incorrectly stated that the unemployment rate is on the rise.

Our Conservative government is focusing on what concerns Canadians: job creation and economic growth. Canada has created more than 650,000 jobs since July 2009, the strongest growth in the G7, but Canada is not immune to the economic turmoil and turbulence the world is experiencing, particularly in Europe and the United States. As a result, the Conservative government is working hard to implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

The last thing Canadian families want is another tax increase that would lead to job losses and hurt the economy. This is yet another example that illustrates why the NDP—

• (1420)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION**

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, from *Mr. Dressup* to *The Friendly Giant*, *Bobino* and *Monsieur Surprise*, *The Beachcombers*, *King of Kensington*, *La Famille Plouffe*, and *Séraphin*, these are just a few of the images and characters that have contributed to our identity as Canadians.

For 75 years the CBC has reflected and shared who we are as Canadians from coast to coast to coast and around the world. We heard the news from Knowlton Nash and Bernard Derome, and the world heard us through Lorne Greene and Marcel Ouimet.

For 75 years, CBC radio plays have brought our unique storytellers to the world.

[*Translation*]

CBC has greatly contributed to shaping our identity as Canadians and Quebecers. In Quebec, Radio-Canada has represented the culture and people, thus helping to make Quebec the strong and vibrant nation that it is today.

[*English*]

For 75 years, CBC has given us the best in good times and in bad.

Today I stand to salute the men and women past and present who have helped represent Canadians at home and abroad.

Happy birthday to CBC.

[*Translation*]

Happy birthday, CBC.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the disunited NDP is showing Canadians again and again that it does not have a plan when it comes to key issues.

Other than hiking taxes on millions of Canadians, which is the one issue NDP members from their placeholder leader to their president Brian Topp stand united behind, the NDP is divided on important questions.

The NDP is disunited when it comes to fairness in the shipbuilding process, the merit-based selection of Supreme Court justices, and marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. A senior leadership candidate is calling for a proposed merger with the Liberals. The list goes on. The placeholder NDP leader even makes up statistics with regard to employment numbers.

These are yet more worrying examples that the disunited NDP is not fit to govern.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

### JUSTICE

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is what the Quebec justice minister had to say about the Conservatives' approach to justice: "The solutions proposed by Bill C-10 do not meet the stated objective of public safety, nor do they address the actual needs of punishing offenders and preventing crime and recidivism." The Government of Quebec has said that it will not pay for the Conservatives' regressive strategy.

Are the Conservatives going to make Quebec pay against its will?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what most of the people in Quebec and the rest of Canada want is a more effective justice system. They want us to crack down on dangerous criminals, ensure that the streets are safe and enhance security. Let us stop always debating and wanting to pit rehabilitation against deterrence. They go hand in hand. They are not mutually exclusive.

Now we have to fulfill our mandate of making our streets safer and we intend to do so through Bill C-10.

[English]

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not only Quebec that is unhappy, but Ontario is unhappy as well with the Conservatives' plan to download the costs of its wrong-on-crime agenda to the provinces.

To quote Premier McGuinty:

[If, for example, you want us to build new prisons in Ontario and staff those prisons with highly trained personnel, that's an additional cost to us and it is incumbent upon you, as the creator of those costs, to come up with the money.]

Will the Conservatives come up with the money, or just download the costs of its prisons agenda onto the provinces?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. The opposition parties are demanding tougher laws for law-abiding farmers and duck hunters while opposing tougher penalties for violent criminals and rapists who prey on children.

I hope that in her third question she will quote a third government, the Manitoba NDP government, which supports Bill C-10.

• (1425)

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, another province, British Columbia, is also unhappy and has raised concerns.

With the Conservatives playing hide and seek on the costs, provinces like British Columbia do not even know how big the final bill will be.

British Columbia's solicitor general, Shirley Bond, said:

### Oral Questions

Any time you impose minimum sentences there are going to be downstream impacts for us just in terms of capacity and cost....

How much will British Columbia have to pay to implement the Conservatives' prisons agenda?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility here. We have a clear mandate, and the majority of Canadians are seeking tougher penalties for violent criminals and rapists who prey on children.

This is what we are doing. We are making laws more severe to ensure safety in our streets. To be more severe is not the opposite of rehabilitation; it is complementary. We should get out of these ideological debates.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the message from the provinces to the government is clear. They are worried about being saddled with the costs of the Conservatives' wrong-headed prisons agenda that will not reduce crime.

This out-of-touch government wants the provinces to foot the bill for more jails, more staff and more congestion in the courts.

Where does the government expect the provinces to get the money, from health care and education? How many front-line police officers will be taken off the streets to pay for the Conservatives' megaprisons?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is very clear there are benefits to actually putting rapists and dangerous criminals behind bars. It means that ordinary Canadians are protected.

I know that the opposition NDP would like to target duck hunters, sport shooters and farmers in my riding, but that will not bring the crime rate down. Targeting real criminals will.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, past transfers to the provinces will not help pay the billions in bills from the government's misguided prisons agenda.

Experts have testified at committee that this bill will not actually improve public safety. The Canadian Bar Association's criminal justice section, made up of prosecutors and defence counsel, called the bill counterproductive, yet, the government is bullying provinces into writing a blank cheque with taxpayers' money.

Will the government listen to the provinces and abandon its out-of-touch prisons agenda? When will it start helping provinces and communities invest in crime prevention and more front-line police officers?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the member that he perhaps go to downtown Winnipeg and speak to members of his party, the NDP party, that holds government there, that supports Bill C-10 and wants to actually see dangerous offenders in prison.

It is willing to pay the cost and, furthermore, it does not want the long gun registry. It knows it is a waste of resources. It knows it detracts police from actually hunting down real criminals.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government on the question that I think still preoccupies most Canadians, which is the economy.

We on this side of the House are finding it hard to understand why the government is still pursuing an ideological path when it actually has an opportunity to do something about two very direct issues which we have raised before. The first one is the increase in employment insurance premiums, which makes zero economic sense at the present time. The second is the failure to ensure that tax benefits and credits go to those Canadians who need them most.

Why is the government having such a hard time addressing these two questions?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the path that we are taking is working and we are following that path. Canada has created over 650,000 jobs, and the Liberals voted against it. We allowed income splitting for older people, and they voted against it.

We created measures to ensure the fees for EI premiums would not increase, and the Liberals voted against it. Now they are opposing the tax credit for hiring SMEs and, once again, they will vote against it.

• (1430)

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is a \$1.2 billion employment insurance premium increase at a time when the world economy is hitting a very heavy storm, and when Canadians and small businesses need help. I am asking the government to take off the ideological blinkers. Let the government see what needs to be done and let the government respond to what is a clear and compelling need of small business, workers and the people of Canada. That is what it is not responding to.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us talk about payroll taxes. Each time we have taken action to protect jobs, the Liberals have voted against it. Recently, we took steps to scale back the recommended increase in EI premiums and, once again, the Liberals are against them. They are making a fuss today, but when it comes time to vote and actually take real action that will affect all Canadian taxpayers, they are not shy about voting against such action. That is precisely what is so offensive and shameful.

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**AUDITOR GENERAL**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, clearly the process for appointing an Auditor General is seriously flawed. The government cannot announce in a job posting that a position requires proficiency in both official languages and then appoint someone who is not qualified based on the government's own requirements. This is an affront to the principles of natural justice.

Will the government agree to postpone the vote until all the parties can come to an agreement on the appointment of the next Auditor General?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ferguson was chosen on the basis of merit for his capabilities. He is very capable. He must speak French. He said he would learn to speak French. He is taking French lessons and he will speak French. Here is what Sheila Fraser said:

He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him.

Learning a second language is not easy, but others have done it before him. It is possible. I think Mike is a very intelligent person. He knows it is important for him to become bilingual.

The matter is therefore closed.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government's crime legislation is misguided. It will cost taxpayers billions of dollars, but the government does not seem too concerned about that, because it is sending the bill to the provinces. Quebec has no intention of absorbing this undisclosed expense, and it is not the only province refusing to do so. This government is not even considering the provinces.

When will the government realize that its plan completely misses the mark?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not taken into consideration the thoughts of the voters of this country, who gave us a mandate to crack down on crime. That being said, I understand the NDP position. Any money being spent to crack down on people in the long gun registry is okay, but its members draw the line when it goes after drug traffickers and child pornographers.

Canadians gave us a mandate to go after criminals in this country, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the provinces are right to refuse to cut their social services in order to fund megaprisons, especially when Canadians do not even know how much such a program will cost. The NDP has been saying from the beginning that this program will cost Canadians an absolute fortune without any certainty that it will have a real impact on reducing the crime rate.

Will this government go back to the drawing board and consult the provinces to ensure that they are not penalized by such a misguided program?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have had extensive consultation with the provinces. They are all very aware of the pieces of legislation that we have put together. The administration of justice is, of course, the responsibility of the provinces.



That being said, I was very pleased when I saw in the last budget that there was an increase for the transfer to the provinces of \$2.4 billion to allow them to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities. All of us should support that and take some comfort in that.

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#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, B.C. has now joined the list of provinces upset about paying for the Conservatives' prison agenda. Provinces want to invest in front-line police officers so we can have safer communities. However, the government is shortchanging the provinces. We know who will pay for it, B.C. families.

Why will the government not let provinces like B.C. have a say in how they are going to spend their own money? When will the Conservatives finally reveal the full cost of their out-of-touch prison agenda?

• (1435)

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. We should spend more money on police officers so that they can catch bad guys, but we should not put them in prison. That is the fundamental flaw with the NDP philosophy. The members believe in talking tough as long as we do not do anything.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is just so typical of that minister and that government. They do not understand—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has the floor.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Mr. Speaker, they have no concept of what front line police officers do in terms of preventing crime.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. As I said earlier this week, if members cannot come to order, they might find themselves short of questions. Order, please.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are about to stick the provinces with a billion-plus dollars in bills for their prison agenda. Ontario has said “enough” and it is demanding that the Conservatives pay for their own prison agenda, not the provinces. They want front-line police officers—not more prisons, just front-line police officers. That is where the money should be spent.

The Conservatives do not understand. I do not understand the humour that is coming from that side of the House.

However, if they are so hell-bent on ramming through this bill, will they at least listen to the three provinces that have come forward and said, “We're not paying the shot”<sup>6</sup> Ontario, Quebec and British

#### Oral Questions

Columbia are not paying the shot. The government should pay the shot.

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do respect my colleague opposite, but I know that he comes from a long and distinguished career of defending criminals as a defence criminal lawyer. Our perception is a little bit different.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I know it is a Wednesday. We are barely a third of the way through the list. The hon. Minister of Public Safety has the floor and has a right to respond to the question.

The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

**Hon. Vic Toews:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I understand the perspective that the member has, given his choice in career, and it is an honourable profession.

It is not the position, though, that our government takes. Our government takes a balanced approach. We want to ensure that victims are protected, that prisoners are—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Western Arctic.

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#### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Privacy Commissioner repudiated Conservative claims about gun registry data. She confirmed records could be shared with the provinces. Once again out-of-touch Conservative talking points failed to hold up under scrutiny. The Privacy Commissioner says all it takes is an agreement between the government and the provinces.

Will the government agree to drop the ideology and negotiate with those provinces that want to use the records to protect their citizens?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last night, this House historically passed at second reading the ending the long gun registry act by a vote of 156 to 123.

Despite the fact that that member told his constituents that he would vote to end the gun registry, once and for all, he failed his constituents. This government does not fail the people we made that promise to.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** But, Mr. Speaker, the government is failing all the victims that we are hearing on Bill C-10 and not Bill C-19.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

The government's arguments do not hold water. The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River said yesterday that if Quebec wants the registry, then it will have to pay for it. However, the Privacy Commissioner refutes that argument. There need only be an agreement to share the information. There is no breach of privacy and there are no costs to cover. The only obstacle is the Conservatives.

Will the government work in good faith with the provinces—

*Oral Questions*

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill C-10, which my colleague mentioned, I would like to point out that one of the staunchest supporters of Bill C-10, and the effectiveness of that type of legislation, has been the NDP government in Manitoba, which has made it clear that it will stand with us against criminals, despite the position of the federal NDP.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, instead of a serious tendering process, we are stuck with a growing list of problems with the F-35s. The cost of the program has more than doubled, the F-35s have been defeated in combat simulations, communications equipment does not work and, worst of all, the pilots are not even safe. It is all very well for the government to say that it takes the safety of our troops seriously, but this fiasco shows the opposite.

When will the Minister of National Defence finally admit that he has failed? When will he finally review the F-35 program?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, all the information provided by the member is false, absolutely false.

[English]

What I continually cannot understand about the NDP is why it opposes getting the best equipment for our military, why it opposes the incredible benefits these purchases would bring to the entire country, including Quebec. I am completely baffled by the position taken by the NDP, which runs contrary to the wishes of the military and the aerospace industry.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, every day new problems with the F-35s come to light. Today, we have learned from an internal National Defence report that the F-35s are so expensive that we cannot afford enough aircraft to meet our needs. Consequently, there will be no room to manoeuvre in the event of the loss of any of the aircraft. This is in addition to concerns about their astronomical cost and their safety.

When will the government stop denying the truth? When will the government finally announce an open and transparent bidding process?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again that is absolutely false.

[English]

The Royal Canadian Air Force has clearly stated the number of aircraft it needs, which meets the right balance for its capabilities, as well as the balance in terms of the budget.

We have seen time and time again that every time we have brought forward improvements for military personnel, whether it be improvements for the children of deceased veterans, whether it be improvements for their salaries, for their equipment, whether it is

anything from the graveyard to the schoolyard, the NDP opposes it if it would improve things for the Canadian Forces.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, to date we have been urging the Minister of National Defence to put his plan for new fighter jets out to tender, but with the air force calling for 80 planes, not 65, what becomes clear is that the government has no clear sense of its own requirements. It has no plan.

Why 65 planes? Why a plane that does not work in the north? Why a stealth bomber designed to support ground troops? Why blow billions on the F-35?

When will the minister finally admit he has botched this file and hit the eject button on the F-35 program?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that is the number the air force asked for. It has clearly indicated that is the right balance. It has clearly indicated that this will allow our pilots in the air force to carry out the important work that we ask of them.

Why is the NDP against giving the best equipment to the best pilots to the best air force? It would improve our aerospace and would bring jobs and prosperity to our economy in his province and across the country. The NDP's position on this is backward thinking.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE**

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the *Bleuet*, the minister from the Lac St. Jean region, known for its blueberries.

Today the papers are reporting that officials have known since December 15 that the Champlain Bridge was a safety hazard and that it could collapse. We could have expected officials at Transport Canada to get together as early as January 6 to find a solution. Instead, the government tried to cover its behind and have the blues pages handy to respond in case of a leak.

What did this government hide? When will it tell the truth about the safety of the Champlain Bridge? We want to know.

• (1445)

**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, we have invested in maintaining this bridge in several budgets. Our government was happy to make an announcement recently, through the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, that we would replace the Champlain Bridge and build a new bridge over the St. Lawrence River. These are important advances.

I hope that we will have the support of the hon. member for these projects.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I asked for a blueberry and got a lemon. I wanted to know what was going on.

*Oral Questions*

The problem is that a decision could have been made on January 6, but we had to wait until October to find out what was going on. Even people at Delcan are saying that it makes no sense and that the bridge could collapse. We have waited all this time and we do not know if the bridge will last another 10 years.

Instead of having to one day appear before a commission of inquiry into the collapse of the Champlain Bridge, could the government table the inspection reports? People are crossing that bridge. Instead of hearing what the minister will say, we want to know whether the bridge is safe.

**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, our minister has demonstrated true leadership on this issue. We have made investments to maintain this bridge. The minister has announced a plan to replace the bridge. The Liberals never did that.

We should focus on infrastructure and not on a Montreal member's campaign for mayor.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, international scientists have asked that the cuts to ozone research be reversed. Thousands of Canadians have signed petitions. We have hosted a non-partisan breakfast on Parliament Hill on ozone research that has showed how important ozone research is, and Canada's leadership.

Will the government unequivocally commit today that there will be absolutely no cuts to ozone research in Canada?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have assured the House any number of times in recent weeks, Environment Canada will continue to monitor the ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Data Centre will continue to deliver world-class services.

This government makes no apologies whatsoever for trying to find the most cost-effective ways of protecting the Canadian environment.

\* \* \*

**AUDITOR GENERAL**

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, experience with analyzing and assessing program spending to ensure real results are being delivered for Canadians, experience with risk methodology consistent with the Treasury Board Secretariat's integrated management framework.

[Translation]

Those are some of the qualifications that were on the French-language job poster put out by the headhunting firm hired by the Conservatives to find a candidate for the position of Auditor General.

My question is simple: how much were these headhunters paid?

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have already said that the government looked for qualified candidates who were more or less bilingual. Upon completion of a rigorous process, the most qualified candidate was chosen. Again yesterday, Mr. Ferguson said that he wants to and will learn French. However, he has other skills that are important for this position.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about this job posting is that the profile highlights do not mention proficiency in both official languages. There is nothing about that. Nada. Zip. Zero. Moreover, the Conservatives cannot tell us how much they paid the headhunters to put a unilingual job posting on their website.

Why did the Conservatives not feel it necessary to find an Auditor General who is proficient in both languages, as defined by the government's criteria?

● (1450)

[English]

And the job posting was in English only.

[Translation]

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ferguson is the most qualified candidate. He has said that he wants to and will learn French.

[English]

He is supported by the former auditor general, Madam Fraser. He is supported by those who have worked most closely with him. The Premier of New Brunswick and even the interim Liberal leader of New Brunswick have supported his candidacy because he is the most qualified for the position.

\* \* \*

**G20 SUMMIT**

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians saw for the first time today disturbing images from inside the notorious G20 detention centre. These makeshift cages held almost 900 people in crowded conditions with very little food, water or even a door on the toilet.

This was the largest mass arrest in Canadian history, and the majority of these people were never charged. A year and a half later Canadians are still waiting for answers and waiting for the government to accept responsibility.

When will it conduct an inquiry into the G20 summit?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the member has specific knowledge of some wrongdoing by police officers in the course of executing their duty, it is his obligation to provide that to the provincial authorities that were in charge of that facility during that time.

### Oral Questions

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of answers of which Canadians are getting tired. Toronto was turned upside down by this summit. While the Muskoka minister can find millions for his riding, small businesses in my community are still waiting for their compensation.

When will the government properly compensate Toronto businesses and finally provide answers, not just to Toronto but to the entire country, about the G20 calamity?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the losses and damages done to Toronto businesses are deeply regrettable. The claims process has been an independent process that has been in place since the previous government put it in place in 2001. It has been used successfully in previous summits.

In the spring I committed to having my office undertake a complete review of the claims process. Following that review, I can assure the member opposite that Toronto businesses were treated just as fairly as at every other previous summit.

\* \* \*

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is squarely focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth. I remind the NDP that in these challenging times there is simply no better job creator than free and open trade. That is why we are negotiating a free trade agreement with India that could help our economy grow by \$6 billion a year and increase our two-way trade by almost 50%.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the House what our government is doing to further advance the job-creating pro-trade plan?

**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 thank the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells for her strong support for our job-creating free trade plan.

Today, as many members in the House know, already the Minister of International Trade is beginning a week-long trade mission to India. With 1.2 billion consumers in India, India represents tremendous opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses of all sizes.

Deepening Canada's trading relationship with India will help protect and strengthen the financial security of hard-working Canadians, and it is all part of our pro-trade free trade plan.

\* \* \*

### POVERTY

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the growing gap between the rich and the rest of us is brought home when we see the number of Canadians now relying on food banks. However, the government's insulting response was "tough luck, get a job".

Thirty-eight per cent of food bank users are children. Food Banks Canada is saying that investments in child care can help. When will the government invest in a high-quality, affordable child care

program, or is its answer to our nation's hungry children that they should also just get a job?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that people are going to food banks, but the statistics speak for themselves. The percentage of children living in low-income families has declined significantly from a peak of 18.4% under the Liberal government in 1996 to 9.5% in 2009 under this government. The poverty rate among children of single mothers fell to an all-time low of 21.5% under this government and—

• (1455)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us use the statistic that 38% of food bank users are children. There is a statistic.

If the parliamentary secretary would put aside her talking points, she would see the economy has lost thousands of good full-time jobs. The cost of living is skyrocketing and Canadians are having a harder time making ends meet. That is why so many are turning to the food banks. Eight hundred and fifty thousand people are using food banks in Canada and that is unacceptable.

Will the parliamentary secretary tell us what her government is doing right now to address this crisis?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every action we have taken to help Canadian families has allowed them to become more independent and helped them contribute to the economy and to their communities.

We will continue to make investments to make a positive difference in the lives of Canadian families. We have enhanced the national child benefit and the child tax credit. We brought the universal child care benefit into effect, which has brought over 24,000 families and over 55,000 children over the poverty line.

What has the NDP done?

\* \* \*

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, national food banks yesterday reported that over 46% in Alberta and 63% in Saskatchewan of rural users are aboriginal. Ten per cent of all food bank users are first nations, Métis or Inuit. That represents a lot of aboriginal women and children. Many rural communities do not even have a food bank to turn to. To their credit, the Samson First Nation women have started a soup kitchen to fill the stomachs of those in need in their community.

What happened to the government's commitment to end discrimination against Canada's aboriginal peoples and to ensure they also benefited from our economy?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are working with first nations like the Samson Cree Nation. What is important is that we provide the proper incentives to get people supporting good government, that there is economic development so they can look forward to jobs and prosperity and that we do the right things in terms of K to 12 education. Those are all things we are working on in a joint action plan with the national chiefs, and we have made much progress.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### POVERTY

**Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, food banks are an important service provided for our communities.

In my riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, a church was vandalized this week, and the thieves even robbed the food bank. Unfortunately, too many families with young children depend on that food bank. This is devastating for them, and completely unacceptable.

When will the government really do something to tackle poverty among young people, so that families will not be so vulnerable?

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight poverty in Canada is to get Canadians working.

The economic action plan is doing just that, growing the economy by 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Whether it be the working income tax benefit that has helped low-income Canadians over the welfare wall or the unprecedented investments in training, this government has a plan. Why is the NDP member not voting for it?

\* \* \*

### JUSTICE

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to Bill C-10.

Canada's crime rate keeps going down. It is a fact. Why does the government want to impose on Canadians the dumb-on-crime big jail agenda that has failed in the U.S.?

It will have a huge cost and it shows a total disregard for our overtaxed justice system. Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia refuse to pay for this nonsense.

Will the government listen to them and replace Bill C-10 with a policy to really fight crime and bring more justice and safety to Canadians?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we

### Oral Questions

are doing, but then again, if the hon. member is in fact motivated by statistics, he might find it interesting to know that drug crimes are actually going up in this country and that sexual exploitation of children is going up in this country.

If the statistics are what is motivating him, then he should be the first one on his feet to be supporting us on Bill C-10.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

[Translation]

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the problem with his policy is that it does not protect victims; it creates victims. The government concealed the fact that it wanted to destroy the firearms registry's database. This is a brutal act that has been widely condemned. The Government of Quebec wants to preserve the data in order to ensure the safety of police officers and the public, and the federal Privacy Commissioner considers that justified. Since the Conservatives are failing in their duty, at the very least, they must stop standing in the way and allow the Quebec government to use the data.

[English]

If the Conservatives do not want to lead, will they at least get out of the way?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for years that member's government was busy targeting law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters and treating them as criminals.

We have consistently opposed this wasteful and ineffective measure, which does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Our government received a strong mandate from Canadians in order to ensure that we end the long gun registry and actually stand up for victims against real criminals.

\* \* \*

### CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government has a bizarre way of celebrating anniversaries. To honour the CBC's 75th anniversary, the government has decided to stage a witch hunt, led by the member for Peterborough.

Canadians are particularly concerned about the committee's decision to deliberate in secret behind closed doors.

My question is for the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Can she update the House on the status of the anti-CBC motion?

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, incredibly, a majority of committee members voted to meet in camera at this time to deal with the business before the committee. This keeps our committee deliberations secret and effectively prevents committee members from commenting on the business before the committee.

*Oral Questions*

I know many members believe Canadians have a right to know, but I must report that the majority of members decided that the public will not be allowed to hear these debates.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the budget for the Prime Minister's Office is skyrocketing under the Conservatives, our public broadcaster has shown remarkable fiscal discipline, yet the Conservatives continue to attack the CBC. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages appeared on television boasting about the draconian cuts and issuing thinly veiled threats about further cuts.

Will the minister protect the legacy of our public broadcaster and invest in its future?

[*English*]

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are demanding accountability at the CBC. For shame.

For Canadians watching question period today, this is very instructive. The NDP started question period by saying we should not spend more money on fighting crime. Then it said we should not spend more money on the Canadian Forces so that they have the equipment they need. Now the NDP stands up and says, "However, let us give hundreds of millions more to the CBC".

That tells us everything we need to know about that party versus where Canadians stand.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today our Prime Minister is en route to the G20 summit in France.

The global economic situation is very fragile, and he will stress to other leaders the need to move forward with critical reforms to achieve concrete solutions at the summit.

Canada still continues to lead with its economic recovery. We have the strongest job creation record in the G7, with approximately 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009, nearly 90% of them full-time jobs.

Can the Minister of State (Finance) please update the House on what the international community thinks of Canada's economy?

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will represent Canadian interests at the G20 summit and stress the need to reach concrete solutions to support the global economic recovery.

Canada has shown that we have a prudent and responsible economic plan that has helped Canada become one of the strongest economies in the western world. The IMF praised us again this week by saying that Canada has made decisive policy responses to recent economic turbulence; it also applauded our plan to get back to balance as a very necessary step.

That is very important. Our Prime Minister—

• (1505)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

**ATLANTIC CANADA**

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservative job cuts continue in Atlantic Canada.

First it was DFO, then Service Canada, then ACOA, and now it is Transport Canada. We found out Marine Atlantic has sold two ships to a company in India, when there was a Canadian company that could have bid to dismantle these ships right in Cape Breton.

Not only have we lost 60 good-paying trade jobs, but this would also have been a great economic boost to a local industry. Why is the Prime Minister letting another minister bleed jobs away from Atlantic Canada?

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in fact the government has invested over \$520 million in Marine Atlantic and has improved the ferry service dramatically. It has been über-successful.

The other parties have voted against all our measures to improve Marine Atlantic service, which is a great boon for the economy and for the people and culture of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Why do those members hate Nova Scotia and Newfoundland?

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned in the World Economic Forum report that Canadian women are still far from achieving pay equity. For every dollar earned by a man, a woman earns only 73¢. The gap is even greater when we are talking about aboriginal, immigrant or disabled women and mothers. Canada ranks 38th—behind Albania, Bahrain and Zimbabwe. Canada has been failing in this regard for decades.

When will the government acknowledge the pay equity problems in this country?

[*English*]

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have an unparalleled record with respect to women's rights and making sure that the state has obligations in this area. We do not take a back seat to anybody with respect to that issue.

We have certain recommendations in the future that we are pondering, but at this time we are proud of our record and we will continue on.

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last night our Conservative government passed the ending the long-gun registry act at second reading, which marks a significant milestone toward scrapping the long gun registry once and for all.

Our Conservative government is strongly united behind this proposal. The NDP, many of whose members ran in the last election on ending the long gun registry, is showing some clear signs of disunity.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please comment on last night's vote?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his hard work on this file.

I repeat that last night the second reading of the ending the long-gun registry act was historically passed by the House on a vote of 152-123, but again many members of the NDP who ran on ending the long gun registry listened to their Ottawa bosses rather than to the voices of their constituents.

However, cracks in the NDP caucus showed up. Members from Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North stood up and voted with the government. Some of those other members still have time to do the right thing.

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### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, winter is hitting the James Bay coast, yet as a result of a severe housing crisis, families there are living in tents and cabins. This past Friday the communities of Kashechewan, Attawapiskat and Fort Albany declared a state of emergency.

I am sure the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development shares my concern, particularly with the risk posed to young children and the elderly in these communities. Will he direct his staff to work with the communities and the Mushkegowuk tribal council to address the severe housing crisis in those communities and get these Canadian citizens the decent housing they deserve?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for Timmins—James Bay. Of course, my officials have worked with the first nations on the James Bay coast and will continue to do so there, as well as elsewhere.

For example, we provided significant funding for the Attawapiskat First Nation on the James Bay coast for housing. This included a significant boost from our economic action plan and funding dedicated to a new subdivision, in which 44 houses have been completed.

We are actively working with first nations towards greater effectiveness and accountability in housing managed—

• (1510)

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

### Points of Order

[Translation]

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, to justify their ideological decision to destroy the firearms registry data, the Conservatives are prepared to do anything, even mislead the public. The Minister of Public Safety said, “the information was created under a specific piece of legislation...It would be unlawful for the information that was collected to remain in the hands of individuals after the legislation is repealed.” That is absolutely not true. The Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, has confirmed that it is indeed legal to transfer the data to Quebec.

My question is simple: why is the government lying to the public?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced legislation to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. Our legislation will destroy the records, which are inaccurate and unreliable and becoming increasingly so over time.

I hope that the member has the decency to apologize; if not, I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will take the appropriate steps for the unparliamentary language that the member used.

\* \* \*

### PRESENCE IN GALLERY

**The Speaker:** On the upcoming occasion of Veterans' Week, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of current serving members and veterans of the Canadian Forces, namely Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, Captain Ashley Collette, Warrant Officer John Hryniw, Sergeant John Carr, Brigadier-General Sheila Hellstrom, Lieutenant-Colonel Shirley Robinson, Sergeant Roland Lawless and World War II veteran Mr. Edward Carter-Edwards.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

### POINTS OF ORDER

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** The Chair has notice of several points of order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during question period the member of Parliament for Jeanne-Le Ber posed a question to the chair of the committee on access to information, privacy and ethics. I am kind of puzzled by it because it is public record that the NDP actually presented a motion to move the committee in camera. That is public.

What I cannot understand is why the NDP is complaining that it found support for that motion.

*Routine Proceedings*

**The Speaker:** That is not a point of order.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention an incident that happened during question period. It was caused by the member for Bourassa. We know that this member often uses colourful language, but he used the term “blueberry” to describe the hon. member for Lac—Saint-Jean, who is a nice guy, I should also point out. If it had ended there, it would not be an issue. Unfortunately, when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities rose, the member for Bourassa called him a “lemon”, suggesting something that does not perform well, in fact, something useless.

I am sure that the member for Bourassa would not stand for being insulted in the House without putting up a fight. I am asking for common decency: he should withdraw his remarks or apologize to the House.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have heard that talking about fruit is unparliamentary. I did not want to compare apples and oranges, so I chose to speak about blueberries and lemons instead.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** I will take a look at the blues and get back to the House.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Industry.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Christian Paradis:** Mr. Speaker, that was a very predictable answer. That is disappointing. My colleague knows full well that the term is used in a general sense to call someone useless.

Since he does not have the decency to at least apologize or withdraw his remarks, I would ask that you rule on this matter.

•(1515)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. Speaker, I would never intentionally or unintentionally call the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities useless. That would be unparliamentary.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** I will examine it and get back to the House.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I seek the consent of the House to table, in both official languages, documents from the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer which show, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the budget line for the Perimeter Institute has increased by 1,270%.

Thus, my questions were appropriate and the accusations hurled at me were unfounded.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

**Some hon. members:** No

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### POLITICAL LOANS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to political loans).

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

\* \* \*

### VETERANS

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, “How will you remember?” “Comment vous souviendrez-vous?”

[*Translation*]

I am moved as I rise in the House today to inaugurate Veterans' Week. I would like to thank my colleagues in this Parliament, whether they are practised politicians or new recruits swept in by the popular tide, for taking the time to pay the most important national tribute, our tribute to those resting in eternal peace for the glory of our country and to those who have sacrificed so much for us.

I am of Irish descent and over the generations my ancestors became a part of French Canada. Therefore, I share Quebec's particular view of the world. It is from this perspective that I look at the world and consider the stories of the great wars and the epic battles that I have learned about. Especially as a member of Parliament, and now as a minister, I have come to realize the extent of the sacrifice made by these men and women whose fate was tragic and heroic, but who are too often ignored or forgotten.

[*English*]

The encounters I have had over the last six months, often in places steeped in history, have proven to be profoundly moving. From Cabaret Rouge, in France, where I paid tribute at the place where the remains of the Unknown Soldier were once buried, to the spectacular Canadian National Vimy Memorial, where more than 11,000 names are engraved, it is impossible not to think about the enormous loss of life and sacrifice.



*Routine Proceedings*

[*Translation*]

Looking at the interminable rows of headstones, which seemed to extend forever, I came to a better understanding of the human drama behind each one, each soldier, each family, each story, each hard-hit community, and also of the history of our country.

At first, the colonists of New France and the British fought as enemies on the Plains of Abraham, but they later united to fight for the common cause of peace and freedom. The two founding nations, along with aboriginal peoples and newcomers, fought side by side at Châteauguay, for example, during the War of 1812, at the capture of the unconquerable Vimy Ridge in 1917, or on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944, where the valiant militia of the Régiment de La Chaudière—from Beauce—and members of the Queen's Own Rifles from Toronto joined together to drive back the Nazi invaders and liberate France.

It was this sacrifice by people of many origins that made Canada what it is today, a strong nation that is the envy of the world. The sacrifices of these soldiers have united our country. We are what we are today because of the sacrifices of these men and women who went to their eternal rest, sometimes far away in Europe and other distant places, and who transformed our nation. Some of our soldiers also returned transformed, with injuries to their souls that burdened them until their last breaths.

It is this blood, spilled in the off lands—European battlefields such as Beaumont-Hamel, where 800 Newfoundlanders faced enemy fire, or Korea, Cyprus, Bosnia and, more recently, Afghanistan—that define who we are. As citizens and parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to rediscover these sometimes tragic exploits in order to better understand where we are going as individuals, as a people and as a nation.

Let us recognize today that we are indebted to them for every vote we hold here in this House, for our freedom and for our ability to shape the destiny of our country.

● (1520)

[*English*]

One does not need to travel all the way to Vimy in France to be a proud Canadian, but I wonder if there is anywhere else on earth where that pride could be felt more intensely than on the ridge overlooking the plain of Douai.

It is not necessary either to go back in time to see examples of dedication, courage and the gift of self. These values of bravery, valour and service transcend time, place and generations. I see it today.

Born in the aftermath of September 2001, where terrorists killed almost 3,000 innocent people, Canada's war on terror hit the ground in Afghanistan and has seen a decade of a strong involvement from large scale military operations to improvements in infrastructure, supporting the opening of schools for girls and providing humanitarian health. However, that came at a great cost as more than 150 Canadians have lost their lives to establish lasting peace.

Many of these men and women who serve our country without hesitation are coming back or returning from the Afghanistan

mission. Individuals such as Sergeant Nielsen, who we have just recognized, are a symbol of bravery and perseverance.

On Canada Day, July 1, 2010, Sergeant Nielsen was hit by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan and was severely injured. He lost his two legs, but he stood up today in the House, which made us very proud.

I was privileged to meet with Sergeant Nielsen. What struck me most was his outlook on life. To him, he was simply doing his job. As members can imagine, I was sincerely impressed with Sergeant Nielsen's attitude and his willingness to move forward no matter what. He said to me, "You can lie down and let the world happen or you can get up and do something yourself". Luckily for us Sergeant Nielsen has chosen the latter.

Mr. Nielsen and his comrades are with us today, his comrades who are supporting him and who are supportive of each other, and with whom I have had the privilege of having dinner. They serve our country with pride and conviction. They fought for peace, freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

We thank our men and women for what they are doing, as they continue to do every day to make the lives of the Afghan people better and therefore for us so we can live in a better world.

That is not all. As we conclude the month of women in the military, we also have remarkable women who wear the uniform and continue to do so today, remarkable individuals such as Brigadier General Sheila Hellstrom who was the first woman to earn the title and Lieutenant Colonel Shirley Robinson who has devoted her life to ensuring women have equal opportunities in the military.

Nellie McClung once said, "People must know the past to understand the present and face the future". These women paved the way for all women, not just those who wear the military uniform but all Canadian women, and this is an excellent example for the world.

There are still challenges. Veterans, such as Sergeant Roland Lawless, who is the vice-president of the Veterans Emergency Transition Services, know it too well. Sergeant Lawless devotes his time and efforts to assist our too many homeless veterans in finding the support they need. For this, he deserves our full acknowledgement.

● (1525)

Yesterday, we paid tribute to those who dedicate their lives to caring for and supporting our veterans. I refer to the families, of course, and the loved ones.

When an individual joins the Canadian Forces, he or she does so by choice. That choice takes a heavy toll on that person's family, whether it is being left alone while their loved one is deployed far away or whether it is trying to transition to civilian life after years of being a military family. All too often, it is the spouses and caregivers who are left to provide stability and balance at home. They bear a burden very few of us understand but they, too, deserve our recognition and respect.

*Routine Proceedings*

[Translation]

As a nation, we have a duty to remember and honour the exploits of those who died defending our ideals. In Libya, we have again shown the world that we are determined not to allow a dictator massacre his people. This House of Commons is the symbol of our freedom and democracy. It is here that we make decisions on behalf of the nation and here that we make the lives of these people a priority in our country. Thousands of Canadians have paid the ultimate price for this freedom, wherever duty called them to serve.

[English]

As of last week, our country was tragically struck by the death of Sergeant Janick Gilbert and the departure of Master Corporal Byron Greff in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Those who for their country gave their lives  
Should hear the prayers of many at their grave.  
Theirs is the most beautiful of all beautiful names.  
Compared with them all glory is ephemeral,  
And the voice of an entire people  
Is like a mother's lullaby to them in their graves.

These are the words of Victor Hugo, which are found in the Canadian Merchant Navy *Book of Remembrance*.

In the coming days, let us feel humbled by the greatness of these fallen men and women, and of those who have served and are currently serving. Let each of us, as Parliamentarians, go to our communities, cities and towns and take the time to quietly reflect and thank them.

[English]

“In Flanders fields the poppies [still] blow...”. I would ask my colleagues how they will remember and I thank them for rightly doing so.

Lest we forget. Nous nous souviendrons d'eux.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs for his kind words.

On November 11, we will gather at cenotaphs, Legion halls and army, navy and air force halls in communities right across this country from coast to coast to coast to pay special tribute to the over 118,000 men and women who will not be with us on that day, as they have made the ultimate sacrifice and are buried in over 70 countries around the world, and, as the media reported just recently, we have lost a few more.

These men and women sacrificed themselves for peace, freedom and democracy and for the liberation of the free world. We will also remember our troops who served in Afghanistan, Libya, Haiti and everywhere else.

Just like my father once said, when he met a Canadian soldier during the liberation of the Netherlands, they were looking up at a Canadian service personnel and saying, “My God, what kind of country do they come from”. We live in heaven and most of us do not even know it.

The reality is that the men and women of the services and those in the RCMP gave us our democracy, gave us the country that we call home and gave us the country that we can proudly call number one in the world. We will never apologize for that. We truly have the best armed forces in the world. We also have the greatest veterans in the world. However, just as important, we also have the greatest family support for our veterans.

Yesterday, the veterans affairs committee went to the Canadian War Museum and we were given a very special gift, the gift of remembrance from one of our own here in the House of Commons, the hon. member for West Nova, whose great uncle, John Chipman Kerr, received the Silver Cross in the Battle of the Somme. We saw Mr. Kerr's photo done by A.Y. Jackson. We saw his Silver Cross medal and other medals donated by the family to the Canadian War Museum. We thank the member for West Nova for sharing his family history with all of us. It was very kind of him.

I could single out so many veterans and armed forces personnel, but there is one that I would like to single out today. I would like to recognize a sad chapter in our military history.

In 1944, a bunch of Canadian airmen were shot down over Paris. Unfortunately, 26 of them were taken, against the Geneva Convention, to the Buchenwald concentration camp, where they were not supposed to go. For quite a while, they were interrogated by the Gestapo. Those men not only showed bravery and courage in what they did, but survived.

There are only four of those 26 brave Canadian airmen who were in the Buchenwald camp and we are blessed and honoured to have one of them with us today. Mr. Ed Carter-Edwards of Smithville, Ontario, is with us today, as was recognized by the Speaker earlier. He has shown tremendous courage and bravery. It is his wish that the story of what he and his comrades went through is never forgotten. Just as important, there is no way Mr. Ed Carter-Edwards could have come back to Canada, lived a normal life and raised his family without the loving support of his wife of over 65 years, Lois, who is with him today. We thank her very much for that.

Ed Carter-Edwards and the many other veterans who are still with us from World War II and Korea are examples of the very best of Canada, the very best of what this country had to offer the world. When the world asked, we came calling. Our veterans sacrificed themselves. Those men and women volunteered.

Our aboriginal people were exempted from wars but they went anyway. They formed the greatest fighting force of all time. They showed the true spirit of the maple leaf. Unfortunately, many of them laid down their lives so that we can sit in the House of Commons and debate the issues of the day and look after our families and call Canada number one.

*Routine Proceedings*

•(1530)

All of us in the House of Commons salute Ed Carter-Edwards and all the current service personnel, those who have served in the past, those who are serving today and the young cadets who will be serving in the future. We thank them and love them all. We cannot thank them enough for all the work they have done. God bless them.

Lest we forget.

•(1535)

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am truly honoured to speak on behalf of my leader and the Liberal Party of Canada as we honour our veterans today in the House of Commons. I want to say at the outset how profoundly I appreciate what veterans have done for Canada in the cause of peace around the world.

As I was preparing my thoughts for today, I was trying to imagine what it must have been like to have served during war. I wondered what it would have been like landing on Juno Beach, or pressing on through the night's skies over occupied Europe, or crossing the North Atlantic in a Corvette during winter wondering if a U-boat was lurking, or fighting at Vimy Ridge or any other Canadian battlefield from Kapyong to Kandahar.

I tried to imagine what it was like to come face to face with the enemy, ready to fight and yet, undoubtedly, worried, to be both brave and human at the same time. I wonder what it was like to be in a fox hole, homesick perhaps, thinking of family, a wife or a sweetheart, or to contemplate what it would have been like to lose a friend on the battlefield and the pain and sadness that would have inflicted on the heart and mind. These are not experiences I would wish to have in my life, but for hundreds of thousands of Canadians this is exactly what they confronted and endured. We, as a country, owe them so much for that.

War and tyranny are awful realities of human history and, sadly, they continue to exist today. Just as war and conflict are realities of the human experience, so are heroism and sacrifice. It is that sacrifice and heroism that brings us here today. None of us here wish to glorify war but we do commit to glorify the men and women who gave themselves for a cause that was greater than themselves.

I am reminded of the wonderful sentiment expressed by John Stuart Mill, who said:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feelings which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse.

A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

That captures the essence of our brave veterans.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 2011, I urge all Canadians to observe a two minute wave of silence.

I will close with a story from my home province. Two young men, about the same age, were back on the Island for the summer. Each had recently encountered a life-altering experience. One of them had done an extended tour of duty in Afghanistan as a reservist and the other had just completed a rookie season as a defenceman with the Boston Bruins, capped off by winning the Stanley Cup. The hockey player said to the young soldier, "You're a hero". The soldier looked

at the Stanley Cup champion and said, "I'm a hero? You won the Stanley Cup". The hockey player replied, "I wouldn't have died for it".

•(1540)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois and all of its members, I would also like to pay tribute to our veterans.

I rise here today to recognize Veterans' Week. It is very important to commemorate—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member must have unanimous consent to respond to a minister's statement.

Does the House give unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** There is no consent.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bob Rae:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Let the record show that when a member of the House rose to pay tribute to the veterans of our country on behalf of his political party, a party with which I do not agree, the members of the Conservative Party, would not allow that member to speak.

[*Translation*]

It is shameful that there are people in this House who do not want to hear the opinions of others. It is shameful.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Mr. Speaker, I want to raise an objection to what the member just said. There is no question that I said nothing in response to the request for unanimous consent. I do not know how many of my colleagues over here did or did not. It is inappropriate for the member to make that a partisan comment by referencing the members on this side of the House.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The Chair sought the consent of the House and consent was not given.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent once again, as dean of this House, as a member of this House. Like all other members, I would like to pay tribute to veterans on behalf of the four members of my party. I also ask on behalf of the Green Party. I do not see this as a partisan act. I see it simply as a noble gesture in order to say to those individuals who went and fought, and those who gave their lives, that we pay tribute to them.

How is it that I cannot get unanimous consent? This is not meant to be a precedent that I will use any other time. Today is a special day. That is all. I simply want to pay tribute to veterans, like everyone else, as we have always done.

*Routine Proceedings*

I am seeking unanimous consent and I appeal to the Conservative members to grant it. It is only fair. The minister said in his speech that this House is a symbol of our freedom and democracy. He said that. I think I should have the right to speak.

[English]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders say, in response to a minister's statement, that only members of recognized parties can make statements. The Bloc is not a recognized party.

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to allow this to evolve into a debate. Consent has been sought and consent has been denied. It seems rather straightforward to the Chair.

I will hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North, but I hope it is not just a continuation of debate. Normally, in order to seek unanimous consent, some proceedings have to precede before the Chair would entertain the same question. However, I will hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North and hope that it is on a specific point.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, you will find that parliamentary tradition says that, yes, we do have Standing Orders of sorts. Those are what we are expected to follow. However, if you look back in terms of the tradition of the chamber, what you will find is, on occasion, members have stood and asked for leave to go outside the Standing Orders in order to do the right thing. I would suggest that this is an appropriate request when a member would like to comment on the importance of November 11.

The point of order is to ask for the government to give consideration that this is an exceptional situation in which we believe in the—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I am going to stop the member there. As I said, it is very simple for the Chair. In order for the Chair to recognize members of parties that are not recognized parties there needs to be unanimous consent of the House. There is no discretion in that. Consent was sought and consent was denied. We will have to move on.

● (1545)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, just to be absolutely clear, when the point was raised by the leader of the Liberal Party that consent had been denied, a member of the Conservative Party rose to say that he had not denied consent. I think, as put on the floor now, the question is was consent denied or not.

Could we have some clarity on that point, since from our side it seemed that some Conservatives said “no”? A Conservative has risen in his place to say that this is not the case. Could we seek clarity on whether consent was or was not denied?

**The Speaker:** I am happy to provide clarity. Consent was denied. The Chair clearly heard members withhold their consent.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Mr. Speaker, I recognize that a similar point of order was raised by my hon. colleagues from the Bloc, but in this circumstance we have heard it said that members of recognized national political parties, such as the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, do not have as a right the opportunity to speak when other leaders have spoken as a result of a ministerial statement.

We also know that the House is the master of its own procedures. By unanimous consent, anything is possible. Surely on an occasion when we mark the sacrifices for democracy, voters in the hundreds of thousands who have supported our parties should not be silenced in this place, while we mark the sacrifices of our veterans.

**The Speaker:** Requests for unanimous consent are neither debatable nor technically votable. It is consent or not. Clearly in this case, to the Chair, there was no consent. It is very simple in that regard.

I now invite the House to rise and observe two minutes of silence to commemorate our war veterans.

[Two minutes of silence observed]

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees in the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence of the ninth report later this day.

\* \* \*

● (1550)

**EXCISE TAX ACT**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-342, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (funeral arrangements).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I introduced this bill in the last Parliament, and it is very succinct. It is about, as a wise person once said, the two certainties in life, death and taxes. Unfortunately, in this case, paying taxes after death is certainly an indignation that I would like to correct.

The bill would essentially exempt the expenses related to funerals from the GST and the GST portion of the HST.

I look forward to debating this in the House as a nice dignified way for the Government of Canada not to tax a person upon death and have it be a hardship on the family.

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

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled earlier this day be concurred in.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

### PETITIONS

#### CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to submit a petition signed by western grain and barley farmers, from Alberta mainly, concerned with the government's ideological plan to kill the Canadian Wheat Board without first holding a plebiscite of its membership, as is required under section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

The livelihoods of western Canadian farmers are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat Board to set the best price for grain, negotiate fair treatment from the railways and lower transportation costs among the many services it provides.

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite.

\* \* \*

### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 120.

[Text]

Question No. 120—**Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to the planned reduction in human resources for Canadian Heritage listed in the 2011-2012 Report on Plans and Priorities, which positions are being eliminated by the department as a part of this reduction, broken down by employee status, by title, and by program activity?

**Hon. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the 2010-11 Report on Plans and Priorities shows a reduction of up to 578.6 FTEs from 2010-11 to 2013-14 when compared with the 2011-12 Report on Plans and Priorities.

The Report on Plans and Priorities is a planning document on key departmental priorities.

The arts, culture, official languages and sport are and will remain a priority for the Government of Canada.

Our priority continues to be to serve Canadians by ensuring that we remain efficient and cost-effective in the delivery of our programs and services.

### Routine Proceedings

[English]

#### QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the answers to Questions Nos. 119, 126, 134 and 139 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 119—**Mr. Robert Chisholm:**

With regard to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Canada's Global Commerce Strategy: (a) what programs will be introduced by the department in 2011-2012 to support the implementation of the strategy; (b) how much money will be allocated to support the implementation of the strategy; (c) what role will be played by regional economic development agencies to support the implementation of the strategy; and (d) what are the details of any analysis conducted for the government concerning key challenges and potential risks that may impact successful implementation of the strategy?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 126—**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:**

With regard to Family Class applications to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC): (a) broken down by visa office, how many applications have exceeded the processing times listed by CIC's visa offices in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011; (b) what is the total volume of correspondence received by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration about shortening the processing times for family sponsorship applications in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011; (c) broken down by visa office, how many officers work on family sponsorship applications; (d) in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011, broken down by visa office, (i) how many family sponsorship applications were received, (ii) how many family sponsorship application were denied, (iii) how many family sponsorship applications were approved; (e) what are the five most common reasons for denials in (d)(iii); (f) of the number of applications denied, how many applicants subsequently appealed the decision to the Immigration Appeal Division; and (g) how many applications refused by CIC were given a positive decision by the Immigration Appeals Division?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 134—**Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With regard to the exterior light fixtures controlled or owned by the departments and agencies of the government: (a) what is the total wattage of these fixtures; and (b) what is the government's position on the use of light-emitting diode (LED) technology for the exterior light fixtures controlled or owned by the departments and agencies of the government, as a means of achieving energy and maintenance savings, as well a reduction in CO2 emissions?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 139—**Mr. Philip Toone:**

What is the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2008-2009, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, identifying each department or agency, initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Speaker's Ruling***POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on October 26, 2011, by the member for Wascana regarding who ought to be recognized to answer questions posed during question period to the chair of a standing committee.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the member for having raised this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and the members for Bourassa and Charlottetown for their interventions.

[*English*]

In raising this matter, the member for Wascana stated that the question posed by the member for Charlottetown related to the work of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which is under the purview of the committee chair rather than under the responsibility of the government or the minister. Noting that committees were masters of their own affairs, he sought clarification about whether it was permissible for ministers to respond to questions on behalf of chairs of committee and suggested that this approach would be a profound change in our long held traditions with respect to the proper functioning of committees.

The leader of the Government in the House quoted from a ruling on a similar matter given on February 8, 2008, at pages 2836 and 2837 of *Debates*, in order to demonstrate that, in recognizing the only individual rising to answer, the Speaker had acted in accordance with the practice established and articulated by Speaker Milliken.

The House leader of the official opposition reminded the House that members of the official opposition chaired several standing committees and suggested that it would be inappropriate for ministers to answer questions on behalf of committee chairs who were from the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

As members know, three kinds of questions may be posed by members during question period. First, questions concerning the administrative responsibility of the government, or an individual minister, may be directed to the ministry collectively. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 509 notes:

Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which Minister responds to which question, and the Speaker has no authority to compel a particular Minister to respond.

● (1555)

[*English*]

Second are questions that concern matters of financial or administrative policy affecting the House itself. These are not directed to the Speaker but rather to members of the Board of Internal Economy designated by the Board to respond to them.

Finally, an extremely narrow category of questions may be directed to chairs or vice-chairs of committees. These must be

phrased in a very specific way and can seek limited information only. In O'Brien and Bosc at page 506, it states:

[*Translation*]

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised. Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance or testimony of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

[*English*]

House practices with regard to oral questions are established in this fashion so that the appropriate persons can be held accountable to the House, be it a minister for the executive, a committee chair for a committee or the designated member of the Board of Internal Economy for House administration matters. These categories of questions reflect the principle of distinct legislative and executive spheres of responsibility and accountability, which is at the very heart of our system of parliamentary government. That this very distinction between the executive and legislative may somehow be jeopardized by a minister answering a question directed to a committee chair is the crux of the matter before us. This is no doubt why the member for Wascana asked:

Is it now permissible in the House for ministers to effectively muzzle the chairs of committees and impose on committees the views of the government?

[*Translation*]

Drawing from O'Brien and Bosc on pages 508 to 510, I would now like to remind the House of the role of the Speaker with respect to replies to oral questions. It states that: there are no explicit rules which govern the form or content of replies to oral questions; the Speaker has no authority to compel a response; the Speaker is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions; and finally, the Speaker ensures that replies are brief, within the time agreed to by the House, deal with the subject matter raised, and phrased so as not to provoke disorder in the House, that is that they adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language.

[*English*]

Coupled with this, of course, is the Speaker's role in recognizing members who rise to reply to oral questions, particularly as there is an expectation on the part of members asking the questions that they receive, at a minimum, a response. As Speaker Milliken explained in the ruling referred to by the government House leader, in recognizing someone to answer a question, the Speaker "is to take a look at those who are standing to answer and choose who is going to answer..." and "...when no one else rises, it is reasonable to expect an answer to a question...". Simply put, it is not for the Speaker to judge who possesses which information and, thus, who might be able to provide the information being sought. As Speaker Milliken put it in reference to the events of February 2008:

[*Translation*]

...no one else rose. The Member who posed the question clearly wanted an answer and got one, or at least got a response.

*Government Orders*

[English]

While there may be concerns about the minister rising to reply to a question properly posed to the chair of a standing committee, in this particular instance, the chair did not rise to respond, nor did the other vice-chair of the committee. It is therefore perhaps not completely unexpected that the minister would rise to offer a response related to witnesses from his department, and that the Chair would recognize him in the absence of any other member rising. Nothing in this incident should be interpreted to mean that members should not continue to direct their questions to those who are properly accountable for answering them. It is also entirely reasonable to expect that those to whom questions are directed, in this case the chair or vice-chair of a standing committee, would automatically be recognized by the Chair to respond, provided they are, or course, rising.

The House will understand that the dynamic nature of question period is such that the Chair is frequently faced with split-second decisions on who to recognize. This is as true now as it was for Speaker Milliken. As always, the Chair is aware that each circumstance must be evaluated on its own merits. Were the House to recommend a different way of proceeding, the Chair would of course adapt to that. As my predecessor suggested, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is well placed to consider this matter and, if it sees fit, to propose recommendations to help guide the Chair in cases such as this.

• (1600)

[Translation]

I thank all members for their attention.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the statements made earlier today, government orders will be extended by 22 minutes.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

**Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of State (Democratic Reform))** moved that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am more than pleased to speak to Bill C-20; however, I believe there had been an agreement among the parties that the first speaker would be from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Once again, I am more than prepared to give my comments now, but I believe my colleague opposite was rising to her feet to give the initial presentation.

**The Speaker:** Does the House give its unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, my apologies to my hon. colleague. I know she was prepared to give comments, but I look forward to listening to my hon. colleague in approximately 30 minutes from now. I have much respect for her. I met her for the first time during committee work at the procedure and House affairs committee. She is a new member, and I must say that if all new members conduct themselves in the same way the member opposite does, this Parliament will be very effective in years to come. My congratulations to my colleague opposite.

I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-20, the fair representation act. One thing I can say most assuredly is that, with the possible exception of the four independent members formerly known as the Bloc, all members of this place would argue that Canada is the greatest country in the world. One of the distinctions that makes Canada such a marvellous country in which to live is the form of government that we currently have. One of the foundational principles of our government that we currently see enacted in Canada is the concept of representation by population.

This government believes, and it is a fundamental principle of our democratic process, that each Canadian's vote should have the same weight. In other words, a vote in one region of the country should have the same weight as a vote in another region of the country. Unfortunately, that is not the case right now. There are regions of this country that are seriously under-represented. By that I mean there are regions of this country that have a population base far higher than the number of elected representatives that they have. We have recognized this inequity for many months.

In fact, in our last election campaign we made three distinct promises. First, we promised to ensure that the faster-growing provinces, specifically British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, would gain more seats in the House of Commons. Second, we promised that the smaller provinces would be protected in their seat count. Third, we promised to ensure there would be fair and proportional representation to the province of Quebec in relation to its population.

We made those commitments. We plan to act on those commitments. Bill C-20 reflects those commitments.

Currently, a formula that has been in place since 1985 basically deals with how many seats there are in this place. I will get into the technical details in a few moments, but I should probably first address a common complaint that I, and I am sure many other members, have heard about whether we should increase the number of seats in the House of Commons. I have heard from a number of my constituents who have argued very emotionally that we should not increase the number of seats at all, that we have too many seats in the House of Commons right now. Some have suggested that we even reduce the number of members in the House of Commons.

*Government Orders*

I can understand those arguments, but it is also an argument that is very easy to make without much thought behind it. It is similar to someone saying that a CEO of a particular company makes too much money and that no one should be allowed to make that amount of money. Similarly, people can say there are too many members of Parliament in Canada and that we do not need that many. Whether one tends to argue in favour or against that notion, we have some restrictions constitutionally that would prevent us from reducing the number of seats that we have right now.

Back in 1915 there was a constitutional provision that is known as the Senate floor rule, which says quite clearly that no province should have fewer members in the House of Commons than it has senators.

I put as the case in point the province of Prince Edward Island, which has four senators, and conversely, four members of Parliament. Based simply on population, one would think that is some form of inequity, because the province of Prince Edward Island only has 140,000 people, yet it has four members of Parliament. In other words, each member of Parliament represents approximately 35,000 to 40,000 constituents. Contrast that to my home province of Saskatchewan, where each member of Parliament represents roughly 80,000 constituents. Contrast that to constituencies and ridings in Ontario, where some members represent 170,000 people or more. There is great inequity across Canada.

• (1605)

Since we cannot reduce the number of seats without unanimous consent from the provinces, which I doubt we would get, we believe our only alternative to try to ensure effective representation by population is to increase the number of seats. Since the last census, which was taken 10 years ago, we have seen the population increase in Canada, and it has been significant. We have also seen that the population has increased most dramatically in three particular provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, and most noticeably, Ontario.

If we believe in that foundational principle of representation by population, we then must address the situation of inequity. Our solution, although there will never be a perfect solution, I would argue, is contained in Bill C-20. I believe it is a fair, a principled and a balanced approach to get closer, at least, to representation by population by increasing the number of seats, particularly in those three provinces.

Also contained in Bill C-20 is what we call the representation rule, which provides that any province that is now either equally represented by population or overrepresented by population should never become under-represented when we change the seat count in the House of Commons. I say that because that reflects on Quebec.

Right now, Quebec is slightly overrepresented. Why do I say that? Quebec has roughly 23% of the total population of Canada, yet the number of seats it has in the House, 75, represents about 24% of all the seats. Our bill would ensure that British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario gained extra seats because they have rapidly growing populations, but Quebec, if we left the number at 75 seats, would be under-represented. Therefore, we plan to give three additional seats to the province of Quebec to ensure that it would be equally represented. That is what the representation rule in Bill C-20 contemplates. By giving Quebec three extra seats to bring its total to

78 seats, Quebec would then have a percentage of the seats in this House almost identical to the percentage of population that Quebec has in the country. That is what we mean by equal representation and representation by population.

Specifically, the bill contemplates British Columbia receiving 6 extra seats, Alberta receiving 6 extra seats, and Ontario receiving 15 extra seats. Would that make it absolutely equal in terms of representation by population? No, it would not, but it would come much closer than the situation we have right now. Would we ever achieve a perfect harmony of equal representation? I cannot see it, certainly not in my lifetime. Why? Because the population of Canada and the population from province to province is always a bit of a moving target. We would never achieve total equality, but this bill tends to address the current inequity in the House of Commons by giving more seats to those provinces that have a higher population and have been increasing their population in the last 10 years.

I am going to get into some of the technical details of the bill right now. It is a bit dry. If I see members opposite nodding off, it is not that they do not find my presentation compelling; it is merely that it is a bit of a dry and tedious process to go into the technical aspects of the bill, particularly the formulas.

I want to start with the current formula. I should also explain how we have arrived at that formula, because it was established back in 1985. I told the House about a provision of the Constitution called the Senate floor rule, which was enacted, in 1915. In 1985, there was another constitutional provision that was enacted which is called the grandfather clause. That clause contemplated that no province that was represented in the House of Commons should lose any seats from the 1985 totals.

• (1610)

Consequently, Saskatchewan has 14 seats today in the House of Commons. If we look at the actual representation by population, Saskatchewan should only have 10 seats, but because of the 1985 grandfather clause, no province, whether it be Saskatchewan, Manitoba or some of our Atlantic neighbours, will see a reduction in its seat count in the House of Commons. That is something we have to live with, and that is contemplated in Bill C-20.

Parliamentarians of the day felt that the formula enacted in 1985 was proper and would deal with representation by population effectively, but unfortunately it actually served the purpose of restricting the number of seats in the future. Whether or not the population of our country grew or grew rapidly, the number of seats would be restricted because of the 1985 formula.

I will explain that formula.

First they took the population of Canada and divided it by the number of seats in the House of Commons, which was 279 at that time. That final total was what they called the “electoral quotient”.



*Government Orders*

Then, province by province, they divided the provinces' populations by the electoral quotient and came up with the provincial seat count. They then knew roughly how many seats each province should receive. However, they then had to add in the two constitutional provisions: the Senate floor, which ensured that no province would have fewer seats than the number of senators, and the grandfather clause, which considered and contemplated that no province should lose seats from the current total in 1985.

The end result was that they had an initial seat count, and then a secondary seat count when they took into consideration the grandfather clause and the Senate floor clause. Then, once they had the provincial seat count, they added one seat per territory; that total ended up being the number of seats in the House of Commons.

I think I went through that without seeing too many nodding heads. A couple of people's eyes glazed over, but we will move on.

While that approach was perhaps appropriate in 1985, if we used the same formula today, we would unfortunately come out with a House that was seriously under-representative, and the three provinces that have had rapidly growing populations would be very much affected.

Consequently, we have proposed a new formula. At a later time I will allow my other colleagues to go into a more detailed discussion of what that formula does and what it means, but I can assure everyone that the formula we are proposing will ensure that we are much closer to representation by population, now and in the future. It does not restrict the number of seats in the House based on the 1985 formula; rather, it is a formula designed to reflect the number of seats that may be needed, both now and in the future, based on population.

The first thing we need to do is recognize that if we want true equity in this place, we need to accept and adopt Bill C-20. Is it perfect? No. Is it the closest thing to equal representation that we have seen in many decades? Yes, I would argue that it is.

Following that, however, and on the assumption that Bill C-20 will pass this place, we also have to deal with the second part of the equation, which is how to redraw the various boundaries. It is one thing to say we will have 30 extra seats in the House of Commons, but it is another thing to say where those seats will be held.

• (1615)

The equal boundary representation act is also included in this bill. It would provide that each province, after we determine the number of seats in each province, would establish a boundaries commission whose job would be to consult with stakeholders, provinces, and other affected people, including members of Parliament who wish to make submissions, and within a set period of time to come up with a new boundary map for each province.

The whole process, from the consultation process to the final product of redrawn boundaries, should be done roughly within the year.

Of course, those boundaries then have to be examined. MPs and others in Parliament, including committees, would have a chance to examine the boundaries presented. In that fashion, we should be able to come to a solution that would allow the four provinces I mentioned, the three fastest-growing provinces plus the province of

Quebec, to have not only new seats in place, but new seats with completely new and freshly drawn boundaries.

I should also point out that one of the things that would happen during the boundaries commission examination would be an opportunity for new names for these various ridings, because not only would there be completely new ridings, I am sure, presented by the electoral commissions, but there would also be hybrids. By that I mean that certain constituencies we have now would have similar boundaries, but instead of having one member, they might have two members.

In conclusion, I believe that Bill C-20, while not absolutely perfect, is the closest thing to equal representation by population that we have seen in many years. It would construct a plan and a formula to ensure that provinces now and in the future would have the representation they deserve.

I think it is patently unfair that in the current situation there are constituencies across Canada whose members of Parliament are representing over twice as many constituents as other members of Parliament. We have to come to a closer balance of rep by pop. I believe Bill C-20 would do that. It would do that effectively. I would ask all members to give it support. I look forward to the continuing debate.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this House since 1996, and this is the first time that a minister is not participating in the debate about his or her own bill. It quite ironic that it is a bill on the democratic practices in this House. It is quite sad.

My colleague has been very candid. He said the bill is not perfect. Indeed, it is not.

Since his constituents are rightly telling him that it does not make sense to add seats in this House, I would ask him why we are not trying to achieve the same result—better proportionality in the House for provinces—while keeping 308 seats. It is certainly doable.

We cannot change the Senate clause, but we—this House, the Parliament of Canada—have the power to change the grandfather clause. We do not need it. We could have the same result for the fastest-growing provinces and for the provinces that are growing more slowly. We could have the same result, the same percentage by province, with 308 seats.

Why does my colleague not agree with that? Does he have one person in his constituency who is asking to have more seats in this House?

• (1620)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier presentation, we are committed to representation by population and nothing more. The formula we have put forward in Bill C-20 would achieve that.

*Government Orders*

It is incumbent upon this government and, I would suggest, upon Parliament to ensure that we respect the parliamentary and democratic principle of representation by population. The suggestion that the member opposite is making would not address equal representation; he is merely suggesting that we take the current number of members of Parliament and divvy it up somehow across Canada.

However, we have to respect the Senate floor and we have to respect the wishes of the provinces. I can assure members that the provinces are on side with the plan we have put forward. Many provinces have come forward to say they are pleased to see us moving forward with Bill C-20. I would ask my friend opposite to do the same.

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. We believe that this bill poses some problems and that it might pit the provinces against one another. Some provinces have already raised legitimate concerns about this bill. Does the hon. member believe it is quite possible that some provinces will be pointing fingers and clashing over this bill and that this could be problematic for various communities across the country?

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I respectfully disagree. I do not think any provinces will be pointing fingers because, as I pointed out, the provinces who have faster-growing populations would receive additional seats, and they have already indicated that they are very happy with that outcome; the provinces with smaller populations would not lose any seats, and they are very happy about that.

I go back to what I said in my earlier presentation. Is it perfect? Of course not. No bill can possibly be perfect, given the fluctuating population base in this country, but is it closer to effective representation by population than anything we have seen before? I would argue that it is. Provinces would be happy, and they have already indicated their satisfaction to us.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what he thinks about the fact that in 2006, here in this House, he was one of the hon. members who voted in favour of the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation. It was not the first time Quebec was recognized as a nation in this House, but in 2006, the vote was unanimous. That is why the Government of Quebec, and even Quebec's National Assembly, unanimously, have adopted more than one motion to say that Quebec's political weight here, in this House, absolutely must remain the same. With the disinformation the government is promoting about its Bill C-20, they are only talking about demographic weight. I would like the parliamentary secretary to make the distinction between demographic weight and political weight. The nation called Quebec—and there is a Canadian nation as well—is being penalized by this bill because it directly diminishes the nation's political weight.

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, again I reject the analysis by my colleague opposite. In fact, just the opposite is true. The representation rule that would be enacted in Bill C-20 would ensure that Quebec, now and in the future, would get equal representation. I mentioned that right now Quebec is slightly over-represented; this bill would ensure that it would have equal representation. It has slightly more than 23% of the population of Canada and it would end up having slightly more than 23% of the seats in the House. It would gain three seats. It would go from 75 to 78 seats. That is fair, equitable, balanced and principled.

We have committed to that principle. We will bring Bill C-20 forward, which would ensure that Quebec, now and in the future, would have fair and proportional representation based on its population. That is a fair approach. I would encourage my friend opposite to support Bill C-20.

• (1625)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Again, Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not want more MPs. They pay for enough. What they want is fair representation. It is what my colleague spoke about. If we are able to achieve fair representation with 338 seats, we are able to do it with 308 seats. We just have to respect the Senate clause; otherwise, some provinces may have fewer seats. What they want, to be sure, is that they will not lose their representation. Sometimes it is better to be 10 out of 50 than 12 out of 100. That is the point Liberals are making.

If the minister were here, I would tell him that. If he wants to avoid making Canadians angry over this bill, he just has to come back with the same percentage by province using 308 seats. That is achievable.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we hear the parliamentary secretary's response, I would remind hon. members that it is not in the rules that we refer to the presence or absence of other hon. members in the chamber.

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

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, once again, I am a little confused. The member opposite, for the second time in his intervention, has mentioned avoiding getting provinces angry. There are no provinces that are angry over this bill. No province would see a reduction in the number of representatives it has right now, and smaller provinces are very satisfied with that; the provinces that have seen increased and fast population growth would receive additional seats, and they are very happy about that.

In fact, we will find, as Bill C-20 is implemented in the months and years to come, that Parliament would reflect the population of this country in a far more effective and representative way than it ever has before.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, especially his praise for my colleague, a woman I have known for years. I like to brag about the fact that I managed to convince her to run for the first time in 2008. I get a deep sense of personal satisfaction from that.

*Government Orders*

I applaud the government for introducing a bill to try to bring fairer representation to this House and to reflect some Canadian realities. However, these same ideas have already been introduced.

Could my colleague tell us whether the government will respect the need for in-depth debates? The committee will have to dig deep to find the best possible option. Our party introduced similar bills a number of times. I think that we can really find something that would satisfy the greatest number of people.

[*English*]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I did not know that my hon. colleague was the one who convinced my other colleague to run, so I congratulate both of them.

With respect to the comments as to committee work, I agree that real work on the bill will be done at committee, such as the examination of the technical aspects of the bill. Quite frankly, I am happy to hear that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition agrees with us, because we want to get this to committee as quickly as possible.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we resume debate on the current motion, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Air Canada; the hon. member for Windsor West, G8 Summit; the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Committees of the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to debate Bill C-20, the Fair Representation Act.

This bill has a history. It dates back to the 39th Parliament and since then it has undergone some revisions and changes. As it currently stands, Bill C-20 illustrates the Conservative government's desire to make some constructive changes to the makeup of this House. The proposals in Bill C-20 also seek to enhance the effectiveness of democracy in Canada and improve representation.

However, what the bill is proposing does not appear to have been well received. It did not take long for reactions from the provincial legislatures to reach Ottawa, and Quebec dismissed the Conservative government's proposals right away. Ontario and British Columbia also raised some legitimate concerns regarding this bill. This response is significant, as it illustrates how poorly balanced the government's approach was regarding the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons.

The provinces reacted as they did because they felt that the initiative was confused and saw that the government was trying to satisfy them with a pittance. It has come up with practically random figures to which the Conservatives are attaching expressions like "fair representation" and "proportional democratic weight". The very terms for what we are debating are flying around in every direction. The provinces understand very clearly that there is some confusion and that when there is confusion, there is some flexibility and room for negotiation.

This feeling of confusion stems primarily from the successive changes that have been made to the bill over time and that reveal considerable hesitation on the part of the government. After all, at the outset, Quebec was not given any additional seats. The government sensed the danger, however, and had the good sense to change its mind. I am sure my colleagues can imagine how the Quebec National Assembly would have reacted had the government not changed its mind.

The Minister of Industry, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, said: "This bill will move every Canadian province toward representation by population." This remark was repeated by the parliamentary secretary who just spoke.

I would like to know if the government plans to use this criterion alone for the new seat allocation. If that is the case, it demonstrates an approach that is narrow in vision and not very serious. In fact, strict representation by population is certainly not the only criterion that should be applied when seats are redistributed. It would be a denial of all the things that make Canada what it is. We need only examine all the clauses used to calculate the number of seats to support that. It seems that the minister is denying what is protecting Prince Edward Island's four seats.

The NDP will stand with the provinces that want us to continue fine-tuning Bill C-20. We acknowledge that the government wants to take action and get it right, but we believe that there is too much hesitation on the government's part and therefore that there is room to negotiate.

I am very pleased to be able to debate this bill. The NDP believes that there is a consensus in the House about the importance of fair and intelligent reform of our democratic institutions. After all, we have everything to gain with a more representative Canada.

I am in federal politics because I am convinced that Canada's strength is rooted in its diversity. The problem of fair representation of the provinces in the House comes up regularly because Canada is changing and its Parliament must reflect these changes. This issue seems simple, but is unexpectedly complex. It also stirs up passions and triggers all sorts of hidden emotions.

Canada is more than just the sum of the 10 provinces and 3 territories. Since confederation, two visions of the country have often clashed. These two visions refer to very different and almost opposite sensibilities that we have tried to reconcile as best we can since the beginning of the federal experience. That is the basis for John Saul's idea of a civilization that compromises. As my Canadian history professor used to say, Canada is a community that is always fraught with bickering. As a Quebecer, I know what I am talking about.

The first of these two visions, considers provincial authority as an end in itself. It focuses on the provincial legislature, local distinctiveness, local cultural heritage and, in the case of Quebec, language. Of course the emotional attachment to Canada remains present and real, but confederation is clearly perceived as a supranational entity.

*Government Orders*

That is clearly the case in Quebec. While it is well known, it is sometimes misunderstood in other parts of Canada: in Quebec, ties to the state are twofold. That is completely normal. Quebec preciously guards the memory of its past and still feels the presence of the other state it once was: New France. Quebec's specificity is so important that this government even took the initiative to give it the status of a nation within Confederation.

Quebec is not the only province in this situation. Take Newfoundland, for example. It was the last province to join Confederation. It had its own currency, flag and national anthem, and its people are still very conscious of their common origin.

● (1630)

Some might even say that Newfoundland has its own language. It joined Confederation 80 years after the founding provinces, after a long history as an independent British dominion. Consequently, Newfoundland had the time to develop a feeling of national allegiance that Ottawa, as a distant and mainland capital, cannot shake, even after 60 years.

I would also like to mention the more subtle case of the Northwest Territories. Northerners live a common frontier experience in a tough environment that is both beautiful and remote. The ethnic balance between aboriginals and non-aboriginals has created a distinct type of country with its own ethnically diverse culture that is incredibly dynamic.

I could go on and on because this is such a fascinating topic, but what I am trying to express is that this vision requires one essential element: balance. When balance is maintained, this decentralist vision does not call into question the relevance of this federal plan and encourages cultural and creative development across our country. The NDP, which is so committed to diversity, is very sensitive to the differences that exist, to varying degrees, in each province.

There is the opposite, highly centralist vision, which sees the federal government as responsible for building the Canadian nation. This vision is behind the notion of nation building. It is a state of mind that promotes unity within the country by focusing on all that is similar at the expense of all that is different. The Constitution Act, 1867, seemed to favour that vision of Canada, but that vision took a hit during the constitutional debates of the 1980s and 1990s. It was, however, the initial cause of sweeping Canada-wide achievements and it is dear to many of our constituents whose values are reflected in it.

It is simplistic to divide the provinces between these two visions. This vision has its roots in the British imperialism that Canada was part of. The Constitution of 1867 was drafted in that vein and we can say without a doubt that Canada as we know it today is a legacy of that time.

Ontario, the most populous province and the most under-represented in this House, has its cultural and political origins in the British colonial era. It is completely justified. The Prairies also find a common cultural foundation in that history. They were constituted as the logical next step in the federal project and steeped in British patriotism. Canada has its history and we do not seek to diminish it.

The Conservative Party clearly favours a more centralist plan. For this government, the federal government and its institutions have the responsibility to build this country. Canada, as the Conservatives see it, has to be moulded from the same clay. Differences have to give way to common elements. It is the Canada of "The Maple Leaf Forever". Their interpretation is as old as the country itself and meets come people's expectations. However, those who share the decentralist vision feel there is a lack of finesse in these democratic reform bills that the Conservative government is introducing in this House. They all have one thing in common: they all attempt to make fundamental changes to the parliamentary institutions without ever having to touch the Constitution.

Bill C-20 is nothing but a weak attempt at giving this House the semblance of fair representation of the provinces that make up Canada. Bill C-20 is just another attempt at doing something when it is clear that no one really knows what to do. The NDP has a vision. Our party has a deeper understanding of what constitutes Canada's wealth and we want to move forward in respect and collegiality.

For example, the NDP explicitly recognized Quebec's distinct nature in Bill C-312, introduced by my colleague, the member for Compton—Stanstead. In short, the NDP proposed that we keep the previous formula for calculating how seats are allocated in the House of Commons, while still guaranteeing that Quebec would retain its political weight of 24.35% within the House, the percentage it had when it was recognized as a nation in this House.

As much as we acknowledge that Bill C-20 is a step forward compared to the earlier versions, there is still a lot of work to be done before it will be acceptable. I condemn the fact that the Conservative government does not have enough strength to take action. At first glance, this so-called strong mandate is not translating into a willingness and a vision to truly move Canada forward. It takes guts, initiative and courage to turn words into action.

Yet when it comes to petty politics and pitting the provinces against each other, this government is one of the best. For proof, we need only look at the provinces' reactions to Bill C-20. With this government, it is one step forward, two steps back.

The problem is clear. The provinces want a number of seats that corresponds as closely as possible to their demographic weight. Since Quebec was recognized as a nation within Canada, it is asking to retain its weight at 24.35%.

● (1635)

The NDP is of the opinion that these two requests are fair and must be defended. The NDP believes that, in order for Canada to work better, it is absolutely necessary that the provinces and their unique characters be represented as accurately as possible. Only the NDP can do this because we have a much better understanding of what Canada wants. Our vision is to make Canada a true success, to make it the best country in the world. We want to debate the role of our parliamentary institutions with respect, rigour and, most importantly, a listening ear. This quality is essential.

*Government Orders*

The basic problems with the representation of the provinces in the House of Commons, namely the chronic under-representation of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia and the concrete recognition through action of the Quebec nation, are far from irreconcilable. However, there are still concerns. The fact that the Ontario premier is not hesitating to speak out shows his concern about this bill, which must be fair to Ontarians. The same goes for the premier of British Columbia, who is asking for no fewer than the seven seats that were provided for in a previous draft of the bill.

The Quebec Minister responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions feels the same way. He believes that Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons should not be decreased. In 2006, this House unanimously adopted a motion recognizing Quebec as a nation within Canada. The constitutional consequences of that decision are unclear. The NDP wants to maintain Quebec's weight in the House of Commons.

Given its status as a nation within a united Canada, Quebec has a special place and we must reflect that fact. All these examples clearly bring one undeniable fact into focus: the provinces are asking the government to listen to them. If the Conservative government continues to turn a deaf ear, it will soon be perceived within the federation of Canada as a steamroller that has little regard for the provinces. First, it was the Senate; now, it is the House of Commons. A trend is becoming painfully clear.

Not only do we need to move away from the verbal rhetoric of simply stating that Canada is the best country in the world, we also need to take real action to prove it. We need to do justice to Canada's diverse, complex character. Our parliamentary institutions need to reflect that. Openness to compromise and negotiation is essential.

I would like to know the point of undertaking reform if it is only done in half measures. In the wake of a slew of democratic deficits, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is suggesting that we merely apply a band-aid solution. Similar to the arbitrary and constitutionally questionable Senate reform this government wants to implement, this addition of seats to the House of Commons only masks the issues. And when it comes right down to it, no one will be happy.

Why does this government seem unable to successfully reform this country's parliamentary institutions? As the NDP has clearly stated, the first logical step is to consult provincial leaders. We are still at the bill stage and sensible improvements can still be made. But there is still one quality that is painfully lacking in this government: the ability to listen, the decency to listen to the provinces and other interest groups. This is not simply a trivial, procedural issue. We need to ensure that each Canadian citizen has the assurance that the House of Commons is a solid representation of the Canadian reality.

It is quite ironic that, because they have their blinders on, the Conservatives are unable to fully grasp Canada's complexity and diversity. This goes far beyond the simple addition of seats to the House of Commons, as the Conservative government is proposing. Creating more cynicism in and contributing to the alienation of the Canadian people with regard to federal politics is the last thing we want to introduce as legislation in Parliament. But it seems that the government's priority is exactly that.

The formula used to calculate how seats in the House of Commons are allocated is a reflection of Canada's diversity and complex nature. The grandfather and Senate floor clauses are proof of that. The idea of democratic representation goes far beyond these mathematical formulas, but we must look even further than that. The solution being proposed by the Conservative government does not address any of these demands. This bill leaves a number of provinces fundamentally under-represented in this House and it decreases the electoral weight of the Quebec nation.

However, all of these changes can be made, but the Conservatives do not seem to know what to do. To start, they offered some crumbs, then a little bit of meat, but at the end of the day, everyone ends up disappointed. That explains the NDP's disappointment with Bill C-20. The formula used to calculate the seats allocated to each province was changed from what the government presented in the last version of this bill, which was introduced in the previous Parliament. That was already different from the formula that is used now, which dates back to 1985.

I would like to focus on this subject for a moment because I have a hard time following this government's parliamentary gymnastics and acrobatics. First of all, Bill C-12, which was introduced in the House during the previous Parliament, changed the redistribution formula by changing the electoral quotient by which a province's population is divided.

• (1640)

The preamble of Bill C-12 states, and I quote, "Whereas the national average population of electoral districts at the 40th general election was approximately 108,000 persons...". That is how it was determined that the electoral quotient, in order to divide the province's population—before applying special clauses—would be 108,000. They simply speculated at the time, with the help of estimates from Statistics Canada, about what the redistributed seats might look like using that formula. So this created certain expectations among the provinces. It is not surprising that Bill C-12 never passed.

Then comes along the current bill on fair representation. The Conservative camp has simply shuffled the cards to come up with a new formula for allocating seats to the provinces. Here is where the confusion begins. Here is what Bill C-20 says about the new electoral quotient to be used:

Whereas the electoral quotient for the readjustment that follows the completion of the 2011 decennial census should be 111,166, that number being the average population of the electoral districts on July 1, 2001, which was determined by using the estimate of the population of each province as at that date, multiplied by the average of the rates of population growth of the provinces.

*Government Orders*

If I understand correctly, the new electoral quotient comes from a mathematical formula that comes from an estimate of the current population that dates back to July 1, 2001. Two questions immediately come to mind. First of all, why use population estimates that are over 10 years old? Why the mathematical acrobatics? Is it because the statistics from back then are more reliable than today's? And second, why use the average rate of increase in the population of the provinces? As we have heard repeatedly in this House, the rates of increase in the population of each province are not all the same.

Ontario is growing faster than any other province. So why this levelling out? How can the government justify creating expectations among the provinces with Bill C-12, only to turn around and crush them so deviously and cunningly with Bill C-20? Did the government really expect the provinces to fall for this trick?

The issue of representation in the House of Commons is complex and goes beyond simple representation by population, a factor that is very important nonetheless. The Supreme Court issued an interesting opinion in this regard. On June 6, 1991, it concluded in *The Attorney General for Saskatchewan v. Roger Carter* that factors like geography, history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of the Canadian social mosaic.

This means that the bill to redistribute seats in the House of Commons must take other factors into account. No matter what this government says, this exercise in effective representation is not irreconcilable with equal representation of the provinces that have had significant population growth. In short, we must continue to work on this bill, listen to the provinces and arrive at a solution that benefits everyone.

I move, seconded by the member for Welland,

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

this House decline to give second reading to Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, because it:

(a) adds and allocates new seats in the House of Commons in a way that would increase regional tensions in Canada;

(b) fails to take into account the need for a nation-building approach to changes in Canada's democratic representation; and

(c) ignores the principle unanimously adopted in this place that the Quebecois represent a nation within a united Canada.

•(1645)

[English]

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties, and I believe you would find consent for the following motion.

I move that it be an instruction to the legislative committee on Bill C-18 that the committee postpone clause-by-clause review of Bill C-18 in order to permit the legislative committee to travel throughout Canadian Wheat Board designated areas in western Canada for the purpose of meeting with experts and farmers who would be affected by Bill C-18; and that in relation to its study of Bill C-18, the chair and 12 members of the legislative committee be

authorized to travel in western Canada from November 14, 2011 to November 18, 2011, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The amendment is in order.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

•(1650)

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like some clarification.

Imagine that, one day, in the House, we decided to say that a certain region of our country was unique and special. In such a case, would the NDP change the formula for assigning seats to that region? Is that the NDP's policy?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Clearly, when we are speaking about the importance of recognizing the weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons, we are referring to the House's unanimous decision to recognize Quebec as a nation within Canada. We are therefore not talking about just any consideration or unique aspect. We are talking about something that was recognized and received a unanimous vote. Quebec has been recognized as a nation. Given this recognition, it seems completely legitimate to me, in this specific case, to say that it is important to maintain Quebec's political weight.

I believe that this is the best thing to do in this case.

[English]

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, coming from the riding that had the largest population in all of Canada in the last census, I would like to ask my friend across the aisle how she could rationalize saying that there should be more representation than what is being given under the Fair Representation act to Quebec when the voters in Brampton West have half a vote compared to voters in her riding. There are twice as many voters in my riding as hers, and she is saying that should continue and in fact get worse.

What does she have to say to the voters of Brampton West? Why does she not think they are entitled to have the same votes as people in her riding?

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

*Government Orders*

We are in Canada. We have certain special characteristics, as I explained in my speech. We live in a country where we cannot, all of a sudden, decide to decrease the number of members of Parliament in certain regions on the pretext, for example, that they are far less populated than other regions. We cannot make such decisions. It is normal for there to be some imbalance. Everyone wants to work to ensure that the imbalance is as minimal as possible and that we operate fairly. No one wants to deny that right.

We recognize that Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta are currently under-represented and that this must be remedied; however, it is not by pitting the provinces against each other and by comparing them that we are going to solve Canada's problems. It is important to recognize the variety of identities within Canada and in each region and province. The best way to do so is to support the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead's bill.

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, which was truly excellent. The NDP introduced a bill that would be an alternative to the government's bill. In our bill, we talk about keeping Quebec's percentage at 24.35%, while the government would keep it at 23%. What difference does that make? For the Quebec nation, it is extremely important to keep that 1%. Could my colleague explain how important it is?

• (1655)

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my excellent colleague for her comments and her question. In fact, what is important here is acknowledging the fact that, since Quebec was recognized as a nation within Canada by this House, the least we could do is allow Quebec to retain the political weight that it had in the House of Commons at the time. We are not simply talking about a stable demographic weight or anything like that. If the government wants to acknowledge the fact that the nation was recognized, and that that was not just empty rhetoric, it must take concrete action accordingly. In my opinion, maintaining Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons is completely justifiable.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's speech and I was very impressed. However, I have a very specific question to ask her.

Does her party feel that there are not enough members in the House and that 30 more need to be added? Has she heard her constituents, the people in her riding, say that we need 30 more members, even though the government is slashing the public service? Is that something she would be proud to tell her constituents? Or does she think, as the Liberal Party does, that we can get the same results—in terms of provincial representation in the House—with 308 seats, without adding a single one?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for his question, which was, as always, specific and intelligent. In the present situation, this bill is trying to correct the under-representation of three provinces that are dramatically under-represented. A solution has been presented, but that does not mean it is the only one. I am sure that there are others. For now, the proposals have been submitted. We also understand that eliminating some of the current sections regarding the political weight of provinces in the House of

Commons could, for example, lead to fewer members from certain provinces. We do not necessarily want that to happen.

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member, who was elected just a few short months ago, who spoke of changes, improvements and negotiations in the entire process, whether she has noticed that with the Conservative government, there is no room for compromise. Four or five times already, bills have been subject to time allocation motions. In committee, they bulldoze their way through everything. The Conservatives select the witnesses; they make sure the debates are as short as possible. I have a hard time believing there is any chance for change or improvement in this bill.

I would like to know whether the hon. member shares my opinion on this. Given the fact that the NDP introduced a bill to preserve Quebec's political weight and given the fact that it has proposed an amendment, does the hon. member and do the NDP members intend to vote in favour of this bill at second reading stage? Yes or no?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for a brief response.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say to the hon. member that, indeed, it can be quite difficult at times to discuss anything with this government. We just had a very concrete example of that when his colleague was unable to address the House to commemorate Remembrance Day. We were very disappointed with that decision.

As far as the negotiations are concerned, we remain open. We want to try to work and move forward. It is our duty as parliamentarians to do as much as we can.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise here in the House to state the Liberal Party's position on Bill C-20, whose main goal is to rebalance the allocation of seats in the House of Commons, taking the needs of those provinces that are growing quickly into account.

The principle of provincial representation by population in the House of Commons is enshrined in our Constitution. Paragraph 42 (1)a of the Constitution Act, 1982 stipulates that any amendments to this principle must have the consent of Parliament and the legislative assemblies of at least seven provinces representing at least 50% of the Canadian population: we know that as the 7-50 formula.

We should all be proud that our Constitution formally confirms this principle of representation by population. It is a fundamental principle of democracy.

*Government Orders*

● (1700)

[*English*]

Alas, nothing is ever so simple in our lively federation. In Canada, we tweak representation by population to take another factor into account. We take great care to assure the political representativeness of the provinces that are in absolute demographic decline, they are losing people, or in relative decline, their population is growing at a slower pace than the Canadian average. We are so careful about this that we are one of the federations where the distribution of seats between constitutional entities is the least numerically representative of its population.

[*Translation*]

We even established a floor below which a province's representation must not fall: no province can ever have fewer members than it does senators.

The Senate floor clause has been in the Constitution since 1915, in section 51A. It can also be found in subsection 41(b) of the Constitution Act, 1982. In order to amend this section of the Constitution Act, 1982, all members of the federation must give unanimous consent.

[*English*]

Hence, Prince Edward Island has four senators according to the Constitution, so it has four members of Parliament, whatever the size of its population.

The four Atlantic provinces cannot have less than 30 seats in the House because that is their number of senators. This legislation would give them eight seats more than what strict proportional representation would give them.

In a 1987 ruling, the B.C. Supreme Court stated that “the principle of representation ‘prescribed’ by the Constitution does not require perfect mathematical representation...”. A year later, the B.C. Court of Appeal said that what must be preserved “is the principle, not a specific formula”.

In other words, Parliament has some leeway in how it applies the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces when dealing with the provinces that are in relative decline. However, that leeway has its limits. Parliament cannot run afoul of this principle. That would be unconstitutional.

Today, we are close to the limit. This is what the most recent Statistics Canada pre-census data shows. In Ontario, there is 1 MP for every 126,000 people; in New Brunswick, 1 for 75,500 people. As we can see, the numbers need to be re-balanced.

This will be the third time the Conservative government tries to perform this rebalancing act. In its first attempt in 2007, the government proposed adding seats for British Columbia and Alberta but left Ontario almost completely out. When Premier McGuinty objected, the federal minister for democratic reform at the time insulted him by calling him the small man of Confederation.

[*Translation*]

In its second attempt last year, the federal government ignored Quebec, making it the only province with a relative population decline to be under-represented.

This time, the bill introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform on October 27, would give British Columbia and Alberta an additional six seats and Ontario an additional 15. Quebec would receive three seats to better reflect its demographic weight. As for the other six provinces, they would continue to be over-represented

[*English*]

One serious drawback of this plan is that it would increase the number of MPs from 308 to 338. I am sure nobody in the minister's riding is asking for that. A 30 seat hike is not something to be taken lightly. Canadians are concerned about the added cost of such an inflationary measure.

The government wants to slash the civil service and gorge itself with more politicians. That is nonsense. In these days of financial restraint, Parliament must take the lead.

As our Liberal leader recently insisted, the number of MPs cannot keep growing forever. We would quickly reach a much higher MP to population ratio than is the norm in other democracies.

We must not forget that in our decentralized federation there are many pressing issues, such as schools and hospitals, that federal members of Parliament do not have to address.

In the United States, a country almost 10 times as populous as ours, the house of representatives is limited to 435 members. Why not follow its example and limit the number of seats in the House to its present value? Nothing can stop Parliament from doing that.

We do need to rebalance the House's seat allocation in order to address the needs of the provinces with strong population growth, maintain proportionate representation of the other provinces and protect those with smaller populations in keeping with the Senate clause. It is possible to do that without raising the total number of MPs. It is doable. We would have no problem doing that, so why not do it?

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Therefore, I look forward to debating this issue in the House.

By introducing this new bill, the government is committed to allowing members and senators, together with the best experts, to thoroughly study the repercussions of the bill.

Democracy itself is at stake and I am firmly convinced that the government and the opposition should definitely be able to vote together on a bill with respect to this issue. Because, despite our political differences, we are all democrats in this House.

It is possible that we will come to an agreement. The government only has to rebalance the numbers, but this time keeping the number of seats to 308.



Having said that, I am not sure that we will be able to obtain the support of the NDP, which believes, because Parliament recognized that Quebec forms a distinct nation within Canada, that Quebec's representation in the House of Commons should be frozen at its current level in perpetuity.

I believe, as do a number of constitutional experts, that Parliament does not have the constitutional authority to infringe to this extent on the principle of proportional representation without the support of at least seven provinces representing at least 50% of Canada's population. It is important to respect the Constitution.

We still have a lot of work to do on this bill.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the government and the minister, once again, to do the right thing with regard to its ill-conceived Senate reform plan. What good would it be to Canadians if we improve the House of Commons but make the Senate completely dysfunctional? This Senate reform plan is harmful and even dangerous, since it will weaken our entire Parliamentary system, including the House of Commons.

Why is this bill dangerous for our democratic decision-making mechanisms? Because, by pitting two elected houses against each other, without a constitutional mechanism to resolve their differences, it would create a state of institutional paralysis similar to what our American neighbours are experiencing.

• (1710)

[English]

What is the government thinking? What do the Prime Minister and the minister have in mind with their ill-conceived Senate reform project? Do they really want to import into Canada the same kind of ritual opposition and institutional paralysis we have seen in the United States and Mexico? Do we not have enough challenges here in Canada that we also need to hinder our decision-making processes in such a senseless counter-productive manner?

Would the government tell British Columbians, Albertans and the rest of the country what logic underlies its decision to shortchange them in the Senate while, at the same time, it is proposing increasing the number of seats in the House for British Columbia and Alberta?

Why do the minister and the Prime Minister, two Albertans, want to hurt their province? Do they not understand how detrimental it would be to B.C. and Alberta to end up with an elected and powerful Senate where these two provinces would be grossly under-represented with only six senators each, while some provinces have 10 with a population four or six times smaller?

The government knows that an elected upper chamber would carry much more weight in its dealings with the House of Commons than it does in its present form. What is the government's interest in creating such a mess for those two provinces?

[Translation]

How is it that, when it comes to adding seats in the House, the government seems to want to respect the spirit and the letter of the Constitution but, when it comes to Senate reform, this same government is ignoring the Constitution?

### *Government Orders*

Why is the government being so inconsistent? Why the double standard?

[English]

Where is the logic? Where is the fairness? Changing the character of the Senate must not be done through a process that excludes the provinces.

[Translation]

Why does the government want to impose an unconstitutional Senate reform plan that will create pointless legal disputes between the provinces at a time when, on the contrary, all our governments should be working together to address the many economic and other problems that are upsetting Canadians and causing them concern?

The Liberal opposition intends, as always, to be constructive and thorough. In the past, we asked the government to amend its bills to make changes to the House of Commons since they were ill conceived, and it listened. Perhaps, the government would agree to once again listen to us, to the benefit of all Canadians, by seeking to achieve the same objectives with Bill C-20 without increasing the number of seats in the House.

We are also asking the government to think about our objections to its Senate reform plan, a plan that is irrational, unconstitutional and dangerous.

[English]

Clearly, it would make no sense at all for the government to undo with one hand what it wants to do with the other.

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. The problem is that when the Liberals were governing, they were used to having winners and losers in the provinces. They would pick winners and losers. This is a fair formula that we brought forward for all the provinces. It brings every province closer to representation by population.

My question to the member is, which provinces, under his plan, has he picked to win seats and which provinces would he take seats away from? Which provinces, under his plan, would be the winners and which ones would be the losers?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is very simple. Everybody would be the winner because nobody wants more seats in this House. Canadians want fair representation, and we are in agreement with that.

What is important is which provinces would be so under-represented that they would need to be rebalanced. We know which provinces they are: Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. However, other provinces would still be over-represented even if we stayed at 308 seats. At the end of the day, this is what Canadians want; they do not want to forever increase.

My question to the minister is, when will it end? In what other country, in order to rebalance the seats between its provinces or regions, is it always an issue to add? Is it France, Germany, or the United States? The answer is none of them.

*Government Orders*

They are all able to rebalance and have proportional representation that is fair for everyone. This is what we need to achieve. We may achieve it by keeping the same number of seats in this House.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, fundamentally, I do not think we can put a price on life or democracy. I am very disappointed to see that my colleague is a fan of doing nothing and that he even wants to make Canadians pay the price.

A few weeks ago, I heard about a debate going on in Calgary, where there are very few city councillors. It seems to be a problem, because they are not saving money. Calgary city councillors must hire a very large staff to be able to manage their massive electoral districts.

We must reflect a country's dynamic, and I think that more seats in the House would reflect that dynamic. Which province would my colleague like to see pay the price of decreasing its political weight in the House?

• (1715)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, this is the only parliament where a member could rationally claim that we are doing nothing when we are trying to avoid increasing the number of politicians at a time when we are asking Canadians to tighten their belts. Almost all of his constituents will tell him that it makes no sense to increase the number of members of Parliament. That is not what they want. They want their province to be represented. Being 10 out of 50 is better than being 12 out of 100. That is the heart of the issue here. It is the percentage that we represent in relation to the total. It is not the number we have. It is a matter of having a fair percentage in proportion to the population. That is what would happen with this bill, which provides for 338 members of Parliament, but we could achieve the same thing with 308 members of Parliament.

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear the hon. member who just spoke talk about another issue. We feel that Bill C-20 is an attack on Quebec's political weight.

What does the hon. member think about the bill introduced by the Conservatives, particularly from Quebec's point of view and given that the House has recognized the Quebec nation? I would also like to know how the Liberal Party will be voting at second reading.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, the second aspect, that we come to an agreement here on this issue, is very important to the Liberal opposition.

We are not ready to throw in the towel. We agree with the bill's objectives. We have been calling for this for a long time. The government improved its bill in comparison to previous versions. We believe that the same results can be achieved with 308 seats instead of 338. To answer the minister's question, as a Quebecker, I would not care if seats were taken away from Quebec, as long as our proportion remains the same. I say that as a Quebecker. I would rather we had 70 seats out of 100 than 75 seats out of 200, if I can use such a drastic example. I would not care if Quebec lost seats, as long as the proportion of Quebeckers remains equal to its representation within the Canadian population. That is the issue.

If the hon. member wishes to forever freeze a province's representation in the House by, let us say, keeping that province from ever dropping below a certain percentage—as the NDP has proposed as well—I would respond by saying that he wants to give Parliament a power that it does not have. It would flout the power of the provinces. It would be asking the Canadian Parliament to tell the provinces that they will go unheard and that Parliament works alone. I cannot accept that. I want Quebec's National Assembly and other legislative assemblies to have their say if the government proposes to freeze a province's representation forever, which would go completely against the principle of proportional representation of the provinces, as established in the Canadian Constitution.

**Mr. Raymond Côté:** Mr. Speaker, I find the hon. member's responses to be absolutely unbelievable. Let us take a look at the Canadian reality. In Ontario, there are exactly the same number of seats in the Ontario legislature as there are—

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That is not true.

**Mr. Raymond Côté:** It is not true? I am sorry. I thought it was exactly the same number. It is possible. The fact remains that the National Assembly has more seats than Quebec has members in the House. Is the hon. member suggesting that the National Assembly is going too far in the number of seats it has? That seems totally inconsistent to me.

On the contrary, a legislature has to be able to represent the demographic weight, the cultural weight, the political weight, the regional linguistic realities, and so on. This can result in an unequal configuration. What is more, that is the case when we talk about the different Canadian provinces. There are tremendous inequalities that are perfectly justifiable. How can the hon. member justify the status quo, which I have already condemned?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, it is the same question, and it calls for the same answer. It is not the status quo. We can do better work if there are fewer of us. When there are too many of us, we do not work as well. That is true in every organization in the world. It becomes a bureaucracy. There comes a time when there are too many MPs.

We are a decentralized federation. We do not have to manage the hospitals and the schools in our ridings. We can focus on our work. We simply need to give MPs more help if they are having a hard time doing their work. We do not need to increase the number of MPs. We do not need any more MPs in the House than we already have. We were doing good work when there were 280 of us, and now we are 308. I think that is enough. The Americans have 435, but they have 10 times the population. Do we need to get to 435 to realize there are too many of us? At what point will the hon. member say that the number of MPs we have does not make any sense? We can very well stay at 308 and rebalance representation of the provinces in the House.

*Government Orders*

• (1720)

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in relation to the last comment made by my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartier, I would like to ask him if he thinks we can compare ourselves to the United States in that regard. Does he believe that the 69 members in Iceland who represent the 300,000 inhabitants there should cut their parliament in half? What number should be sought in proportion? I do not understand why there should suddenly be a global standard for the number of parliamentarians in a parliament.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, that exists everywhere. People compare the number of parliamentarians to the population in every country. Canada is currently becoming an inflationary country in that regard. Just when the government is slashing the public service, when we do not have enough environmental inspectors, the government wants to increase the number of politicians.

I am certain that if I went into all of my colleagues' ridings and defended my point of view, everyone would applaud me. People would say that they do not want more politicians, that we have enough as it is and they should do their jobs better. We do not need to increase that number by 30 or 40.

[*English*]

BILL C-20—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The fair representation act is important for Canada's democracy. In view of the upcoming census results and redistribution, it is important that the bill is passed in a time fashion. I thought the opposition agreed.

We have heard the member for Hamilton Centre and the NDP critic for democratic reform say that if we did not have these seats available for the next election then, quite frankly, the government will have failed. We agree with him.

However, as is evident from the motion that was moved earlier today by the opposition that this not proceed past second reading, I regret to advise that agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-20, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I wonder if it is safe, now, for us to assume, because there are rules that we have in place inside the Chamber that help facilitate debate so that members of Parliament can actually contribute. I know the current Government Leader of the House of Commons is a big fan of the whole time allocation thing. As opposed to negotiating in good faith with opposition House leaders, he prefers to come down with the majority big stick saying, "No more debate. Let's shut it down".

Is this the kind of majority government we can anticipate—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. This is not a point of order, so we will continue.

The hon. minister of state.

SECOND READING

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak about fairness and representation for all Canadians.

In the last election and in previous elections, our party committed to Canadians that we would address the growing unfairness in representation. During the last election, we made three distinct promises to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair for all provinces.

First, we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

Second, we would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons, and we are delivering on that commitment.

Bill C-20, fair representation act would provide fair representation for Canadians living in the fastest growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

First, I would like to outline the problem that we need to fix.

According to our Constitution, every 10 years the number of House of Commons seats allocated to each province is revised. The way this is done is through the seat allocation formula explained in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

The seat allocation formula in place now dates from 1985. Back in 1985, our predecessors in this place faced a decision. They could either allow the size of the House of Commons to grow roughly in line with population growth, or they could attempt to restrain the growth of the House of Commons. They decided on a formula that would restrain the growth in the House of Commons. In doing that, they entrenched a seat allocation formula that would remain anchored in the past and that would not properly account for population growth in the future.

The most obvious and unfortunate result was that the representation of Canadians in our largest and fastest growing provinces was discounted. In fact, population growth was largely ignored by the formula and fairness in representation for Canadians suffered more and more as time went on. To be fair, the problem was not simply with the formula. It was flawed, certainly, but it needed help. Our population growth patterns were that help.

*Government Orders*

Population growth since the mid-1980s has seen significant higher than national average growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Population growth in those provinces has been even higher in large urban and suburban areas. Under the 1985 formula, the population of these three provinces have become significantly and increasingly under-represented due to the population growth.

This has caused a representation gap. This representation gap should, of course, be addressed. To illustrate the need for addressing this representation gap, we look no further than the riding of my colleague from Brampton West. He joined me for the announcement of the bill last week in his riding and his riding is the perfect example of the need for this bill.

Brampton West is home to the largest number of Canadians in any one constituency at over 170,000 people. That population figure was as of the 2006 census, over five years ago. Truly that number is even higher right now. That 170,000 people compares to an average national riding size of just under 113,000 people. In fact, only our four largest provinces have average riding sizes of over 90,000 people.

Brampton West is represented by one member of Parliament, though its population alone could warrant almost two in most other areas of the country. Brampton West is also home to a considerable number of new and visible minority Canadians. Canada's new and visible minority population is increasing, largely through immigration. These immigrants tend to settle in fast growing communities like Brampton and in our fastest growing provinces like Ontario.

These three factors, high immigration to fast growing regions of the fastest growing provinces, combine to magnify the representation gap to these regions. This situation inadvertently causes new Canadians and visible minorities to be even more under-represented than the average.

It is clear for all to see that this situation undermines a principle of representation by population in our country. Brampton West is the most extreme example of the representation gap, but it allows us to put the problem into perspective.

If left with the status quo, the representation gap experienced by Canadians living in fast growing provinces and constituencies will grow even more striking. If left to grow worse, this gap could seriously threaten the legitimacy of our claim to being a representative democracy.

• (1725)

It truly is that important. This is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution. I propose that Bill C-20 would be that solution.

With the fair representation act, our Conservative government would deliver a principled and reasonable update to the formula allocating seats in the House of Commons.

The bill would do a number of things. It would move every single province toward representation by population in the House of Commons. It would address the representation gap by moving Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta significantly closer to representation by population. Using the formula put forward in the bill, Ontario would receive 15 new seats, British Columbia would receive 6 new seats and Alberta would receive 6 new seats. The bill

would increase seat counts for these provinces, both now and in the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the foundation principle of representation by population would be much better respected and maintained, now and in the future.

At the same time, the bill would ensure that smaller and slower-growing provinces would maintain their number of seats. The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation at a level proportionate to its population. Quebec has just over 23% of the provincial population and it would have just over 23% of the provincial seats in the House of Commons. That is what we have promised and that is what will deliver.

Since the purpose of the bill is to move every single province toward representation by population in a fair and reasonable way, Quebec will receive three new seats under a new representation rule applicable to all provinces should they need it. This rule will ensure that no province that is over-represented will experience representation less than what is proportionate to the population after any future seat adjustment. The reason for this is simple and fundamental. While the relative weight of provinces may fluctuate, our seat-allocation formula should ensure that efforts to move under-represented provinces closer to representation by population do not also bring over-represented provinces under the level which their populations warrant. This is in support of the principle of proportionate representation and is one of the fundamental principles in our Constitution, right alongside representation by population.

It would not be fair or principled to enact a formula that could punish a smaller or slower-growing province in that way. This rule is part of the fair balance that we must strike.

We have an obligation to enact a formula that better respects and maintains representation by population. The bill would do this. We have an obligation to enact a formula that ensures the effective and proportionate representation of all provinces, especially for smaller and slower-growing provinces. The bill would do that. We have an obligation to enact a principled formula with national application that is fair for all provinces. The bill would do that. We have an obligation to work together to ensure that the vote of each Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, has equal weight. The bill would do that. Canadians rightfully expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. I think this bill would provide that as well.

I would like to discuss the details.

*Government Orders*

As I have stated, Bill C-20, fair representation act, would update the constitutional formula for allocating seats in the House of Commons among the provinces. The seat readjustment formula has been updated by Parliament a number of times since Confederation, each time seeking to strike a balance among the principles I just outlined. Parliament acts through its authority to amend the Constitution in relation to the House of Commons under section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982. This was the same constitutional authority under which the existing formula was passed in 1985. I want to make it clear that we are on firm and well-travelled ground.

The seat allocation formula operates by determining an electoral quotient which, theoretically, represents the average population per seat and then dividing the population of each province to determine the initial number of seats per province. Once initial seat allocations are produced, the formula provides additional seats to certain provinces, according to the two minimum seat guarantees outlined in the Constitution.

Added in 1915, the Senate floor guarantees that no province can have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has in the Senate.

● (1730)

Added in 1985, the grandfather clause guarantees that no province can be allocated a number of seats that is less than the number of seats it had in 1985.

The final step adds the total provincial seats and one seat for each territory to determine the total number of seats.

The representation gap I spoke of earlier stems from this point. The current 1985 formula sets 279 members as a permanent divisor in determining the electoral quotient, and 279 was the number of provincial seats in the House of Commons at the time that the formula was passed in 1985.

The House then had 282 seats, 279 provincial seats and three territorial seats. This divisor of 279 was not allowed to readjust over time to reflect the actual number of provincial seats in the House of Commons, currently at 305.

The combined effect of fixing the divisor at 279 and the seat guarantee to slower growing provinces is this. It prevents faster growing provinces from receiving a share of seats that is in line with their share of the population. Faster growing provinces have accordingly become significantly and increasingly under-represented in the House of Commons, relative to their population, and are likely to become even more under-represented in future reallocations under this existing formula. This is clearly not fair.

The fair representation act would provide an updated allocation formula that would move every province toward representation by population and significantly reduce the number of increasing under-representation for the faster growing provinces.

The electoral quotient with the 2011 readjustment will be set at 111,166. This number reflects the average riding population prior to the last seat re-adjustment in 2001 and increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates.

The Senate floor and grandfather clause would continue to apply.

The representation that I spoke of would also apply, such that if a currently overrepresented province becomes under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats would be allocated to that provinces so its proportional representation, according to population, is protected.

For the purpose of calculating the provincial seat allocation, provincial populations would be based on Statistics Canada's annual population estimates from July 1, 2011. These estimates correct for undercoverage in the census and provide the best data available on provincial populations and therefore the most appropriate data with which to determine provincial seat counts.

For the 2021 readjustment and each subsequent readjustment, the electoral quotient would be increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rate since the preceding readjustment. The result is a larger increase in the number of seats in the House of Commons compared to the current 1985 formula, both in the next readjustment and in the future readjustments.

These increases will more accurately reflect population growth across the country and will provide for far closer representation by population. The increasing representation gap would be closed and Canadians would be represented much more fairly.

Where and how the House of Commons seats are distributed within provinces is a separate and distinct process that will remain largely unchanged. Once the number of seats per province is established, the process set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act is used to readjust and redistribute electoral boundaries within the provinces.

The readjustment of electoral boundaries is taken in accordance with census data, as it has always been, which provides population counts at the geographic level that is necessary to most accurately revise electoral boundaries.

The independent boundary commissions that determine the electoral boundaries for each province will continue to be constituted in the same way and will continue to operate unchanged. This independent boundary commission process was established in 1964 and was amended slightly in 1979. There is no change to that aspect of the process.

The fair representation act does include amendments that would streamline the timelines governing the boundary readjustment process to ensure that it will be completed and in effect before the end of our government's mandate. The changes proposed to the boundaries readjustment process are aimed simply and solely at streamlining the process.

● (1735)

Moreover, each proposed change to the timelines has been recommended previously in some form by the Chief Electoral Officer, the procedure and House affairs committee, or the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, known as the Lortie commission.

These changes should streamline and modernize the process. They have taken into account recommendations expressed by Elections Canada.

*Government Orders*

While the timelines are changing somewhat, the process itself remains unchanged and independent.

To conclude, the fair representation bill is a principled nationally applicable update to the formula that allocates seats to the House of Commons. It is fair. It is reasonable. It is principled. It solves a problem that needs to be fixed and that will only grow worse if we fail to act. It will achieve better representation for faster growing provinces while maintaining representation for smaller and slower growing provinces.

I will say it again: Canadians rightfully expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. The fair representation bill delivers on this expectation and delivers on our government's long-standing commitment.

I strongly encourage the opposition to work with us in passing this principled and reasonable legislation as quickly as possible to ensure the vote of every Canadian has equal weight to the greatest extent possible and as soon as possible. I look forward to continuing my work with all my colleagues in the House to ensure that happens.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech given by the minister for democratic reform.

Clearly, taking a first step towards rebalancing the political weight and representation in the House is a good thing. However, given that there is a risk that the debate will be cut short again, I am very worried because we have some proposals to make. The minister just reached out, asked us for suggestions and proposed working together, but I have to wonder under what conditions we might be working.

Unfortunately, I have a feeling that this offer was merely for show, merely to look good in the eyes of the public. How could we possibly get the government to listen to us and hope to move this bill forward in co-operation with the provinces under the conditions imposed on us?

[*English*]

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Madam Speaker, this is a formula that is principled and applicable to the entire country. It is fair for the entire country as it brings every province closer to representation by population. There has been debate about this in the House. There will be further debate about this in the House of Commons. Then there will be opportunities to speak about it further in committee.

What Canadians want us to do is to move forward. This government received a strong mandate to bring fairness in representation and to bring every province closer to representation by population. We are moving forward on that. We have made this commitment and we will follow through on that commitment.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I agree with the minister's conclusion that Canadians want to have proportional representation in the House that would be fair for every province.

I will say to the minister that the bill he tabled is much better than the two other attempts by his government. I think we are much closer

now. However, I reiterate my point that we may achieve it without adding one seat in the House.

If the minister has heard Canadians say that they want more MPs or more politicians, he should tell me because I have not heard one Canadian say that. Canadians think the system is fair with 308 seats. That is enough. We could achieve the same percentage by province that he has mentioned by staying at 308.

It is true that my province of Quebec would have fewer seats but our representation would be as good as it is in the bill. To have 70 seats in Quebec out of, let us say, 250 would be better than 78 out of 338. I am sure it would be the same for all my colleagues in all provinces. What is important is the representation of a province, not the number of seats.

Could the minister tell us if, after working with experts, he came back with another scenario of 308 seats, what that would mean for fair representation?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Madam Speaker, the fact is we live in a very large country with varying populations. Along with that, to complicate the issues, we have constitutional guarantees of seats for certain provinces, for provinces that have slower growing populations and populations that have moved to other parts of the country.

We made a commitment in the campaign that we would protect the seats of those smaller provinces. We made a commitment in the campaign that we would bring the provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario closer to representation by population. It is only fair that the people living in those provinces have their vote counted, to the greatest extent possible, equally, just like the other provinces. We are moving forward on that commitment by bringing every province closer to representation by population.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Madam Speaker, following on the question from the Liberals, I have had difficulty with this. We saw two incarnations of this legislation in previous Parliaments, neither of which had an increased number seats for the province of Quebec. As much as the government members may think I do not have much intelligence, I think I have a reasonable knowledge of how this system works, but I have no comprehension whatsoever as to how they came to the number of three additional seats for the province of Quebec.

With regard to that, I want to take some credit for my party for having pressed the government into recognizing all the various considerations that go into increasing the number of seats in this House. The Conservatives' responsibility as government in proposing this type of legislation is to take into account the historical rights that the province of Quebec has in terms of an equilibrium of seats and its right to have fair representation in the House. I congratulate the Conservatives for finally moving on that and I take some credit on behalf of my party for seeing them do that.

I come back to my basic question. How did they come to the three seats? I have no way of understanding that.

● (1745)

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to answer the question.

*Government Orders*

That fact is we committed that Quebec would have representation equal to its population. The numbers work out like this: Quebec has 23% of the population and it will have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons, which would require it to get three additional seats. That is where those three seats come from.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Madam Speaker, I am enjoying this discussion with the minister. I want to tell him how important it is for me that we agree at the end of the day. We are all democrats and it would be good to agree.

I am sure Canadians would prefer 308 seats rather than 338 seats. No one is asking for more MPs. We do not need that many in Canada. The United States has 435 seats for ten times the population that Canada has. We do not need to add any seats. We could achieve the same goals that are in the bill by keeping the same number of seats. I know Quebec would have fewer than 75 seats, but the representation for Quebec would be the same. This is what is key for Quebecers.

I am telling the minister that we have the constitutional power to do it. We need to keep the Senate floor rule clause, and it is good, but the grandfather clause can be changed by Parliament alone. We do not need to have a long constitutional discussion about that. It would be much better for Canada.

I am asking the minister, when would we stop adding seats? When would we say there are enough seats?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Madam Speaker, the hon. member's proposal would have us change some legislation and not change the Senate floor rule, which would actually leave some provinces over-represented and other provinces continue to be under-represented.

What we have done is to bring forward a principled formula that brings every province closer to representation by population. At the end of the day, the Liberal proposal would have us open up the Constitution and get into long drawn-out constitutional battles that no Canadian wants. What Canadians want is to be fairly represented in the House of Commons. Further to that, they want this government to continue to work on the economy and work on jobs and not get into the long drawn-out constitutional battles that the Liberals want.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my question has to do with the comments made by the minister just now.

I am a bit concerned that he thinks Canadians do not want a debate on this issue. I do think that Canadians want a debate on this issue because we are talking about a constitutional amendment. That is huge.

I would like the minister to reconsider his comments. I would also like him to talk about the fact that the government decided to limit discussion on this issue.

[*English*]

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Madam Speaker, the fact is, yes, Canadians want to hear debate. There is debate on this bill and there will be more debate on this bill as there is on every bill. We give more than enough time to debate bills in the House of Commons. What

Canadians really want is action. Canadians gave this government a strong mandate to move forward and that is what we are doing.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been extensive discussions on this topic and I believe we finally have agreement. If you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs that it travel for the purpose of meeting with veterans as part of its hearings into the impact of the recent decision by the Conservative government to cut over \$200 million from the Veterans Affairs department, that it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to hold hearings in each province and territory, and that in relation to this study, the 12 members of the Veterans Affairs committee be authorized to travel within Canada no later than December 16, 2011, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

● (1750)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Does the House give its consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been no extensive consultations. There have been two of these so far today, and the members are misrepresenting what is going on. They should not be saying there have been extensive consultations when they have been consulting themselves.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has two minutes to begin making his comments.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Madam Speaker, since there is no use going into the topic itself in that short period of time, let me make a few comments about the government moving time allocation.

This will now be the sixth time in about 40 sitting days that the government has moved time allocation. It is fast approaching matching the former Liberal government in its 2000 to 2004 term of office with the number of time allocation motions it moved, although the Conservatives are way ahead of the Liberals in terms of the period of time within which they did it. It took the Liberal government of the day about 130 sitting days to move time allocation on nine different occasions. The Conservatives are up to six time allocation motions already in a little over 30 days.

We have seen incarnations of this bill twice in previous Parliaments, and each time there is a difference in the numbers. There appears to be a different rationale each time.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member will have 18 and one-half minutes to make his comments when this bill is next before the House.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:52 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[Translation]***PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT**

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP)** moved that Bill C-306, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (political affiliation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, this evening we are debating Bill C-306, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (political affiliation), which concerns the foundation of our democracy. Before debating the bill, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore on his excellent work over the years to ensure that this bill was introduced in each new session of Parliament. It is an honour for me to introduce it once again and to have seconded it the first time.

The bill provides that a member's seat in the House of Commons will be vacated and a by-election called for that seat if the member, having been elected to the House as a member of a political party or as an independent, changes parties or becomes a member of a party, as the case may be. However, I would like to point out that the seat will not be vacated if the member, having been elected as a member of a political party, chooses to sit as an independent.

I believe that this bill will help restore Canadians' faith in our democracy. For these reasons, I am asking members on all sides to support it. Recently, the government proposed certain political reforms, and we hope that it will show that it takes them seriously by supporting this bill.

This bill also reflects a fundamental objective of my party, which is to do politics differently in order to renew people's trust in elected officials. It is unfortunate that, in a number of surveys on Canadians' trust in different professions conducted in recent years, politicians were always ranked at the bottom. Politicians who crossed the floor in recent years only added fuel to the fire. Even though there has been a slight increase in political engagement in recent elections mainly due to our party, it is not difficult to see that the Canadian political system, in particular the politicians, no longer inspires the confidence of people in general. In the last election, few observers talked about Canadians' interest and engagement in the democratic process and what Canadians think of politics in general.

I will now fill that gap. To shed light on these issues the Association for Canadian Studies commissioned Léger Marketing to ask Canadians a series of questions that offer insight into political interest and engagement. The results show that Canadians have a negative view of politicians and that the vast majority of Canadians do not recommend pursuing a career in politics. Just over one in five do not think that most politicians can be trusted and a similar percentage would recommend a career in politics. In fact, the vast majority would not suggest pursuing such a career.

More specifically, when asked whether most politicians can be trusted, only 3.1% agreed. When asked whether they would recommend that a friend or family member pursue a career in politics, only 4.9% said that they would. The entire system is being called into question. When asked why they think Canadians choose not to vote in elections, most suggest it is the feeling that their vote

has no impact. The second reason offered by Canadians as to why people decide not to vote is that they do not like any of the choices.

With regard to the choices offered, 26.9% of men did not like the choices as compared to 31.3% of women. We should all be wondering why they do not like the choices offered. Something is not working at the political level. In addition, when we look at the figures on politics in general from a language perspective, 40% of francophones did not like politics, as compared to 46% of anglophones and 41% of allophones. It is unbelievable. Voter turnout for Canadian elections is still a major challenge. For the past five elections, the trend has been down: voter turnout was only 61% for the last election.

• (1755)

Canada is now behind countries like Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic and even Greece. Even if we are ahead of the United States, we are still behind Great Britain and New Zealand.

Over the past 30 years, political cynicism has been on the rise in Canada. For example, since 1982, the feeling that honesty and integrity among members of Parliament are weak or very weak increased in 49% of Canadians. In my province, Quebec, according to an article in *La Presse*:

The results [of the survey] show that 87% of respondents chose words like "discouraged" or "put off" to describe how they feel about politics. One in five voters, or 21%, said that they were [completely] indifferent. Only 9% said that they felt optimistic and 11% felt passionate about politics. Among Quebec voters of average age, 34 to 55 years, the proportion of those who felt discouraged or put off by politics climbed to 94%.

When respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be disillusioned or cynical, 47%, and 50% of women, said that they did, 37% said that they did not and 16% were unsure.

When they were asked why they were so disenchanted, they responded:

Primarily because of integrity. That is the top reason given by 80% of the respondents to explain their disenchantment. Lack of effectiveness came in second, at 72%...Two-thirds of respondents, or 61%, said that "nothing changes in politics". Lastly, 48% said that politicians have a "lack of ideas".

I will go on, because it is important.

Nearly 80% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that "politicians are honest". Only 14% agree with that statement. Similarly, 88% of respondents disagree with the statement "politicians tell the truth". [Unbelievable.] Only 9% think that politicians tell the truth. It should be noted that no respondents, or 0%, said that they strongly agree with the fact that politicians tell the truth. Some 69% disagree with the statement that "politicians care about the interests of the public". However, nearly half, or 45%, acknowledged that "politicians work hard".

At least we have that.

That is not a pretty picture. A number of articles suggest that the topics Canadians care about most when it comes to trusting politicians is sincerity, honesty, wasting money and lack of public interest.



*Private Members' Business*

• (1800)

[English]

This is a situation that should concern us all. In order for a democracy to be healthy and to thrive, it must enjoy the confidence of the vast majority of the electorate. If not, we may very well be headed for a democratic crisis such as exists in the United States, where only 49% of people vote in the federal elections. That is less than half of the eligible voters.

There is a clear need to restore the confidence of Canadians. Cases like those of David Emerson and Belinda Stronach have greatly contributed to weakening Canadians' opinions of our political institutions, but so have consistent governments that have done nothing with regard to political reform.

For example, in 2006, by defeating the bill introduced by my distinguished colleague, Mr. Stoffer, the Liberals, who were in power and were backed by the Bloc Québécois, simply maintained—

[Translation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I would like to remind the hon. member that he cannot refer to another member by name.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnat:** I am sorry. I meant to say “my distinguished colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore.”

[English]

I will resume. The Liberals, who were in power backed by the Bloc Québécois, simply maintained the status quo in 2006. They proved to Canadians that the political class was once again not truly interested in democratic and ethical reforms for Parliament.

We need to give voters in Canada a greater say in the political future of their elected representatives, particularly those who want to cross the floor in order to satisfy their careers.

The point of principle here is this: whose seat is it that we or I am sitting in? This seat is not mine; it is the seat of the people of the Pontiac. I feel very strongly that our political future as MPs must always be decided by our constituents. Only when we stand up on principle and give greater control to the Canadian electorate will some of the cynicism felt by voters in this country fade. It is a fundamental question of accountability to the people we represent. No one should have a problem with that.

Since the NDP introduced the bill in 1997, there has been broad support for it among Canadians. Given the above, this does not surprise me. Ordinary Canadians are tired of the ping-pong game of politics. The reality is that nobody votes for a candidate without considering what party he or she belongs to. It is a true slap in the voter's face when elected representatives join another party without seeking approval from their voters.

Parties are there to present a series of values to Canadians. Election platforms are value statements, and Canadians connect with those values. Canadians know there are differences in values between political parties. They know that the NDP is not the Conservative Party. It is a grave injustice to treat their choices and their political values as though they have no consequence. It is an insult to their intelligence.

Honestly, I do not see this as a partisan issue. It is about disciplining us all, on this side of the House and theirs. NDP MPs as much as government MPs would be bound by this legislation.

The government has made a number of proposals with regard to democratic reform. The Conservatives themselves have been concerned about democratic reform ever since they were in opposition. There seems to be an openness by the government with regard to taking action on these matters, but time will show us how serious the government is about reform and about eliminating the backroom dealings that Canadians have come to hate about our political system.

Resistance to this legislation equals resistance to cracking down on backroom deals and secret deals. Fixing Ottawa has to start with ourselves. If the Prime Minister and the government, as well as the other parties represented in the House, are serious about democratic reform, then they should vote for the bill.

• (1805)

[Translation]

This bill aims to discipline us, as representatives of the people, to make us more accountable to the voters' wishes and to cut down on petty politics. It is aimed directly at cynicism.

Many people will undoubtedly ask us, “Why this time? Why now, when it did not work the last time?” When the NDP introduced this bill in 1997, there were 21 NDP members; in 2001, there were 14. We are bringing it back again, now we have more than 100 members, because we believe in it. It is important to us and to Canadians. We are simply continuing what was previously started by the NDP. This is important to us. Today, thanks to Canadians, we are now in a better position, as the official opposition, to get this bill passed.

To conclude, this bill gives us a golden opportunity to show Canadians that we are truly ready to be more responsible and to respect their political choice.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the member would propose such a bill. This is a bill that actually passed in the Manitoba legislature.

There were individuals who presented in committee and raised a great deal of concerns. I was told by one individual, and we can do some research to find out if in fact it is the case, that Winston Churchill had crossed the floor on several occasions.

If the issue is to get people engaged and believe in politics, and re-establish this honourable profession as it is, we could probably do more by addressing the whole issue of, for example, negative advertising and the impact that has had. The way in which some campaigns rely on negative advertising in order to capture votes also discourages people from voting.

If we want to get individuals to go out and vote, we have give them a choice. Maybe we could put “none of the above” on the ballots. These are things that would increase the amount of voter participation.

*Private Members' Business*

My feeling is that, yes, we do need to get more people involved in the process. There are many other things that we could do that would have a very real impact in terms of voter turnout.

I am not too sure, and this is one of the issues that was raised in Manitoba, if this is constitutional. If we have members of Parliament who, in good faith, for whatever reasons, believe they cannot participate or believe it is in their constituents' best interests to take a certain action, like Sir Winston Churchill who many recognize as one of the greatest parliamentarians, do we deny them the opportunity to take an action that they feel is in fact appropriate?

I see them as two different issues, in terms of voter turnout versus something that—

• (1810)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I would like to give the hon. member for Pontiac a chance to respond.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Madam Speaker, I am certainly not opposed to some of the suggestions that the member has put forward, with regard to engaging the population.

When it comes to constitutional issues, as the member will know, the bill actually proposes that the individual sit as an independent. So, it directly relates to the role that political parties play in choices during elections. One could question it, but then again, political parties have a particular place in our Canadian democracy. They do represent a certain number of choices, a certain number of values, and those choices should be respected by politicians of all stripes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I very much like the private member's bill introduced by my colleague. Having had a previous life in another party, I feel very comfortable saying that when I decided—completely voluntarily—to join the NDP, I did so by getting elected as a new member of this party. I did not leave in the middle of a term after earning the trust of my constituents under one banner, and then for some reason, no matter how valid, change my mind and cross the floor.

To pick up where the hon. Liberal member left off, what I like about the bill introduced by my colleague from Pontiac is that it does not take away an individual's right to change parties. It simply says that if someone leaves a party, he or she must be re-elected. I wonder if the member for Pontiac could explain this bill a little more—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Pontiac has less than a minute to respond.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Gatineau for the question.

We are talking about the case of someone who wants to cross the floor during their term. I think it is responsible and reasonable to leave one's party to sit as an independent, and then ask voters to elect that individual in a given political party. There are many good reasons for crossing the floor. We are not attacking the principle. We are attacking the principle of not asking voters to re-elect such individuals when they change their political party.

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am here

to speak today to Bill C-306, introduced by the member for Pontiac, which addresses changes in the political affiliations of members of Parliament, or more commonly known as floor crossing. The bill would require the resignation of a member of Parliament and a subsequent byelection if the member crosses the floor to sit as a member of a different political party.

While I understand that the goal of this bill would be to ensure that a member's decision to cross the floor is endorsed by a member's constituents, the result of it would be simple. This bill would seriously undermine the independence of members of this House and I do not think that is something we should encourage or support.

This bill would have some practical negative consequences. The bill would impose restrictions upon members who wish to express a different position than the one endorsed by a majority of their caucus. This bill would also impede members of Parliament in representing the interests of their constituents, which is one of the fundamental duties under our Constitution.

I want to briefly go over the details of this bill and then explain in more detail why I believe restrictions on floor crossings would not fit with our Westminster parliamentary system and are inadvisable.

Bill C-306 would require a byelection whenever members join a different registered party than the one that has endorsed them for the previous election or if they were elected as independent candidates during the previous election and subsequently join a political party. However, Bill C-306 would not require a byelection when members leave or are expelled from their caucus to sit as independents, leave their party to form a new party that does not yet have registered party status under the Elections Canada Act or, and I stress, two parties that have registered status under the Elections Canada Act merge. According to the Elections Canada Act, a party obtains registered party status when it endorses at least one candidate for an election, provided it has made the proper application to the Chief Electoral Officer at least 60 days before the issue of writs for that election.

So here are the details. I have some concerns about the technical wording of the bill and not only with its principles. I will speak a bit about the bill's reference to registered parties. Our party system plays a fundamental role in our democracy but, in fact, there are a few statutory provisions regulating the role of political parties in Parliament itself, including the Parliament of Canada Act which Bill C-306 would modify.

In contrast, the roles, rights and obligations of individual members of Parliament are well established in Canada's legislation whereby members of Parliament are central actors in our Westminster system of government. Practically, the caucus system in our Parliament is joined with, but distinct from, the registered party system.

Bill C-306 would go against existing rules and traditions by allowing the party machinery to take precedence over individual rights and responsibilities of each member of Parliament and their caucus choices. This does not correspond to our system of government. As I stated earlier, I believe Bill C-306 would have negative and undesirable consequences on the roles of members of Parliament.

In effect, the bill would require members who fundamentally disagree with their caucus or with the leader of their party to resign their seat or to sit as independents. However, it would blur the line between party membership and caucus membership. Such restrictions would strengthen the control of political parties over individual members by bolstering a party's threat of expulsion in order to maintain party discipline and limit the representative role of members.

Therefore, the bill could discourage elected representatives from expressing their views in caucus debates and encourage party leaders to act without regard to their caucus members' best interests.

We should remember that members of Parliament have three competing but equally important representative roles in Parliament. They are to represent the interests and opinions of their constituents, to present their personal views and judgments, and to support and promote their political parties and party leaders.

By seeking to punish members of Parliament who disagree with their parties so fundamentally that they decide to change their political affiliation, the bill would focus exclusively on the party role of members. This would be detrimental to the individual roles of members, including their duties to act as trustees of the public interest and that of their constituents.

Moreover, the decision to cross the floor cannot be taken lightly. It is an important decision, often with significant consequences.

● (1815)

Of the six members who have crossed the floor since the 2004 election, only one has managed to be re-elected in a subsequent election as an independent candidate. The same premise applies to members of Parliament who have decided to leave or who were expelled from their caucus to sit as independent members. Of the six members who left their caucus to sit as independent members since the 2004 election, only one was re-elected in a subsequent election. What does this mean?

Members are subject to scrutiny by the public, by the media, by parliamentary colleagues, and most importantly, by their voters, their constituents back at home in the next general election. Therefore, I believe this bill is unnecessary as it is that court of opinion by which members are truly judged. To emphasize, general elections themselves are the appropriate mechanism to hold members of Parliament accountable for their actions.

According to the Library of Parliament, there have been approximately 194 floor crossings since Confederation. The floor crossing tradition reflects the importance of preserving the independence and mobility of members of Parliament to vote with their feet when they feel it is in the best interests of their constituents or the country to do so.

### *Private Members' Business*

None of our provinces require a byelection when a member of their legislative assembly changes political affiliations, although Manitoba requires members who leave their caucus to sit as independent members until the end of their terms. Moreover, crossing the floor exists in other Westminster parliamentary systems. The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand do not currently impose restrictions on floor crossings.

When New Zealand went through a transition period from the first past the post electoral system to a mixed member proportional system, it had passed legislation to prevent floor crossings as a temporary measure in 2001. However, it did not renew these provisions after the 2005 election as they turned out to be ineffective.

This is consistent with the fact that laws banning floor crossing are rare in established democracies, but common in nascent democracies where they are defended as temporary measures designed to consolidate a parliamentary system. We are certainly not in that position here in Canada, nor are our peer countries. I simply cannot see the need for the provisions of this bill.

In conclusion, party affiliation is certainly an important factor when Canadians cast their vote, but they also expect elected representatives to act according to their convictions when they represent local interests at the national level. Ultimately, members are held accountable by their constituents at the next election. Therefore, I encourage all members to oppose Bill C-306

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, my remarks will not take very long. It is late. I would like to tell the hon. member that his bill is based on good intentions. However, there is a principle that we do not create laws unless it is necessary to do so. In this case, I do not feel that it is necessary. I have sat in this House since 1996 and only once did it not seem legitimate to me when a member crossed the floor.

[*English*]

However, we do not enact a new law for one case. Mr. David Emerson, a couple days after the election, crossed the floor to be appointed minister. That was unacceptable as he campaigned against the Conservative Party, but a few days later became a minister. If this were a pattern, of course, I would agree to do something, but it is an exception.

[*Translation*]

In the other cases that I have seen, the members who changed parties had legitimate reasons for doing so. For example, when Jean Charest gave up the leadership of the Conservative Party to become the leader of the Liberal Party in Quebec, the Conservative Party really changed. Many Quebec members were no longer part of the new party because the leader had changed and their constituents asked them why they did not join the Liberals, so they came to us. When election time came six months later, they were all re-elected. The voters followed them. Had they been obliged to resign and had they been prevented from doing their work in their ridings for six to eight months, what purpose would that have served? They told me they were hopeful that their voters would follow them when they made that change.

*Private Members' Business*

All hon. members who have switched parties more or less justify their decision that way. They feel that they did not change, but their party did and that they were elected for certain commitments that the party has not respected. They were no longer comfortable in their party and they switched. It does not happen very often, but it does happen from time to time. Every time it happens—and I do not necessarily approve of the change when it is Liberals who leave to join another party—I am not happy about it, but I cannot deny the legitimacy of the decision. As the hon. member was saying earlier, if voters do not follow them, they will not be re-elected. They will be treated as turncoats and they will be defeated. That is how the system works. I do not see the need to change it when we do not have the necessary justification for unduly strengthening the parties with respect to the free choice of the hon. members of this House, who, for personal reasons, might want, quite legitimately, to change their allegiance.

My colleague mentioned other parliaments earlier. The parliamentarian who quite possibly is the most respected in the history of democracy, who not only saved a country, but a civilization, is Winston Churchill. If ever there was a parliamentarian who switched parties often, it was Winston Churchill. Thus, under certain circumstances I think it is legitimate to switch parties. That being said, I am a Liberal and I will always be a Liberal.

• (1825)

[English]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am completely shocked. I thought the Conservatives were a party of democracy, as were the Liberals. I did not know that even though my name is on the seat here it is not my seat. I do not own this seat. It does not belong to me. It does not belong to my party. It belongs to the 91,000 people I represent in Sackville—Eastern Shore.

I was elected as a New Democratic member of Parliament. However, if in an hour I called the leader of the Liberal Party or maybe the Prime Minister and asked if they wanted me, I could be a Conservative member of Parliament or a Liberal member of Parliament in an hour or even less than that.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Not a chance.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I was not elected as a Conservative, a Liberal or a Green member. I was elected as a New Democratic member of Parliament.

If, for whatever reason, I could no longer sit as a New Democratic member of Parliament, either I was being a real rabble-rouser and the party members said that I was being a major pain in the buttocks and that I could not be here any more, or I could no longer live by the philosophy, I would have several solutions to my problem. I could sit as an independent until the next election and make my choice known or I could quit. The premise then would be to seek the nomination of the new party, fly under its flag and seek election under that banner.

It is the people who decide our fate. There is nothing worse than sitting in the House of Commons listening to a new member of Parliament, for whom I have great respect, read bureaucratic notes that are handed to her. Does she not remember what the Prime Minister said when the former member for Kings—Hants joined the

Liberal Party and became a cabinet minister? He said that any person who crosses the floor for a few pieces of silver has more or less sold their soul. He was very angry that it happened.

I remember when the great Belinda Stronach left the Conservatives and went over to the Liberal Party. Not one Conservative said that it was a wonderful thing she did. Not one Conservative sent her flowers and said, “Good for you, Belinda, that was great. You exercised your member of Parliament’s duty”. No. What they said was very vile. What they said was extremely rude, because she was a woman and she was well known in this country. However, the comments from the Conservative members of Parliament and the Alberta Conservative members of Parliament were beyond the pale. Besides the tone of those comments, they were justified in their anger because a person left the party to sit as a cabinet minister in another party.

I will use the great David Emerson as an example. The beauty of being here for a while is that we get to remember some of these things. David Emerson was a minister in the Liberal government. There was an election in 2006, and the Conservatives won the election.

In February 2006, the cabinet of the Conservative Party was sworn in, and rightfully so, and the beauty of our democracy is that not a shot was fired. However, an hour before the Conservatives took over the government, the former member for Vancouver Kingsway, who was a Liberal cabinet minister when Paul Martin signed off, was sworn in as a Conservative cabinet minister with a better pension, better pay and a car. That was a Liberal cabinet minister who had said that he would be the Conservatives’ worst nightmare, and it turned into a dream for him.

Would David Emerson have crossed the floor if he were to sit in the backbench with no critic area or anything? I do not think so.

The reality is that this is not my seat. It belongs to the people of Canada in my riding.

I cannot thank my hon. colleague for Pontiac enough. For the Liberals to stand up and say that they do not like this, they should get real. If we do not start disciplining ourselves, more and more people will not go to the polls. Canadians are telling us that they do not like the fact that we are entitled to our entitlements. The last thing members of Parliament should do is Dingwall the Canadian people. We should stop that.

• (1830)

If a member wishes, for whatever reason, to join another political party while sitting as an elected member of Parliament of a current party, it is quite simple: the member should sit as an independent until the next election, or quit, seek a byelection and explain to his or her constituents why he or she now needs to have another flag over his or her home. That is constitutional responsibility, and that is being true to democracy and to one’s constituents.

The Conservative member spoke with bureaucratic notes without really thinking. There are four reasons that members get elected: first, to throw bums out; second, for their leader; third, for their party; and fourth, for themselves. In most cases, being oneself is the last reason people vote for a person.

*Private Members' Business*

The member talked about giving too much party discipline to the leader and the party. I remember a certain Conservative defence minister from Central Nova who said, “We don't kick people out of our party for voting against the budget or voting against the wishes of their constituents”. Guess what? Bill Casey, the former member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, voted against the Conservative budget because of the Atlantic accord and, before that man sat his derrière on the seat, he was out of the party. He was gone.

The Conservatives exercised discipline because they triple-whipped the vote. We understand that parties do that time and again, but we cannot have a senior minister, who joined the Conservative Party, say publicly in the House of Commons, “We don't kick people out for voting against us and doing what they wish”, and then, before the member could sit down, kick him out. That is party discipline. We understand party discipline. It happens. It is what all members of Parliament need to understand when this happens. If members take chances, they take the consequences.

We have a party system, but, and I am talking about the ladies and gentlemen across the way, how many of them would have gotten elected as independents? I ask them to put up their hands right now if they could have been elected as an independent in the House of Commons. I do not see any hands going up. The reality is that it does not happen. It is rare that it happens.

Therefore, we should stop abusing the trust of our constituents. Our constituents are the ones who put us here. We tell our constituents which political banner we are being elected under. For whatever reason, it happens all the time. There are legitimate reasons for members to leave their parties. I will bet that members who are here long enough may think maybe it should. However, the reality is that members have a couple of beverages, forget about it and move on.

The truth is that we should never abuse our constituents. This bill would enact more discipline among ourselves and, more important, it is a private member's bill. We would hope that the Conservatives and the Liberals would enact a free vote on this measure, get it to committee and have Democracy Watch and others from across the country attend. I can honestly say that I have been working on this legislation since 1999 and the overwhelming majority of people I have spoken to, not just New Democrats but a lot of Conservatives, Liberals, the Green Party and former Bloc members are fully supportive of this legislation.

They do not want us treating the House of Commons as the no-tell motel, where people check in under an assumed name. This carpet is very expensive. We cannot just keep tramping back and forth when we want to. We need to have respect for the institution, but, most importantly, we need to have respect for our constituents.

This is what this bill is all about, and I am very proud of my hon. colleague from Pontiac for introducing this legislation once again. All the Conservatives and Liberals should send ten percenters or householders into their ridings and ask their constituents about floor crossing. They would be surprised at the answers. I have already done that and I know the answer. The overwhelming majority of Canadians want us to stop that practice, stop the entitlement of entitlements, behave ourselves, be more responsible and understand

that the seats do not belong to us. They belong to the people of Canada.

• (1835)

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, this is the time of the year that the seasons change with Halloween, the geese fly south and for 30 days the moustache of the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore disappears before it makes its annual return to our chamber.

I want to take this opportunity to address the bill. I think it is an unwise bill. It is problematic on a technical level and I will explain what that is very briefly. However, even if it worked, which I do not think it would, it would do something that is not in the public interest, and that is to establish greater control for the party leadership in each of the parties, not just the governing party but all the parties, over the individual member, something which, frankly, there is too much right now. In fact, that was a fair part of the substance of the member's speech.

I will read one of the four sections by which it would amend the Parliament of Canada Act. The bill states:

Any person holding a seat in the House of Commons who becomes a member of a registered party as defined in subsection 2(1) of the Canada Elections Act is deemed to have vacated the seat and ceases to be a member of the House if, in the last election, the person was endorsed by another registered party or was not endorsed by a registered party.

In other words the member is an independent. It is trying to say that if I were elected as a Conservative in my riding and I crossed the floor to the New Democrats, I would cease to be a member and there would be a byelection. It does not actually achieve that goal because I could just as well sit with the New Democrats as a member of the caucus without being an actual card carrying member of the New Democratic Party. It may very well be that the New Democrats would not accept me, but I am assume if they were willing to accept me on those terms, this whole process would be obviated. There have been many examples, both of opposition parties and of governments which have functioned with members of multiple parties.

The actual goal of the bill will not be achieved even if it is passed. Quite frankly, that is a good thing because the bill is a bad bill. It is a bad idea and it was a bad idea when it was proposed by a New Democratic member a couple of Parliaments ago. I spoke to it then. It was a bad idea when it was proposed by a Conservative member a few Parliaments ago, when I spoke against it and voted against it as well.

It is not because these are bad members or members who are lacking in goodwill, but because anything that establishes further control for the reasons that my hon. colleague from Calgary spelled out in her speech and anything that creates greater control for the party leadership over the individual MPs is a bad thing.

*Private Members' Business*

I am not alone in thinking this. As my colleague from Calgary mentioned, there have been 194 floor crossings at the federal level and many more at the provincial level since the time of Confederation. The Library of Parliament apparently did that research, but there have been so many floor crossings that there is actually a Wikipedia article about Canadian floor crossings. I asked one of the researchers to print the pages that dealt with floor crossings since I became a MP in the year 2000.

It is interesting to look at what happened to people who tried crossing the floor. Some of them were defeated in the next election, indicating that their voters did not like what they did. Others were re-elected, some of them many times. I will read some of the names and members will see my point.

In September 2000, just before I first ran and was elected, David Price, Diane St-Jacques and André Harvey all left the Progressive Conservative Party caucus and joined the Liberals. At least two of those were re-elected successfully in the next election.

Rick Laliberte, a New Democrat, left the NDP to join the Liberals at that time as well.

In 2001 there was rebellion against Stockwell Day, the leader of my party at that time. I was a member of the Canadian Alliance and a number of members rebelled against his leadership and sat as the Democratic Representative caucus, a separate group which had not previously existed. Whether that would violate the terms of this act, I do not know, but they sat separately: Art Hanger, Chuck Strahl, Gary Lunn, Jim Pankiw, Val Meredith, Grant McNally, Jay Hill, Jim Gouk, Monte Solberg, Andy Burton, Brian Fitzpatrick, Deborah Grey and Inky Mark all did that. Most but not all of them returned to the new Conservative Party caucus once the new Conservative Party had been created.

•(1840)

Others of us did not go through that process, but we did enter that Parliament as Canadian Alliance Canada and left as Conservatives after the creation of the new Conservative Party, or as Progressive Conservatives, and left as Conservatives. Those were all legitimate changes.

Would they fall afoul of this bill? I do not know, but they were legitimate changes. I can say for myself, I was re-elected with a much more substantial margin following that election. Was it because people liked me more? Was it because they liked the new party more? Was it because they liked the new leader more? I am not sure. It was some combination I suppose, but the point is in the end that choice was validated by my voters.

Continuing along down here, in 2002, this was while the Canadian Alliance was still in existence, before the merger of the CA and PC, Joe Peschisolido, a Canadian Alliance MP, left to join the Liberals. He was defeated in a subsequent election.

In 2003, in the course of the merger negotiations between the PCs and the CA, the member for Kings—Hants left the PCs, just as the new Conservative Party was to be created, to sit as a Liberal, ran, and has been successfully re-elected several times.

That was also what Keith Martin did. He was re-elected twice, or maybe three times after that as a Liberal, and chose not to run in the recent election.

About the same time, a year later, John Bryden, a Liberal MP, stepped down. He sat as an independent first, joined the Conservative Party, and then was defeated in the nomination battle for the Conservative Party, so we never got the chance to see what the voters thought of his proposal.

David Kilgour sat for many years as a Liberal. He had been elected as a Progressive Conservative and chose to cross the floor prior to the 1993 election. He was then re-elected, served as a Liberal, and in fact became a cabinet minister for the Liberals. Clearly, the voters were willing to accept what he did.

Belinda Stronach, of course, left the Conservatives after having sought its leadership. She sat as a Liberal and was re-elected as a Liberal, so voters agreed with that.

Wajid Khan tried leaving the Liberals to join the Conservatives in 2007. He was defeated in the subsequent election. Voters were not willing to accept that.

Blair Wilson ran as a Liberal, was essentially pushed out of his party, and then sat as the first Green Party MP. He was then defeated in the next election, so his voters were not willing to accept that.

As we can see, there is a wide range of people who have done this, and there has been a wide range of voter reactions. The general reaction has not been to say, "We absolutely reject what these MPs have done". Absolutely not. There has, in fact, been a considerable acceptance when the circumstances seemed legitimate.

I want to make a further point about this. There have been some quite well-known people who have made multiple floor crossing changes. Someone earlier mentioned Winston Churchill. Here is what Winston Churchill did. He was elected in 1901 as a Conservative in England. In 1904, he crossed the floor to the Liberals and served in their cabinet. This rankled the Conservatives so much that in 1915, during the first world war, when the Conservatives joined with the Liberal party to form a coalition government, they demanded that he be demoted as a condition of joining a coalition government, in the time of war, so this really bothered them a lot.

However, as it turned out, his voters thought it was okay and he continued to be re-elected and served until 1924 as a Liberal MP. He was then defeated, spent some time, about a year, as a private citizen, then came back in as a Conservative again. He made the observation, because some people did not approve of this sort of thing, by saying, "Anyone can rat, but it takes a certain amount of ingenuity to re-rat".

He then went on and served his country, admirably of course, as prime minister. He did save western civilization, so he could not have been all bad. He did so, I should point out, as head of a coalition government. Effectively, he was not a Conservative while he was doing that. He served as prime minister the second time as a Conservative. He served, really, in three different parties. He served as prime minister in two different parties. Clearly, these things are permissible in certain circumstances.

I have a final note, because I know I am just about out of time. My former colleague, Inky Mark, was one of those who was a floor crosser to the Democratic Reform caucus. Here is his history, party wise. He was elected as a Reformer, served as a Canadian Alliance MP when the party changed, then served in the Democratic Reform caucus, then served as a Progressive Conservative, then served in the Conservative Party of Canada. His voters re-elected him over and over again.

Clearly, this is an acceptable practice and I do not think we should make it illegal.

• (1845)

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand in support of the Bill C-306 submitted by my colleague from Pontiac. I was here for some of the time that the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore gave some examples. I always find it interesting to listen to the comments from the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. Once again, I do not agree. We usually do not agree, but we do enjoy the give and take. As often as I can, I say I have a great deal of respect for the member, but I disagree with him again.

I will deal with the core piece because I will not have a chance to deal with all of it.

At first blush, one aspect citizens think about when they want to choose their member of Parliament, whether it is in the legislature or in the House of Commons, is the candidate. I thought the point was well-taken that an awful lot of us believe we are the only ones who could get here on our own. We do not need anybody or party because they are a big problem more than they are a help. The reality is that most members do not get elected on their own name, recognition and reputation alone.

A lot of people, especially these days, do not have a particular allegiance to a political party. Rather they take it issue by issue, election by election. They will see what the issues are and the ones that affect them the most, determine how they feel about them and that often drives their decision, recognizing that citizens have the right to base their decision on anything they choose. That is one of the beauties of democracy and freedom.

Certainly a lot of people look at what the parties are offering. They might not even know the candidates or they do not care about the party label. Rather they care about one issue, they find the party that is closest to their heart on that issue and that is where they mark their ballots. That is fair enough.

Some folks have great allegiance to a political party. All members of all parties have active members in their riding associations. These are people who, with some exceptions, will likely vote for the candidate no matter who it is. They will vote for the candidate no matter what the platform is because they support the party.

All of that is entirely legitimate and acceptable.

Those people who vote for the candidates probably do not care much as to whether they are independents, or members of the parties they have run for, or have crossed the floor, or have re-rat, which has been brought back from history as former Prime Minister Churchill

### *Private Members' Business*

had said, and I am glad that is in there, or have re-rat over and over again. They really do not care.

However, those people who vote on platform or party are often devastated when the person they voted for crosses the floor. They told their friends to vote for that candidate. They put signs on the their front lawns in support of the candidate. They took all the heat from others who did not vote for that candidate during the election. They told people that was their candidate because of the platform or the party. Their whole reason for voting for that candidate is negated.

It is not a small matter. When I have stood for election for the four parliaments I have been elected to, I have stood on my own reputation and I am accountable for the decisions and the actions I have taken. However, make no mistake, in my riding a lot of my constituents voted for me because they liked our platform. As long as there was a candidate who would support the platform, they would be with that person. It is likewise for the party.

If we accept that is a legitimate, rationale, understandable and important reason for people to think about voting for a candidate, the platform or the party, if one then bails out, as did Mr. Emerson, which is the richest example, and I do not like to personalize, it takes one's breath away.

• (1850)

I do not think the writs were even returned. The ink was hardly dry on the ballots, and this man was already trotting across the floor to join another party. He believed that was the right thing to do, for him, but what about all those constituents who had a reason to believe that once elected, the member would actually go about enacting the platform and policies of the party that member belonged to?

By crossing the floor, in many cases a member is throwing away what he or she believed in to join a party that is 180 degrees in the other direction. How do we think constituents feel? They would sit there wondering what happened. Constituents went out and voted in good faith, as did all their friends, and they expected that the money they donated to that campaign and the sign that they posted were all to help get enough seats on a particular platform so that the way the constituent would have liked to have seen Canada shaped on a particular issue would have actually happened. Now that would be gone, because the member could just cross the floor in order to remain a cabinet minister. It really is problematic.

I have great respect for the other views. It is never easy to change things around here, and for good reason. We do not want to rush to change, but by the same token, we cannot be afraid of change. This is an evolving place, and the way we do business here does evolve.

It would seem to me that it is an appropriate restriction on members when they get to this place. Just as members cannot break the rules of the code of conduct or break the rules of the House—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member will have three minutes when this bill returns on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

[*Translation*]

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the situation is simple. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That committee has met a number of times, at first to discuss the Auditor General's reports, which the previous committee had begun to consider.

It is important that we reopen those studies. Fourteen of the Auditor General's chapters remain on hold. Seven of those chapters simply needed to be tabled by the committee in order to get a government response. Three other chapters simply needed to be adopted by the committee. The reports had been adopted by the committee and referred by the committee for a government response, but, for three of them, the committee still had work to do.

We moved a motion. We made it public even before the committee meeting began. The government decided the meeting would be held in camera. That is why we moved our motion in public. We also managed to talk about it a bit at the beginning.

I would like to specify, and this has been reported in the media, that the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, a member of the committee, said outside the closed doors that, with this election, much has changed.

• (1855)

[*English*]

He said that with this election, much has changed.

[*Translation*]

He also mentioned that he wanted to start again with a fresh slate.

[*English*]

He also mentioned that he wanted to "start with a fresh slate".

[*Translation*]

I want to point out that, in these reports, the Auditor General raised some very important points, notably the massive cost overruns in the purchase of military helicopters, the poor management of parliamentary building repairs and, a hot topic at the time, the charges against the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner.

Therefore, we introduced this motion. Then we went to an in camera session. I obviously cannot repeat what was said, but I can say that the motion was not passed. It is not in the minutes. If it had passed, it would be there.

I would like to point out that this is a question of transparency and accountability, and we are sorry that the committee decided to meet in camera. We voted against that. As I said, this question is fundamental to transparency and accountability.

We received a comment from a voter in Ottawa, Andrew MacLeod, who spoke out against these actions. I would like to read what he wrote:

[*English*]

I would like to register my disappointment and anger at your recent [decision] to go *in camera* and shelve a number of reports from the Auditor General's office. This is particularly disappointing given that the Conservative government came into power in 2006 upon a platform of transparency and accountability. I believed it then, which is why I was ready to vote Conservative at that time. However, here we are five years later, and it's apparent that you learned nothing from the experiences of the previous Liberal government.

It may be within your rights—

—he is still addressing Conservative members—

—as a committee to decide not to study these reports and to decide that the public should not know about their contents. But it is not right. We, as Canadian citizens, send you to Ottawa to make decisions for us and to spend our money wisely. We do not send you there to recklessly fritter away our hard-earned tax dollars—

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I will give the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board an opportunity to reply.

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I remind my colleague that we did not cause the spring 2011 election. It was the opposition parties that did. It was his party that did.

Our government wanted, at the time and to this day, to work hard for Canadians, not as the NDP continues to do in striving every day to advance endless cheap political games.

Last spring the NDP caused the election, which ground to a halt all of the work that was under way in Parliament, and that set us back. Right now in the public accounts committee, we are in the midst of a study into the spring 2011 Auditor General's report; in a few weeks, we will have to study the fall 2011 Auditor General's report. We have public accounts to study in a couple of weeks as well, and untold other business until the winter constituency break.

The public accounts committee, as well as others, was in the midst of or had completed studies on matters related to that Parliament, the previous Parliament, the 40th Parliament. With the election, much changed.

I congratulate the new chair of the public accounts committee as the first NDP chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I look across the way during committee to see several newly elected MPs on our side too. I do not think anyone would suggest that the current position of Parliament reflects the Parliament before the spring election.

I know it is difficult to believe, but we are now at the beginning of November. That gives us just over one month to address a lot of new material, so I just do not know how that member or his party could propose taking on all the work from the last Parliament as well. Where does it stop? With this new Parliament, should we revisit studies from the 39th Parliament as well?



*Adjournment Proceedings*

It is unfortunate but true that the spring 2011 election set us back. I, along with the government members of the committee, cannot simply rubber-stamp reports from the last Parliament. That is not fair to the subject matter and it is not fair to the new members on our committee.

While I think it is unfortunate, and I remind the members that this situation was not the government's doing, I do not believe we can begin to look backward when we have so much work ahead of us.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. I would like to point out that Parliament was adjourned and the work interrupted because of a motion of contempt, a first in Canadian history. The fact that we have a new Parliament does not mean that the chapters of the Auditor General's reports are no longer pertinent.

It is not as much work as he claims. The government will be asked to provide a response to only seven chapters. That will take five minutes. The reports on the other three chapters to be studied must be approved by the committee and returned to Parliament. We are talking about a half hour's work approximately. Three reports, including the one on the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, remain to be studied.

The fact that there is a new government does not make the problems go away. The problems identified by the Auditor General must be dealt with and that is why we raised the issue. If we want the Canadian public to have confidence in its institutions, these decisions should at least have been made in public and not behind closed doors.

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Madam Speaker, it is not fair to force new MPs to deal with reports of previous committees when they were not even around at the time. They did not even have the benefit of hearing witnesses, nor of discussing these reports in committee. These are simply not their reports.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, with new reports and new witnesses. We need to get going right away on these new reports to get work done for Canadians.

G8 SUMMIT

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise again in this chamber to raise an issue that is very important to my riding and to accountability in this country. This regards the current President of the Treasury Board, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, and the misallocation of nearly \$50 million of border infrastructure funds. These funds did not go into ridings like mine, where there is a significant thickening of the Canada-U.S. border which affects our economy, tourism and a whole series of very important things.

When I asked my question, the President of the Treasury Board's assistant got up to answer, as he has done so many times in the House of Commons. He gave a rebuttal but he did not expand on why there was no accountability. This is very important as we are talking about \$50 million.

I have a couple of examples of critical things which took place while the President of the Treasury Board was spending \$50 million on glow sticks, gazebos, arenas, a fake lake, different projects that really were not appropriate for the G8 and G20.

In Windsor, the federal government closed the administration and decision-making component of our customs and border facility for a few million dollars. Agents in Windsor have to communicate with an office 400 kilometres away, in Fort Erie. This is despite a government report that said if there was going to be consolidation of the Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and Windsor areas, it should be situated in Windsor because it is the busiest international border crossing between Canada and the United States. It is one of the busiest in the world. Agents are dealing with drug busts. They are dealing with issues regarding immigrants coming into Canada illegally. They are dealing with all kinds of problems on a daily basis. They now have to radio an office 400 kilometres away to get someone to make a decision about apprehending individuals.

The Conservatives often talk about being tough on crime. All kinds of handguns are getting into Canada through the U.S. border and it is unacceptable. It increases crime and tragedy in Canada.

Meanwhile, \$50 million was being spent 650 kilometres away from the Windsor-Detroit border on gazebos, fake lakes and a series of pet projects. At the same time the government was cancelling and closing the administration and supervisory capacity at the busiest border crossing, the Windsor-Detroit crossing. That is just not acceptable. We want answers.

If the government has money to allocate for those things, then surely it has enough money to protect the streets of Windsor and Essex County all the way along the 400-series highways to Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City. It does not make any sense to cut a few million dollars out of the budget and move operations 400 kilometres away just because the Conservatives had pet pork-barrel projects 650 kilometres in the other direction.

It is very important to recognize that these ideological cuts by the Conservatives are because they want to cut the department by 5% through attrition. The decision is not based on need or fact. In fact, that decision is counter to reports the government made.

I would like to have an answer as to why the government would redirect money from border infrastructure and border support systems to Muskoka. The money should have been put into Windsor to protect the streets of Ontario.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1905)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, there were no funds redirected from border security to the G8 fund. In fact, there was a top-up that was authorized by the House of Commons to the border infrastructure fund that ensured any dollars spent would not come out of existing allocations for border security. That should put the hon. member's mind at ease as a representative for the Windsor border region.

On the broader question of the G8 fund, it is clear that the House of Commons should have been made more aware of the details of the authorization that it voted for in the estimates leading up to the projects that were funded. That mistake was pointed out by the Auditor General. The government acknowledged it and has pledged to fix it for future allocations and expenditures.

The good news is that of the 32 projects identified and approved by Infrastructure Canada, all of them either came in on or under budget. We know where every single penny went. If members of the public want to know how those dollars were spent, they can go to the Infrastructure Canada website where everything is publicly listed.

The outcome is that we know where the money went. We know what it was spent on, and it all came in under budget.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Madam Speaker, what it really boils down to is for Canadians to figure out that \$50 million went to gazeboes, fake

lakes, and a series of projects that were supposed to be border funds. Perhaps the cut I am talking about in particular here was not a border infrastructure fund but surely the government could have reallocated those moneys for those operations when it was seeking to cut the Windsor decision-making process that keeps guns, drugs and illegal immigrants off the streets of Canada, but it did not do that. We would have had that money easily available for 50 years if it were not misappropriated.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Madam Speaker, once again, the funds were not redirected away from any border security initiative. They were authorized as additional or supplementary funds that allowed the projects to occur without diverting resources away from the important priorities, such as border security, with which the hon. member is so legitimately preoccupied.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly the notice is deemed withdrawn.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:10 p.m.)

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