



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 061 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, December 6, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 6, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

PETITIONS

PROSTITUTION

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present to the House 2,940 signatures regarding the Nordic model. The petition requests that Parliament amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services and criminalize the purchasing of sexual services, and also to provide support to those who desire to leave prostitution. The Nordic model actually targets the market, and victims would be helped on the prostitution or trafficking side.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have 6,062 signatures on the national action plan. The petitioners request that the government develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan to combat human trafficking.

In our last election it was announced that our government would put forth a national action plan to stop human trafficking. There are over 6,000 signatures to support that.

I want to thank the House for the opportunity to do this.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from all across Canada who call upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known and that more Canadians now die of asbestos than from all other occupational industrial causes combined. Yet, they point out, Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, spending millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these petitioners call upon the government to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for the asbestos workers and the communities they live in; to end all

government subsidies of asbestos, both in Canada and abroad; and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 185, 188 and 189 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

[Text]

Question No. 185—**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area (PNCIMA): (a) what are the reasons for the government's withdrawal from the funding agreement; (b) given the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' budget cuts, will there be any future funding allotted for PNCIMA and, if so, where will it come from; (c) what are the tangible successes from the government's higher-level approach in Large Ocean Management Areas (LOMAs) such as the Eastern Scotian Shelf Integrated Management (ESSIM) and Beaufort; (d) how have communities, economies, and the environment benefitted from LOMAs, (i) how have they been damaged; (e) what are the government's objectives in its higher-level approach to integrated ocean management, (i) what are the indicators tracked to know whether objectives are being met; (f) what are the specific cases around the world from which the government is drawing experience and knowledge in terms of oceans management; (g) what are the specific details of the plan to wind down LOMAs pilot projects and begin applying integrated oceans management approaches as part of regular operation and what does this mean for each of Canada's LOMAs; and (h) how does the government meet its Integrated Management collaboration objective set out in the Canada's Oceans Strategy and the Policy and Operational Framework for Integrated Management of Estuarine, Coastal and Marine Environments in Canada without any funding for the collaborative process, (i) if there is funding for the collaborative process, where will it come from, (ii) how will the government meet its obligations under the Policy and Operational Framework for Integrated Management of Estuarine, Coastal and Marine Environments in Canada, (iii) how will the government fulfill Canada's Oceans Strategy, (iv) will Canada's Oceans Strategy be discarded or changed?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders*Question No. 188—**Mr. Scott Andrews:**

With regard to a Federal Government Loan guarantee for the Muskrat Falls project in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador: (a) what correspondence has been exchanged and agreements and/or understandings signed between the Department of Finance and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador pertaining to this project; (b) what is the anticipated date of signing of the official approval documents for the loan guarantee; and (c) if the official approval documents have not been signed, what is the reason for the delay and what is the anticipated date for official approval?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 189—**Hon. Hedy Fry:**

With regard to the case of PHS Community Services Society v. Attorney General of Canada: (a) how much was spent by the government in this case before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department, (iii) type of expense; (b) how much was spent by the government on its appeal to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia of the British Columbia Supreme Court's decision in this case, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department, (iii) type of expense; and (c) how much was spent by the government on its appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada of the Court of Appeal for British Columbia's decision in this case, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department, (iii) type of expense?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are eight motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-20.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 3 to 6 will not be selected by the Chair, because they could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at report stage.

Motions Nos. 1, 2, 7 and 8 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put motions Nos. 1, 2, 7 and 8 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

• (1010)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-20 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 1 speaks to deleting clause 1, which states:

This Act may be cited as the Fair Representation Act.

Notwithstanding that after three bills we finally have a better bill in the House, we contend that we still do not believe it truly represents fair representation in the context of Canada, certainly from a historical perspective and, most importantly, from a nation building process going forward.

The House will recall that at second reading we made the argument that the bill needed to be looked at in a great deal of detail. We had hoped that at committee we would have a legitimate give and take as I have experienced on that committee as opposed to what we see at some committees in certain circumstances where the government marches in with its majority rule and all but dictates what the committees will do.

As I do not have a lot of time this morning, I will say that I was very pleased that the process was a continuation of the fair give and take that occurs at that committee when dealing with matters of national importance vis-à-vis seats like this and when talking about changes to our election laws, and issues that go way beyond any partisan aspect that any of us might bring.

The cornerstone of our concern is that the government is missing a great opportunity to strengthen the bounds of our country. We believe that when the motion passed almost unanimously in this House stating that the House recognizes the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada that it meant something. I was privileged to be here for that vote. I felt very proud on that day because I thought in one small way we were strengthening this nation. As everyone knows, that is not always the easiest job in this country. We have stresses, as do many nations around the world. I would just point out parenthetically that certainly over the last couple of decades many nations have looked to us as a model in terms of how we deal with those stresses.

Government Orders

We in the NDP as the official opposition thought that was an important moment, that it meant something, and that from that we would continue to send the message to the Québécois that their fear and concern of the assimilation over time of their unique culture, which is not only unique in Canada but in North America, would be strong enough and secure enough that they could have pride for both their culture as well as being Canadians.

We in the official opposition felt that building on that was an opportunity that unfortunately the government missed in Bill C-20 because we believe that the relative strength and political weight that Quebec had at the time that motion passed should reflect the basis of the seats that it had going forward, which would be 24.35%.

The National Assembly in Quebec has chosen 25%. The Charlottetown accord had 25%. I would remind members that the 25% in the Charlottetown accord was not accepted in the referendum. It was signed on by the prime minister of the day, a Conservative, and every province and territory in the nation. The concept of there being a respectful recognition of the importance of that political weight, as it is tied to the Québécois as a nation, now recognized by this House as a part of the united Canada, makes all the sense in the world.

●(1015)

We could have gone with 25%. It would have been a lot easier. The Bloc was there as was the National Assembly, but quite frankly, tying it to the Charlottetown accord, that did not succeed, did not seem like the best idea.

Going with that vote, which took us to 24.35%, we felt would stand the test of time, going forward, so that 50, 100, 200 years from now, when our successors are standing here talking about the success of Canada, one of the things we could point to was the respect that we paid to that unique nation within Canada.

Unfortunately, the government has chosen not to, and the Liberals were never really clear on that part of it. They have their own idea and I will let them talk about that.

An hon. member: We are very clear, you are not.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I apologize if I have offended in some way. I did not mean to. I retract anything that came across as an insult. It was not meant to be. Anyway, that is enough on the Liberals.

What we still have some concerns about, going forward, is the issue of Ontario still being—

An hon. member: The NDP has no principles on this.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, do I still have the floor?

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask for a little order, please. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I appreciate that.

The fact that Ontario, B.C. and Alberta, for that matter, are still under-represented means this is not a perfect resolution to the matter.

We have taken a position that more work could have been done to get us to where we need to go. However, one of the things that I committed to on behalf of our caucus at second reading was that unless we had some reason, which was not evident then, we would not be obstructionist about this because it does deal with adding seats. I will acknowledge it does take us a long way from where we were, remembering and bearing in mind that it took the government three bills to do it.

The first bill put the shaft to Ontario and still left Quebec out. The government solved the Ontario problem in some way in the second bill, but still left Quebec out. Because of the pressure of the official opposition, there is now a formula in place that at least brings three new seats to Quebec which were not there before.

While we acknowledge that this is an improvement, there is not a lot of glory that the government can take in how it did this. We do find it difficult to be 100% supportive at this stage because we have still left out this important element.

While I am on my feet, may I also just extend thanks and an acknowledgement to the minister, personally, and his staff, who have been excellent to work with. I was very pleased with the forthrightness of his answers before committee. Credit where credit is due, the minister has been very honourable on this file and it has been a pleasure to work with him. Even though we disagree on some aspects, it has been a joy to work with him at a parliamentary level and I respect the way he approached this and thank him very much for that.

To wrap up, we have honoured our commitments at second reading to hold the government to account, to look at this in great detail at committee. I would mention that we offered all the provinces and territories an opportunity to comment. They did not, which says what it says, but at the end of the day, while we acknowledge it is an improvement, and we are appreciative and glad that there are seats where they are needed that are being added, it is still not ideal, but most important, we are missing that nation building aspect.

We believe it is a missed opportunity to ensure that going forward, the people of Quebec feel comfortable that indeed Canada is their home and their place in all of North America, and therefore they can benefit from their culture, but also benefit from what it means to be a Canadian and part of this great country.

In conclusion, our position is based on ultimately that lack of what needs to be here as opposed to any real dying angst on the bill, recognizing that it could always be better. We look forward to improvements as we go forward, but at this point we still feel that aspect is missing and that would make for a better bill. We will stand on that point all the way through because we believe it is important enough in terms of Canada's future.

●(1020)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague does good work on the procedure and House affairs committee. He rightly points out that we have had great discussions there with lots of input from a number of witnesses. We are moving ahead.

Government Orders

At one point in his speech today he said, sort of in a derogatory sense, that we on this side have our own ideas. Well, he is right that we have our own ideas. Our idea is to establish the principle of fair representation in this country.

For far too long we have had provinces that have been badly under-represented. It is to the point where a vote in one province is actually worth only one-quarter of a vote in another.

We acknowledge that this idea is not perfect, but it moves us closer to fair representation.

The NDP position would guarantee Quebec's overrepresentation and add 10 more seats. This would hurt our fast-growing provinces. Our formula says that Quebec is 23% of the population and it would have 23% of the seats. That is fair. I would ask my colleague how he could not call this the fair representation act, when in fact we are moving so close to actual representation by population?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, my colleague's personal remarks are much appreciated and I would reflect them back on his work on the procedures and House affairs committee. I agree that it is a good committee.

This may sound like something Bill Clinton would say, but what is the meaning of fair?

In the Canadian context, fair would be respecting P.E.I.'s right to be overwhelmingly overrepresented and that is deemed to be sort of fair, because those are the rules. It is not purely fair.

In that context, when we look at Quebec's historical significance in the creation of Canada and in the ongoing strength of Canada, we think that fair would be acknowledging the 24.35% that Quebec had at the time when we passed a motion in this House recognizing that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada. I believe the hon. member was in the chamber just as I was. That either means something or it does not. To us, it means something.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, why is it that the member's party did not say that the motion about a Quebec nation meant that its representation in the House of Commons would be frozen forever?

Second, as a proud Quebecker, I am proud to be part of a country where the principle of proportional representation of provinces is entrenched in the Constitution. I want my national assembly of Quebec to be respected. If this House wants to contradict this principle, then we would need the support of seven provinces at least, including the province of Quebec. I want that to be respected.

Third, I think the NDP is a national party and therefore needs to provide numbers for its proposal. How many seats would the House have?

The Conservatives would balloon the House to 338 seats. The Liberals would keep the House at 308 seats. The Green Party provided numbers. Why is the NDP unable to provide numbers?

I think I know why. With all the rules in the NDP proposal, we would easily end up with a House of more than 350 seats and the NDP is embarrassed by that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, that was a lot in that question.

First of all, in terms of the Liberal proposal, I look forward to it being brought forward as an opposition day motion where we can go through it in great detail. I look forward to seeing it as part of the Liberals' election platform in terms of what they would offer if they were to be the government after the next election.

Politics is the art of the possible. What can be done right now is to take a significant step forward in getting to representation by population. I remind the member that we do not have less representation by population by any stretch of the imagination. The notion of asymmetry, whether the member agrees with it or not, is like whether one agrees with gravity or not. It is there. If we were starting with a blank slate and creating a new country, fair enough, but that is not where we are right now.

While the member is enjoying heckling me, I tried very carefully to respectfully listen to what he had to say. I apologized when I thought I had offended him. Clearly he does not want a dialogue and that is disappointing.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-20, not because the bill is worthwhile, but because, once again, the Bloc Québécois is standing up for the interests of Quebec in the House.

With this bill, the Conservative government is trying to diminish Quebec's political weight. In Quebec, there is a consensus, and even the Quebec National Assembly unanimously agrees that it is against this bill. Today, we are presenting amendments to delete clause 2, in which the calculation diminishes Quebec's political weight.

What is ironic about the whole situation is that not so long ago, the Conservative Party abolished political party financing in order to save lots of money—about \$27 million—or so it said. The Conservatives addressed the issue of political party financing in a completely demagogic way, although the funds from voters were distributed based on votes. No one in Alberta saw their money go to the Bloc Québécois, for instance. Of course, there are no Bloc Québécois candidates in Alberta. The money came from the people who had voted for the political parties in question.

Furthermore, under Bill C-20, so with 30 more MPs, millions of dollars will have to be spent. Consider an average of about \$300,000 per member just for the member's office budget and salary for a year. Thus, no money will be saved by abolishing political party financing if we increase the number of members in the House.

Government Orders

However, I do not wish to focus only on the economic argument here. Once it passes, this bill will decrease Quebec's political weight from 24.35% to 23.08% in the next election. Quebec's special status will disappear completely. The member who just spoke talked about the motion that was passed in 2006 regarding the Quebec nation, but it no longer has any meaning, because the government is using statistics to say that the percentage of members from a given province will be based on the percentage of the population. This does not apply to Prince Edward Island, of course, which has four MPs, because the Conservatives are invoking the senatorial clause. I want to reiterate that the goal of my speech is not to take members away from any other provinces. I simply wish to point out that special status does exist and that Quebec's special status is being completely disregarded with this bill.

Earlier I was talking about the National Assembly of Quebec, which has unanimously adopted more than one motion calling on the federal government renounce the tabling of any bill that would reduce Quebec's political weight. I understand that the federal government does not want to listen to the concerns of any party from Quebec, but I have trouble understanding why it does not even listen to the federalist parties. When the current government arrived in 2006, it said it wanted open federalism. That should have pleased the federalist parties from Quebec, including the Liberal Party of Quebec, which currently forms the government. However, we see that in matters of justice and a number of other files in which the Government of Quebec disagrees with the federal government, the arguments of the Conservative government and its ideology are what matter. Open federalism is non-existent in the House.

Speaking of the Liberal Party of Quebec, I will quote Yvon Vallières, the new Canadian intergovernmental affairs minister, who is an MNA in my riding. This is what he had to say about the new bill that proposes adding three more MPs for Quebec: "It is not enough...We had three unanimous motions on this in the National Assembly. There is an exceptional consensus; Quebec does not want its political weight to be diminished".

Quebec's federalist government could not be any clearer: Quebec does not want this type of change.

We are going to strongly oppose Bill C-20. To the Bloc Québécois, Quebec is a nation and its political weight in the House of Commons should therefore receive special protection. Bill C-20, as I was saying, introduces a formula under which Quebec will lose its influence and its tools for defending its language, culture and distinctiveness.

• (1030)

This is just the start. In fact, the 24.35% is being reduced to 23.08% even though, I should note, Quebec currently represents 23.14% of the population. In the next election and subsequent elections, if other provinces' proportion of the population increases, that number could possibly be reduced and reduced again, and it might even go below 20% in this House. Consequently, we are opposed to this formula for the simple and good reason that the Quebec nation, one of the two founding nations of Canada, has been left out and the government is simply looking at the statistics and, to a certain extent, saying that these calculations will apply only to Quebec. In fact, as I just said, this is not a factor for Prince Edward

Island. Its proportional weight will be calculated according to demographics and its political weight will not be factored in.

At present, Quebec has 24.35% of the seats in this House. I would remind you that in October 2009, the National Assembly of Quebec adopted a first unanimous motion stating:

That the National Assembly demand that the Federal Government renounce the tabling of any bill whose consequence would be to reduce the weight of Quebec in the House of Commons.

Based on the July 2011 Statistics Canada population estimates, Quebec would have only 23.08% of the seats in the House of Commons whereas it represents 23.14% of the Canadian population. When it spoke for the first time about Bill C-20 and to fudge the numbers presented in its press release, the government omitted the territories. It is playing a bit with the numbers, but that does not make a huge difference to us in any event. What we must do is keep the percentage at 24.35%.

The second change—and this will probably take me to my conclusion—would be the government's decision to use preliminary data. We know that the government wants to rush everything in this House. It needs time allocation motions for almost all of its bills. Here, it is using preliminary data to say that, in terms of statistics, there will be a certain percentage, when the real purpose of the Conservatives' amendments is to ensure that the additional seats and therefore the readjustment of electoral ridings will take effect with the next election, replacing the existing process.

Two types of amendments are made to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. First, Bill C-20 reduces almost all of the time periods regarding the readjustment process for electoral ridings. So instead of waiting for certified census results, the government will set a maximum time period of six months to proceed, from the start of the census, even if the figures have not yet been released by the chief statistician. The government also wants the minimum notice period for public hearings to be reduced by half, from 60 days to 30 days, giving interested parties less time to learn about the consultations and adequately prepare.

Another amendment would complicate the public's participation in the consultations. The time period for asking to submit comments in writing has been reduced by 30 days. The electoral boundaries commissions will have two months less to produce their reports. Finally, whereas before, amendments, once completed, came into force one year after their proclamation, now the time period has been reduced to just seven months.

This is how this government does things. The government plans to use estimates to readjust the ridings rather than the real population figures. The Chief Electoral Officer will have to use the estimates made by the chief statistician to calculate the number of ridings to attribute to Quebec and to each of the provinces, rather than certified results. As I was saying, this is how this government does things.

Government Orders

I will wrap up now. The purpose of the second amendment is to abolish this way of doing things. Will it buy us some time? I do not know, but one thing is for certain: the debate will continue. This issue has already been debated in Quebec. In Quebec, the government and the opposition parties, whether federalist or sovereignist, unanimously agree that the political weight of the Quebec nation here in the House of Commons must not be diminished. That is what the Conservative government is trying to do against all odds. It is trying to ensure that Quebec loses its weight and its voice here for purely statistical reasons.

• (1035)

Given the exceptions granted to other provinces, there is a double standard in the House. I do not know why the 2006 motion is not being honoured.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to point out that the fair representation act would give Quebec 23% of the seats in the House and it currently has 23% of the population. That seems fair to me.

My colleague says that we are using preliminary data. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are using the population estimates. The chief statistician of Statistics Canada, Mr. Wayne Smith, appeared before the procedure and House affairs committee and confirmed that the population estimates were a much more accurate way of counting the number of Canadians for the purpose of determining the number of seats required.

The other thing my colleague commented on is the rush. The Electoral Boundaries Commission is obligated by law to begin its work in February. When the chief statistician provides the numbers to the Chief Electoral Officer, the Electoral Boundaries Commission goes into effect on February 8. That means that, if we do not have something before the Chief Electoral Officer before that time, the commission will start its work based on the current formula and then, possibly six months or a year later, that process may need to be started all over again, which is an unbelievable cost and delay. It is important that we move ahead.

Does my colleague think that the additional cost and frustration that the Electoral Boundaries Commission would experience by delaying this bill unduly would actually be in the best interests of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Speaker, I understand that the member is defending the best interests of Canadians, as he says. I am here to defend the best interests of Quebec. As I said in my speech, and I did not make this up, Quebec has more than once introduced motions unanimously calling on this Parliament not to change Quebec's political weight here in the House.

There were times when Quebec was guaranteed a political weight in the House of Commons of about 25%. There are 308 members in the House. The Quebec National Assembly is calling on the government not to reduce Quebec's existing weight, which is 24.35%. My colleague can bring out all the arguments he wants, valid or not, but one thing is certain: Quebec is not being respected in this bill.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's speech. I am sure he knows that the NDP introduced a private member's bill that would make it a fundamental principle that Quebec have 24.35% of the seats in any readjustment of seats in the House of Commons.

Does the member think that the bill we have proposed is a step in the right direction and will he support it when it is voted on in the House?

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Speaker, yes, we plan to support this bill. Furthermore, when it was introduced, the Bloc Québécois's position was already well known in that regard. Unlike my colleague, I am in favour of complete representation in Quebec, that is, at the National Assembly; I want Quebec to become a sovereign country. Until then, in this House, we will support every measure that gives Quebec its proper place. The National Assembly has spoken unanimously, which is significant. We often say that here, but with good reason. The elected members of the Quebec National Assembly represent their population and when we bring their voices here, it means something. We represent—

• (1040)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for a brief question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, why is the member asking the Parliament of Canada to ignore the constitutional prerogatives of the provinces, including Quebec? We do not have the power to take it upon ourselves to contradict the principle of proportional representation of the provinces. We must do the same thing regarding the senatorial clause for any province—in this case, Quebec. That must be in the Constitution. We must respect the Constitution and the provinces.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska has 30 seconds.

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Speaker, 30 seconds is not long enough to debate the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville; it could take a lot longer than that. People need to understand that what is being ignored here is Quebec's political weight. I know many arguments have been raised regarding demographic weight and that many constitutional changes have been made since 1867. But one thing is certain: Quebec will always demand that its political weight be respected, and I am not talking about demographic weight. Bill C-20 scorns Quebec's political weight.

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to once again speak to this House about the need for fairness and representation for all Canadians. It has been our government's long-standing commitment to Canadians that we would address the growing unfairness and representation in the House of Commons.

As I have detailed before, during the last election we made three distinct promises to Canadians. Those promises ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair for all provinces.

Government Orders

First, we would increase the number of seats now and into the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, we would protect the number of seats for smaller and slower growing provinces. Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population. We campaigned on these promises and Canadians voted in a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government. We received a strong mandate and, with this bill, we would be moving this House of Commons toward fair representation for all Canadians.

We promised that to Canadians. They voted for us. So, we are delivering on our commitments.

Bill C-20, the fair representation act, would provide fair representation for Canadians living in our fastest growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Canadians in those provinces have long been seriously under-represented. The current formula maintains the serious under-representation and, in fact, makes it worse as time goes on. Well over 60% of Canada's population is and would continue to be seriously and increasingly under-represented under the current formula. This is not acceptable and it is not fair. Bill C-20 would address this problem.

The bill would also move all provinces closer to representation by population. We believe that is fair. Our bill would also keep each of our promises to Canadians, which, again, is fair. The three large, faster growing and under-represented provinces would move closer to fair representation and would be fairly treated in the future. Again, this is fair. In this way, the foundational principle of representation by population would be much better respected and maintained now and in the future. That is fair.

Quebec would have 23% of the population and it would have 23% of the seats in this House. That is fair.

The smaller and slower-growing overrepresented provinces would have their seat counts continue to be protected. They would also move closer to fair representation. That is fair.

Members may notice a theme developing in my remarks. We have called our bill the "fair representation act". We believe that this is a very fair way of describing it. We believe that its process and effects would be fair to all provinces and would restore fairness, and that the majority of Canadians would continue to be unfairly treated by the current formula if it were allowed to continue. It would fix problems that need fixing and would strike a fair balance between the sometimes competing and contradicting principles that we must consider.

Twenty-five years ago, our predecessors in this place faced a similar choice. When the current formula was put in place, the balance between competing principles was tipped toward consideration, which is not a principle at all. That choice has had serious negative effects for more than those 60% of Canadians I just mentioned.

Our predecessors in this place decided to place a priority on the consideration of the size of the House. They decided not to allow the size of the House of Commons to grow roughly in line with the population growth. They decided against an important representation principle, and the people of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta have paid a price because of that. They are not fairly

represented and their votes count for much less than the votes of Canadians in other provinces. That unfairness would only continue to grow without these changes.

We are re-balancing the formula by restoring fairness and prioritizing principles, the principles of representation by population, of fairness for all provinces and of protection against unreasonable loss of weight in the House. This rebalancing is necessary and it is important.

We need to move quickly to ensure that these important changes are in place before the next election to ensure that Canadians will be fairly represented in their next voting opportunity and that their votes, to the greatest extent possibly, will carry equal weight.

• (1045)

This need is particularly acute for Canadians in our three faster growing provinces because many of those under-represented Canadians are new Canadians and visible minorities. Canada's new and visible minority population is increasing largely through immigration and these Canadians tend to settle in our fastest growing communities in our fastest growing provinces. When we combine this situation with the current formula that increasingly underrepresents these provinces and the result inadvertently is that new Canadians and visible minorities are even more under-represented than the average Canadian.

This further undermines the principle of representation by population in our country. This is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution. We are moving quickly to meet the deadlines we face in the new year to best facilitate the process that will bring these changes in place for all Canadians.

The Chief Electoral Officer told the procedure and House affairs committee that passing this bill before next year is the best scenario. I encourage members opposite to consider his advice and testimony at committee.

With the fair representation act, our Conservative government is delivering a principled, reasonable and fair solution. The bill better respects and maintains representation by population. The bill would ensure the effective and proportionate representation of all provinces, especially for smaller and slower growing provinces. The bill provides a principled formula with a national application that is fair for all provinces. The bill would ensure that the vote of each Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, would have equal weight. The fair representation act delivers on all of these points and delivers on our government's long-standing commitments to Canadians, and it does so fairly.

Try as they might, and I am sure they will try this week as we debate this bill, the opposition members with their proposals are not able to make these claims. I am proud to be the minister responsible for moving these fair changes forward and to be able to support a bill that treats all Canadians fairly.

Government Orders

I look forward to the continuing debate of the bill today and later this week. I thank my hon. colleagues in advance for their contributions to this important debate.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would remind the minister that, while he is all puffed up with pride about the bill, it took three tries and shafting a number of other provinces before we finally came to something that really was close to fair.

Given that it was a Conservative prime minister who signed and promoted the Charlottetown accord that recognized that Quebec should maintain 25% of the seats in the House, and given that it is the current Conservative Prime Minister who moved the motion that recognized the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada, first, would the minister not agree that fairness would dictate that the motion's intent would be reflected in this bill? Secondly, if it does not mean that, exactly what did that motion mean to Conservatives?

• (1050)

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the fact is that this formula is a principled formula. It is very clear in how it is applied to the entire country. It treats every province fairly. In speaking about Quebec, the fact is that after this formula is applied, Quebec will have 23% of the population and will have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons. That is fair. It is seen as fair by all Canadians because this formula treats all provinces fairly and actually brings every province closer to representation by population. We believe that is fair.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to explain to the minister why I disagree with him when he said that we must be proud of this bill. At a time when his government is slashing and cutting so many essential services to Canadians, he knows very well that his constituents do not want more politicians, which is, by the way, why the Conservatives are rushing this bill through. They know that Canadians are very upset by the idea that we will have more politicians.

The minister challenged me to prove that it was possible to achieve the same representation by provinces keeping the House at 308 seats and I delivered. Therefore, why does he not agree with the amendments of the Liberals? We would then have fair representation but we would respect the taxpayers at the same time.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, Canadians want to the greatest extent possible that every Canadian vote should carry equal weight.

We will not do what the Liberals are doing, which is to pick winners and losers. They should be very clear about their intentions. The Liberals would take three seats away from Quebec, two seats away from Manitoba, two seats from Saskatchewan, and one seat from Nova Scotia. They would take seats away from Newfoundland and Labrador. That is unfair to those slower growing provinces.

We made a commitment that we would treat every province fairly, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his hard work, because I come from one of the provinces that have been under-represented.

There is a strong concern with my constituents about what would happen if this bill did not get through. We have seen the tactics from the opposition. We have seen the opposition do everything possible to slow down and obstruct the bill. The opposition is doing whatever it can so that Canadians do not have that fair representation where a vote means a vote no matter where they live in Canada.

Would the minister take the time to explain what would happen if this bill did not get through promptly? Could he contrast the differences between the NDP proposition and the Liberal proposition compared to ours?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, what would happen if we did not pass this bill is that there would be a duplication of process. Whether or not we do anything, the process will begin next year. The redistribution will begin. We need to pass this formula and put it in place before that begins. Otherwise, that process will begin. At some point this formula will pass, and then we will have to adjust it again. If we do not pass this formula, the fastest growing provinces will continue to be under-represented, which is just unfair. The member's province of Ontario, my province of Alberta, and British Columbia will continue to be under-represented, and that is unfair.

With respect to the difference between the formulas, it is hard to describe the NDP formula because the NDP is not telling us what its numbers are. The NDP is not being clear to Canadians about the numbers. That party talks about all these different ideas, but what are the numbers and how many seats are the NDP proposing? The NDP is not being clear about that.

The Liberal plan is to pick winners and losers. We will not do that.

The difference between the opposition's proposals and ours is that ours is fair for all provinces.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are no winners and losers; there are only winners with the Liberal plan: Canadians.

[*Translation*]

This bill is so preposterous that the House must reject it. That is what I am going to show in the time that I have been given.

The government is proposing to needlessly increase the number of seats in the House by 30—from 308 to 338—but it has not made any mention of the costs associated with these new seats. It is not necessary to expand the House of Commons in this manner because each province could be given equal representation without changing the current number of seats. That is what the Liberal plan proposes. It keeps the number of seats in the House at 308 while offering each province the same proportion of seats—within a few decimal points—as the Conservative plan, which expands the House to 338 seats.

The Liberal plan has been praised everywhere, except by certain politicians. It is only politicians who want more politicians. Canadians are concerned about the additional costs of the expanded House that the Conservatives are preparing to vote in. The government is sending the wrong message. It wants to increase the number of politicians but, meanwhile, it is making cuts to the public service and to services for the public. That does not make any sense. Parliament must set an example in these times of fiscal restraint.

Government Orders

•(1055)

[English]

Here is a non-exhaustive list of cuts effected by the Conservative government to services to Canadians: \$226 million from Veterans Affairs support services; 700 scientists from Environment Canada; 600 employment insurance processing staff from Service Canada; 92 auditors from Audit Service Canada; 725 people from Statistics Canada; drastic cutbacks to Environment Canada's ozone monitoring network; drastic cutbacks to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency; closure of St. John's and Quebec City maritime search and rescue centres; and so on.

There are cuts, cuts everywhere, except when it comes to politicians. Oh no, then the government wants to protect their stake. The cuts and sacrifices are for Canadians, but for the politicians it is leisure and luxury. That is the Conservatives' way. There is a record-size cabinet, record-size PMO, and now there would be a record-size House of Commons. But what can we expect from a Prime Minister who protects one of his ministers caught using a rescue helicopter as his private limousine?

[Translation]

These are politicians who are serving themselves rather than serving the public. Canadians do not appreciate that.

Let us look at what is happening elsewhere. In Great Britain, the Conservative government is forcing the people to make difficult sacrifices, but it is also setting the example by decreasing representation by 10%.

[English]

Here is a quote:

In these times of spending restraint and operational review, the members of this House should not be considered exempt....The number of electoral districts in our province will be reduced....

This quote comes from the recent throne speech of the Government of New Brunswick, another Conservative government. It shows that decency is not a matter of partisan politics; it is a matter of ethics, of respect for the citizens who gave us the privilege to serve them instead of serving ourselves.

Here is another quote:

A smaller House offers considerable cost savings, less government and fewer politicians—and clearly this is what Canadians want.

Canadians are already among the most overrepresented people in the world.

That was said on November 25, 1994 by a young member of Parliament who is now the Prime Minister of Canada.

There is no consistency. There is no respect for Canadians.

[Translation]

The government also has no respect for Parliament. Why does the government want to add more members when it thinks so little of Parliament?

[English]

Why does the government want more MPs when it is using time allocation as never before, cutting off debate, deflecting questions, bullying the House to force through its bills as never before?

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, you should have been in committee when we heard from experts who, for the most part, told us that we must keep the number of seats in the House at 308, while making the House more equitable for all the provinces.

The Conservative members have demonstrated appalling corporatism and, unfortunately, the members of the NDP have joined in their whining, saying that they are overworked, that they cannot go on and that they need more members to do the work. That is untrue. Three hundred and eight members can do the work for Canadians. We do not need to add 30 more members that Canadians do not even want. Therefore, we must say no to this bill to bloat Parliament.

[English]

We must say no to this bill that would add more politicians.

[Translation]

Instead, members should support the Liberal plan, the amendments proposed by the Liberal caucus, which call for a House that provides fair representation for all the provinces but stays at its current size. Let us show Canadians that we are not out to serve ourselves. We are here to serve Canadians and Canada.

•(1100)

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we make no apologies for addressing the under-representation of ordinary Canadians. The Liberals do not support fair representation for all Canadians, yet they do support the direct taxpayer subsidy to political parties at \$30 million a year. It is disappointing that the Liberals would rather invest in political parties. They are more concerned about the state of their finances than they are about ordinary Canadians.

Why do the Liberals support the direct taxpayer subsidy to political parties at \$30 million a year and not fair representation for all Canadians?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that the minister does not want to discuss the bill. He wants to switch to another debate, which I would be pleased to do. We have a bill on the table. The minister has said he is very proud of the bill. However, he is unable to discuss the bill.

He said that we are creating winners and losers. When it is time to allocate seats, the House should be kept at a reasonable number but the minister wants to inflate the House with 30 more seats. He does not want to debate the issue because he is embarrassed by it.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are days when I think that adding more seats in the House of Commons would be a lot like putting more deck chairs on the *Titanic*.

Government Orders

The real issue is not representation by geography but representation by party. As I am sure the member knows, the party across the way received 39% of the vote, has over 55% of the seats and pretty much 100% of the power.

Could the member tell me if the Liberal Party is ready to discuss getting behind true proportional representation based on parties?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, I am ready to have this discussion, but my question is why both the minister and my colleague from the NDP are afraid to discuss their plans about inflating the number of seats in the House. Again, I would ask one of my colleagues in the NDP to please table that party's numbers and tell us what the NDP's plan is for how many seats there would be in the House and how much it would cost Canadians. I tried and even with 350 seats, we still would not achieve fair representation for provinces without the rules that the NDP wants to put in its plan, one of which is unconstitutional by the way, and I want to respect the Constitution of my country.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my friend and colleague is a bit of a dreamer if he thinks we are going to get numbers from the government. We see the Conservatives going ahead with the construction of super-jails with no costing. We see them going ahead with the F-35, which is a deal that is falling apart at the wings and they still do not know the costs going forward. To think that they would be able to attach some numbers to a piece of legislation like this bill is a little hopeful.

Before I get to my question, what is more shameful is we have a piece of legislation like this bill and the minister gets up and blah-blabs about election spending. Could my colleague explain and do the math on it? Under our plan we would lose a seat in Nova Scotia but still the proportional representation in Nova Scotia is higher if we lose one seat in the current structure—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, my colleague is right that with the Liberal plan Nova Scotia and Quebec would have the same representation as with the Conservative plan. However, Nova Scotians and Quebecers would be winners as Canadians because they would have a House that would be reasonable. All of them know that.

The Conservatives know that in their constituencies people are upset by the fact that they are increasing the number of seats when it is not needed, when they are slashing and cutting services to Canadians. They are providing a bad example to Canadians when they have the duty to show a good example, the right example at a time when we need to make so many sacrifices. Why serve ourselves instead of serving Canadians? That is the question.

• (1105)

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak about fairness in House of Commons representation. Addressing the significant and increasing under-representation of Canadians living in the fastest-growing provinces is a long-standing commitment of our government and of our party.

First, though, I note that our government's top priority is the economy. We are focused on the mandate Canadians gave us to

secure our economic recovery through a low-tax plan for jobs and economic growth. In addition to securing our economy recovery, our Conservative government has a strong, stable national majority government and a mandate to strengthen and enhance Canada's democratic institutions. In the last election and in previous ones, our party committed to Canadians that we would address representation fairness.

I would first like to outline the problem we need to fix, which is the primary motive of Bill C-20. This problem has been mentioned at length during debate, but I believe it warrants underlining again.

The representation of the provinces in the House of Commons is readjusted every 10 years using a formula established in section 51 of the Constitution Act of 1867. The current formula dates to 1985 and was designed to provide modest increases to the size of the House.

While the 1985 formula has been successful in limiting the size of the House of Commons, it has created a representation gap for the fastest-growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. It has prevented these provinces from receiving a share of seats that is more in line with their relative share of the population.

To illustrate the significance of this representation gap, we look no further than my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton in Ontario. Bramalea—Gore—Malton is home to the fourth-largest number of Canadians in any riding, at 152,698 people. I note this population figure was as of the 2006 census, over five years ago.

During the last election, we made three 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 the population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta; 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 with the fair representation act. Bill C-20 moves every single Canadian closer to representation by population.

The size of my riding, with over 152,000 people, compares to an average national riding size of fewer than 113,000. Only four provinces even have an average riding size of over 90,000 people. Ontario is one of those provinces. The Greater Toronto Area has nine of the 10 largest ridings in the country. All of these ridings have over 130,000 people. The largest in Canada, Brampton West, has 170,000 people.

Government Orders

My riding and many others in the Greater Toronto Area are home to a significant and increasing number of new Canadians. New Canadians, who tend to settle in large cities with large riding populations, are among the most significantly under-represented Canadians in this country, simply by virtue of living in fast-growing communities in fast-growing provinces.

Is it fair that new Canadians, many of whom come to our country to enjoy the democratic freedoms denied to so many millions of people around the world, and indeed all Canadians living in regions like Bramalea—Gore—Malton, have a democratic voice that is significantly diminished merely because of where their home is located? We believe it is not fair.

Every Canadian's vote, to the greatest extent possible, should carry equal weight. If we are left with the status quo, the representation gap experienced by Canadians living in fast-growing provinces, and in particular Canadians living in regions like mine, will only grow more prominent. This is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution.

• (1110)

Bill C-20 proposes the best formula to address the representation gap without pitting Canadians against Canadians and regions against regions. This formula is a principled and reasonable update designed to bring Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta closer to representation by population, while at the same time maintaining the seat counts of low-growth provinces and ensuring that Quebec maintains representation directly proportionate to its population. In fact, the fair representation act brings every single Canadian closer to representation by population.

The practical result of applying the new formula will add an additional 30 seats to the House of Commons, for a total of 338. In terms of provincial breakdown, Ontario will receive 15 new seats, Alberta will receive six new seats, British Columbia will receive six new seats and Quebec will receive three new seats, as a result of being the first beneficiary of the representation rule, which will ensure that its seat total does not become less than what is proportional to its population.

In my province, Ontario's average riding size is down from 126,160 to 110,521. Thanks to this legislation, Ontario's percentage of seats in the House of Commons will more closely reflect its share of Canada's population. This is a great thing for Ontario and indeed a great thing for all Canadians.

Even more significantly, the bill provides an adjustment to the formula in order to adjust for future increases in population following future censuses. Unlike the formula on the books today, the formula in Bill C-20 accounts for population growth and trends. This is good news for all Canadians, both now and in the future.

To conclude, this bill, the fair representation act, is a principled, nationally applicable update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is reasonable, principled, and fair for all Canadians. It addresses a problem that needs to be fixed, a problem that will grow worse if we fail to act. It will achieve better representation for Canadians living in fast-growing provinces while maintaining representation for smaller and slow-growth provinces.

Again, it brings every single Canadian closer to representation by population.

The fair representation act delivers on this government's long-standing commitment to bringing greater fairness in House of Commons representation. I strongly encourage the opposition to work with us in passing this principled and reasonable legislation as quickly as possible. I look forward to continuing my work with all of my colleagues in the House to make sure that happens.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, in 2006, the Conservative government recognized Quebec as a nation. Today, however, with this bill, the Conservative government is spitting in the face of Quebecers. It is very clear to the NDP that Quebec must keep its historic percentage of seats in the House of Commons.

My question is for the hon. Conservative member. Does the fact that his party recognized Quebec as a nation mean absolutely nothing in their eyes?

[*English*]

Hon. Bal Gosal: Madam Speaker, the government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons. It guarantees Quebec's proportional representation, reflected in the number of seats Quebec is gaining. Also, the legislation moves every single province toward representation by population.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, but we learned nothing from it. There is no response to the opposition's arguments. I will repeat them and I will give him a quote. I would like him to comment on the quote. The quote is:

A smaller House offers considerable cost savings, less government and fewer politicians—and clearly this is what Canadians want.

Canadians are already amongst the most overrepresented people in the world.

I would like to know if my colleague agrees with this quote. For his sake I hope he will, because it is a quote from his boss.

• (1115)

Hon. Bal Gosal: Madam Speaker, as I said before, the government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons. This bill guarantees that. This legislation moves every single province toward fair representation by population. This legislation, unlike the Liberal plan, does not pit one province against another, or communities against other communities. It is fair for all Canadians throughout Canada.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, in listening to some of the comments back and forth in the House, I heard members from the Liberal Party talk about their plan. However, they failed to put forth the fact that they actually had a majority in the House for many years and, for some reason, did absolutely nothing to address the fact that there is under-representation across the country.

Government Orders

Therefore, I ask my colleague what he thinks of the fact that the Liberals did absolutely nothing to address the democratic deficit that we had in Canada for so many years, but then voted to keep the \$30 million taxpayer subsidy. The Liberal Party of Canada would not vote for fair representation, but did vote to keep the taxpayer subsidy.

Could my colleague comment on that, please?

Hon. Bal Gosal: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has a great question. These are the questions that the Liberals should be asking their own colleagues.

Rather than just pitting one province against the other, the Liberals should be working for all Canadians. The Liberal plan would actually take away seats from provinces. That is not fair at all to the provinces. The Liberals are not working for the people of Canada but for the Liberal Party of Canada. They are working for the subsidies, not for fair representation.

The Liberals should be working for the people of Canada, not for the Liberal Party of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words about Bill C-20, especially after the eloquent speech by the hon. member for Hamilton Centre, who raised a number of interesting points.

He mentioned that in 2006 the Conservative government moved the following motion, which was adopted: “That this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada”. It bears repeating.

One of the most widely used meanings of nation, especially in social sciences, is: a nation is a human community identified within geographical boundaries that sometimes fluctuate over the course of history, whose common trait is the sense of belonging to the same group. And certainly Quebec's boundaries have changed over the course of history.

Based on that definition it is easy to see why the NDP supports the principle of Quebec as a nation within Canada so strongly: because Quebec is different. It is different in a number of ways, in terms of its language and its civil justice system, among other things. Quebec is governed by civil law, while the rest of the country is governed by common law. I could provide other examples, but I do not think I need to illustrate that Quebec is truly a community that is different from the rest of the country.

That is what the motion presented by the Conservatives and adopted by the House in 2006 is all about. If we recognize that Quebec forms a nation within Canada, we must also recognize that this province has its own unique attributes which must be taken into account by the proposed legislation. What is being proposed in Bill C-20 concerns what Quebec should be if it is a nation within Canada. I am not saying that Quebec is superior or inferior to, or better or worse than the rest of the country, just that it is different. And we must take this difference into account because the notion of proportional representation must be one of the elements in a bill such as C-20 that affects the redistribution of seats.

Proportional representation is one of the principles that must be included, but it is not the only one. In 1991, in a case affecting riding boundaries in Saskatchewan, the Supreme Court recognized that proportional representation should not be the only criterion used when establishing the number of seats in a province or in Parliament.

In 1991, the Supreme Court said, “The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s. 3 is not equality of voting power per se, but the right to “effective representation.” And the Supreme Court defined effective representation as follows:

Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic.

In this sense, it is crucial to consider the redistribution of seats in any legislative assembly not just as an exercise in mathematics or accounting, but as a social exercise. With Bill C-20, the Conservatives are missing an opportunity to go beyond accounting and are making this a nation-building exercise instead. This is an ideal opportunity to move Canada forward with respect to representation in the House and to recognize the founding peoples, who, unfortunately, are under-represented in the House. I am speaking here of the first nations.

Some of my colleagues have also mentioned that this position is not criticized in Quebec. Although there are sovereignist and federalist movements in Quebec, the National Assembly, which has provincial members of all allegiances, has recognized three times that Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons should be maintained at its current proportion, which was established by the 1985 act.

• (1120)

The Quebec National Assembly, made up of federalist and sovereignist members, unanimously passed three motions, or three resolutions. This must be taken into account when we are dealing with a topic like Bill C-20, and this unfortunately has not been done.

However, I must admit that progress has been made, because this is not the first time that the Conservative government has tried to introduce a bill like this. With previous bills, Quebec would have no added seats or would have seen its proportion of seats radically diminish. Thanks in large part to the work of the NDP and the pressure we applied, the bill revised by this Parliament included three additional seats for Quebec, which is much closer to its current proportion.

We also know that some media have reported the fact that this position has been criticized within the Conservative caucus because many government members did not want to give these three additional seats to Quebec. But that is what is in the bill.

Is that enough? No, it is not enough, because as the member for Hamilton Centre said, we must recognize the fact that there is a basic principle, and if we want to protect Quebec's weight and recognize its difference—that it is a nation within a united Canada—we must protect this proportion of 24.35% of the seats. That is what the bill by my colleague from Compton—Stanstead proposes. It is not a matter of using a mathematical calculation. We must apply a principle that gives more power and more substance to the motion that was passed in 2006.

Government Orders

We must recognize that proportional representation does not exist in Canada and it never will. Why? Because the Constitution guarantees four seats to Prince Edward Island, for example. In fact, that province currently has four seats in the Senate and cannot have fewer seats in the House of Commons than in the Senate. Could we achieve proportional representation in the case of Prince Edward Island? It would not work.

We often hear that all Atlantic provinces and all prairie provinces, except Alberta, are overrepresented. Can proportional representation be achieved through legislation? I do not think so. Thus, if we take proportional representation as a guideline and not as the only possible option, we could make more progress regarding a seat redistribution bill, rather than confining ourselves in a straitjacket that, in the end, will be harmful not only for the work of this House, but also for the work of nation building that this Parliament must also have in mind.

I mentioned Prince Edward Island. I could also talk about the territories. At present, we have three seats for the three territories. In terms of pure representation by population, if we were to adopt that as our only principle, we could easily end up with one seat for the three territories. The population would be closer to what we see defined as the average used to calculate seats. Who would support that? Certainly not me, because Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut each have unique features that deserve to be represented individually in the House of Commons.

Similarly, if we push the proportional representation principle just a little further and adopt it as the one and only principle, that puts ridings like mine in danger. The riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques has a fewer people than the average used by the House of Commons, which could decrease my region's representation because of the exodus of people from rural regions to urban centres. The people of my riding have specific problems that deserve to be represented individually.

I really cannot imagine increasing the size of the riding just to achieve pure proportional representation, given that it already takes me two and a half hours to drive from one end to the other to see my constituents, to talk to them and understand their concerns. So, yes, the principle of proportional representation should be observed, but it is not the only principle if we want to have fair legislation.

That is why the NDP has pushed, and will continue to push, for maintaining Quebec's representation in the House of Commons at 24.35%.

• (1125)

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the NDP plan. If he has read the plan, he knows the NDP plan uses out-of-date numbers on population figures, which are not relevant at this time.

The other thing is the NDP plan would tie only one province in the entire country to a percentage in the House of Commons and that would require a constitutional change. How would he propose to do this through the House of Commons, which he cannot do?

Why are NDP members not being upfront about their numbers? Why are they not telling Canadians what the actual seat numbers

are? What are they proposing? We really do not know. We hear all these ideas from them, but we do not know what the numbers are. Why are they not being upfront with Canadians?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Madam Speaker, we are proposing the principle of recognizing Quebec. This principle is not better or worse, but different and it reflects the spirit of the motion adopted by this House in 2006. If they want to convert the 24.35% that we are proposing into a number of seats, then they can go ahead and do so. We do not necessarily need to mention a number of seats. What we want, and what we are currently emphasizing with this bill, is the principle of recognizing the motion adopted in 2006.

If this House then deems it necessary to decrease the number of seats we have, it could still do so. However, it must keep in mind—and I do not think it requires a constitutional amendment to do so—that the figure of 24.35% is the percentage that represents the number of seats Quebec needs for it to maintain its proportion in the House. The calculation will be easy even if the government decided to decrease the number of seats in a future bill.

• (1130)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I apologize for being so insistent with the hon. NDP members, but I would like just one of them—the hon. member has the opportunity to do so here—to take responsibility and tell us what the House would look like under the NDP plan. How many seats would there be in this House?

The Conservatives did it. They outrageously inflated the House to 338 seats. The Liberals have done so by proposing that we maintain 308 seats in this House and fair representation for all the provinces. Even the Green Party has done it. Why is the NDP unable to tell us the number of seats it is proposing? I am asking it to do so right here and right now. I tried to figure it out myself. By applying all the rules in the NDP plan, even with 350 seats, we still do not come up with a fair proportion for all the provinces.

Mr. Guy Caron: Madam Speaker, I have already been asked that question by a member of the government. I will give the same answer. The NDP is proposing a principle that would result in Quebec having 24.35% of the seats. I will not give a specific number of seats. Why? Because if the House subsequently decides to decrease or increase the number of seats, for whatever reason, we would have this principle of 24.35% of the seats, which represents the proportion of seats held by Quebec since 1985. That is our proposal.

Government Orders

If we maintain this principle, the House and the government will function, whether under this bill, which will obviously be amended, or under future legislation, and we will apply this proportion to the number of seats that Parliament decides to have. If we had 280 seats and Quebec had 24.35% of these seats, that would be in line with what the NDP is proposing. If the House sees fit to increase the number to 350 seats or 360 seats, the principle of 24.35% would always apply.

I do not believe that is the right question to ask. The right question is about knowing the place that Quebec must have in the House of Commons given the 2006 motion that recognized Quebec as a nation within a united Canada.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, our Liberal colleagues are proposing to reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons to pay for representation in the House of Commons. The NDP is proposing to abolish the Senate because we believe that it is far preferable to have elected members in the House of Commons rather than unelected representatives in the Senate.

Does my NDP colleague not find that this is a better way to reconcile fiscal obligations with the representation of the country's citizens?

Mr. Guy Caron: Madam Speaker, the issue of representation cannot be determined based on the cost of governing. At election time, for example, there is always talk of the cost of holding an election. That is the price that must be paid to have a functioning democracy. In that regard, the NDP is calling for the Senate to be abolished, which would free up a fairly significant amount of money and give us some leeway with regard to increasing representation in the House of Commons. This is not a solution that I am calling for immediately. The steps would take a fairly long time to implement. At the end of the day, the price of democracy is not a relevant issue. It is up to the House to determine what constitutes proper representation for our constituents.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure and honour to talk to Bill C-20, the fair representation act.

I thank the Minister of State for Democratic Reform for bringing the bill forward. It is a difficult file, but he has done a fabulous job in ensuring the public understands the need for us to move forward with fair representation.

I believe in representation by population. It is an important concept that we learn in school as young people. As we understand what is expected from a democracy in Canada, representation by population, as close as possible, includes all the voices that we represent here. We have a representative democracy, not a direct democracy, and we need to ensure that our system, whether at the federal, provincial or municipal levels, has an equalized voice for everyone through the representative the people have elected in whatever election it may be.

I want to talk about the principle of fairness and effectiveness.

To begin with, we need to be clear. Our party, in the last election and over the last number of years, had committed and promised to have fair representation in the House of Commons. We committed to

allocating an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the population across the country. We would maintain the seats that were guaranteed, whether through the Constitution or act of Parliament for smaller provinces. We would maintain the proportional representation, including that of Quebec. The bill does that.

Let us talk about fairness. My province of Ontario has had significant growth. The provinces of British Columbia and Alberta have also had significant growth. It is only fair that the number of seats should represent approximately what every other province gets. The bill looks at about 112,000 people, or somewhere in that range. The formula that has been developed by the minister would allow for that kind of representation in Ontario. Is it a perfect system? It is not. However, is it fair? It is fair to those people.

My riding has about 120,000 people, which is relatively close to the number we are looking for, but surrounding ridings in my area have as many as 170,000 people. Is it fair that their representation has 30% more people than mine? Not really. We are in the same geographical area. We need to add seats to give the voices of those constituents the same representation they get from me. I am a few kilometres down the road from them.

Can we do that in every province? Of course not. There are Constitutional requirements, for example, in P.E.I. The number of seats it has in the House represents the number of seats it has in the Senate. In terms of the numbers by representation, it is less. The whole population of P.E.I. would fit in my city of Burlington. Therefore, it will not be completely equal.

We are not calling it the "equal representation act", we are calling it the "fair representation act". We are working on making it as fair as possible throughout the regions of the country based on the legislation that exists now, which is the Constitution and legislation that has been passed in the House of Commons.

I was excited to speak today on the principle of being effective. We come here every week and do our jobs between September and December and January and June. However, a tremendous amount of our work is done in our own ridings. I often get asked what the most gratifying part of being a member of Parliament is. The most gratifying part is for me and my staff to be in the riding, helping individuals with whatever problems they may have and helping to solve those issues.

● (1135)

Unfortunately we cannot do it for everybody. Probably the worst part of the job is when we have to say no to somebody. However, what has become clear to me over the almost six years I have been here is that being accessible, being able to reach out to those individuals who come to see us in our offices and to be effective in helping them try to solve their problems is what makes the job of being a member of Parliament gratifying to each and every one of us.

It is a vital and important piece of why we choose to get elected. Not all of us will have a chance. The big national policies move large chunks of the country in directions, whatever direction that may be. We are all part of that, but we can make a difference as individual members of Parliament to individuals in our ridings.

Government Orders

Why this is important? When we get larger and larger ridings, which has happened in my province and in other provinces, it makes it more and more difficult for us to be effective in helping individuals. It is harder to see people. If we represent 180,000 people, we only have so much time that we can see these folks when they come to our riding offices for help.

It became clear to me a number of months ago when a recent immigrant came to see me and was very excited about the opportunity to come to the office of the member of Parliament. I had not given it much thought, but in the country that individual came from the people did not see their members of Parliament. People were allowed to vote for their members, but they did not have any relationship with them. They did not see them or have an opportunity to talk to them about their problems. The members of Parliament would go away with the head of the government for that country and the people would not see them again. The people did not have a relationship with their members.

That makes a member of Parliament much less effective. It devalues their job. That is why a fair representation would allow, if we can get around an average of 111,000 people, our constituents, the people who have elected us to represent them here, an opportunity to be engaged, to have a relationship with us.

We represent a democracy and our job is to represent those folks. If we do not get a chance to hear from them, to see them, to get involved in their issues, how can we represent them properly here? That is why it is important we look at what we can do to ensure we are fair across the country in terms of representation and that the system allows us to be effective. That is why I am in favour of the bill.

I am a bit of a finance person so I like to talk about numbers. In terms of fairness and effectiveness, we are looking at the populations of each province, the percentage they have of the total and the percentage of the seats they have in the House.

The system been brought forward by our Minister of State for Democratic Reform gets us as close as numerically possible and moves us in the right direction. For example, Ontario, which is just shy of 39% of the population, will have 121 seats and 36% of the vote in the House. Is it a perfect system? No. Does it move us from where we are today at 35%? Absolutely. It moves us in the right direction.

Right now British Columbia has just over 13% of the population. It has almost 12% of the representation in the House and this moves it to 12.5%. It is more fair and it will still allow us to be effective in our jobs as members of Parliament.

I want to thank the minister for all the work on this project. I am eager to see the bill passed. I would like to see it in place as soon as possible so that—

● (1140)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Burlington for his speech. I found it very interesting.

Since the debate began, we have been talking a lot about representation based on demographic calculations. I find that, to some extent, this shows contempt for our history and even our geography. We spoke about recognizing Quebec as a nation. The member spoke about the challenges he faces at his riding office in trying to represent his constituents. I agree that it is an important job to try to represent the people. We must also be aware of our geography because we live in a very large country. I would like to hear the hon. member's thoughts on how this bill recognizes our geography and our history, including the fact that Quebec is one of the founding nations.

● (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, regardless of what we do in the House, there is not much we can do about the geography of Canada. I am very proud. I have been in every province and two of the three territories.

We have to pick what is doable. What is doable is to have a representation from the regions based on population and what is represented in the House. Currently, Quebec has 23.2% of the population now and 75 seats, which is approximately 24.5% of the seats. Under the new system, Quebec would gain. It would get 3 more seats, making it 78 in total, and would have 23.28% of the seats in the House, which almost directly reflects exactly how much the population is as compared with the rest of the country.

It would be a very fair system and it would make us effective.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that my colleague puts his personality into his speech instead of reading notes written by others. It is not always the case, as he knows.

Australia has 150 MPs and they are not burned out. The United States has more than us. The House is fixed at 435 seats.

Why does he want to impose upon his province of Ontario 15 more seats in the House? Fifteen more seats in Queen's Park would mirror the number of seats in the House of Commons for Ontario, which is 30 more politicians. Nobody wants that in Ontario. It is possible to have fair representation for Ontario, with four seats in the House and four seats at Queen's Park. Does he not think this would be much more beneficial for Ontarians?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, I have to admit I appreciate the work and effort that the member has done on this file. I do not agree with the proposal that he put out to all members of Parliament.

Government Orders

I will comment on his remark about the United States. I have a daughter who goes to school in the United States. As a result, I have met a large number of people. One of her friend's father is a member of Congress. I also have relatives in the United States. I have heard from a lot of them. They say that their politicians are very much separated from their constituencies, based upon their numbers. They do not see them. They do not deal with them. They see them in the news. They get a story from them. They get a call from them maybe when they are fundraising. However, they are not nearly as effective as I think we are as members of Parliament in Canada.

It is only fair if I am able to handle the issues and deal with the problems that I have based on a number that is very close to what we are looking for. My colleague lives less than a half an hour away and has 30% more people, 30% more problems and 30% more issues to deal with. In fairness it needs to be spread out. If that requires us to add more members of Parliament for more effective and fair representation in the House, it is the direction we should take.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak about this bill since there are several issues that I would like to address.

The first is the issue of Quebec. I may not be as eloquent as the hon. member for Hamilton Centre was this morning, but I would still like to give it a try.

A little over a week ago was the fifth anniversary of the date the House recognized Quebec as a nation. As I said before in a debate on another bill, no member took this decision lightly. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques also pointed out, when we spoke about the way humanities defines a nation and what that means, that this is not the type of thing we should support without taking into account the resulting commitments and considerations, particularly in the House of Commons.

These commitments involve more than just respecting the French language. They also involve respecting democratic representation. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform asked what concrete measures we have. It is simple: we have the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead's Bill C-312, which seeks to protect Quebec's political weight.

In this case, we are talking specifically about 24.35% of the seats in the House. The Conservative members often argue that, although the percentage will decrease under their bill, the number of seats that Quebec has in the House will increase.

Unfortunately, although there may be an increase in the gross number of seats, there will also be a decrease in Quebec's political weight in the House. I would like to do a little math. For example, if there were 100 members and 24.35% of them were members from Quebec, then if the number of members were increased to 200, 48.70% of them would be from Quebec. There would therefore be a relative increase in Quebec's political weight. I think that is very important.

In 2006, as has been indicated a number of times, this government recognized the Quebec nation. There needs to be an understanding, however, of what equity means in relation to fairness. In his speech, the member that rose before me said that it was not a

question of equal representation but of fair representation. I could not agree more because I think that that is very much in line with what we are proposing. We are not talking about equity purely in terms of population—five representatives for every five representatives, six for every six—we are talking about what is truly fair, we are talking about a province that has been recognized as a nation, and we are talking about a concentrated francophone population that is a minority in North America. It is very important therefore to ensure that we have significant political weight.

The upshot of having a francophone minority is that the issues are often different. Therefore, we need different representation, and in this case, greater representation. We are not asking for major change, just that our political weight in relation to the rest of the House remain the same. I think this request is quite reasonable.

The other issue that I wish to raise is the proposal made by the other opposition parties regarding the cost of the bill. It would increase the number of seats in the House, which would cost more money in a period of economic uncertainty. And yet, we are asking all our fellow citizens to tighten their belts. It would not be fair to increase the number of politicians while services are being slashed.

● (1150)

In principle, I agree that it is not appropriate to have more government spending at a time of budget cutbacks. I do not agree with the current cuts. I do not want to start debating other bills that will be discussed in the upcoming days, but there is a very simple solution to getting the resources needed to fund appropriate elected representation, representation that is accountable to the public: the abolition of the other place, the Senate. We would then have sufficient additional resources to fund an increase in the number of elected representatives in this House, who would be transparent and accountable to the Canadian public. That would be a very simple solution and it would kill several birds with one stone: the problem we are discussing today and the problem that will be discussed in the upcoming days.

I would now like to talk about the issue of Quebec's representation. It is crucial that we respond to an argument that may be made by our colleagues opposite regarding what this means as far as the representation of the other provinces is concerned. I have already answered that question in part by saying that we are not calling for an increase in the number of seats; we just want Quebec's political weight to be maintained.

Moreover, the increased political weight of other provinces with growing populations does not necessarily go against the interests of Quebec in this instance. We completely understand that in certain provinces, particularly in British Columbia and Alberta, the population is growing and requires increased representation in the House.

Government Orders

It is quite correct to say that Quebecers—a very reasonable people who are well acquainted with how political representation works—will understand why other provinces' representation is being increased. The NDP members in particular are working very hard and campaigned on this issue. Our late leader, Mr. Layton, said on several occasions during the election campaign that we were working on maintaining Quebec's political weight while giving the other provinces their due. These two notions are not in conflict and need not be considered separately.

The other problem with this bill, which specifically affects my riding, has to do with boundary changes and the readjustment of ridings. This issue will be addressed at the start of next year, in 2012. I represent Chambly—Borduas, which is the third-largest riding in Quebec in terms of population. This means that we will certainly see a change in our electoral boundaries. This past year, provincial ridings were changed, including my own riding. These changes were not easy. A number of municipal, provincial and community bodies worked very hard to ensure that these changes were fair and that they did not harm the public interest or representation.

That is why I was so proud to second the motion by my colleague from Hamilton Centre this morning. This motion aims to delete the government's clause that would reduce the time period for notices in the *Canada Gazette* and would enable people to sign up to participate in redoing the electoral map.

It is very important to give all community bodies the chance to speak up in order to maintain some regional equality, as was the case with municipalities in the Richelieu valley and the Chambly basin, in the provincial riding of Chambly, and as will certainly be the case with this region's federal riding.

• (1155)

This is something we will examine. I think it will be very important to look at this issue very carefully in the coming months and to allow all stakeholders to speak. That is why I support the opposition's work plans.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the NDP member's speech. I must say that we in the Liberal Party brought forward a proposal that talked about 308 seats in the House, which is the current number. We would not add any seats during this time of economic recession. The Conservatives did the math and presented some numbers. They are talking about 338 members—

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges on a point of order.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The member must know that all men in this House are required to wear a tie. I do not like wearing a tie, but that is the rule of the House. When a man rises to speak, he must wear a tie.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: I apologize, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member is quite right. I did not notice that the member is not wearing a tie and I should not have recognized him.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Brampton—Springdale.

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale in support of Bill C-20, the fair representation act. This bill fulfills our government's commitment to move forward to fair representation in the House of Commons.

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, Ontario and Alberta. 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 will be fulfilling each of those promises with this bill. Fairness in representation for all Canadians is a very important goal. It is important that we act to ensure we are moving toward the goal and not away from it.

The current formula for allocating seats in the House of Commons is outdated and does not meet the current needs of Canadians. This problem is particularly serious in and around my riding of Brampton—Springdale. Directly to the west of my riding is the riding with the largest population in Canada, Brampton West. Directly east is the fourth largest riding, Bramalea—Gore—Malton. Within a 15 minutes drive from my riding, I can reach seven of the ten largest ridings by population in all of Canada.

All of these ridings, including my own, Brampton—Springdale, suffer from what the minister described as a representation gap. This representation gap must be fixed. The seat allocation formula that provides for new seats in the House of Commons every 10 years now dates from 1985. The formula now does not properly account for population growth. In fact, it is especially bad at dealing with large population growth in large cities in our largest provinces. My riding of Brampton—Springdale fits that description exactly. However, this problem is seen across the country, especially in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

What are the implications of the representation problem?

In the report titled “Voter Equality and Other Canadian Values: Finding the Right Balance” Matthew Mendelsohn and Sujit Choudhry wrote, “This problem is getting worse and, unless there is fundamental reform, will continue to do so in the future”. As well, they stated that “the character of voter inequality is changing”. They wrote that the combination of problems with the current formula and high level of immigration increasingly disadvantages new Canadians and visible minorities.

Government Orders

This is because many new Canadians choose to live in a densely populated suburban area like my riding of Brampton—Springdale. Mendelsohn and Choudhry wrote about the new reality of representation in Canada. They wrote:

—it is Canadians of multi-ethnic backgrounds living around our largest cities, particularly the GTA, who are under-represented, injecting a new dimension of inequality into our federal electoral arrangements.

More than 56.2% of my constituents are part of visible minority groups and multi-ethnic backgrounds. Members can understand why the fair representation act would be greatly welcomed by my constituents of Brampton—Springdale. Not only are my constituents becoming more under-represented but they are becoming more under-represented much faster than Canadians in other parts of our country.

● (1205)

Bill C-20, a bill that is applauded by my constituents, is a solution to this problem. This bill would move every province toward representation by population in the House of Commons. 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. At the same time, Bill C-20 would ensure that smaller and slower growing provinces would maintain their current number of seats.

The legislation also fulfills our commitment to maintain Quebec's representation at a level proportionate to its population. Quebec would receive three new seats. Since the purpose of the bill is to move every single province toward representation by population in a fair and reasonable way, we are keeping our promises.

Since we are talking about fairness, I would also like to talk about accuracy. This bill would ensure that when we allocate seats to each province, we would use the best data available to us. Instead of using the census population numbers, the bill would use Statistics Canada's annual population estimates. These estimates work to correct for some of the undercoverage in the census and provide the best data we have of the total provincial population. This change would assist in making sure that the growing representation gap is closed.

In Bill C-20 we are also maintaining the independent process that draws the riding boundaries in every province. By using census data, we can ensure the accuracy that is necessary to most properly draw the new electoral boundaries. There would be no change to that aspect of process. That has been the process since 1964. It would remain fair, impartial and independent.

In conclusion, Bill C-20, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is fair, reasonable and principled. It would solve an important problem that needs to be fixed and will only grow worse if we fail to act on behalf of all Canadians. It would achieve a better representation for fast growing provinces where better representation is strongly needed. It would address and correct the under-representation of many new Canadians in suburban ridings like my own, Brampton—Springdale. It would also maintain effective representation for smaller and slower growing provinces.

The fair representation act would deliver these things and delivers on our government's long-standing commitments. I hope that we can pass this sensible and good piece of legislation as soon as possible. The vote of every Canadian should have, to the greatest extent possible, equal weight and we should not delay. The constituents of my riding of Brampton—Springdale expect that from us and we need to deliver.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague must know that our country has a historical reality. Between the Act of Union in 1840 and Confederation in 1867, one of the most contentious issues was representation by population.

● (1210)

[*English*]

Upper Canada at that time was afraid of assimilation by the United States, so it had to make strategic deals with lawmakers in Lower Canada. George-Étienne Cartier and John A. Macdonald managed to keep the balance. It was primarily George Brown in Upper Canada who was the one voice speaking for rep by pop. He actually went to the point of saying to his wife after the Quebec conference in 1865, "Is it not wonderful? French Canadianism entirely extinguished"! That is what worries Quebecers.

[*Translation*]

If the government really believes in the concept of the Quebec nation, it must respect Quebec's political weight and maintain its proportion at 24%.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, as I stated in my speech, Quebec would receive three additional seats. The bill does exactly what it needs to by bringing representation by population as close as we can. That is partially the reason for ridings such as mine, Brampton—Springdale which has a huge population, over 170,000 people. Just to the west of my riding, Bramalea—Gore—Malton is the fourth largest by population. Canadians, especially my constituents and those around my riding, expect us to fulfill our commitment.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was looking at the numbers, I had a problem because I could not actually get at the figures the government was putting forward in terms of Quebec's representation. Every time I calculated the Quebec number of seats, 78, divided by 308, I actually got below the threshold of Quebec's actual population.

Therefore, the idea that the government is actually recognizing Quebec's percentage of the population is wrong, unless we do what the government is doing which is to remove the three seats from the territories from the 308 seats.

The issue is a territorial MP is the same as everyone else and a voter in the territories is the same as anyone else. How does the member justify looking at territorial seats as somehow different in the House of Commons?

Government Orders

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I realize the hon. member is having trouble calculating numbers and it is not the first time that Liberal Party members are having issues with their numbers and calculations, but I would be more than happy to help him with that.

This is a fair and principled bill. I would like to applaud the efforts of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform for bringing the bill forward and addressing the issue that urgently needs to be addressed in the House before going into the next election.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Brampton—Springdale has very articulately laid out the government's plan for fair representation. The Liberals are opposing this plan based on cost and yet they support the taxpayer subsidy to political parties of \$30 million, which is more than the cost of this plan. I would like to ask the member's opinion on why the Liberal Party would do that? Why does he think the Liberal Party would support taxpayer subsidies to political parties?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, the minister's question is the same question that I have on my mind, the same question that my constituents ask me all the time. But believe me, my constituents are really applauding the efforts of the government for eliminating the political subsidies to the political parties because as we all earn our money to pay our bills, to keep our houses going, political parties also need to do the same. They need to raise their own funds to do whatever they need to do. They should not be relying on taxpayers' dollars to push their political propaganda.

● (1215)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about fundamental democracy; folks being sent to this place to represent their ridings.

I thank the minister for his attempt, although I disagree with the title of the bill, the fair representation act. I would call it almost fair. I am not sure anyone could actually ever get it to be fair. There will always be some province saying it is not fair. Examples abound across this great country of ours demonstrating that this is a difficult place to represent. My friend from what he likes to call NWT—which is really the riding of Western Arctic, but he does not think it is the western Arctic—has the challenge of representing few people in a great geographical territory. The challenges of that are self-evident.

How do we get to some compilation of what the government now calls fair representation, and I would call it almost fair representation? Clearly, it is about how we determine representation. It should be, in a sense, fluctuating all the time since the demographics of the country fluctuate. However, one fundamental should not be lost. With great apologies to first nations folks, we adopted the Westminster model, built upon the sense of two nations.

My friend talked earlier about Upper and Lower Canada, and about how those two pieces came to build what we consider to be Canada. When one looks at that, how does one get a sense of what fair representation should look like? How does one respect the fact that these two pieces, within the model we know as this House, are representative of the places that founded this particular country that we call home?

How do we do that? How do we satisfy those needs? They are legitimate. In 2006 the House said that Quebec is a nation in a united Canada, driven by the current Prime Minister, to his credit. I congratulate the Prime Minister for doing so. I think it is a good thing.

As my colleague, the member for Hamilton Centre, said this morning, we can look back to the previous Conservative prime minister. He thought Quebec should have 25% of the House seats. We had a debate and an accord around that and acceptance around that. However, at the end of the day it fell apart when we saw resistance, not to the 25% but to other aspects that people did not like. It eventually unravelled. Otherwise, we would not be debating whether it should be 24.35%, as we have suggested; it would be 25%, and that accord would be amended.

I have not heard from this side that they wish to go back and look at the Constitution. I am not so sure there are a lot of folks in the House who really would want to go back, look at the Constitution and say they want to change this part or that part, knowing the difficulties in this country.

An hon. member: That's what you're doing.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I hear my friend. We are to a certain degree, but by the same token I do not think folks want to get into that. If we really wanted to do that then we would get rid of the red chamber. Then P.E.I. would not need four seats anymore. It would get rep by pop. It would not have four seats; it might get two if we rounded it out, but it might only get one. Do we really want to do that?

My friends at the far end suggested they do not lose any seats in their plan because it cannot be changed. If they want to bring it forward and lose two seats that is up to them.

Ultimately, if it were a true cost factor that my friends down at the end are talking about, then we would roll up the red carpet, wish them all merry Christmas and send them on their way. We would give them a pension and save \$85 million. An average budget for a senator is somewhere around \$400,000 a year. Then we would actually elect folks democratically who come to this House, duly elected by the citizens of this country. They would not be people who sit down in the other place and who are not elected, who are appointed regardless of whether Alberta has an election or not. Someone could get elected in Alberta to sit as a senator and never get a seat if the Prime Minister decides not to put that person there. That is really reformation of this place.

● (1220)

If this discussion is really about how we determine representation in this place and we actually want to save taxpayers' money, then New Democrats will not be against that. However, I would encourage my friends to amend their suggestion to say that they will close the other place. We would be happy to help them do that.

Government Orders

That, indeed, would save us some money. Then we could start talking about what representation, true representation, elected, democratic representation is actually all about. We could decide whether this House should grow or not.

My learned colleague at the other end knows all too well that there is a quotient to do this, and that it is going to happen whether they do it or not. Unless, of course, we say that we should get rid of the quotient altogether and, regardless of where the population goes over the next 25 years, stay at 308. We can find a way to divide the 308 into whatever the country looks like. Maybe we will reduce the number of seats.

My colleague from Burlington talked about the U.S. Congress earlier. Members of Congress certainly represent a lot more folks than we do. I have a basic riding of average size, about 120,000. While it is certainly a lot bigger than those in some smaller provinces, I do not deny those folks the ability to be represented in the way that they have been represented. I think that is fair.

However, I do begrudge the folks in the other place who say they represent Canadians. Nobody ever elected them. Nobody ever marked a ballot for them. They just happened to know somebody. That is really what it boils down to. Heaven knows they did not know me because I did not appoint them, but they knew somebody, whether in the previous government or in this one. That is how this comes to be.

I would ask my Liberal friends to amend their piece and actually talk about rolling up the red carpet. We would save money. I understand what they are saying. We should not be cutting public services to Canadians. Our view as New Democrats is that we should not do that.

However, if we truly want to save millions of dollars, let us find a way to get folks democratically represented. Let us find a way to take the undemocratic red chamber and send it on its merry way.

Clearly for us as New Democrats, it is about making sure that we protect small provinces. We agree that those folks need to be represented. We would not want to see the north represented by one MP. If we did rep by pop, and the suggestion is that we are headed there, we would have one MP for the whole of northern Canada. From coast to coast to coast in northern Canada, beyond the 60° latitude, there would be one MP if we did rep by pop.

That is why I said this is almost fair. One MP would never be asked to represent the entire northern part of this country. In fact it could not be done. The government wants to increase the member's office budget. If this were the case, 15 people could be hired to help do the job across the top of the country, but it will not happen.

Clearly there are challenges in this country. There is the geographical challenge that everyone acknowledged. There is also the demographic challenge. My colleague referred earlier to the huge influxes of population in the greater Toronto area. They are new Canadians, and they deserve to be represented in this place. We have to find the balance.

That is the uniqueness of this country. It is finding that true balance in a place that is so large and that has such great diversity. It brings us together and unites us. It is what makes it such a great

place but also a great challenge. That is always going to be the real challenge: how to find a way to approach an approximate to fairness in representation.

Unlike the government's bill, it will never be fair. I would suggest that the government should amend the title to "almost fair", because it did not quite get all the way there. I would hope my colleagues would say that we need to continue to work at this because we are not there yet. The one proviso that is etched in stone for me as a member is that Quebec cannot go below 24.35% of the seats in this House of Commons.

● (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see that the Conservatives have formed an alliance with the New Democrats in agreeing that it is time that Canadians get something they do not want. Canadians do not want more members of Parliament. However, the Conservatives, with the support of the New Democrats, want more MPs whether Canadians want it or not.

Because it is in government and provides the legislation, at least the Conservative Party has the courage to say that it will increase the House by 30 seats.

On the other hand, perhaps the NDP has not had the ability, although I would suggest it has not had the courage, to table its plan. We speculate that the size of the House it is proposing is somewhere around 350 seats or more.

I ask the member to share with us and all Canadians how many seats the House of Commons would have to accommodate under the NDP plan.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I can say that the NDP plan would not include the other chamber that the member and his party have constantly filled with lackeys and bagmen, brothers and sisters all, to the tune of \$100 million. Yet they stand down there and preach to the House about cost-effectiveness. They took \$57 billion from the EI fund and they want to talk to us about costs?

If my friends down at the other end want to talk about practicality and reducing costs, they should join with us and more than 60% of Canadians who say that the other place should go. We should wish them a merry Christmas and roll up that red carpet. I suggest that they join with us. Together, we will save Canadians all that money.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it will be somewhat difficult to ask a question after all that, but still I am going to try. I would like to thank my colleague for his comments.

Under the other opposition party's plan, we would see a reduction in Quebec's seats. And yet they often quote the prime minister who said, at the time, that Canada was a country where people were overrepresented. I do not know whether it is the government that did it, but someone mentioned the example of the United States Congress. As a colleague pointed out, members of the U.S. Congress are often away from home and have large teams of staff.

Government Orders

Is it really a problem to have the chance to represent people well? Why do the people in the other party think it is a problem for people to be well represented by their elected members?

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is right about the two models. Comparing the congressional model and our model is like comparing apples and pears. Clearly, what we see in the U.S. is members of Congress who, for the most part, are away from constituents. This is unlike what we do in this place, where the vast majority of us mingle among our constituents on a regular basis. With respect to knowing a congressman in the United States through his daughter's friend, the member for Burlington said earlier that ordinary American citizens do not get the opportunity to talk to their member of Congress. If they call and try to schedule a meeting, there is no likelihood of succeeding.

Over time, we have built a face-to-face model where we are actually in contact with the folks we represent. That is what we will continue to do.

As a new Canadian, an anglophone who came to this country many years ago with a Scottish accent, the duality of this country, of the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada, is intrinsic to my beliefs. I believe in that. I understand it. I have come to the conclusion that it is how we build this place. That is why I stand firm on the 24.35% figure, which is based on what we and other parliamentarians have done in the House.

I again congratulate the Prime Minister for recognizing the Québécois. It was the right and honourable thing to do. We should build on that as a foundation going forward.

• (1230)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the government's Bill C-20, the fair representation act, at report stage. I strongly support the bill and I will tell my colleagues in the House why I support it.

The fundamental makeup of this House is that it be representative of the population. We need to take a step back and survey the history of this issue in order to better understand why this is such a fundamental principle in the House.

Before Confederation, Canada existed as the province of Canada. It was created out of the Act of Union from the early 1840s to 1867. When this parliamentary precinct was built, the provincial legislature sat in it for one session before Confederation in 1867. The province of Canada was a unitary state made up of a unicameral legislature that was divided into two equal halves, Canada West and Canada East, each with 42 seats.

At the beginning of that Act of Union in the early 1840s, Canada West was much more represented in the House than Canada East, and that was by virtue of the fact that Canada West had far fewer people than Canada East.

However, over the course of that roughly 25 year period, the population balance changed and Canada West, which is now Ontario, became far more populated than Canada East, which is now Quebec, as a result of American immigration, British immigration and immigration from other places around the world.

By the 1860s, the leader of the then Liberal Party of Canada, George Brown, whose statue stands just behind Parliament Hill, made it his fundamental mission to reform our constitutional structure, reform our democratic institutions, through his battle cry of representation by population. He felt that Canada West was under-represented in the House by virtue of the fact that Canada West and Canada East each had an equal 42 seats.

After many debates and much wrangling over the course of many years, what resulted was a federal system of government where there would be two sovereign orders of government. The provincial order of government would have a particular set of responsibilities and the federal government would have another set of responsibilities.

In that federal level of responsibility there would be a Parliament of Canada made up of a bicameral legislature of a lower house, the House of Commons, and an upper house, the Senate. That lower House of Commons was to have a fundamental principle that would guide it and that fundamental principle was that it would be representative of the population.

Administratively, for the better part of 150 years, the House has been divided into provincial divisions. These are not provincial seats. These seats do not belong to the provinces. We consult the provinces because we like their opinion but their views are not binding on the federal government. These are provincial divisions for administrative purposes so we can apportion seats in much the same way as seats are divided within a province. They are not divided without regard to municipal boundaries so that it makes more sense to people.

Nevertheless, even though there are provincial administrative divisions in the House to help us divide up the seats among the different provinces, the fundamental principle remains the same, which is that this House needs to be representative of the population of Canada. That means that no one region, area or seat in the House can become so far out of its representation that Canadians in that region are denied fair representation in the House.

That is the situation we have today. In rapidly growing regions of the country, especially in our greater cities like Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto, the seats have become hugely unrepresentative of the Canadians who they are supposed to represent.

• (1235)

In fact, when we look at the 30 most populous ridings in this country, more than half of them have populations of visible minorities greater than 25% and most of those seats lie in the city regions of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto. One reason for the under-representation of visible minorities in this House is a result of the fact that there are not enough seats in those rapidly growing city regions. This bill is so very important because this chamber needs to reflect the makeup of Canada today and it currently does not.

With the bill that the government has introduced and which is now at report stage, we will ensure that this House, after the next election, better reflects the makeup of the new Canada.

Government Orders

Many other ideas have been floated out there about how we could address this under-representation by populations in the rapidly growing regions of the country. I will say that I completely disagree with the proposal of the official opposition in this regard because that would violate the fundamental principle of representation by population.

No administrative provincial division in this House should guarantee a province a particular amount of seats because of some purported idea that it should have 25%, 23.7% or whatever that fixed number may be. That is not consistent with Confederation and it is not consistent with our constitutional division of powers and how the federal system was set up. It is not consistent with representation by population.

There has been another proposal from the Liberal Party. I think it is principled and it is a proposal that makes sense. However, it has one big problem and the big problem is a political one. The big problem is that it would take seats away from these administrative divisions of Quebec, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It is going into a year or two period where we may be facing provincial governments of a different stripe. It think it would create too much political rancour in this country at a time when we have relative federal-provincial peace.

I think the proposal by the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville is a principled one but I think, politically, it is untenable. The House should adopt the government's bill because it is principled, it honours that fundamental constitutional principle of representation by population and it also is palatable politically. That is an important consideration as we embark on it.

I acknowledge that the provinces do not have any say over the administrative divisions in this House but, nevertheless, we need to be sensitive to the political realities of this country and we need to be sensitive to the fact that certain other iterations to achieve representation by population would create undue political friction in this country, which I think we should avoid.

The effects of the current imbalance in this House are very real. The rapidly galloping heterogeneity of the new Canada reflected in cities like Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver is not reflected in this House. That is a result of the under-representation of those seats in this House of Commons. The bill would go a long way to addressing that. It strikes a good balance between the different political interests in this country and, for those reasons, I encourage all members of this House to support this very important legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, the NDP is in favour of greater proportional representation in the House of Commons. However, this bill has a specific cost. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation estimates that the Conservatives' bill will cost taxpayers \$18 million a year. The NDP knows where to find that money: by abolishing the Senate, which cost Canadians \$106 million in 2010 alone.

I would like to ask my Conservative colleague where his government will find the additional money to pay for this bill. Is it again going to cut government programs that help real Canadians in order to pay the salaries of more politicians in Ottawa?

• (1240)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his questions. Democracy costs money. Yes, we can cut expenses in the House of Commons by reducing the number of members.

[*English*]

However, democracy does cost money and, in order to add these new MPs, it will cost money, but that is the price one pays to live in a democratic system.

I have heard similar arguments from people who say that we have had too many elections and that we can do without the expense of an election. We could go to elections every 10 years and we would save \$500 million or \$600 million, but that is not reflective of the values in this country. We need to have a democracy and that involves certain costs. This is the price we pay to live in a democracy.

As far as abolishing the Senate, that is not constitutionally and politically possible at this juncture so it is a moot point.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a very thoughtful and genuine speech. He has been much more honest than his colleagues on the Conservative side who say again and again that what we are proposing is wrong and that we should not have losers and winners between provinces.

The member rightly said that it was principled. However, I do not think it is principled not to have the political courage to do what we are proposing. He said that we cannot do it because it would create disagreements here and there in Canada. That may possibly be the case but most Canadians would applaud the government for doing that. Most Canadians would say that we need to have restraint everywhere, including Parliament. That is what we did in the history of our country.

The member spoke a lot about the history of Canada. Canada made reallocations of seats for decades. It is only recently that we are afraid to do so. Other democracies are doing that and nobody is saying that there are losers and winners. They say that it is part of life and that we need to follow the demography of the country.

Why not support the Liberal plan that would not only offer a fair representative House but an affordable one at the same time?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I respect the views of my colleague for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. He has been a staunch federalist for us in the House of Commons over the years and his views on federalism are welcomed by many.

However, the bill that the government has presented is principled and does not cause undue political rancour. I would put to the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville that Canadians living in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and Nova Scotia, under the proposed Liberal plan, would vehemently disagree with a reduction in seats.

Government Orders

I can tell the member that if this plan were ever to be presented in the House, a firestorm would erupt, not only among the citizens in those four provinces, but also among the political leaders from those provinces. It would create undue federal rancour at a time when we do not need it.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for all of his hard work on this legislation, as well as the member for his speech today.

My constituents in Simcoe—Grey view this bill as a welcomed opportunity for being represented fairly and I think it is because they carry the same values as all Canadians. They want to ensure that all Canadians are winners. Unlike the Liberal approach of winners and losers, they want to see fairness championed.

How does the member see this as being a fair representation for Ontarians.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, the bill would ensure that rural Ontario continues to have the number of seats it has presently, while, at the same time, adding new seats to the rapidly growing urban regions of our province.

One of the challenges with the bill that the Liberals have proposed is that, while it would add some new seats to the rapidly growing regions of urban Ontario, it would take seats away from rural Ontario and add them to urban Ontario. Our bill would not do that, which is why I think it is not only principled but it is the political solution to this very difficult challenge.

• (1245)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the comments made by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills give the impression that at the very least he would support what the Liberals are proposing, except for the issue of dealing with the political rancour that would be created if we were to adopt the Liberal proposal. The Liberal proposal, in essence, just keeps the same number. We do not need more members of Parliament. The table brought forward by the Liberal Party makes sense, and the member acknowledges that, except for the political rancour aspect.

I come from the province of Manitoba. I would welcome any member from the Conservative Party and its cousins on this issue, the New Democrats, to debate this issue in the province of Manitoba. Manitobans are no different from other Canadians. They see the economic situation that Canada is in. They understand that we do not need to have more elected members of Parliament.

This is nothing new. Canadians have spoken loud and clear on this for years, and there was a time when the current Prime Minister acknowledged it.

Let me cite a couple of quotes.

This is from the current Prime Minister, back in the 1990s. He said:

Mr. Speaker, we have offered to meet with the government any time to negotiate a reduction in the number of members in the House, and the government has refused to do that.

The is the Prime Minister of today challenging the government back in the 1990s to reduce the number of seats.

Again, today's Prime Minister said:

The size of the House should be capped. Maybe even the size should be lowered, but the proportionality of the provinces should be reflected.

What has happened to the Prime Minister? Did something slip by the PMO? I doubt it.

One has to ask what has happened. Canadians' opinions have not changed; the population as a whole recognizes that there is no need to increase the size of the House of Commons, yet the government has chosen to do that. It has chosen to increase it by 30 seats when it is not warranted.

One could bring up the argument of the economy, something the Liberals are talking a great deal about. This session is about jobs, jobs and jobs. It is very important. We see the government making cutbacks. We see the cutbacks taking place in Atlantic Canada and throughout the country.

My colleague made reference to the bloating cabinet and the growth in the government and its offices. That growth contradicts what I would have thought were Conservatives' principles in former years, quite possibly when they were Reformers. Now we have bloating government. We have a somewhat sluggish economy because the government has not been able to do the things necessary to create the types of jobs that are important to Canadians, and now it believes we need to increase the size of the House of Commons.

Do members know that while the Prime Minister is trying to increase the number of MPs, over in England, in the U.K., they are actually decreasing the number of elected officials? They are reducing the number of MPs.

I would suggest that we need to revisit this issue. The government needs to get in tune with what Canadians are saying on this issue. The Prime Minister should reflect upon the 1990s, when he used to advocate that we did not need 308 seats, that 308 was too many seats. I believe he wanted somewhere in the neighbourhood of 295, or maybe even fewer.

However, what I like about this bill is that there is a really clear difference between the Liberals, the Conservatives and the NDP. The NDP has this weird, twisted formula. It is a formula that really does not make that much sense, and its members know it does not make sense.

• (1250)

That is why, when we ask them to show us their idea and put on paper how many members of Parliament they would like in the House of Commons, not one of them has been prepared to stand up and show the impact of what they are suggesting. Maybe it is because it just does not add up. Anyone who tries to work through what the New Democrats are talking about will find it would be at least 350 members. We are really not sure.

In second reading debate on Bill C-20, the New Democrats gave us the impression that we just cannot have enough, that we would replace the chairs with benches and pile as many MPs as we could into the House.

Government Orders

The idea that representation needs to be based on population is not something new; it is in our Constitution. Every modern western democracy recognizes the value of representation by population. There is only one political entity that I am aware of, outside of the Bloc, that would argue against it: the New Democrats. They do not recognize any value in rep by pop, based on what they are suggesting. They even put it in Bill C-312, which was a private member's bill.

I just asked a New Democratic member of Parliament to provide us with a plan showing the number of members of Parliament that the member sees coming into the House of Commons after the next election. Instead, he said he wanted to talk about the Senate. He completely avoided the question.

We disagree again with the New Democrats in regard to the Senate. There is value to the Senate. In the future it might be able to deal with some of the regional differences among our provinces and so forth. Let us not confuse the Senate with this particular bill.

If members are supporting this bill because they want to provide better service to their constituents, I suggest there is a better way of doing so: by providing adequate or more resources to the current number of members of Parliament. By doing that, we would enable members to serve a larger number of constituents.

There are members of Parliament here today who serve over 130,000 people. I serve roughly 85,000 to 90,000 people. I am not going to argue that I serve my constituents any better than the person who is serving 130,000, but if it is a question of providing service to constituents, then we can deal with it in that fashion.

To try to give the impression that the cost of the bill is only \$30 million is very misleading. It takes a great deal to house an additional 30 members of Parliament, and I believe the government is underestimating that cost.

Yes, there is a cost to democracy, and I acknowledge that, but I recognize the reality of today's economy and what is taking place with government cuts in areas that have grown over the last number of years through cabinet bureaucracy. Now we have before us a bill that would increase the number of members of Parliament, an increase that I believe Canadians as a whole would not support.

I say with all sincerity that if there is a member who is concerned about political rancour, I am from the province of Manitoba and I am prepared to debate the Liberal Party proposal, which would keep the number at 308, anywhere in the province of Manitoba. That is because I believe that Manitobans, as all Canadians, would recognize that we can change from within the current number of 308 and that this bill is just not necessary. We do not have to increase the numbers.

• (1255)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the comments of the member for Winnipeg North on why the Liberals' bill would not be politically explosive.

It is clear that if the House of Commons were to vote for a bill that took seats away from Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, it would be politically explosive. While the premiers are not responsible for apportioning the seats in the federal House of

Commons, they nevertheless would use it as a tool to further their own political interests. The problem is that we are potentially facing an election in the province of Quebec next year, and we would be handing the non-federalist forces a tool to harangue and attack the federal government at a time when there is political and federal peace.

How would the member respond to the Province of Quebec if it started to voice its outrage about loss of seats in its provincial division in the House?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is about political leadership. It is about having the courage to do the right thing. If the member is so concerned about it, then why would he not go to Manitoba, where he says the rancour would be the most significant, and debate with me in the province of Manitoba? I invite him to come to Manitoba, or to debate my colleague in the province of Quebec, where it is proportional.

What we are really asking the government to do is demonstrate courage and leadership. Just to add a bunch of seats to try to achieve something, when we could have settled with 308, does not make sense, unless, of course, you do not have the political courage to do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am not sure if that was referring to my courage or not.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the topic of political leadership and political courage. We are debating ad nauseam how many new seats can dance on the head of a pin in the House of Commons. We have a Liberal Party that for decades has resisted having real democracy on the issue that really matters, which is proportional representation based on parties. There are about 100 democracies in the world, but only five of them, all British colonies, including Zimbabwe, have our antiquated first past the post system.

The Liberals have resisted proportional representation. My question is this: now that they have 34 seats instead of the 58 that they would have with proportional representation, will the Liberals finally stand up for true proportional representation?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am humoured by the question, but the more important issue is the bill itself, Bill C-20. New Democrats have failed to participate genuinely in the debate on this bill because they have not been able to provide their numbers. All they talk about is wanting more seats, but they are not saying how many. My challenge, not only to this member but to all members addressing this issue today, is to stand in their places and tell Canadians how many seats the House of Commons will have under their proposal.

The NDP is the only political party that has not done that. Canadians have a right to know.

Government Orders

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the unfair Liberal approach, which would create winners and losers and negatively impact smaller provinces. Could the member tell us where and when Liberals have already consulted Manitobans and other Canadians on their proposal?

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I have consulted probably just as many Canadians as the current Prime Minister consulted back in the 1990s when he was in favour of reducing the number of seats in the House.

I suggest she might want to ask the Prime Minister which Canadians he consulted when he came up with the idea of increasing the House of Commons by 30 seats. Why was there a road to Damascus for the Prime Minister on this very important issue to Canadians?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to join in the debate on this very important bill. It seems to be a spirited debate between the members in the far corner and some of the members on the government side.

The bill represents a commitment that our government made to Canadians to move the House toward fairer representation. In particular, it reflects our government's three distinct promises to provide fair representation by: allocating an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the population growth in Ontario, which is my home province, British Columbia and Alberta; maintaining the number of seats for smaller provinces; and maintaining the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

We campaigned on those promises and Canadians voted in a strong, stable, national Conservative government. We received a strong mandate and with this bill we are moving the House of Commons toward fair representation for all Canadians. We promised that to Canadians; they voted for us, and we are delivering on that.

I would be remiss if I did not specifically challenge the member who just spoke. I was going to ask him a question, but because I was next to speak, I thought I would address it in my remarks.

I have coined a term for the Liberal proposal. It is a little catchy, and if members find themselves saying it later, it is okay; they do not have to give me credit for it. I call it the Liberal loser plan.

The Liberal plan is a loser because it takes seats away from provinces including Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the maritime provinces, but it also makes a loser out of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta because they are not getting fair representation. It takes the voices away from rural Canada and deposits them in urban Canada. It would take seats away from Manitoba, for example. I would be very interested to see the member go into rural parts of Manitoba and talk about how those people are going to lose representation in the House. That voice for agriculture, that voice for natural resource economies, that voice for rural infrastructure, that voice that speaks on behalf of wardens in rural municipalities, those

voices are not going to be here any more because the Liberal Party would take those voices away.

In the province of Ontario, for example, we have very large ridings, especially in the 905 belt, some of which are represented by large representatives, as my colleague is pointing out. There are some very large population-based ridings. Those ridings would still be under-represented. A vote in that province would not carry the same weight as a vote would in other jurisdictions of the country.

I openly admit that the bill would still leave some regions somewhat overrepresented compared to others, but it would move the entire democratic system in this country in the right direction.

If we look at the Liberal plan, as my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills has correctly pointed out, if I live in Saskatchewan, Manitoba or Quebec, I understand one thing from what the Liberal proposal is. In absolute terms it would reduce the number of voices that would represent my province, that would represent my rural part of the country, that would represent my cities in Ottawa. That means that amid all of the voices here, amid all of what goes on here, in absolute terms those regions of the country would have fewer representatives than they have today.

I represent a fairly large riding. By no means is it the largest in the country, but the population of my riding is roughly 126,000. Its population size is close to that of all four ridings in Prince Edward Island. By that math, a vote in the riding of Peterborough is worth about 25% of what a vote in Prince Edward Island is worth. We have understood that. It is okay. Our system is not perfect. We understand that we need to correct it.

Bill C-20 reduces the number of votes in each riding in the province of Ontario and it does so in a very fair and principled way, working off census figures. It makes sure, as I said earlier, that no province is actually going to lose representatives and it also maintains the proportional representation of the province of Quebec.

• (1305)

That is why, for example, only a few weeks ago when the bill was introduced, Liberal members said that they thought we got it right. The leader of the Liberal Party is on the record as saying that. Members currently in the House who are making some commentary while I am speaking are on the record as saying such. That is why the bill, when it was introduced, received the endorsement, largely, of governments right across the country. That is why Canadians are supportive of the bill.

I would argue that the Liberals are playing a little bit of cheap politics on this. They are saying that they will hold the number of seats in the House of Commons at the arbitrary figure of 308. There is nothing special about the number 308, other than it happens to be the number today, but it was not the number when some of the members across the way were elected. It was not the number when a number of great prime ministers of this country served. That number comes as a result of a formula that has been in place since 1867, which was later refined in the 1980s. That is where 308 comes from.

The longer the current formula is in place, the more the electoral system in Canada, representation by population that we espouse, the more that actually becomes stretched and the less it becomes in actual effect in this country.

Government Orders

It is critically important that we move in that direction. That is what Bill C-20 does. If we determine, as the Liberal Party has, that it should be an arbitrary number of 308, and we start taking seats away from some regions and depositing them in other regions while still not moving any of those regions to representation by population, it would simply be playing cheap politics.

The Liberals are saying it is not the right time to spend money. That is very interesting. They did not feel that way on the per vote subsidy. They thought the per vote subsidy should be maintained. They were not in favour of saving Canadians that money. I am sure my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London recalls that debate in the House. We almost had a coalition government over that with the various parties, including the Bloc Québécois.

Ultimately, we are here to discuss fair representation. The Liberal Party members are being somewhat presumptuous when they say that when we add more members of Parliament, it will cost x number of dollars, because they are simply taking that average, but there has been no determination in the House as to what savings can be found. I challenge members across the way. I receive a subsidy to account for the excessive number of folks that I represent compared to other ridings, but I should not expect that the subsidy would be continued if the total number of electors in my riding is in fact reduced, and I do not. I do not expect that at all. I expect efficiencies to be found in those areas.

I would simply note that this all comes back to fair representation. That is what it is about. That is why the Liberal premier of Ontario has said that he supports the government's plan for fair representation, not the plan put forward by the Liberal Party, not the proposal put forward by his Liberal cousins, and certainly not the plan put forward by the NDP, which would probably expand this House closer to 400 members. It would actually move us much farther away from actual representation by population in the country, because it is also quite arbitrary in how it is put together.

This is the best formula. It is quite simply the best formula to move all provinces toward fair representation in a reasonable and principled manner. There has to be a principle behind what we are doing when it comes to representation in this country.

The growth in the size of the House of Commons will be kept at a reasonable level. I should note that all efforts will be made to make sure that the cost of operations in the House are conscientiously maintained at a level that I believe Canadians support.

What I will never support is to reduce in absolute terms the number of voices that speak for rural Canada, the number of voices that speak for northern Canada, the number of voices that speak for places outside the large metropolitan areas. That is what the Liberal proposal would do. It would hurt farmers. It would hurt our natural resource economy. It would hurt our rural municipalities. It would make a loser out of every region and territory of this country. That is why it is a Liberal loser plan.

• (1310)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague's comments when he said that there is a principle in the bill. I have been sitting here wondering, what is the principle? I know he will say that the principle is fair representation, but surely, if Parliament or the government is to

engage in this exercise and talk about increasing seats in the House of Commons, is the principle not about nation building? Is the principle not about respecting the historical representation of Quebec in the House and in this country?

I think that the Conservatives have the wrong principle. Perhaps the hon. member would address that. What happened to the principle of nation building?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair and reasonable question. The principle on which the bill is built is to allocate an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the growing populations of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. We also want to maintain the number of seats in smaller provinces. This is a principle. We do not want to take any seats away. We want to make sure that the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population would be maintained no matter what the formula was.

The bill would specifically add fifteen seats for Ontario, six seats for Alberta, six seats for British Columbia, and three seats for Quebec. That is in keeping with the principles we set out to maintain. It is also in keeping with making sure that all provinces are fairly represented.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, NDP members have put themselves out of this debate by not having the courage to table their numbers.

The debate is between a House of 338 seats or a House of 308 seats. I am ready to have this debate with the member in every province of our great country. I am sure Canadians will say very clearly that they do not want more politicians. They do not want more than 308 seats. They want the same proportion. They want the same fair representation. They will say that en français and in English.

The member does not have the courage to do the right thing that other democracies in the world are doing. When it is time for fair representation, it should be done through redistribution and the House should be kept to a respectable size. Why not?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is not about courage. I would argue it is about practising the art of the possible.

We have constitutional guarantees in this country that the member is simply not acknowledging. He is saying that we can set the number at 308 and we will make sure that every vote in the country is equal. He knows in his heart that is not true. He knows in his heart that simply cannot be done.

I could never support the member's plan. I would gladly go into any rural part of the country and debate with the member on this fact. His plan in absolute terms would reduce the number of voices that speak for farmers. It would reduce the number of voices that speak for tourism operators. It would reduce the number of voices that speak for natural resource companies. It would reduce the number of voices that speak for all the various rural municipalities in this country. In absolute terms it would reduce the number of voices that represent them here. I am totally opposed to that.

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at committee when we were studying this piece of legislation, many experts and quite a few political science professors came forward to give their bit on how best to do this.

The intention of the legislation is to have representation by population. They were asked if anybody had ever studied the work of a member of Parliament outside of this place. Almost none of those so-called experts said yes. They could talk about the work of a member of Parliament inside these four walls and the work that we do on pieces of legislation and the committee work we do.

Making representation by population smoother would lessen the workload in the offices of members who have large constituencies. The member for Peterborough is an expert on that. Could he talk about how this legislation would help make that job easier?

• (1315)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a great point. Elgin—Middlesex—London, not unlike Peterborough, is a mixed riding. It contains both urban and rural centres and that is a particular challenge.

As the member suggested, my riding is medium in size geographically. It is certainly much larger than some of the metropolitan ridings, but it is much smaller than some of the northern ridings and so forth.

The member is absolutely correct in pointing out that by expanding the number of seats, we will be increasing access for folks in each of the constituencies to speak to their MP and to do so in a convenient manner. The Liberal plan would remove rural voices. Those folks would have a lot farther to travel and fewer doors would be open to them.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with one comment that my colleague who just spoke said, which is that there has been a very spirited debate in the House today. Sometimes we do not see that as it is quiet. However, this has been a very interesting debate.

I have been sitting here all morning listening to the debate. I do not know if it is because we are talking about our place or our home, so to speak, that we get so caught up in it. Maybe that is a reason. But it raises fundamental issues in terms of how many members of Parliament there are, how they are selected, and what criteria is used. I do think they are important issues.

However, in looking at Bill C-20, which is supposedly calling for fair representation, I do think that there is an underlying issue that to me is very important, that being that we are dealing with a Conservative government that now has a pattern of putting forward legislation that really is out of touch with the reality of Canadians.

Last night we passed Bill C-10, the mega crime bill, for which there was massive opposition across the country. Every leading expert in the country said it was a bad bill and yet here were the Conservatives hell-bent on pushing it through. They brought in closure, time allocation, because they believed that this absolutely had to be done. When the evidence shows that crime is actually going down, putting more people in prison is a completely failed agenda when one looks at what has happened in the United States.

I wanted to preface my remarks today on that because there is a pattern in that we are now debating legislation that many people do not see as relevant to the real priorities they are facing. Here we have this bill on seat distribution and adding additional seats. However, it completely misses the fundamental issue in terms of our democratic and electoral systems, that being that the basic system by which we elect members of Parliament is fundamentally not fair.

It is not only a question of seats but also the way that we vote in this country, what we call first past the post. It is very revealing that when the government has an opportunity to bring forward these issues, it makes a decision to bring forward a bill that is actually flawed instead of focusing on a debate or a proposal to implement something that would fundamentally improve the democratic process in Canada and would enormously improve the way that people actually relate to politics.

All day I have heard the Liberals' position to actually take seats away. I am sure there are members of the public who might support that position.

What I think would be a good a debate is one that proposes proportional representation. Then we could really engage people and ensure not only fair representation but that when voters vote. their vote is actually counted in a way that is proportional to the aggregate votes for any given party. That is certainly not the system we have now.

It is hugely disappointing that on the one hand we have a bill that deals with the Senate that again did not deal with any issues around proportional representation, and on the other hand we have Bill C-20, which is at report stage today and will be going through third reading I imagine quite soon. It is a bill that will continue a pattern and proposal that is basically not fair in terms of its representation.

I am glad that the NDP put forward its own private member's bill that did lay out the important principles of what we need to look at when we deal with seat representation.

I am from British Columbia and the first to say, as I know my colleagues from the NDP in British Columbia will say, that B.C. has been under-represented in the House, as have other provinces. We understand that. However, when we look at this bill, even from a B.C. point of view, we are not gaining adequate representation. I think the NDP bill that has been put forward really addresses some of the principles at issue here. One of those principles is the historical context of this country and how it was founded.

• (1320)

We cannot deny the reality that we do not have pure representation by population. It is not possible in a country as diverse and as large as Canada. Many people have given the examples of Prince Edward Island or other maritime provinces that on a population basis are hugely overrepresented, or northern communities. We understand that. We understand that there is a balance.

Government Orders

In fact, those balances and those principles have been reflected in decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada and other decisions that recognize the history of this country. Certainly, one of those principles is the place of Quebec within the nation of Canada. I was in the House when the motion was passed in November 2006 where we unanimously declared a nation within a united Canada. That was a very important principle that was enunciated by the House. Therefore, in terms of recognizing what that means to seat distribution and recognizing the historical level of seats within Quebec, this bill fails on that ground.

The Conservative government chose to raise this issue. It chose to bring it forward on its political agenda. It chose to use the particular seat distribution that it came forward with. I find it very surprising and perplexing that it did it in a manner that is not consistent with the historical representation that we have had for the province of Quebec.

I feel there are some very sound arguments here to speak out loud and clear that this bill is flawed. If we are going to do it, should we not be doing it properly? Should we not be ensuring that there is fair representation, and should we not be doing it on the basis of fundamental democratic reform and advancement in this country?

Many of my colleagues have pointed out that we are now really one of the last remaining nations under parliamentary democracy that still uses first past the post. Why are we not having a debate on that? Why are we not seeing a bill that would bring that forward? Unfortunately, we know the answer. The government is afraid to lose what it sees as a monopoly that it has on the system that we operate under. We have seen that with Liberal governments before them.

I am very proud of the fact that the NDP has been a champion of proportional representation and has been in the forefront of that struggle to say that it is a fundamental reform that needs to take place in this country.

We are responding to a bill that the Conservatives brought forward. We have our own bill that lays out very clear principles of the way we believe this issue should be approached. It should be approached as a nation building exercise. What consultation was done here? What provinces, what people were consulted on this bill?

This is another unilateral, arbitrary, dump it down, and rush it through bill. Like many of the government's bills, it is recycled. This is the third time it has come around. There was a choice here if we were going to deal with this issue to deal with it in a way that would have actually advanced democracy in Canada, and would have advanced representation in terms of members of Parliament for the population. Unfortunately, this bill does not cut it. It does not meet that test or standard.

That is why we are here today in the House at report stage pointing out the flaws of this bill and saying that there could have been a better choice.

• (1325)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to my colleague. She did bring up some principles, particularly representation by population and fairness. I had also been listening to the debate this morning and the speech by my colleague, the member for Saint-Laurent—

Cartierville. Even though I do not agree with him, he has actually brought forth a principled position. He has actually brought forward the numbers so that the Canadian people can judge it.

I come from an area in Ontario that is growing very quickly. We are under-represented. We have brought forth a solution to that. What I am going to ask the NDP member right now is to actually stand up in the House and let the people of Canada know the exact numbers she is proposing to change. What is Ontario going to end up with? Into the future, she is proposing a change that would give one province representation forever and ever with a certain percentage. I believe that would take a constitutional change.

Could the member address those two issues?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to address the issues being raised by the parliamentary secretary.

If the member were to look at Bill C-312, which is the NDP bill on this matter, he would see that we have taken the time to lay out the process. Numbers are important for sure, but on an issue about seat distribution and representation, the process of how we engage people is also important. It is the process of nation building.

From everything that we can see in terms of the minimal consultation that was done, there is very little comment from the premiers. There has basically been no consultation with the provinces. This is not the way to build a nation in this country.

I reiterate, the bill is a failed approach. I think the NDP bill is a much better approach and response to this issue.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague. However, I would tell her that if she wants to be principled about the issue, she should table her numbers, not only for us but for Canadians.

Looking at the NDP legislation, it wants more seats for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. We agree with that. NDP members want to respect the Constitution and they respect the Senate clause. We agree with that. They want to keep the grandfather clause, like the government. We think it is a mistake, but it is what they are doing.

In addition, the NDP wants to freeze forever the representation of the province of Quebec at 24.35%. The question is, how will these four rules add up? How many seats will be in the House under the NDP plan? We have the right as Canadians to hear an answer from my colleague.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I certainly respect my hon. colleague and I have listened to his point of view many times. I would encourage him to vote for the NDP Bill C-312.

A bill at second reading is a vote in principle and that is what we have done. We have laid out the principles by which this process should be engaged. Once we do that, then let us have a debate and consult with people. I do not see the Liberals doing that. They came out with a bunch of numbers, but who have they talked to about that? We have been asking that question and have not received an answer. Let us deal with the principles and then deal with consultation.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to my colleague for her speech, particularly since she gave it in a very human way. We have to understand that this is very important to the progress of our country in terms of the number of seats and the representation of Quebec in the House of Commons.

I noted that my colleague was very mindful of the historical context in Canada in relation to the two founding peoples here and the balance that must be struck.

What does she think would be the appropriate balance, in terms of proportionality and representation, for communities that are somewhat more remote and provinces that are somewhat less populous?

• (1330)

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is a new member and she offers a very new and fresh perspective to the House. One thing we have learned is to consult with people and local communities. It is a perspective the member brings to the House and I think it is very important.

For example, when we did have a proposal a few years ago on proportional representation, there was a whole public process that was part of it. Unfortunately, it was ditched by the Liberal government at the time. The NDP had proposed a wonderful process to talk about PR.

What consultation has been done on this bill? None.

Again, I come back to our own Bill C-312 that does lay out the principles and would allow that consultation to take place, while recognizing the historical context and the reality of our country.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak again to Bill C-20, the fair representation act.

I spoke at second reading to the bill, and I gave it my full support. It is a very important bill, not only for my province of Ontario but for the fairness in representation for all Canadians. The minister has spoken eloquently about the need for the bill, and I agree with him wholeheartedly. I would also commend my colleagues who have spoke today during this debate.

As representatives of our constituents, we should have a special interest in the bill. Anyone who has contributed to this debate so far has done so in a constructive manner.

This afternoon I would like to provide the House with some context for report stage debate on the amendments that have been moved or proposed. I do that by sharing some of what has been heard at the procedure and House affairs committee, of which I am honoured to be the chair.

After we heard from the minister who was very helpful at the committee, answering our questions, we heard from the Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand. I note that this morning my colleague from Hamilton Centre thanked the minister for his helpfulness at committee, and I agree with him.

I am happy to hear the sort of collegial remarks that have come from my colleague. We certainly need more of what the member for Hamilton Centre said and how he demonstrated it this morning. In our committee, the member has also been similarly very helpful, reasonable and pleasant to work with. The member is a credit to his party and to the House.

Back to the committee on procedure and House affairs, the Chief Electoral Officer appeared so he could give us his views on how Elections Canada would manage this process, its role in assisting the independent boundaries commissions to do their work and how Elections Canada would handle the new timelines proposed in the bill. He, too, was helpful. Of course that is what the committee strives for, to get the information from those who will end up doing the work.

What was most important was he told us that the passage of the bill before February 8, 2012, when the process is scheduled to begin, was by far the best scenario. That is why we have moved quickly to study the bill and that is why we have made the bill a priority in the House.

By moving quickly to ensure its passage before February, we will avoid having the boundaries commissions repeat their work. This is important from a cost standpoint and also for clarity. Having the boundaries commissions start the work under one formula and then having to stop, change the formula, change the timelines and repeat what they have already been done would be a waste of time and taxpayer money.

Having the boundaries commissions start their considerations on the new electoral map under one set of assumptions only to change them midstream would also muddle this process for Canadians. We want clarity for our constituents. Ensuring the bill is passed and in operation at the beginning of the process will ensure that.

The Chief Electoral Officer was quite clear about that. He was also clear that the new timelines proposed in the bill, on the whole, would help Elections Canada to be fully prepared for the next general election. He did mention that Elections Canada would be working very hard to meet these timelines in the bill, but that it was certainly possible, given it met the same final timeline in the last readjustment.

That is an important point as well. Elections Canada needs sufficient time to prepare for the new boundaries, as do all of the parties, as do Canadians. It is in the best national interest to ensure that we move quickly to ensure everything is in place.

The Chief Electoral Officer also confirmed for us that almost every one of the new timelines proposed in the bill was recommended by his predecessor, Mr. Kingsley, who also appeared at the committee to verify this information. Our committee has and continues to study the reports.

The point has particular relevance today, as the opposition has proposed some amendments to the timelines in the bill. We should put those timeline amendments to the side. The fact is we did not pull these new timelines out of thin air. The operation for the process under the current timelines was examined by the Chief Electoral Officer and the recommendations for change and improvement were made. Our committee has made some similar recommendations in the past, as did the 1991 Lortie Royal Commission report.

Government Orders

These timeline proposals are not new and they have not been brought forward without due consideration or study. In fact, it is quite the opposite. They have been studied and recommended multiple times by multiple bodies over the past 20 years.

• (1335)

I am quite confident that these changes will be positive and will not have the negative side effects about which the opposition has speculated. By its reaction to these proposals, it is almost as though many in the opposition have not read the various reports that the committee has produced. Nor does it seem like they have paid much attention to the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer over a number of years.

I can only conclude that the committee will have to find flashier, more interesting ways to engage our colleagues with discussions, studies and recommendations so that in the future they pay attention to some of the reports that have been issued by the committee. I will see what the committee can do to ensure that all of our colleagues are better aware of the good studies and recommendations that exist.

The committee also heard from the chief statistician, Mr. Wayne Smith. At the risk of sounding repetitive, Mr. Smith was also highly helpful and a very thorough witness. The committee's time with him was constructive and very informative. He outlined for us how Statistics Canada's census count and population estimates worked. He outlined their differences and told us about the strengths of each measurement.

Like the Chief Electoral Officer, he was very clear on two very important points.

First, he told us that it was absolutely Statistics Canada's view that the population estimates were a more accurate assessment of the population from province to province than the unadjusted census figures that would be available on February 8, 2012. Due to some statistical and methodological factors, this is the case. Having the chief statistician before the committee may be a fairly dry meeting, but it did get some very good information. There are more accurate province-by-province population numbers in the estimates than there are in the census.

Second, he confirmed that the only data source that was sufficiently accurate for the purposes of drawing the electoral boundaries themselves was in the census. That makes sense, since the census has street-by-street population data. No other data source would be anywhere near as accurate as that. Through the passage of the bill, we will find that we will soon be using the best possible data available for each separate stage of the process. It is only fair that we do the right thing with the information we have been provided. We have the data sources available to use the best data at each stage, so in fact we will do that.

It seems like common sense to me, but the member for Richmond—Arthabaska moved an amendment to remove the population estimates from the bill. I am at a loss to explain why he thinks that is a good idea. I certainly do not think it is a good idea and the committee heard from the chief statistician as to why it was not the right course of action. We think that amendment should be put to the side as well.

To conclude, as the minister and my colleagues have said, the bill fulfills our government's long-standing commitment to move toward fair representation. It fulfills our promise to Canadians from the last election. It will bring faster-growing provinces closer to representation by population, while protecting the seats of slower-growing provinces and providing the seats to Quebec in proportion to its population. The new formula corrects a long-standing imbalance in democratic representation among the different provinces of our federation. It is reasonable that its provisions make sense.

As we have seen, many of the concerns raised in the debate and the amendments by the opposition are not based on the facts heard at committee. I hope all hon. members in the House will agree and will support the bill.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I have the honour of working with him on the committee he referred to numerous times in his speech. I do agree with several of the points he raised because we in fact had very concrete and real explanations from a number of witnesses on some aspects of this bill.

Here we have a bill that is going to affect the representation of several provinces. The goal is to try to help those provinces have better representation. When the National Assembly of Quebec adopts a motion unanimously and all members state that they would like Quebec to retain the weight it has at present in the House of Commons, what is it told? It is told, on the contrary, that its political weight is going to be reduced. On this point in particular, I would like to know what we can say to the National Assembly when it adopts something unanimously.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her great work in committee. She has been an active participant, very thoughtful in discussions and helpful in getting some of this information out.

I can only speak to the provinces in the sense that in my own province the premier has come out in strong measure endorsing the bill and certainly looking for a more fair representation by population in Ontario. He has been nothing but supportive of the bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are four possible positions on the bill. The first position is to reduce the number of members. We have the current Prime Minister who, a number of years ago, used to advocate that we should reduce the number of members of Parliament. The second position is to keep it the same at 308 members, which is what the Liberal Party of Canada has said. The third position is that we should increase the numbers, which is what the government and the Prime Minister have said. The fourth is the NDP option of being irrelevant.

What caused the Prime Minister to change his mind? He used to reflect the general will of Canadians when he said that we did not need a larger House of Commons. His position today is he wants to see an increase in the size of the House of Commons. What does the member believe caused the Prime Minister to flip-flop on that issue?

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, during the last election, the one that ended on May 2, which gave our government a majority government in the House and put him away down in the corner, the constituents who I spoke to in Ontario mention that they were looking for fair representation by population in our province and asked why did we not go to Ottawa and get it done.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's bill would add seats to urban Canada while, at the same time, protect the seats currently in rural Canada. Whereas the proposal from the Liberal Party would take seats away from rural Canada in order to add them to urban Canada. That is the important difference in this bill and that is why it is a practical bill which the House should support.

It is also a principled bill because it is one of the most important pieces of legislation introduced in the House in the last 10 years. The reason for it is simple: visible minorities are under-represented in this place. Only one in ten members of Parliament is a member of a visible minority group when its numbers are double the population and there will be triple that number in the population in 20 years.

Maybe the member can speak to the issue of why this bill is so very important to add seats to the city regions of Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain I could do it more eloquently than the member for Wellington—Halton Hills could, but it is exactly the point. There were changes needed in how people in Canada were represented. In our largest cities, we have gone beyond the size that is most appropriate for a member of Parliament to represent. A great number of the citizens of Canada he mentioned are found in the urban areas and therefore changing the size of those ridings would give a more fair representation.

I happen to represent a riding that is mostly rural, although it has a piece of London, the tenth-largest city in Canada. The answer there is we continue to find the constituency work to be much of the draw. We come here to work and it is fairly easy to get the work done. It is all equitable here as to how much work we have. Some of us with larger ridings back home find that work to be changing. This would help affect that.

• (1345)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to join in the debate on Bill C-20 because, members might be interested to know, perhaps even before I got into politics, I was seized with the issue of constitutional reform, as it relates to democratic reform, in my days working as a carpenter. I answered an advertisement in *The Globe and Mail* back in 1991, I believe, looking for interested Canadians who may want to participate in what was at that time a very bold and unique venture, which was a cross-country consultation with Canadians, to have a discussion, a debate, about opening the Constitution to address a number of the irritants, as it were, that threatened the integrity of our Confederation.

As fate would have it, my name was chosen to be one of what they called “ordinary Canadians” who would form a citizen assembly.

Mr. Mike Wallace: They didn't know you.

Mr. Pat Martin: They didn't know me very well. That's right.

Somehow I got through the screening process and was chosen as an ordinary Canadian to participate in a cross-country consultation of great value and great merit.

This was put on by the previous Conservative government, hosted by its minister of foreign affairs at the time, Joe Clark. The government went to great effort and great expense to truly consult Canadians on a number of pressing issues that we believed were necessary. We can imagine what was going on in Canadian history at that time, but it was based on the premise that our Canadian Federation and the Constitution that holds it together is a very fragile construct. It needs to be maintained, nourished and updated on an ongoing basis in order to maintain the fabric. It is a fragile thing that we have thrown together here.

I was surprised to learn that there are fewer than 20 federations in the world. Of all the countries in the world, less than 20 are federations because they are, by definition, difficult to knit together for a common purpose and a common goal.

At that time, three out of those 20 federations were at risk. One of them, the Soviet Union, is now gone. Another one, Yugoslavia, is now gone. The third one that was on the species at risk list was Canada. There was genuine concern at that time that we might not be able to keep this country together. The dynamics, the disparate, legitimate interests of the participating parties to our federation were not satisfied and were frustrated. They felt that the Confederation was not serving their needs as was the commitment made at Confederation.

Therefore, this bold, courageous enterprise took effect, and we had five meetings across the country. The 160 of us chosen as ordinary Canadians formed the nucleus. Then they invited about 1,000 or 2,000 more in each of the five cities in which we had these meetings. The 160 who were chosen were given a backgrounder in the complexity of the makeup of the Canadian Confederation and the reasoning behind why we have the two chambers, the efficacy of the two chambers, the representation in this chamber as opposed to the lack of representation in the other.

All of that was a great history lesson for a lot of ordinary Canadians so that we could make an informed recommendation as to what kind of changes were necessary to add value to Confederation and to amend the Constitution to ensure the viability of a great nation and to take us off the species at risk list for countries with federation as their makeup. We believed it was a sad thing that Canada was even on that list. However, the issue of representation by population was key and integral to our dialogue.

We had these five special meetings and, at the very end, it was decided we needed a sixth meeting because we forgot that there were not two founding nations that formed this country, that there were first nations, as well, and that somehow, perhaps due to tradition, we had left them out of the debate. We had another sixth round dealing with aboriginal people.

Government Orders

● (1350)

Since that time, I have travelled to and learned a great deal about the country of New Zealand, another Commonwealth country with which we have great relations. It has seats reserved in its house of commons for the Maori people. They are set aside, guaranteed. They are not limited to that number of seats but they are guaranteed that number of seats and, should they win more by the proportional representation system, so be it. but they are guaranteed representation in their house of commons.

That is the kind of debate and the type of consultation that we should have had going into such an important subject matter. One of the themes throughout all the speakers from the New Democratic Party in the context of this debate is that if we are going to do this now, we had better do it right. There is a bigger picture here than just the simplistic mathematics of ensuring that every seat represents 111,316 constituents. That is the easiest part of the debate. That does not even touch on the thornier issues that are at stake here if we are to reopen the debate on the type of democratic reform that is necessary in this country to maintain the integrity of a great nation with a great Constitution.

The one thing that we learned in the cross-country consultations leading up to the Charlottetown accord is that we need to be ever vigilant to maintain a constitution. A constitution is a living, breathing document. It is not rigid or carved in granite with a chisel. It is something that needs to be revisited on a regular basis, nurtured, watered and watered in a respectful way.

I am fully cognizant of and will acknowledge freely that it is difficult for members of Parliament when one is tasked with representing 88,000 constituents, as I represent, and another member of Parliament with the same budget, the same amount of staff and the same amount of resources representing 131,000. Just by ratio, one would think that the member will have more casework. I am critical, though, that while we do compensate members of Parliament with a greater constituency office budget if they represent a greater geographic area, and we do compensate members of Parliament with a supplementary budget if they represent larger numbers of people, we do not make any accommodation for members of Parliament who may represent areas of greater need.

I represent an area where 47% of all the families live below the poverty line and 52% of all the children in my riding live below the poverty line. Low income people, in fact poverty, puts people in a constant state of crisis and those people need a disproportionate amount of support. The average family income in my riding is less than \$30,000 a year. If the average family income in a riding is \$130,000, people are not likely to go knocking on the door of their member of Parliament nearly as often as when people are thrown out of an apartment, their social assistance cheque has not arrived or their children have been scooped up by child and family services. Poor people are in crisis on a regular basis. I wish we could acknowledge and recognize that some members of Parliament are dealt with far more pressing casework than people who want to go to the Bahamas for their Christmas holidays and their passport is late arriving.

We are dealing with an incredibly important issue here. I believe it is negligent of us not to be dealing with some of the larger issues

regarding democratic reform in the context of doing the math on dividing up the seats in the House of Commons. This is one of those bills that has not gestated, not finished. It is being rushed through without due consideration and it would benefit from a broad cross-country consultation, perhaps not of the magnitude of the consultation that led to the Charlottetown accord, but surely more input from more groups, more organizations and more Canadians who could tell us what they want done with their democratic institutions.

● (1355)

We can point to the other chamber, the undemocratic, unelected Senate, which is burning up resources at breakneck speed. Perhaps ordinary Canadians now, in these times of budgetary restraint, would have some input and some guidance as to whether we really need a second chamber at all or whether that is just some place for senators to go globe-trotting around the world on parliamentary junkets.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the bill and this House needs to adopt the bill. I will tell the House why.

This place does not reflect the makeup of Canada. If there is any institution in this country that should reflect the makeup of the Canadian population, it is the democratically elected House of Commons and currently it does not do so. Only one in ten members of this chamber is a member of a visible minority group when their numbers in the population are double that number. I will tell the House why it does not reflect the makeup. In the 30 most populated ridings in this country, the population is disproportionately made up of visible minority populations and those ridings are in the areas of Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. That is why we need to pass the bill.

The longer we wait to add these seats, the more difficult it will become. Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary are growing rapidly. We need to deal with the galloping heterogeneity of this country, add these new seats by passing the bill to ensure that, after the next election, this chamber better reflects the makeup of the new Canada.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, often we are told, when we enter into areas that may require constitutional reform, that there is no appetite on the part of Canadians to reopen the Constitution for any reason, that Canadians are tired of constitutional reform, that after that period in the late eighties with Meech Lake and the early nineties with the Charlottetown accord, that, and this is a term I always hear, there is no appetite to revisit it.

I think anybody who says that is actually misreading the will and the interests of the Canadian people. I think there is a great interest and a great appetite. In fact, there has been a generational change. It has been 20 years since the failure of the Charlottetown accord. There is a whole new generation of Canadians who have never had this debate. They have never been consulted.

This is why I believe that the patchwork quilt initiative of addressing one shortcoming, but without even any knowledge of how it might impact other shortcomings, is short-sighted.

Statements by Members

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention from the member for Winnipeg Centre, who always gives us a passionate speech in defence of our country and a reflection of where we go forward from here.

However, as the official opposition, as a party that is proposing that it is ready to govern this country, when the Conservatives put forward a proposal to give 30 more seats, we have given zero more seats in this House.

I would like the straight-shooter from Winnipeg Centre to please tell us exactly how many more seats the NDP plan would add to this House of Commons.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, we have put forward a private member's bill, after much thought and consultation with the constituent groups that form the official opposition, that would put in place a framework and a foundation that would underpin the consultation that would lead to the answer to the question that my colleague has put.

The difference between us and the Conservative Party in this matter is that it is important for us to get the fundamentals in place and build from the foundation up in a consultative approach instead of a prescriptive approach. We are proposing a consultative approach.

• (1400)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been hearing from the Conservatives that because there is a need to reflect the suburbs better that is, to some extent, to the democratic deficit in this country. What they do not talk about is the inability of many Canadians to actually see their elected representatives because they represent ridings that are so huge.

For example, in my riding, it costs over \$1,000 to fly from Attawapiskat to Timmins just to meet with the elected representative.

Why does the member think that the larger issue of the diversity of this country is being ignored by the government that is focused solely on the suburbs?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we should be careful not to take too simplistic an approach toward representation in this country. It is not as simple as taking the population and simply dividing it and getting the number of seats. We have never been that way in this country.

A number of elements and factors need to be considered before the design of this chamber is agreed upon. P.E.I. and northern Canada have been used as examples. Providing reasonable representation is not as simple and straightforward as the Conservatives would have us believe.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Christmas break approaches, my constituents in Crowfoot and I want

to commend our Prime Minister for providing Canada with a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government.

Faced with the challenges in the current global economy, our Conservative government remains focused on providing Canadians with jobs and growing Canada's economy. In the third quarter of this year, Canada's economy grew by 3.5%. This is an amazing achievement and a performance level envied by many nations around the world facing massive budgetary deficits and crushing public debt.

We have provided marketing freedom for farmers and decriminalized responsible law-abiding gun owners by scrapping the failed and costly long gun registry. As well, our changes to Canada's criminal law have targeted violent and repeat offenders and sex offenders preying on children.

Canadians put their trust in this government, and we are fulfilling the promises we made during the election campaign.

I wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and many more promises fulfilled in the new year.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today on December 6 we remember the tragic massacre of 14 young women in Montreal 22 years ago. One lone gunman with a lethal weapon could not contain his anger against women. Canadians mourned and vowed to work for change.

Jack Layton and others spoke out against men's violence against women and co-founded the white ribbon campaign, now supported by millions in 55 countries. They and the families of the 14 young women fought for gun control. Marc Lepine's weapon is listed on the long gun registry, which the Conservatives now tragically aim to destroy.

The government should strengthen gun control rather than eliminate it, so that we can all stand in this House on December 6 and say, "Never again".

[Translation]

Today, December 6, let us all stand together and say: never again.

* * *

[English]

WHITE POINT LODGE

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the honour of presenting White Point Lodge with the Tourism Industry Association of Canada Award for Excellence in Human Resources Development. This award is presented to a business that has clearly demonstrated a commitment to professionalism in the tourism workforce

This award held a special significance for all of White Point's management and staff because their main lodge was completely destroyed in a devastating fire on November 12 of this year.

Statements by Members

Located on Nova Scotia's beautiful South Shore, White Point is Nova Scotia's favourite year-round, oceanfront beach vacation destination. With ISO 9001 certification, White Point provides an extensive human resources program that includes student scholarships and placements, professional development, staff recognition and support of local tourism industry initiatives.

To Danny and all the staff at the White Point Lodge, congratulations on the prestigious award and on the plans to rebuild.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was 22 years ago when a deeply disturbed man burst into Montreal's École Polytechnique with a legally obtained Ruger Mini-14 rifle and savagely shot 28 people. In the days that followed, we learned that these students were targeted for one simple reason: they were women.

The incoming Liberal government at that time took action to help protect Canadians by launching a new firearms licensing and registration system that took aim at the criminal misuse of firearms. The system included mental health, spousal and criminal background checks, and, for the first time in history, the law required all Canadians with a gun to have a permit.

I am proud to support the Liberal firearms package and on this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, I call upon the Conservatives to end their efforts to turn back the clock by repealing the firearms registry.

Violence against women is never acceptable anywhere at any time. I believe it can be stopped, but only if we work together.

* * *

●(1405)

MAYOR OF PITT MEADOWS

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Don MacLean, a man who has served the community of Pitt Meadows in public life for the past 21 years.

Mayor MacLean is retiring from politics today, having served the city of Pitt Meadows for nine years as a councillor and 12 years as mayor. He has attended countless community events and represented his city on many boards and committees in metro Vancouver. In an exemplary way, he has overseen the steady growth and development of a strong and vibrant city, a city with natural beauty right outside our door.

It is quite an accomplishment for a man who was looking to purchase a house in another community, made a wrong turn on Harris Road, and never left.

On behalf of my constituents in Pitt Meadows, I want to thank Mayor MacLean and wish him all the best in his future endeavours. When Don and Diane stroll through MacLean Park, I hope he experiences the well-deserved personal satisfaction that comes from having served his community well.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Vancouver-based community activist Jennifer Allan has been travelling across Canada to raise awareness about discrimination and violence against sex workers. This is an issue that touches me closely in my riding in Vancouver East, especially on this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Despite the ongoing missing women inquiry in British Columbia, sex workers in the Downtown Eastside continue to receive tragically little understanding and recognition. They continue to struggle with chronic poverty and are forced out of public view, leaving them vulnerable to violence.

Jen is calling on political leaders to take action to ensure the fundamental human rights of sex workers are no longer violated. Such action includes the creation of safe houses, reforming Canada's solicitation laws and improved training for police officers.

I call on members from all parties to confront the underlying prejudices that have prevented us for so long from addressing this issue. We have failed in our responsibility to protect one of the most marginalized groups in our society.

* * *

SENATOR ROBERT CARRALL

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a local unsung hero, Senator Robert Carrall.

Senator Carrall, originally from Ingersoll in my riding of Oxford, received his MD from McGill University in 1859. He used his medical talents as an assistant surgeon for the Union Army during the American Civil War. Upon his return to Canada in 1865, he continued working as a doctor and played an active part in the Cariboo gold rush. In 1868, he was elected to the Legislative Council of British Columbia and was one of three delegates who went to Ottawa to negotiate British Columbia's joining Confederation.

In 1871 he was summoned to the Senate of Canada and was a confidante to Sir John A. Macdonald. He supported the construction of the CP railroad and petitioned Parliament to pass a bill instating the holiday we now know as Canada Day, before dying at the age of 42.

Senator Carrall's story remained largely untold until recently, when Irene Crawford-Siano, of Woodstock, published her ninth book, entitled *Senator Robert Carrall and Dominion Day*.

We thank Senator Carrall for his inspiring work on behalf of Canadians and Irene for sharing his story.

*Statements by Members***HALIFAX EXPLOSION OF 1917**

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Halifax harbour 94 years ago today, the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* struck the Norwegian vessel *Imo*. The resulting explosion was the largest non-nuclear man-made blast in the history of the world.

The blast caused a tsunami in Halifax harbour. It caused an air pressure wave that snapped trees, obliterated buildings and even twisted steel. It rattled the glass in the Truro hospital, 100 kilometres away.

Halifax was shattered by this blast. The devastation was unimaginable: 2,000 dead and 9,000 more wounded. Relief efforts were sent from all over, as far away as the city of Boston.

Halifax was shattered that day, but Halifax was not defeated. We will always remember the devastation that took place 94 years ago today. We will also always remember those who sent relief in her hour of need.

* * *

● (1410)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today as we mourn victims of violence at École Polytechnique, we also mourn the violence that permeates our society. Aboriginal women are among those who experience the keenest edge of this violence, which is rooted in colonization, assimilation and cultural genocide.

While we have recognized the great harm we have done to aboriginal women, there is still the lingering violence that manifests itself in the chronic lack of decent housing, educational opportunity and economic security.

This has been going on for generations. Aboriginal women themselves speak most eloquently to this. Ms. Marlene Pierre of the Robinson Superior Treaty Women's Council told parliamentarians, "Women are saying the same damn things we said 50 or 60 years ago. Why? What are you people doing that will have some meaningful impact?"

The violence continues.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a model on the world stage for respecting freedom of religion. In fact, one of our government's key re-election promises was to establish an office for religious freedom. However, religious freedom is not something that is enjoyed by all people around the world. One such case is in Vietnam, where Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, a Roman Catholic priest, has been repeatedly arrested for peacefully criticizing the Vietnamese Communist government's stance on religion.

Father Ly was rearrested most recently in July of 2011. He was returned to prison despite having health problems, having suffered three strokes that caused paralysis of his right arm and leg.

Vietnamese Canadians across the country are deeply concerned about this undemocratic situation. This week I will have the privilege of tabling a petition from the community that will call on the Vietnamese Communist government to unconditionally release Father Ly from prison.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the 22nd anniversary of the tragedy at École Polytechnique. We honour the memory of the 14 women who lost their lives that day. This is not a time for partisanship, especially in a House where women hold 25% of the seats. However, ironically, the firearms registry is set to be scrapped and the data in it completely destroyed this year, adding to the pain of this tragedy.

The registry was initially created in response to what happened at École Polytechnique. Last week, in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I heard survivors of this tragedy advocating for the continuation of the registry. Their testimony was quite upsetting. But the Conservatives remained unmoved. How can a government that claims to care about victims behave this way? How can Conservative MPs look the opposition in the eye and say that public safety is important to them?

It is not too late. The Conservatives can still transfer the data to the provinces, as Quebec is asking them to do. I still hope they will make the right decision to honour the memory of the victims who died on December 6, 1989.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Parliament established this day so that Canada would never forget the tragic deaths of 14 young women who were killed at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989 because of their gender. Every year this day reminds Canadians that violence against women is a fact of life in our society. However, this tragedy gave us the courage and the strength to act to eliminate gender-based violence.

On December 6, I encourage all Canadians to observe a minute of silence, wear a white ribbon or attend one of the silent vigils that will be held across the country. Together we can make this a world without violence.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, December 6, 2011 marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer a rose to every woman and girl who has been the victim of violence in Quebec, Canada and the world. Let us remember the 14 women who were murdered at École Polytechnique because of their gender. Let us remember the families. Let us remember the survivors.

On this sad day, I condemn the recklessness and irresponsibility demonstrated by this government, which chose to derail the gun control system rather than protecting women and children. This government not only chose to abolish a registry that saves lives but, worse, it also plans to destroy the data that cost so much to acquire.

The Quebec National Assembly is listening to those responsible for public health and safety and for mobilizing the people of Quebec to keep the memory of those killed by firearms alive. I look forward to the day when Quebec has a firearms registry.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, December 6, 1989, is etched into our collective memory as the date of one of the most tragic events in Canada's history. Twenty-two years ago today, 14 young women at École Polytechnique who all had dreams of bright futures lost their lives in one of the darkest acts of misogyny we have ever seen.

We all swore that we would do what was necessary to ensure that this would never happen again. That is why we created the firearms registry at the time, to act as an additional measure to help prevent crime. Twenty-two years later, the Conservative government is adding to the tragedy. It plans on destroying the registry and the data it contains as part of a purely ideological and sectarian plan.

Our duty to remember the 14 victims and their families demands that we maintain this registry. Today, we must not only remember these women, but we must also fight to preserve what came out of that tragic event and we must keep fighting to better protect the rights of our sisters and daughters in the future.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 22 years after the massacre, we continue to mourn the 14 students who were gunned down by a killer who did not think they had the right to live free and fulfilling lives. That day, Canada understood just how horrible violence against women can be. This violence destroys lives and shatters hope.

[English]

Let the House never forget these 14 lives, victims because they were women.

Let us together commit to do everything in our power to end violence against women in Canada.

We must fight for the thousands of women who must leave their own homes to escape violence. We must step up our efforts to solve the cases of nearly 500 missing and murdered aboriginal women, gone without a trace.

We must never give up the fight, because that is Canadian leadership.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women was established in 1991. Inspired by the tragic deaths of 14 young women on December 6, 1989 at École Polytechnique in Montreal, this national day reminds us to first mourn, then work for change.

Canadians are doing just that. Across the country, Canadians honour those women who have been killed through vigils, memorial services or special projects that raise awareness about the issue of gender-based violence. A quiet resolve to eradicate violence underpins the nature of events marking December 6. These events help to fuel the momentum for change that lasts throughout the year. As a result, Canadians are undertaking powerful initiatives to bring the vision of a peaceful society closer to reality.

Let us send a message to all Canadians. We must all be active partners if we are to achieve our shared vision of ending gender-based violence.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Speaker: I understand there have been discussions and I now invite the House to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the tragic event that happened 22 years ago at École Polytechnique in Montreal.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

ORAL QUESTIONS

●(1420)

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once upon a time, there was a minister. He woke up one morning, went fishing to Gander, but he had to come back; he had to do a newser. To leave the fishing camp, he called a helicopter. In the basket he climbed, got up in the chopper. He made up a fairy tale to provide some cover. How will this story end, all Canadians wonder.

Perhaps now is the time for the Prime Minister to show some leadership and fire the minister.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I have already answered this question. The minister said that his use of the government aircraft was for government business and that clearly was the case.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not realize that his minister is making things up: a bogus rescue mission, a bogus training mission to leave a fishing camp in order to announce a military contract out of the blue at the last minute. It is nonsense.

The minister is an embarrassment to the government, an embarrassment to the Prime Minister, and an embarrassment to the entire country. It is time to say goodbye and good riddance.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition claims that the aircraft was used for personal reasons, but it is clear that it was used for government business.

* * *

PORT OF MONTREAL

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' ethical problems do not end with the fabrications of the Minister of National Defence.

Police are currently investigating a case of influence peddling and corruption at the Port of Montreal. The Prime Minister's entourage is in deep: Dimitri Soudas and Leo Housakos allegedly worked with Bernard Poulin and Tony Accurso to facilitate the appointment of Robert Abdallah to the Port of Montreal.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that members of his inner circle exerted political pressure and made threats?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that appointment is the responsibility of the Port of Montreal's board of directors, and the board made its own decision in this case.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there are many more questions than answers about corruption at the Montreal Port Authority.

This is what Bernard Poulin had to say to Tony Accurso about Leo Housakos: "Leo Housakos is coming to see me...Leo is good not because of his association with Cannon, but with Soudas...If you want, I'll start talking to him if he's ready to get his buddy Soudas involved. His buddy Soudas can twist arms better than anyone else."

The question is simple: what role did the Conservative party's friend, Leo Housakos, now a senator, play in the Montreal Port Authority appointments?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is none. The chair of the board of directors is appointed by the members of the board. My colleague should know that the chair of a board of directors is appointed by the members of the board. The person named earlier was not appointed as a member or as chair of the board of directors. End of story.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the story of arm-twisting and influence

peddling continues. The Conservatives are not helping to shed light on the matter.

Here is another conversation between Mr. Poulin and Mr. Accurso:

Mr. Poulin: "...We'll get the information. Now, Soudas, if he can do something, well..."

Mr. Accurso: "What would you see him, Soudas, doing?"

Mr. Poulin: "Because Soudas is the boss in Quebec, the real boss in Quebec."

What role was played by the Prime Minister's former communications director in the Montreal Port Authority appointments? We want to know.

• (1425)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition just said that it was to have Mr. Abdallah appointed as the chair of the board of directors of the Montreal Port Authority. The member spoke about influence peddling in order to appoint Mr. Abdallah, and yet he was not appointed chair, end of story; there was no influence peddling. The chair of the board of directors of the Montreal Port Authority is appointed by the board of directors. They did their job.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister.

Perhaps he misunderstood the problem with the answers given by his Minister of National Defence. The problem is that the minister said clearly, and I quote, "I cut the trip short to take part in a search and rescue demonstration."

It is clear that it was not a search and rescue demonstration; it was to pick up the minister and take him from one place to another. Why did the minister tell the House things that clearly did not happen and were not true?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the opposition that said that the aircraft was used for personal reasons, when it is clear that the minister used it on government business.

* * *

[*English*]

PHONE CALLS TO MOUNT ROYAL CONSTITUENCY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear the government has a real problem with admitting it made a mistake and has a real problem with simply telling the truth.

In the case of the campaign against my colleague from Mount Royal, the government opposite allowed a campaign to take place when it knew things were being said, in directly attacking the member for Mount Royal, that were in fact false and completely untrue.

Oral Questions

My question is for the Prime Minister. When will he stand in his place, take some responsibility for the things that are going on around here, and tell his ministers and his friends that morality and truth start right in this place?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I utterly reject the premise and the so-called facts in that question.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I utterly reject the facts and the allegations made in that question.

The truth of the matter is that the people of Canada have elected a Conservative government. They sent a very clear message to the Liberal Party.

I note that in a recent public opinion poll the people of Canada continue to believe that this country is moving in the right direction, that we are creating jobs and growth, and that is what we will continue to do.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sometimes I think I am in the wrong place. The minister has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Once again, I will have to ask members to hold off their applause until the member is finished putting the question, not in the middle of it.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, we ask a question on one subject and we get an answer on another.

The question now is for the Prime Minister with respect to Attawapiskat. It is a truly terrifying situation for the people there to have a government whose only response to the situation of urgency and emergency is to send in an auditor. We are hardly surprised that the response to that from the local people living there, the chief and those in charge, would be to say, “Look, we expect respect for our governance. We expect respect for our rights. We expect to be taken seriously”.

How could the Prime Minister, having given the apology that he did, have gotten it so wrong with respect—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would disagree with the hon. member and I guess just about everyone else. I think the hon. member for Toronto Centre is right where he belongs.

In terms of the specific question, this government has made it very clear at every stage that it has been and will continue to respond to the immediate needs of that community. Part of that response is not simply to expend public funds, it is to make sure that, for all Canadians but particularly for the people of that community, help gets to the people who actually need it, and that we are accountable for doing that.

● (1430)

PORT OF MONTREAL

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not only us who are asking questions about the Port of Montreal file, both the RCMP and the Quebec Provincial Police are officially investigating influence peddling, including Dimitri Soudas, former chief of communications for the Prime Minister.

If we listen to the records, we will hear talk of payoffs to Conservative senators and threats to members of the Montreal ports administration.

Did the Conservatives officially play a role in those nominations, and what was it?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Montreal Port Authority is appointed by the board of directors. The board of directors did not appoint Mr. Abdallah, as I said before, as president. The fight is over.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it all sounds like a conspiracy between two businessmen to get their man the job in the Port of Montreal. The federal contracts are in fact worth over \$12 million, and despite the fact that they did not get their man into that position after some arm-twisting, Mr. Poulin and Mr. Accurso nevertheless got the contract. Two months later, Revenue Canada launched an inquiry.

How are we supposed to believe that these negotiations were conducted freely and without influence peddling?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CEO of the Port of Montreal is appointed by the board of directors of the Port of Montreal. The tendering process is run by the Port of Montreal and its board of directors.

By the way, I would like to thank the board of directors of the Port of Montreal for its incredible support with the construction of the new bridge over the St. Lawrence River. While the opposition is trying to make political hay with this, the board of directors is helping us to find solutions so that the public gets something that works.

* * *

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 26 the Minister of National Defence said in this House:

—I took part in a previously planned search and rescue demonstration.

On December 1 he said:

—took part in a search and rescue exercise that we had been trying to arrange for some time.

We all know now that this is just not true. I want to give the minister one final opportunity to do the right thing.

Oral Questions

Will the minister now apologize for misleading Canadians and this House?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, I was on personal time on a trip I paid for myself. I was scheduled to be away for four days. I came back after the third day to go back to work. That is what happened.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's actions are an embarrassment to him, his government, and the Canadian people. His continued misleading of the House and his refusal to apologize in spite of mounting overwhelming evidence, totally contradicting his version of events, is proof that he is no longer fit to hold his high position of public trust.

Therefore, it is more in sorrow than in anger that we demand that this minister either resign or be fired.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered this question. I left my personal time to go back to work.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Attawapiskat continues to deteriorate. This is what 12-year-old Jack Linklater, Jr. sent me this morning. He wrote, "The cold is here. It is going to be -34°. The ice is now in our windows and mould is gaining by my bed. My sister had to stay up all last night to keep the fire going because there are holes in the house".

This is a humanitarian tragedy. The Red Cross is on the ground and provincial officials are on the ground.

Does the government think that sending in an accountant to take control of the band will actually make this humanitarian tragedy disappear?

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring residents, especially children, have warm, dry, and safe places to sleep.

We urge the band council to be part of the solution. It is clear that significant investments in this community have not resulted in adequate standards of living. Third party management is in place to address these urgent health and safety needs. Preventing the manager from working in the community will only delay urgently needed housing for the residents.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Attawapiskat is not alone. Today two reserves in northern Quebec declared a state of emergency.

Capital and maintenance costs on reserves are underfunded by \$200 million a year. Third party management will not solve these problems. The Alberta Lubicon are under third party management, yet mould still creeps throughout their school. The government's own evaluation concluded third party management was not effective

and certainly did not solve the critical problems facing communities like Attawapiskat.

Why are the Conservatives applying this same failed policy for first nations communities in crisis?

• (1435)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with willing partners to improve the quality of all aboriginal communities from coast to coast to coast.

We have made specific targeted investments in first nations priorities like education, water, waste water infrastructure, and housing under Canada's economic action plan. Right now we are building more than 2,000 new homes and renovating more than 3,000 homes every year on reserves. We are working in collaboration with first nations at the community, regional and national level to these ends.

We will continue to invest in practical innovative solutions to get real results for aboriginal communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Attawapiskat is not an isolated case. Today, two reserves in northern Quebec declared a state of emergency after having spent 24 hours without electricity in extremely cold temperatures.

An immediate injection of funds is required to meet the demand for 85,000 new social housing units. One hundred and twenty communities have to boil their water. Reserves are chronically underfunded and the shortfall now amounts to \$200 million a year.

Third party management is not a solution to these problems, problems that have been ignored by successive Conservative and Liberal governments alike. When will there be an infrastructure plan to help first nations communities in crisis situations?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member then would be ashamed that his colleagues, in a previous session, voted against the infrastructure that we have been putting into those first nations communities.

We continue to work with willing partners to improve the quality of life for aboriginal people. We have made these significant investments, targeted investments, for first nations priorities, like education, water and housing.

Oral Questions

We are working in collaboration with first nations communities at the community level, the regional level and the national level to these ends, and will continue to invest in practical, innovative solutions for these communities.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 22 years ago today 14 women were killed by a Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle. Soon that rifle could be sold with no safeguards, not even a confirmation of a valid gun licence. The Conservative member for Portage—Lisgar incredibly believes that shopkeepers' income tax forms would replace these safeguards. It is incredible, it is offensive, and it is just not true.

Even as we mourn, the government is going too far, moving ahead with its dangerous and unnecessary plan. Why?

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is completely misrepresenting the facts.

Our government believes the best way to tackle violent gun crime is to ensure individuals who commit crimes with firearms are in jail.

The NDP needs to get behind us with these initiatives. I do thank the NDP members from Thunder Bay who supported our initiative to get rid of the long gun registry because it is ineffective in fighting violent gun crime. We need to get behind measures that do not just make people feel safe but actually make them more safe.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was just quoting my colleague across the way. With answers like that, the parliamentary secretary is destroying the legacy of the victims from the Polytechnique, women who paid with their lives for the lack of control over high calibre weapons.

The government is so out of touch that dangerous weapons, like those that killed 14 women 22 years ago, will circulate freely.

The chiefs of police—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Gatineau has the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, both the chiefs of police and the provinces have told them the same thing. Women and victims say that this bill does not make sense.

What part of this does the government fail to understand?

[English]

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking real action to combat violent gun crime. We believe that measures need to be effective. They need to be a good use of resources and they need to target real criminals.

Our legislation that would end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry would not touch the licensing requirements. It would continue to be a crime to purchase a firearm without a licence or to sell a firearm to anyone without a licence.

I do thank the NDP members from Thunder Bay who supported our measures and believe the long gun registry is wasteful and ineffective. We appreciate their support.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the definition of “honourable” means possessed of high principles.

When General Natynczyk was questioned about his use of military aircraft, he went out into the lobby and responded fully to each and every question and, in the end, offered to reimburse Canadian taxpayers for any inappropriate use. That was the honourable thing to do.

The Minister of National Defence, on the other hand, hides from the press, misleads Canadians, and tries to blame the forces for his misdeeds.

Will the Minister of National Defence do the honourable thing, as General Natynczyk already did?

• (1440)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): I am not hiding, Mr. Speaker, I am right here. I have been answering questions on this repeatedly. I left my time off that I was spending with friends, which I paid for personally. I was called back to work, and that is what happened.

* * *

[Translation]

PORT OF MONTREAL

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In the case of the Port of Montreal, there is talk about pressure on the old Port of Montreal when the president was appointed. There is talk about the Rosdev Group, a property case that involved the dynamic duo of Housakos and Soudas, but here we are talking about the port's administration.

I would like the Prime Minister to tell me when he knew there was an RCMP investigation into the Port of Montreal case and whether he personally or the members of his office were questioned.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would note that the board of directors of the Port of Montreal appoints a president. I understand my colleague's question, but the news today, to our minds, is to point out that it is in fact the people on the board of directors who appoint the man or woman who will be president of the Port of Montreal. At present, the president is a woman. Certainly we are going to continue to work with them to make sure there is sound management of the Port of Montreal.

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason Mr. Abdallah was not appointed president by the board of directors is that his predecessor, Michael Fortier, took a stand and prevented people like Mr. Housakos from attempting to infiltrate. That is what happened. Attempting to infiltrate is as serious as infiltrating, and Mr. Housakos was subsequently appointed as a senator.

Can the Prime Minister tell me about the security report before Mr. Housakos was appointed? Is he prepared to table that report? Was anything said at that time about Mr. Housakos' relationships with a lot of buddies?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has just said, Mr. Abdallah was not appointed president and CEO of the Port of Montreal. Today, that is what everyone is talking about. After voting as its mandate instructs it, the board of directors appointed a president. Today, someone else holds that position. We are going to continue working well with that board.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have always said that it was impossible to have a deal without the major emitters. China, India, Brazil and South Africa are finally prepared to address climate change but Canada is leaving the negotiating table and slamming the door. The government continues to attempt to sabotage the fight against climate change.

Why is the government putting so much effort into making Canada a laughingstock instead of acting as an environmental leader?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague opposite said, "I just hope the international community ignores Canada".

Before she continues to denigrate our country, I would like to remind her of a few things. One, Canada has a world-leading clean energy technology sector. Two, there is strong action at home with our sector-by-sector regulatory approach that sees real action. Three, there is a commitment to an internationally binding agreement that has all major emitters around the table. That is real action. Shameful.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they certainly have noticed us and they know that the gig is up. First the government said that it wanted a climate deal only if big emitters like China or India were involved. Now that China and India are at the table, the government has walked away from the negotiating table. Is it any wonder that the government is scaring off our trading partners and killing Canadian jobs?

Derailing Kyoto and sabotaging climate negotiation talks only hurts Canadian families. When will the government pay attention and stop shutting out families from high-paying clean energy jobs? Why is it letting Canada fall behind?

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague

opposite would have those in the international community ignore Canada, this is what she would have them pay attention to: one, an NDP carbon tax that the NDP leadership candidates have put forward; two, an international agreement that only accounts for one-third of emissions. That is not action.

We have a strong action plan at home. We are proud of it. It is working. I hope NDP members get on board.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every December, Service Canada staff members work overtime to process the spike in EI claims before the holidays.

First, the Conservatives cut front-line EI workers and now Conservative grinchers are putting the kibosh on overtime.

This decision is a lump of coal for thousands of out-of-work families hoping for EI cheques before Christmas. These Canadians paid EI all their lives. Why is the government playing the grinch?

Will the minister rescind her decision and approve overtime for workers processing EI claims?

● (1445)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really should stop her fear#mongering.

We are committed to getting EI benefits to Canadians just as quickly as possible. We have a long tradition of putting on extra resources for the traditional peak in demand at Christmastime.

We will continue the tradition this year of putting extra resources toward EI processing to make sure that Canadians get their benefits as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after cutting 1,000 positions at Service Canada, the Conservatives are now forbidding employees to work overtime to process employment insurance claims.

This is more bad news for the 75,000 Canadians who have lost their jobs since October. Not only do they no longer have a livelihood, but now they will not even receive their EI benefits before Christmas.

Why are the Conservatives absolutely refusing to implement measures to help these people?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. He is wrong because we have a very long tradition of putting extra resources in EI processing for the season and just before Christmas so that Canadians get their benefits as quickly as possible. We will continue that tradition this year.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime, which is why they gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe.

Anyone who has witnessed gang activity knows that those who produce, import and traffic illicit drugs are a major threat to the safety and security of Canada's cities. Police chiefs, fire chiefs and victims agree that those who engage in this kind of activity should receive sentences that reflect the serious nature of their crime.

Could the Minister of Justice please inform the House about what measures he is taking to ensure that Canadians can be confident in our justice system?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that the safe streets and communities act was passed by the House by a convincing majority of members.

The member is correct that violent gangs will produce, import and traffic drugs as part of their criminal enterprise, and that police, firefighters and victims have long called for tougher sentences for those who engage in this kind of activity.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties missed yet another opportunity to side with law-abiding Canadians, but I am going to reassure them we have an ambitious justice agenda. We are going to give them more opportunities in the future to side with victims and law-abiding Canadians.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Prime Minister will sign off on a deal that will hand Canadians' private information over to U.S. Homeland Security. Exactly what information is still a secret; the government refuses to say.

Canadians have no idea if their privacy is being protected and they have good reason to worry. When the government negotiates with the Americans, Canadian families always lose.

Will the government finally reveal what information it is handing over to the Americans?

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the privacy of Canadians is important to us. The United States will not end up with more information than is already accessible. This plan is about jobs and the economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs just said, without actually coming right out and saying it, is that the President of the United States will know before Canadians what private information the Americans will be given about them. There is concern about the deal being signed tomorrow because, when the government signs deals with the Americans, Canadians always lose.

Let us be clear: we are talking about movement across our borders, and the safety and privacy of Canadians.

What is in this agreement that the Conservatives refuse to tell Parliament?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the President of the United States issued a joint declaration in February. We have consulted Canadians extensively as we have worked with the U.S. to develop an action plan. This issue was discussed with Canadians during the recent federal election campaign.

* * *

[Translation]

ASBESTOS

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in 130 years, Quebec's asbestos mines are closed.

A majority of Quebec's civil society is now against public funding of the industry and against the export of asbestos.

Just when circumstances finally allow us to resolve the situation, the government is aggravating it by eliminating tariff barriers with India.

We have already exported enough disease to countries with inadequate standards.

Will this government finally bring in a transition plan to guarantee a future for the asbestos regions? Please, out of respect for those who no longer have jobs, will the Conservatives stop the broken record?

● (1450)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, the government has been supporting the safe use of chrysotile. Chrysotile can be used safely in a controlled environment that is properly regulated, either at the national or international level.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough that the government will not ban asbestos, but do we have to be the number one cheerleader for the asbestos cartel? It is bad enough that Conservatives spend millions of dollars subsidizing the industry, but now they want India to take the tariff off this made-in-Canada epidemic so they can export their human misery duty-free.

It makes me wonder. They are always talking about siding with the victims. Why are they doing the asbestos cartel's dirty work? Why do Conservatives not stand up for the victims of asbestos both in this country and abroad?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, my colleague made no mention of risk management. What we are saying is that, for 30 years, the government has supported the safe use of chrysotile. Recent scientific studies show that chrysotile can be used safely in a controlled environment that is properly regulated, either at the national or international level.

* * *

[English]

OCEAN CHOICE INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Ocean Choice International announced it is closing its plants in Port Union and in Marystown. Close to 500 people are directly affected and will lose their jobs permanently.

I have two questions for the government. First, what assistance will the federal government provide to help these families in need? Second, will the government assist the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in helping these devastated regions?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our hearts and prayers go out to the people who have been laid off, and their families, particularly at this time of year.

Service Canada does have programs to work with the provinces and employers to help the people who have been laid off get access to all the benefits to which they are entitled as quickly as possible and to help them get trained so that they can pursue other opportunities to support their families in the future. We look forward to doing that.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Veterans Ombudsman made the case that veterans should receive the same amount for funeral costs as serving Canadian Forces members. However, today we learned that the Conservatives will cut \$4 million from the Last Post Fund.

Page 30 of the Conservatives' 2008 campaign platform said that they would "increase funeral and burial assistance rates for veterans to bring the rates for veterans in line with those of active duty Canadian Forces and RCMP officers".

Why promise to increase support for funeral costs and then today cut \$4 million? Why betray veterans?

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, funeral and burial assistance is provided to veterans regardless of their rank or decoration. In fact, it was the previous Liberal government that cut assistance for funeral and burial costs by half. Our government has provided an additional

Oral Questions

\$3 billion over six years for veterans' benefits and services. We will continue to work with the loved ones and families to address their priorities and their concerns.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when a female RCMP officer came forward with serious allegations of sexual harassment, it took two years for the force to even acknowledge the complaint. Every day we are hearing more and more alarming stories of harassment, yet we see little or no action in response. This is yet another example of problems in the RCMP under the Conservative government's watch.

On this day, will the minister commit to a full-scale investigation of harassment inside the RCMP?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, yes I will. In fact, I have been saying that for the past two weeks.

I am extremely concerned about these troubling reports. That is why, in consultation with the new commissioner, Commissioner Paulson, I have asked the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP to investigate allegations of systemic failures to deal appropriately with sexual harassment in the RCMP.

It is imperative that all of us recognize that members of the RCMP be free to face the daily and expected challenges of a day's work without harassment.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP is abandoning its own officers. How can the police force protect Canadians if it cannot protect its own staff? Substantive change is needed at the RCMP. Whether it is the issue of how sexual harassment complaints are handled or of internal supervision by civilians, the system is completely broken. The RCMP is broken and its mechanisms are hurting the men and women who proudly serve Canadians.

When will the government do something to correct this extremely embarrassing situation?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I for one am very proud of the men and women in the RCMP. That kind of generalized statement does nothing to assist the hard-working men and women in the RCMP.

We have taken a number of steps, both in the new contract that we signed with the province and also with the new commissioner, to ensure that there is a complete investigation of what may be systemic failure to deal appropriately with sexual harassment within the force.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is deeply concerned at the ongoing violence in Syria. Sanctions on the Syrian government by the Arab League are expected to result in the suspension of many commercial flights later this month. Foreign Affairs consular services has recently updated the travel advisory for Syria.

Would the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs responsible for consular services please update the House on this travel advisory for Canadians?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for her great work in protecting the safety of citizens, particularly women and girls.

Our government stands with the Syrian people in their quest for greater freedom and democracy, but the situation there remains very dangerous. The travel advisory was recently updated to urge Canadians in Syria that they should leave now while there are still commercial means available. Canadians who remain in the country need to know that our embassy's ability to provide consular assistance will be extremely limited. Those looking for more information should consult travel.gc.ca.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's answers with respect to the use of the plane by the Minister of National Defence keep changing. The September answers were that he was on a previously planned search and rescue operation. In the answers that we have heard from the minister and the Prime Minister today, and in the answers yesterday, the words "search and rescue operation" appear nowhere.

My question for the Prime Minister is simply this. Was the Minister of National Defence, or was he not, on a search and rescue operation on his trip in Newfoundland, yes or no? What kind of a trip was he on?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question a number of times. I left time off to go back to work.

* * *

CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently released video of a horse-slaughter facility in Saint-André-Avellin, Quebec, offers a shocking insight into Canada's failing animal welfare system. The disturbing footage shows that at least 40% of the horses in the stun box were not rendered immediately unconscious after using 11 bolt pistol shots to stun one animal.

Horses are not raised for human consumption and are routinely administered drugs banned in the food supply. Phenylbutazone can cause aplastic anemia in children.

When will the minister put a stop to this violent industry and start to address the serious health concerns?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CFIA is reviewing this video. CFIA inspectors are present daily to verify that animal welfare requirements are met, but our government has taken steps to give the CFIA more tools to impose tougher fines and to improve animal welfare. For example, we have more than doubled the fines from the \$4,000 limit to \$10,000 for infractions and we have extended the amount of time CFIA can consider multiple offences from three years to five years.

I will finish with a quote from Connie Mallory, the Ontario SPCA chief inspector, who states, "The steps the government have made today are encouraging action for animal welfare".

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today women and men from Canada will be gathering to commemorate the tragic events that took the lives of 14 young women in 1989. Equally as tragic, many women and girls continue to suffer violence today.

Could the Minister for Status of Women provide comment on this important issue?

● (1500)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a very tragic event, but we must also use it as a way to continue to take action. At Status of Women Canada, we have doubled our funding for women's programming and now 60% of our funding goes to projects to end violence against women. We also know that one woman in six has experienced rape on university or college campuses. Therefore, last week we launched a new program to fund projects to end violence against women on university and college campuses. Importantly, we are asking students for their input.

We will continue to act to end violence against women.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN LIVING IN POVERTY

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, poverty prevents entire families from achieving their full potential and directly increases instances of violence against women. Today, 1.6 million women live in poverty in Canada. When the government refuses to tackle pay equity, refuses to create a national affordable housing strategy and withdraws funding for a national child care program, it puts women in danger.

Why is the government not doing anything to help women get out of poverty?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has done a great deal to help women get out of poverty. For example, we introduced the working income tax benefit to do just that. When women work, they can keep more money. We also introduced special benefits for self-employed workers, the majority of whom are women. We also supported job creation through our economic action plan, and it is working.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, Quebec remembers. It remembers a massacre perpetrated with a firearm at École Polytechnique. It remembers the 14 young women who died and those who miraculously survived. Unfortunately, this insensitive and stubborn government is seeking to kill gun control by abolishing a firearms registry that saves lives. This government will be morally responsible for the consequences of that decision.

Since this government does not care about the victims and is truly obsessed with abolishing the long gun registry, will it transfer to Quebec the data it has already paid for?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that this government and this country remember. We remember the terrible tragedy that occurred on December 6, 22 years ago already. We want to ensure that the violent and tragic events that occurred 22 years ago never occur again.

We may never fully understand what happened that day, but together in this House we can ensure that it never happens again. We are working on it.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Thomas Rachel, German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of Education and Research.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

DISTURBANCE IN GALLERY AND DECORUM IN THE HOUSE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on two points of order raised concerning disturbances in the chamber.

The first is the point of order raised on November 24, 2011, by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader regarding the disturbance in the gallery on November 23, 2011. Second, there is the point of order raised by the hon. member for Toronto Centre regarding a disturbance on the floor during the taking

Speaker's Ruling

of a vote on November 28, 2011, and the ensuing gallery disturbance.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader and the member for Toronto Centre for raising these matters. I would also like to thank the Right Hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, the Chief Opposition Whip and the members for Malpeque, Churchill and Acadie—Bathurst for their contributions.

[English]

The events that have given rise to the first of these points of order are the following. On November 23, following the recorded division on the motion to allocate time at the report and third reading stages of Bill C-18, Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act, a disturbance occurred in the gallery when a protestor held up a sign and shouted loudly. Proceedings in the chamber were interrupted while the individual concerned was removed by security personnel and, while this was happening, certain members of the opposition were cheering and encouraging the protestor.

● (1505)

[Translation]

The following day, the parliamentary secretary rose to say that the protestor had been sponsored by the hon. member for Churchill and went on to allege that the member for Churchill, along with her colleagues, had known that the protest was going to take place. He argued that this foreknowledge was apparent since several members had cameras ready, and were cheering and encouraging the protestor. He stated that these actions by opposition members were an affront to the dignity of the House and diminished respect for our parliamentary institutions.

[English]

In response, the chief opposition whip acknowledged that the member for Churchill had provided at least eight people with passes to the gallery but stated categorically that the member for Churchill had no advance warning of the protest, was in no way responsible for it and, on the contrary, she regretted that it had occurred. The member for Churchill herself later confirmed this account when she intervened on the matter on November 28, at page 3684 of *Debates*.

On November 5, 2009, at pages 6690 and 6691 of *Debates*, Speaker Milliken had occasion to rule on a strikingly similar incident and, in doing so, referenced two other such incidents. In all three of those cases, it was alleged that a certain member had prior knowledge of, and was therefore complicit in, a disturbance in the galleries. Then, as now, the accused members denied involvement and Speaker Milliken accepted those explanations. Remembering the time-honoured tradition in this place that members are taken at their word and so in keeping with the precedents just cited, the Chair is prepared to consider this particular aspect of the matter to be closed. As for the actions of certain members while the November 23 incident occurred, the Chair will have more to say later in this ruling.

Government Orders

The second point of order I want to address arises out of events that occurred November 28, when the House was voting on third reading of Bill C-18, Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act. On that occasion, while their caucus voted, members on the government side applauded loudly in a sustained manner. When the result was announced, a large number of gallery spectators applauded as they rose to file out of the gallery. This time, it was members on the government side encouraging and cheering the disturbance.

[*Translation*]

Let me be clear that the public is welcome to view our proceedings from the galleries—indeed, such visits are, I believe, encouraged and members' offices facilitate such visits all the time. However, it is a fundamental principle of public attendance in the House that the proceedings must be respected by those who come here to witness them first-hand. In the galleries, the public is here to observe. There is ample opportunity and appropriate public venues for demonstrations but the chamber of the House of Commons and its galleries do not constitute such a venue.

[*English*]

When members assist people who wish to attend the House by providing them with gallery passes, it is simply not acceptable for those people to take advantage of their access to disrupt a proceeding of the House. So, be it the actions of the single protestor on November 23 or the groups of applauding observers on November 28, the Chair has no hesitation in stating that these behaviours are not acceptable.

[*Translation*]

But our concerns cannot end there. The actions of members to encourage the behaviour of those who ought to have been simple spectators were as troubling to the Chair as were the disturbances themselves. The House of Commons chamber enjoys a reputation as a forum where matters of national significance are debated and strongly held views are expressed. Sometimes, as in the case of proceedings on the Wheat Board bill, emotions will run high. The Chair understands that. But this does not obviate the responsibility of all members to act in a manner that is befitting their role and worthy of this institution, setting an example of appropriate behaviour for others.

[*English*]

Rising to address the events of November 28, the member for Toronto Centre asked the Chair to define which types of demonstrations are permitted. It is unfortunate that such a question needs to be asked, but let me be clear with hon. members on all sides of the House, and with those who follow our proceedings. Demonstrations are not part of the accepted standard of decorum in this chamber, not in the galleries by visitors to the House, and not on the floor by members of the House. Even brief applause, which has been tolerated at times when a particular member rising to vote is being acknowledged for his or her contribution to an initiative, is never encouraged. In fact, Standing Order 16(1) states:

When the Speaker is putting a question, no Member shall enter, walk out of or across the House, or make any noise or disturbance.

I repeat “or make any noise or disturbance”. This role has traditionally applied until the results of the vote are announced.

Clearly, sustained applause during a vote is out of order and should not happen again.

While we are on the subject, let me add that lately during votes we have witnessed a variety of carryings-on, including mischief-making by whistling, changing places to confuse the vote callers and other disruptive behaviours that are not in order. Too frequently lately, lack of decorum is evident during question period, for example, when members asking or answering questions are being drowned out by heckling, applause, or to use a colloquialism, hooting and hollering of one form or another.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

Left unchecked, a deterioration in order and decorum risks impeding the work of the House and doing a disservice to members and to the voters who sent them here. All members must take great care in what they do and say here—they are personally accountable for their actions and for their words—so that they do not risk transgressing the accepted rules that exist to protect the dignity of this House and its members.

[*English*]

As your Speaker, I have been entrusted with preserving order and decorum, but I can only succeed with the serious and sustained co-operation of all members. I count on each individual member on all sides of the House for that co-operation.

I thank all hon. members for their attention to this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to once again rise to speak to Bill C-20 the fair representation act. I spoke in support of this bill about a month ago. I will continue to give it my strong support today.

As mentioned in my previous remarks on this bill, my riding is the largest riding in Canada, according to the last census. I am quite confident that the new population figures will confirm that my riding continues to be one of the largest in this country.

I am certainly proud to represent the fine people of Brampton West, and there are many of them. It is striking to see the differences in population between my riding and some others in this country. For instance, the population difference between my riding and the average national riding is large enough to warrant another riding.

Government Orders

The problem that we all face is not strictly about numbers but about principles. Representing as many people as I do is not the problem. The problem is that those people's votes do not carry the same weight as the votes of other Canadians. My constituents are not alone in this.

In fact, it is an odd twist of fate that over 60% of Canada's population now finds itself increasingly under-represented. The votes of over 60% of Canadians are worth increasingly less than the other 40%. My point is not to pit Canadian against Canadian. My point is that the principles behind the formula that make this odd twist of fate are out of step and must be rebalanced to provide fairness for all Canadians. That is something we should try to fix. This bill can fix this issue.

As I remarked last month, Bill C-20 is a fair and reasonable fix to voter under-representation in Canada. We committed in the last election to address this issue and bring forward legislation. This legislation would fulfill that commitment.

We made three distinct promises to Canadians during the last election with respect to fair representation. This bill would live up to every one of those promises. First, we committed to increasing the number of seats now and into the future to reflect the population growth in the faster growing provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, we committed to protect the number of seats for smaller provinces. Third, we committed to protect the proportional representation of Quebec. The vote of every Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, should have equal weight in the House. Without the passage of this bill, we will in fact continue to move away from that fairness.

The proposal that has been put forward by the NDP would also continue the current unfairness. Its proposal is to guarantee a fixed percentage of seats now and indefinitely into the future to one province, regardless of that province's population. I do not think that is fair, nor do Canadians think it is fair, to give one province special treatment that is not available to other provinces. We do not even think the proposal by the NDP is constitutional.

The fact is that the NDP proposal violates the principles of proportional representation in our Constitution. It would completely depart from the principle that a province's population should determine its seat count to the greatest extent possible and that, to the greatest extent possible, each province should be represented fairly and proportionally. Even more disappointing is that the NDP proposal would further penalize the provinces, such as my own, that are already seriously and increasingly under-represented. It would ensure that this under-representation continued into the future.

There is no getting around that. Fixing one province's seat percentage at a certain level that is above that province's percentage of Canadian population has the unavoidable result of causing the larger and faster growing provinces to be further under-represented. As I say, this is a disappointing position for the official opposition. It is a bad idea that, even if it were possible, sabotages the very principles that New Democrats purport in their bill. They argue theirs is fair, but it is clearly unfair to all of the other provinces.

●(1515)

The NDP plan would lead to far higher seat growth in the House. While we believe that there is an investment in democracy and in fair representation that needs to be made, that plan goes too far. It is unnecessary and it goes in the wrong direction.

Our bill, on the other hand, is principled. It has a national application for all provinces and it strikes a fair balance. The faster growing provinces need to be treated much more fairly. Failing to provide a fair level of representation to these rapidly growing provinces and regions is to deny, in particular, new Canadians and visible minorities their rightful voice in this chamber.

My riding is home to approximately 55% visible minorities. Their votes are significantly under-represented in this House. The NDP bill would exacerbate that situation. It is just not fair. With our bill we are moving towards much fairer representation for Canadians and for all growing provinces. As the minister has said, Canadians from all backgrounds in all parts of the country expect and deserve fair representation.

We have allowed the House to move too far away from representation by population and that cannot be allowed to continue. We are getting back to fairness with our bill. I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, regardless of what party or province they may come from.

The bill, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating seats in the House of Commons. It is fair, it is reasonable and it is principled. It will achieve better representation for the faster growing provinces where better representation is so desperately needed. It delivers on our government's long-standing commitments. I am proud to stand in the House today and say that I fully support this legislation.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member said that we should not pit one region against another, is he saying that is what they are doing in the rest of the world?

Why would Canada be the only parliament where fairness means forever adding seats and politicians? This is something that Canadians do not want. Why is it that, in the last 22 times that we changed Liberal seats from one province to another, which was a common practice in Canada, nobody said that it was not fair?

It is part of life. It is part of democracy. It is what we should do. Why not?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has put some hard work into the proposal that the Liberals have put forward.

I have to say that at least they have put forward a proposal that has a certain allocation of seats. This is unlike the members of the NDP, who in this House were asked at least four times when I was here what their specific number was. They danced, they moved, they did everything they could to not answer the question.

Government Orders

With respect to the substance of the question, I disagree with what the member is saying. The legislation the Liberals are proposing actually does pick winners and losers. It would take away seats from one province and give them to another. We do not need to go down that road. We do not need to say to Quebec that its seats would now go to Ontario, or Manitoba's seats would go to Alberta. Those are the kind of regional differences we do not need to inflame in this country. Our legislation addresses that, while theirs does not.

• (1520)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the principle is that a certain percentage of the population would get a certain percentage of the seats. We could do that with 250 seats, or 300 seats or 350 seats. It is not a matter of taking away particular seats. If we gave 100 seats to B.C. would everybody else be hurt? Yes, because the proportion of seats for people in Ontario, for example, would decrease.

Does the member not understand that it is proportion that matters? Their solution is simply to add more and more seats. Fifty years from now there would be 700 seats in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, does my friend not understand that we have constitutional guarantees for certain seats for certain provinces? Is he suggesting that we get rid of those? It would appear he is.

We also have certain legislative elements that set certain benchmarks for seats. Is he saying that we get rid of those? Again we would be pitting provinces against provinces.

We would be saying that one province's seats would be taken away. We would take away the legislation that was designed to protect its seats. That plan says, "That is gone. We are giving it to someone else. Too bad, you lose and somebody else wins".

That is not what we are doing. That is what they want to do. They want to pit region against region, take seats from one province and give them to another. It is not how we are going to do it.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would my colleague comment on the Liberal proposal which would cause the loss of some seats in some of the smaller provinces? Does he think that it is fair and equitable for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to have the same number of seats even though their populations are substantially different, or does it bring us closer to or draw us further away from representation by population vis-à-vis those two small provinces?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal proposal would do exactly that.

The other thing that the Liberals have not told us about their proposal is that they would make rural ridings exceptionally larger to get closer to representation by population, which would make those ridings much more difficult to manage. We heard a member stand today to say that it is difficult for his constituents to come and do that.

We need to balance all kinds of different interests to ensure the country works for everyone. We will not create gigantic ridings for rural Ontario in order to compensate taking seats away from different provinces, like the Liberals want to do.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act.

I recite the full title of this bill with purpose. The reference to our Constitution Act, in particular, serves as a caution to us all. It advises us, implicitly at least, that in consideration of this bill we must tread, if not cautiously then at least with great sensitivity.

I think it is true to say that this bill does not proceed with sufficient sensitivity to the nature of this country. The principle of representation by population is a reasonable and supportable principle. I would acknowledge that it is responsive to some very obvious practical considerations.

I am aware that there are ridings in this country whose populations have increased dramatically owing to immigration and/or urban transformation, in particular suburbanization. All of us in this House are aware of the ongoing challenge of connecting with our constituents, as they deserve, in a meaningful and personal way. I would acknowledge that in some ridings these challenges are greater than in others owing to the distribution of our population. There is, too, the issue of votes in highly populated ridings, in a sense, counting for less than in lesser populated ridings.

However, it is the case with all principles that their application, irrespective of context and specific circumstances, leads to issues and sometimes have a contradictory effect. This bill and its central principle of representation by population is a case in point.

Our country is a strong country. As the last century or so of state building around the world comes under significant challenges, if not simply undone, Canada stands out internationally as a stable and united country. While this is the truth about Canada, we are wise to remember that our history has not been without moments when our future as a country has come into question. That history is a reminder that we must never take for granted our collective existence as a country.

This is an incredibly complex country. I do not think we can overstate how complicated it is. I am not sure, in fact, how fully we have even grasped that complexity. We were born of treaties with first nations. There have been battles within between founding nations. There have been triumphs over greater forces that ensured our sovereignty. Then, just when we think we have a firm grasp on this history, from time to time our history is revisited and revised in a profound way to make better sense of how we came to be and survive as one country.

Government Orders

However, through all of that, our very existence today suggests that this country was built on a solid foundation. If we are to carry on together as one, then it is not enough to know that there is a strong foundation. We must know what that foundation is. We must understand what it is that allows that foundation to carry on supporting a society that is growing and changing, becoming increasingly diverse and enduring irrespective of changes in the global context in which we exist.

These are my thoughts on that foundation. I think that Canada provides, if not perfectly then at least sufficiently, a sense common to or shared by enough of us that we belong together and could not do without one another, or at least that we would not feel whole without the other.

It is not the whole of our foundation, we are much too complex for that, but at the heart of this sense of belonging together is our recognition that Quebec is a nation within this united Canada. This fact, I am so pleased to say, was unanimously recognized by this House just over five years ago.

Herein lies the fundamental flaw of the bill before us. It fails to recognize, reflect and incorporate that truth about Canada. It fails to acknowledge that it is this recognition that is so essential to so many of us feeling that we belong here together. It fails to acknowledge that it is this fact, perhaps in some strange, counterintuitive way, that affirms us as a single country and allows us to endure as a single country.

• (1525)

We are about 33 million individual stories in Canada. Each of us would have our own way of articulating our sense of belonging but I know that critical to millions of us is the recognition of Quebec as a nation within Canada and its inclusion in Canada on that basis. It is not just to the people of Quebec that this matters.

I was born in Quebec, just across the river from this place, to a young francophone mother but I was adopted at an early age and raised in Kingston, Ontario. I call Kingston my hometown. Quebec, I recognize as different and yet it is also a part of me and a part without which I would not be whole. I think the same is true of Canada.

Therefore, this bill must, if we are to be sensitive to the foundation upon which we were built and have endured, recognize Quebec's place in this country. This bill should be an opportunity to continue to reinforce that foundation, to continue to build this country. I think it is the case that countries are not just built once or at least not just once in a way that will allow them to endure. We are too dynamic a society and too interactive a world to set in concrete the foundation that will provide forever a sense of belonging to all. That foundation must be reinforced time and again to ensure that we, with all our diversity and all the pushes and pulls that act upon us, feel like we belong together.

To do so, it is to our benefit to ensure that each province has the number of seats it is entitled to based on its population and the principle of proportionate representation. However, we can also ensure that Quebec maintains its current weight in the House of Commons at the time that we recognize it as a nation within a united Canada. Bill C-20 fails to do this by reducing Quebec's relative

weight in this House. For this reason alone, Bill C-20 requires amendment.

• (1530)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is 3:30. There is still time for the NDP to table its numbers.

My colleague said in his speech that each province must have the number of seats that it is entitled to. In the NDP plan, that means a House of how many seats? We need a number. It is a very simple question. Canadians deserve to know how many seats the House would have with the NDP plan.

We know the answer with the Conservative plan. The financiers would be interested in that. The government is cutting everywhere but it wants to increase by 30 seats the number of politicians in Canada.

What are the NDP numbers?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, I would remind my colleague, as his fellow caucus member from my hometown, Kingston and the Islands, just mentioned, that this is an issue about proportions in this House and not just about numbers. It is the position of this party that Quebec retain that proportion of the seats in this House that it had at the time in which we recognized its place within this country in 2006.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech and I thank him for the recognition he gave to what should be going on in the Conservative bill as nation building and not just some kind of juggling act where every time the Conservative government brings forward a bill it has a different set of numbers in it. I agree with him on the question of proportionality.

Many members in the House have been talking about the large number and extra number of politicians. For me, coming from British Columbia where we are severely under-represented, I would like to see more MPs. Would the member agree with me that one of the things we could do is abolish the Senate where both British Columbia and Ontario are severely under-represented. We could more than compensate for the number of new MPs by getting rid of the unelected Senate.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that it is not just Canadians from any particular province who are under-represented by the Senate. I would suggest that all Canadians are under-represented by the Senate for it seems not to represent Canadians at all in their views. I would most certainly support the abolition of that chamber and also support an increase in the number of members of Parliament in this place.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North may ask a brief question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the NDP is challenged on this issue in terms of coming forward with a number. I can appreciate why. Its members are trying to suck up to the province of Quebec and the voter.

Government Orders

NDP members are underestimating the intelligence of the people of Quebec by making themselves irrelevant to the debate. Either they want to be part of the debate and put their numbers on the table or they do not. I would ask the member to respect the audience listening to the debate and understand that if the NDP wants to be part of the debate, it has to show what numbers it is talking about.

We in the Liberal Party say the number of seats should be kept the same. The Conservatives are saying—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I did say a brief question. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York has a minute remaining.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, I do not appreciate the notion of sucking up to anybody.

I would say to my Liberal colleagues, both of whom have asked a question, that my sense is that there is a certain pettiness to this desire to have numbers put forward.

What is at debate here is the very fundamental issue of what makes this country and what keeps this country together. Before we talk about the number of chairs in the House, we should be talking about the fundamental principles of what makes this country great, what allows it to endure and what will secure a great future for it.

• (1535)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising to continue to offer some thoughts additional to those that I offered at second reading of the bill and to endorse once again the basic notion that we want to have a House of Commons that represents as much as is practically, legally and constitutionally possible the principle of representation by population. The bill seeks to do that.

One can quibble about small details of this bill, as I myself have done at various points, while seeing that it accomplishes this goal quite well. It does it better than the previous efforts from the current government on this matter, and certainly much better than efforts of past governments in this regard.

In particular, it honours the commitment this party made going into the last election that we would try to accomplish three things in the legislation we would bring forward should we be re-elected, those being, number one, that we would try to ensure more representation for the three under-represented provinces of Ontario, B.C. and Alberta; number two, that we would not remove any seats from the provinces that are currently overrepresented, but simply try to lower the weight of those seats through increasing the size of the House; and number three, that we would ensure that Quebec would retain the proportion of seats in the House to which its population entitles it. Once one creates more seats, that can only be done by giving some seats to Quebec to raise it up to the level that its numbers warrant.

It is worth mentioning in this regard that Quebec is, as it more or less always has been through Canada's history, represented by about the number of MPs that its population warrants. It has varied up and down by a tiny amount, but only by a very slight amount. That has been a principle, and it is actually a foundational principle.

We may recall that in 1867 the Constitution included a formula that said that Quebec got a certain number of seats and the number of seats for any other province in Canada was to be based upon a formula ensuring that the number of electors per riding would be the same as in Quebec. That foundational principle continues to be honoured in this bill, and I think it is really the only way that it can be honoured.

I know the New Democrats have suggested a different proposal that would deviate from that formula and would say that Quebec ought to get more seats than is proportional to what its population would warrant. It ought to essentially be frozen at a certain percentage of the population, much as we freeze the representation of provinces in the Senate regardless of their populations.

I would point out two things. First, that is something that in federations is normally done in the upper chamber. Canada is not unique in this regard; that is the case in Germany, in the United States, in Australia and in Canada as well. It is not an appropriate way of dealing with the lower chamber. The foundational part of the compromise in all federations is that one chamber has something other than representation by population and one chamber is founded on representation by population. I would hate to see us deviate from that.

I would also point out that there have been a few other attempts to propose this idea in the past. The Charlottetown accord is an example. These proposals have been rejected by Canadian voters, and I think we should accept that the Canadian population has spoken on this point. We do not want to deviate from the principle of representation by population for all provinces, and most definitely for Quebec.

This really was part of our original Confederation deal. One of the primary drivers to bring Confederation into existence in 1867 was the unworkability of the representation formula in the Parliament of the Province of Canada, which met in this very spot prior to Confederation.

The formula under which that Parliament operated was equal representation in both Canada East and Canada West—in other words, Quebec and Ontario—despite the fact that their populations were not the same. That was fundamentally unworkable. Anybody who doubts that statement can go back and look at the Confederation debates to see just how unworkable the Fathers of Confederation themselves thought it was.

This is part of the basis upon which our federation is established.

The concept that votes should be equivalent in value, that the weight of every vote should be the same, is intrinsic in other places.

In Australia, the term is referred to as “one vote, one value”. It means the same thing as representation by population.

Government Orders

• (1540)

In the United Kingdom, one of the key points in that country's transition to full democracy was the Great Reform Act of 1832, in which the so-called rotten boroughs were abandoned. The U.K. had had a policy of freezing representation—over centuries, actually—while populations went up and down, to the point that the smallest of these boroughs, known as “rotten” or “pocket” boroughs, had only a handful of voters and were effectively controlled by individuals. One could actually gather up a number of pocket boroughs in one's pocket because one controlled that small number of electors, who also voted through an open balloting process. The result was that one could send off one's friend or son, if he could not find a job anywhere else, to the House of Commons. That system was very wisely abandoned.

I should point out that the Americans as well dealt with this problem. An example was the *Reynolds v. Sims* case in 1964, in which the United States Supreme Court dealt with the wide variation that existed in levels of representation, not between the states, but within individual states. The U.S. dealt with situations such as one in the New Hampshire assembly, where the largest and smallest districts were separated by a factor of 1,081. The largest district was over 1,000 times larger than the smallest district. Clearly it was a worse problem than we have here.

There were a number of other states. California locked in representation by county. County populations changed, so by 1964 the population of Los Angeles County was 428 times larger than the smallest county in California, but they both had the same number of people in the California State Senate. That was determined to be unconstitutional, and that lack of representation by population was abandoned. The U.S. has a different constitution, but the principle is fundamental to all of these countries, including our own.

In Canada the distinctions are not as great, but a report by the Mowat Centre states that the standard deviation between the most overrepresented and the most under-represented populations is substantially larger. It is about eight times larger than in the U.S., about four times larger than in Australia and more than twice as large as in Germany or Switzerland. That seems to me to be problematic.

I note that Canada has gone through many different electoral formulas. We have amended this part of our Constitution numerous times. The last of these amendments, according to the Mowat Centre study, had the result of putting a cap on members in the House of Commons, thereby driving up the disproportion between provinces. It has a very interesting chart showing that over the past 20 years the rate of disproportion has doubled between provinces like Ontario and B.C. on the large side and Newfoundland and Manitoba or Saskatchewan on the small side. This would continue if we did nothing to expand, and would lead to less democracy, not more.

The solution is necessarily to expand the number of seats in the House of Commons. We could, as the Liberals suggest, try to cut the number of seats for the smaller provinces. This would have the opposite effect to what we have done. The number of seats in Quebec would have to be reduced in absolute terms to keep pace with that, and that is part of the Liberals' proposal.

I disagree with their proposal for a couple of reasons. First of all, we have seen that there is tremendous resistance historically to doing this sort of thing. Because this is a proposal by a party not in power, we have not seen the full weight of popular disapproval, but it would be extensive, based on what we have seen in the 1940s, in the 1980s and on other occasions when this sort of thing has been bounced around.

The second problem we face is that the smaller provinces themselves would see a substantial disproportion as they were levelled out down to the allowable floors set by the so-called senatorial floor. That problem would lead to a different kind of disproportion: relative levels of under-representation or overrepresentation among those smaller provinces. That is a fundamental problem.

Finally, I want to point out that I fundamentally disagree with the Liberal member who has proposed this alternative, although I respect his opinion very much. I personally do not think there is anything fundamentally wrong with increasing the number of members in the House of Commons. In 1867 there were about 165 members in the House of Commons; we now have about twice as many members, for a population that is about 10 times as large.

• (1545)

There are some areas of the country where this has led to many populous but geographically small ridings. I will just put it in my own area. If we go back and look at a map of the area covered by Lanark, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, the first electoral map postdated 1867, what we would see is that they do not fit perfectly, but there were about four ridings in an area that is now covered by one riding.

Relatively speaking, those people have seen their representation decline. That is a reality of life, not in all parts of Canada but in large parts of Canada. It seems to me that slowing down that process of relative decline and relatively geographically expanding ridings is something that, for those of us who represent rural Canada, is meaningful.

If there is a concern about cost, and I have heard him mention that, let us look at some of the other costs in this chamber and perhaps when he gets to ask his question, as he will do in a moment, I will invite him to comment on whether or not he thinks we could get the same result by perhaps lowering our salaries somewhat or in some other way dealing with costs rather than removing representation.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the reasons, I keep hearing, that we need to make this change right now is because of this need to reflect our communities, the changes, the rotten boroughs, and giving us a historical perspective.

Really, when we look at our geography, we have some ridings that are larger than France, so far more than numbers need to play into it when we look at our ridings.

If we are looking at diversity and trying to see that diversity in Parliament, we just have to look at my NDP caucus. I think we are very diverse and we do not have as many seats held by us as the Conservatives are holding, not only when it comes to gender but also when it comes to ethnicity and all of that.

Government Orders

My colleague mentioned one cost-cutting measure which is that we as MPs could take salary rollbacks in order to pay for this new drama, but what are some of the other suggestions you would have?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. But before he comments, I would just ask all hon. members to direct their comments through the chair.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I have a sense that when the member asked that question, she was asking about other cost-cutting measures I suggested. I am not sure I have any others.

With regard to the salaries, I will just note that when I first arrived here in 2000, one of the first things we did was to vote ourselves a \$20,000 pay increase. The argument that was presented at the time was that if we did not pay more, we would not get good people, leaving me wondering, what about us. We came here when the salary was at the old level. We thought it was fine.

What can I say? If we cut the salaries by 10%, we could have 10% more people. I am not advocating for or against this. I just point out that I do not think we should say that in a multi-billion dollar budget, we ought to start by trying to trim democracy and representation. I think there are other ways of going about it.

With regard to large ridings that are hard to manage, it is a good point. Nunavut is the size of Ontario. It seems to me that one of the things we could do is provide, and now I am going in the opposite direction, extra funds that would allow members to open a second constituency office, for example, or provide services in some other way.

That, I think, would be a better way of assuring proper representation for those very geographically large ridings. I would not want to do anything that fiddles with the notion of representation by population to obtain that kind of constituency service that people have the right to expect.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington for having a dialogue. That is something we need.

He said in his proposal that smaller provinces have differences of representation; not more than the government. No province has representation different than our plan of 308. The government has its plan at 338, so the question is, why not 308?

He said that we have large ridings. We have much better communication systems than before. The U.K. is cutting 60 seats. New Brunswick will cut seats. The Prime Minister suggested that we needed to cut these seats in this House in the past.

Ontario, the hon. member's own province, has decreased its seats from 130 to 103. Is there one of these cases where he thinks it has been detrimental to the representation of the public because all the studies I have seen have shown that it is not case. The people are able to reach their elected representatives. They have the same satisfaction with democracy. Adding seats will not improve the representation in this House.

• (1550)

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, the point I was trying to make with regard to the provinces was vis-à-vis each other. As we cut

them down to their senatorial floors, we do encounter some new inequalities that creep in. The example I used to make this point was Nova Scotia versus New Brunswick. We have 10 seats in one province right now and 11 in the other with a larger population. Because they have different populations and the same number of seats, we would actually see a fairly substantial difference between them.

With regard to the question of having more rather than fewer members overall, I will just make the point that when one examines it, because there is a wide range of variations in seat size in various jurisdictions, my own impression is that we do get better representation and less party discipline when we have larger Houses.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to discuss this because it is actually turning into what is, at least for politicians, a very interesting discussion. I do not know that Canadians are gripping the edges of their seats while watching this debate, but the conversation about how to make our democracy fairer, how to ensure that various areas of this country are properly represented, is one that is good to have.

However, I would like to emphasize that in the Liberal proposal we talk about keeping it at 308 seats, the Conservatives talk about 338 seats, and the NDP still does not know how many seats it wants to arrive at. It just wants a lot more, but there is no magic number. There is no magic number that Canadians will get hooked on to say that is the perfect number of MPs in the House.

If we ask most Canadians, very few of them would even be able to say how many MPs their city, province or region has. The number of actual MPs who represent them matter much less to Canadians than the quality of that representation, and whether or not there is a fair proportion in the House, however big or small the House may be, for the voices from their region. That is the important key element, that proportion be respected.

That is why when the Conservatives put forward a plan that is based, as they say, on three very clear principles, I applaud those principles and agree with them entirely. The first principle is to ensure more representation for the three fastest growing provinces. The second principle is to ensure that the smaller growing provinces still remain overrepresented, hopefully less so, but more overrepresented than their numbers would warrant because of the importance of our regional areas. We will not talk about one MP for the three territories because we need three MPs for the three territories. The third principle is that Quebec retains its proportion of the population, if not slightly above, which is in fact a repetition of number two but is politically important.

The Liberal Party entirely agrees with those three conditions. We just ask one further question. If we have to do it by adding 30 MPs, is there not a way to keep us at 308 MPs? The question we are asking is, are there really Canadians out there who want to see more MPs added to the House of Commons?

• (1555)

[Translation]

It is not about having greater representation, it is about representation of greater quality. The issue is even more relevant given what happens with a lot of members in this Parliament: they toe the party line. This is truer for certain parties than it is for others, but to a certain extent, members of Parliament tend to vote along party lines.

Having more members, therefore, is not necessarily the answer. All of these members need to have good and better resources, and there needs to be fair and proportionate distribution in the House.

[English]

What we actually have before the House today are two proposals that reach the very same proportions for the different regions and provinces in the House. If we put side by side the 338 seats in the government proposal and the 308 seats in the Liberal proposal, the totals are the same in terms of proportion of the House. There are no more and no less. To be quite concrete, Ontario would have 36% of the House in the Conservatives' proposal and 36% in the Liberals' proposal, 12% for B.C. in their proposal and 12% in our proposal, 10% for Alberta in their proposal and 10% in our proposal.

The details are almost identical. I say almost identical because, in fact, if we crunch the numbers, the Conservatives' third rule falls flat. They have said they do not want Quebec to go under the proportion of the population it represents as a proportion of the House.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, their figures do not hold water. According to Statistics Canada, Quebec accounts for 23.14% of the population. But under the 338-seat proposal, Quebec would account for only 23.08% of the House. It would therefore be under-represented in terms of its population. Right from the outset, that just does not work. It breaks one of the rules that the Conservatives themselves introduced.

The reason people do not realize it is because the Conservatives are being underhanded with their math. They are not dividing the 78 seats Quebec has by 338, but by 335. Why 335? Which three seats are not being counted as real seats in the House of Commons, but as separate seats? The answer is that the three seats belong to the territories. Dividing 78 by 338 gives you a result under the real floor for Quebec. This situation is unacceptable. By using bad math and trickery, the Conservatives are taking away the territories' seats.

Members from the territories are members like anyone else. They can be Prime Minister, a minister or a member of the opposition. A person in the territories has as much right to vote as anybody else, and his or her vote should be as legitimate as anybody else's.

By artificially separating the provinces and the territories, the Conservatives would have us believe that Quebec is well represented, but this is not true. This bill breaks the Conservatives'

Government Orders

own rule. Quebec is not adequately represented with 338 members. We have a real problem, because Quebec needs another seat and the other provinces need more or else they will become increasingly under-represented. We would end up playing into the hands of the NDP, who want to indiscriminately add seats, which would leave us with a ridiculous number of members without there being any greater democracy or equity in the House.

• (1600)

[English]

I understand that my colleagues on the Conservative side are in a bit of a pickle right now because their Prime Minister, for years before he came to power, was calling for a reduction in the number of seats in the House.

The Conservative Government of Ontario, under Premier Harris, reduced the seats for Ontario. New Brunswick is talking about reducing the number of seats. Seats are being reduced in England by a large number. It does not lead to less democracy. What is important is keeping the proportion.

We have put forward a proposal that respects the constitutionally guaranteed 1915 Senate minimums. The proposal we have, and I will admit it right now, does not respect the legislated floors that were brought in in 1985. They were brought in by an act of Parliament, not by having to reopen the Constitution, but they can be undone simply by an act of Parliament if only someone were to stand up and say that in this time of recession, where cynicism is rampant around politicians and our expenses, we need tighten our belts a little bit.

We are about to cut the public service and services to Canadians, let us not give them more voices to feed in the House of Commons. This is an opportunity to show restraint.

It does not mean that we will be at 308 seats for eternity. Maybe 10 years or 30 years from now we can refresh and say that we should be a little bigger because of population growth. However, for now, the Liberal Party has put forward a responsible proposal that says that we will copy the proportion and the balance that the Conservatives have put forward and we will do it saving the Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars. It is very simple. This is the kind of proposal that the Conservatives would be applauding if it were not for the fact that they did not bring it forward. That is the pickle that our Conservative friends are in.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member for Papineau, with his magical solution that the Liberals have come up with of a smaller House that has no impact on representation.

I am a member who represents a riding that stretches from urban into rural areas. The obvious impact of keeping the House at 308 would be to not really recognize the geographic fact of this country, that we have some very large geography to cover, and it is not just cultural representation. Therefore, when the number of seats are reduced in provinces, like Manitoba or Saskatchewan, we will come up against some very large and difficult to represent rural ridings.

If the seats are redistributed in British Columbia without increasing the number, then we would also come up with the same kind of unrepresentable ridings in northern and interior British Columbia.

Government Orders

Has the member really considered the impact of keeping the numbers the same in the rural parts of the provinces?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the challenge is that Canada is a country that is both urban and rural. The fact is that right now, in every province in the country, that balance plays into itself. Whether we are at 338 seats or 308 seats, the same questions will come up. We will be required to deal with difficult choices and answers. All we can do is ensure that we are giving MPs the resources they need to represent their ridings as best they can.

We propose that perhaps some of those millions of dollars we will save by not increasing the seats by 30 go toward giving MPs more tools to answer to their constituents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my impression that as long as our discussions focus on trying to find a mathematical solution to the problem, we will never solve it. While a mathematical approach may seem egalitarian, it is in fact not equitable. What Quebec is looking for in this new bill is recognition of its nationhood. We gave it that recognition unanimously in this House.

Could my colleague acknowledge that essentially, recognition of the Quebec nation can confer rights that derive not from mathematics, but from the very recognition of that status?

• (1605)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Madam Speaker, it is odd that my hon. colleague would disparage mathematics somewhat and then propose an arbitrary mathematical solution of 24% for Quebec, in perpetuity, without recognizing that everything changes. The important thing is to recognize Quebec's real weight and make sure that Quebec's voice is always heard loudly and clearly in this House, above and beyond its mathematical proportion.

So our proposal, which says this involves more than mathematics, is a reflection of reality and not a magic number like the 24% figure they are proposing.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, would my colleague comment on why he thinks it is important that all political parties enter into the debate by providing the numbers that they believe the House of Commons should be at?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the Conservatives are in government. The Liberal Party has been in government and expects to be in government once again, eventually. If we talk to NDP members, they would very much like to be in government, hopefully, sometime soon. The NDP members are unable to provide actual substance to go with their arguments. They are unable to provide numbers, and we are not even talking about difficult economic numbers. We are talking about basic math right now. The NDP really needs to take its numbers seriously if it is going to begin to gain the confidence of Canadians to be an effective opposition, much less a government-in-waiting.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-20, the fair representation act.

Bill C-20 delivers on our government's long-standing commitment to move the House of Commons toward fair representation. We have campaigned on those promises and Canadians voted for us to deliver on that commitment to them.

In addition to jobs and the economy, our government's top priorities, our party committed in the last general election that we would address the representation gap experienced by Canadians in the fast growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

We made three distinct promises on House of Commons representation. First, that we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, that we would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces. Third, that we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government received a strong mandate to deliver on these commitments and we are doing exactly that with the fair representation act. Bill C-20 would move every Canadian closer to representation by population.

To start, it is important to revisit the primary motive in bringing this legislation forward. Canadians living in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario are significantly and increasingly under-represented in relation to their share of Canada's population.

The representation of the provinces in the House of Commons is readjusted every 10 years using a formula established in section 51 of the Constitution Act of 1867. The current formula dates to 1985 and was designed with the purpose of tempering growth in the House.

While the 1985 formula has been successful in limiting the size of the House of Commons, it has created a gap in representation for the faster growing provinces as the representation of those provinces has moved farther and farther away from what their population would warrant.

Well over 60% of Canada's population is and would continue to be seriously and increasingly under-represented using the current formula. The combined effect of fixing the formula divisor at 279, as the current formula does, and the existence of constitutional seat guarantees has left Canadians living in the fastest growing provinces significantly and increasingly under-represented.

As Canada's population grows, their representation will continue to fall relative to their share of the population. Clearly, this is not fair and, clearly, something needs to be done.

The formula in Bill C-20 is principled and is a reasonable update designed to bring those provinces that experience high population growth closer to representation by population.

Strict representation by population would be impossible in the House of Commons without a massive increase in the number of seats. Exact representation by population based on some of the current constitutional guarantees, for example, would require over 900 members in the House of Commons with our existing constitutional guarantees and, clearly, that is not possible.

Government Orders

Bill C-20 is the best formula for bringing fairer representation to the House in a principled manner while maintaining a manageable number of seats in the House and while respecting the long-standing constitutional guarantees protecting the representation of smaller provinces.

In fact, the fair representation act brings every province closer to representation by population. If we look broadly, the practical results of applying the new formula will be to add 30 seats to the House of Commons for a total of 338. The national average riding size will fall from 112,692 to 102,600.

In terms of the provincial breakdown: Ontario would receive 15 seats, Alberta would receive 6 seats and British Columbia would also receive 6 new seats. Quebec would receive three new seats as a result of being the first beneficiary of the representation rule which would ensure that its seat total does not become less than what is proportionate to its population.

Significantly, unlike the formula on the books today, the Bill C-20 formula accounts for population growth and trends. It is flexible and would be able to more accurately reflect population trends over time. Under the status quo formula, the electoral portion was set and did not move to accommodate population growth. This contributed to the faster growing provinces becoming increasing and significantly under-represented.

By introducing a seat allocation formula that is more responsive to population growth and trends, the fair representation act would move the House closer to representation by population both now and in the future, and that is good news for all Canadians.

A further update to the formula is to base the allocation of seats among the provinces on Statistics Canada's population estimates. There is a reason for that. The population estimates provide a more accurate picture of Canada's total population. The chief statistician endorsed this change, and said so when he appeared at the procedure and House affairs committee on November 17. When asked directly whether the population estimates were a more accurate assessment of the population than the census or any other numbers available, he said, "Yes, that is absolutely our view".

● (1610)

As a member from Alberta, I want to take a moment to underline the significant step toward representation by population that Albertans will take with the bill.

As it stands, the average size of a riding in Alberta is 134,977 people, which is much higher than the national average riding size of 112,692. Is it fair that the democratic voice of Albertans is significantly diminished merely because of the province in which they live? We do not believe that is fair.

Every Canadian's vote, to the greatest extent possible, should carry equal weight. The population growth within those fast-growing provinces has been even higher in larger urban and suburban areas, such as my riding of Edmonton Centre.

Canada's new and visible minority population is increasing largely through immigration and these immigrants tend to settle in fast-growing communities in our fastest-growing provinces.

These three factors, high immigration to fast-growing regions of the fastest-growing provinces, combine to magnify the representation gap for those areas. This situation inadvertently causes Canadians in large urban centres, new Canadians and visible minorities to be even more under-represented than the average. It is clear that this situation undermines the principle of representation by population in our country.

Alberta would get six new seats in the House of Commons. However, without this legislation, Alberta would only receive half as much representation in the upcoming redistribution. With Bill C-20, Alberta would have a share of representation that would be more in line with its share of population.

The average riding size in Alberta would drop to a manageable 111,157 after the next redistribution. For Alberta, the fair representation act means that as the province's population grows over time, Albertans would continue to have a strong voice in Parliament, and this is only fair.

To conclude, the fair representation act is the best formula to address the under-representation of Canadians living in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, without pitting Canadian against Canadian and region against region. It is reasonable, it is principled and it is fair for all Canadians. It would achieve better representation for Canadians living in fast-growing provinces, while maintaining representation for smaller and slower-growing provinces. It brings every Canadian closer to representation by population. It delivers on our government's long-standing commitment to move towards fairer representation in the House of Commons.

The fair representation act is principled. It is reasonable legislation that needs to be passed as quickly as possible. I encourage the opposition to work with us in this regard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, NDP): Madam Speaker, my concerns are mainly practical. I wonder whether my colleague opposite has calculated how much adding 38 new members will cost, if we take into account salaries and travel costs, which are enormous, as we know. We are in a time of economic crisis and uncertainty where the talk is about job creation and budget cuts. Where are we going to put these 38 members?

● (1615)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, those are two very practical and reasonable questions.

Government Orders

On the first matter of cost, it is about fair representation to constituents. In my case, it is about having a riding that has over 130,000 people and, in an extreme case, a riding in P.E.I. that has maybe 35,000 people. The bill would give access to folks on a more equal basis and, yes, there is a cost involved in doing that. To an extent, that is the cost of doing business.

However, I go back to my colleague from Ontario who talked about other ways to mitigate that. We are going through a deficit reduction program now on this side of the House, in which I am personally involved. There are a number of measures that we could take to economize on some of the things we do as members of Parliament, and that is part of what we would do.

With respect to the size of the House and the physical capacity, a study done in 1996 concluded that within the current space, there was adequate space to allow for, in a fairly current kind of setting, 375 members in the House. It would take an awfully long time for us to get to that stage, if we ever do. However, in regard to that practical question, there is room in the House for significant expansion.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke about his province, Alberta. I want to point out factually that with the government's proposal of 338 seats, Alberta's proportion of seats in the House of Commons would be 10.06%. With the Liberal Party's proposal of keeping it at 308, the Alberta representation would be 10.06%. In other words, they are identical. That is something that is not being explained adequately to Albertans.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what he thinks of this citation from his Prime Minister, who said:

"Canadians are already among the most overrepresented people in the world....A smaller House offers considerable cost savings, less government and fewer politicians—and clearly this is what Canadians want.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, perspectives change over time with experience when one gets immersed in the reality of what goes on in the House or anything that we do as representatives of the people of Canada.

I will give quotes from another couple of people who have commented on this. One is by Christy Clark, the premier of British Columbia, who said:

I think they got close. Perfection in these things is impossible because it's a big and complicated country. The thing that is really encouraging about it is, we now have a formula that means we will not continue to be under-represented.

Cal Dallas, the Alberta intergovernmental affairs minister, said:

Obviously, the voice of Alberta representation will be enhanced and over a long period of time will have a significant impact for Albertans.

I am here to represent Edmonton Centre, Alberta and Canadians. We are all doing that in the best way we know how.

There was a point earlier about people not knowing how many seats there were in the House. I can guarantee that most people in my riding know who their member of Parliament is and that they have access to me. If there are 20,000 or 25,000 fewer people trying to get that access, then it stands to reason their access would be better.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the bill before us. I listened to a lot of the debate today and if I were back in my riding or

any riding in Canada right now, I would really be shaking my head. I would be wondering why my parliamentarians were debating the size of Parliament when they need to be debating the economy or talking about shortening the time period that people were having to wait for their EI cheques. They should be debating critical issues such as the struggle to get doctors, especially in my riding, health care and dealing with horrendous line-ups. They should be debating the international concern about what is happening in the Middle East at this time. Rather than talking about all of those big or small issues that are critical to citizens across Canada, we are in our Parliament discussing its size.

What I have heard over and over again is that we need numbers. I heard one of my colleagues say that unless we had numbers, how could we possibly be ready to govern?

Being ready to govern is not about numbers. It is about engaging Canadians. It is about real democracy. One of the things the NDP has put out is a process that would engage Canadians in having a discussion before we go about making changes. This at a time when the government, no matter how dire the employment rate, which it is in my riding, and I do not use that term lightly, is proceeding with its unwise cuts and is not really investing in a significant way in infrastructure. Instead, its members are here to promote the growing of Parliament quickly. They are not even willing to go out and engage Canadians to hear what they have to say with respect to this matter.

As I look at all of these things and while I listen to the debate, I keep thinking that surely we in the House cannot be that out of touch with the hurt Canadians are feeling today. Our poverty rate has grown. Yesterday the OECD figures showed that the gap between the rich and the poor had widened.

I want someone to tell me how adding to Parliament in haste, without consultation with Canadians and without dealing with their issues, will address issues that are absolutely critical to them.

Also, I feel there is a lot of irony and hypocrisy in this room today. I hearing members say that that this is about democracy and proportional representation. Canada does not exactly have perfect representation by population. We know we are a huge country, with a huge geography and a huge diversity. We do not have equality. What we have is some form of equity. We know some areas have grown and they have to be addressed, but not in a foolish way that is rushed. It has been admitted that this will not take us all the way there. It is just a baby step in the right direction, which will cause a huge amount of pain. Why would we inflict that?

Government Orders

At the same time, I have heard a lot of words about democracy and representing our constituents. I was elected by my constituents on May 2 to come to the House to debate bills and deal with issues. Over and over again the majority across this aisle has muzzled my voice and has not allowed me to take part in debate. Therefore, by having 30 or 38 more voices in here who cannot take part in a debate because in its arrogance the government uses its majority to call for time allocation and time allotments, how can those same government MPs then sit in the House and talk about democracy?

• (1620)

You have given parliamentary democracy in our country a bad name because you have used time allocation and time allotments. You have not—

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to direct her comments through the Speaker.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, my colleagues across the aisle have not given the duly elected MPs who sit in opposition, who were elected on May 2 to represent their constituents just as the government members were, the opportunity to have a full debate on critical issues like the budget. Fancy moving closure on the budget. They did not allow us to have a fulsome debate on Bill C-10. That bill, which encompasses nine bills, was railroaded through Parliament with hardly any debate. There were a number of points I wanted to make but I was denied the opportunity to do that. Then those very same colleagues stand here today and say that in order to improve democracy, we must have more MPs. If more MPs are going to be brought here only to be muzzled, why would we waste taxpayers' money? I am opposed to this legislation.

I would urge my colleagues across the aisle to stop railroading legislation through the House. I would urge them to respect parliamentary democracy and respect the voices of members of the opposition who have a role to play.

Unless the opposition is able to use its voice to critique, support or amend legislation put forward by those who hold the majority, our parliamentary democracy is being undermined and we are moving toward an autocracy, in which case we would not need as many MPs as we have right now. In fact, probably far fewer would be needed if all we got to do was to come here and stand up and have, for example, 61 votes in one evening just so things can be rushed through Parliament.

One of my other colleagues today made a good point, that as we look into the future, we have to look at our history. If our foundation is strong, then changes should not be made willy-nilly. That is what I feel about this legislation that is before us today. There have been so many iterations. Now the government is saying it cannot go all the way to rep by pop so it will go a little way and do it in a hurry.

Why would we do that to Canadians when we are going through some of the most difficult economic times? While Canadians are going through these difficult times we are telling them to tighten their belts. We are telling the public sector to trim its budgets. We are doing all of that while saying that we will spend \$30 million to \$50 million extra so a few more MPs can sit in the House. Those MPs will not have a chance to speak because history has shown us that the

government will move time allocation to cut off debate because it does not want to hear voices that disagree with its ideas.

None of us, whether it is my colleagues on this side sitting at the far end, or whether it is my colleagues across the way, should worry about having a process that engages Canadians in this conversation. If I were to ask my constituents what things they want their parliamentarians to deal with, I would bet my very last cent that changes to the House of Commons would not be in the top five. I would argue that this issue may not even make it into the top 20.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I come from British Columbia, as does the hon. member. When I was on the campaign trail the people of British Columbia were concerned about the fact that we are under-represented in this chamber. They certainly will support Bill C-20 and the balanced approach that we take.

The hon. member said a minute ago that perhaps she agreed with the Liberals' proposal, and perhaps we did not need more members of Parliament. However, we have not heard today what the NDP actually has proposed. It has said that it does not like the government's plan and does not really like the Liberals' plan.

What is the NDP's number? What does the NDP want to have as the number of members of Parliament? Is the member prepared to say today that she will be voting against the six additional seats for British Columbia?

• (1630)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I have heard at different meetings that people always care that there is equity. As Canadians, we have understood that equality is not always possible but equity is what we go for.

Once again, I keep hearing this obsession with numbers. What the NDP has put forward in its private member's bill is actually a process. There are some guiding principles. Let us adopt those guiding principles and engage Canadians. After we have heard from Canadians, we can sit down and develop a plan. I am absolutely prepared to go back into my community and have this conversation because my constituents would not want us to pass legislation in haste that did not address their needs and was not balanced in a way that would respect our historical roots and look into the future.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I encourage my colleague to read the bill of her own party. It is not a process. It is not a conversation. It is a set of rules that the NDP wants to impose on Canadians. These rules do not add up. We are asking the NDP for a number because the NDP tabled a bill that would increase the seats in the House. When we add the number of seats needed for British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, the Senate clause, the grandfather clause, the clause which freezes Quebec at 24.35%, at 350 seats, the NDP's rules still are not respected.

Government Orders

The member should table all the numbers. What would be the size of the House if she wants us to vote for the NDP bill?

I would encourage her to vote for the Liberals' bill. The House would remain at 308 seats and we would not impose on Canadians a cost that they do not want to pay.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, let me make it clear that I am not supporting the Liberals' ideas on this either. I am saying that the NDP has put forward principles and we need to take the time to engage Canadians in a conversation.

There is nothing wrong with putting democracy into practice. There is nothing wrong with engaging Canadians and having that conversation with them. There is nothing wrong with taking the time to come up with a system that works. There is no rush to do this today or in the next few days. Let us stop. Let us take our time. If we are going to make changes to one of the chambers of our Parliament, it should not be done in haste.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for York South—Weston, the Canadian Air and Space Museum.

The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill, the fair representation act.

Representation by population was the guiding principle in determining the allocation of seats in the House of Commons at the time of Confederation, but over time the representation formula used to readjust seats based on population changes has actually served to penalize some of Canada's fastest growing regions.

We have especially noted the disparity in my home province of Alberta, where an average federal riding contains some 27,000 more constituents than ridings in most other provinces. In my riding of Wild Rose, I am proud to represent people who live in 28 different communities, a municipal district, three counties, an improvement district in Banff National Park, and two first nations reserves. Those people are all spread out across a big and beautiful 28,000 square kilometre constituency.

As of the 2006 census, our riding was home to more than 116,000 people, but with the explosive growth that we have seen since then, the estimate that we have currently of my riding's population is somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 135,000. If we compare that to some ridings in other parts of the country, we see where the differences are.

For example, looking at the province of P.E.I., it has about the same population of 135,000 as my constituency does, yet there are four members of Parliament to represent them. Voters in Wild Rose have one MP to represent nearly the same number of people that those in P.E.I. have four MPs to represent. I would like to believe that I am as valuable as four MPs, but I will probably have to settle with knowing that I represent the same number of people as the four other MPs.

In all seriousness, in this current state of affairs, one vote in P.E.I. in terms of representation is essentially worth nearly four votes in Alberta. By any measure, that is certainly not fair. However, a

constitutionally guaranteed floor of representation for some provinces makes it virtually impossible for the House of Commons to balance its seats in order to reflect strict representation by population. If we were to try, the House would swell to over 900 members. We would be voting from up in the public galleries and spilling out into the foyers, and maybe we could swing a few people from the chandeliers somewhere. That would obviously make for a very cumbersome and expensive Parliament that I suspect very few Canadians would find reasonable or affordable.

Luckily, this hallowed chamber can easily accommodate the 30 new members who will soon take their seats here. On that topic, I will give some interesting trivia. A 1996 study found that the chamber could actually accommodate up to 374 members, if we were to include seating under the side galleries. We are still good for space, and I would like to settle everyone's anxiety in that regard.

Rather than unrealistically expanding the seats in the House as strict representation by population would require, our government is working within the framework of the constitutional realities to deliver on our election commitment to Canadians to move the House of Commons closer to fair representation.

This legislation reflects our government's three distinct promises to provide fair representation by: allocating an increased number of seats, both now and in the future, to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta; maintaining the number of seats for smaller provinces; and maintaining the proportion of representation of Quebec exactly according to its population.

The current representation of the provinces in the House of Commons is readjusted every 10 years using a formula established in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867. The current formula dates to 1985 and was redesigned to provide modest increases to the size of the House. While the 1985 formula has been successful in limiting the growth of the House of Commons, it has also created a representation gap for the faster growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. The fair representation act proposes to address that gap.

Currently, 279 is set as the divisor in determining the average population count per federal seat. As a result, provinces with fast growing populations, like my province of Alberta, are prevented from receiving a fair share of seats because the actual number of members in the House of Commons is now 308. Over 60% of Canada's population is, and would continue to be, seriously under-represented if we were to keep this formula.

● (1635)

The twin problems of fixing the divisor at 279, in combination with existing seat guarantees in the Constitution, have prevented the three fast-growing provinces from receiving a share of seats that is line with their relative share of the population.

Government Orders

However, Bill C-20 addresses that by using Statistics Canada population estimates to determine how many seats each province would receive. Statistics Canada's population estimates are already considered the best data for determining total provincial populations. In fact, those estimates are used to determine the allocation of funding for the federal-provincial equalization program, the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer and the territorial formula financing. They are an established way to project populations and to address their needs.

The bill also would adjust the formula to account for future increases in population counts following future censuses. This approach would provide accuracy and certainty on provincial seat numbers.

Therefore, under the terms of Bill C-20, Ontario would receive 15 new seats, rather than only three new seats under the status quo; Alberta would receive six new seats, rather than only three under the current formula; and British Columbia would receive six new seats, rather than only one under the old formula.

I cannot overstate the fact that Canadians living in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta have become increasingly under-represented in the House of Commons. That is not fair and it is unacceptable in an assembly of equals. A Canadian living in Alberta has as much to say about the future direction that he or she wants his or her country to take as a Canadian living in P.E.I., or any other province, and should have an equal say in our Parliament.

That is why our government is taking this principled approach that would strike a balance between restoring fairer representation for faster growing provinces, while protecting the seat counts of slower growth provinces, as well.

For Alberta, my province, this would mean a stronger voice for a province that is among the fastest growing regions in all of Canada.

We must do this quickly. It seems like just yesterday that Canadians voted to give our Conservative government a strong, stable majority mandate on the basis of our election platform, which, of course, included this commitment to move toward fairer representation in the House of Commons. However, it was not just yesterday. It was actually more than seven months ago. Time has passed quickly and it has a tendency to continue to fly. Another election is not so far away as we might think.

As we must give Elections Canada time to properly establish the new constituencies that would come into being under the bill, with the next representation update already due and to begin in early 2012 following the release of this year's census results, we need to be ready with this legislation passed and the work of the provincial seat counts and boundary redistributions complete in order to have these new seats established and ready to be contested by the time the next election rolls around.

With regard to redistribution, it is important to note that Bill C-20 would also amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act to streamline the timelines in the current boundary readjustment process. However, there would be no changes to the timelines for the parliamentary phase of the electoral boundary process and Canadians, of course, would have the same opportunity to voice their

opinions on boundary changes during public hearings held by the commissions.

Because those important consultations are in place, it is vital that we move quickly to meet the various deadlines that we would face beginning in the new year to most effectively bring these changes into place for Canadians.

We, on this side of the House, invite and encourage our colleagues across the way to join us in making every Canadian's vote, to the greatest extent possible, of course, carry equal weight in the House of Commons. I say this because, with respect, the alternative proposals of the opposition parties fall short in addressing the problem of under-representation.

The Liberals have a proposal that would freeze the House at the current 308 seats, but it would do so by pitting regions of Canada against one another. They would simply shuffle the deck by taking away seats from some provinces to give to others. Given constitutional provisions guaranteeing seats, that proposal is simply not realistic.

The NDP proposal is also problematic. That party wants to guarantee a fixed percentage of seats, now and in the future, to one province, regardless of that province's population. It is proposing special treatment to one province that would not be available to any other. That would undermine the principle of proportional representation upon which Canada was founded and which I referenced earlier. It would lead to far higher seat growth than what Bill C-20 proposes and it would penalize provinces that are already seriously under-represented. That would only serve to kick the problem of under-representation further down the road a ways, and that is certainly not leadership.

• (1640)

Only our Conservative government is taking a balanced approach to this admittedly thorny problem of representation. I would urge all members opposite to support the bill and to work with our government to implement it.

• (1645)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really must contest what the member is claiming: that the Liberal Party plan, whose numbers are available to everybody, pits region against region.

There is a principle here. If a province has a certain percentage of the population, it gets a certain percentage of the seats. If we follow that principle, we do not pit regions against each other.

I would like to ask the member whether he is being realistic, to use his own words. If every region, obeying the constraints about the number of senators, had the same proportion of seats as the proportion of the population, the regions would not be pitted against each other.

Government Orders

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member across the way cannot accept a little criticism of the proposal. However, there is no question in my mind that it is unrealistic and that it does pit regions against one another. When we take seats away from one province to give to another, we create regional divisions in this country. It is really unfortunate that Liberals would propose such a measure to do just that.

We believe that our proposal is the closest thing, under the constitutional guarantees that are provided and under the formula that could be created, we can find to fairer representation for the House of Commons. It would not only protect the smaller provinces but it would also ensure better representation and fairer representation for the provinces, like my province of Alberta, like British Columbia and like Ontario which are currently under-represented. It finds that balance that is realistic and as fair as possible under the circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I just wanted to make sure I understood properly.

My colleague seemed to have a problem with the fact that a province, like Quebec, I imagine, could be represented in this Parliament otherwise than by its demographics. Are we being told that recognition of the nation is an empty gesture that entails no concrete recognition? If that is not the case, it seems to me that this is not a matter of a double standard. Let us recognize Quebec's status as a nation, which gives it certain privileges that the Canadian nation is also given.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that, under our proposal, Quebec would gain seats. It actually would give Quebec the exact proportion to its population the number of seats that it deserves. That is certainly what I would call fairness.

The hon. member's party is talking about trying to work with a different formula, but it does not want to define or explain to this House or to Canada what that proposal would do in terms of the number of seats in the House of Commons.

We have been very clear on exactly what the seat counts would be. We have been very clear that Quebec would receive exactly the number of seats it is entitled to based on its population. That is fairness. It is unfortunate that the NDP wants to propose something other than that. We are trying to create fairness for all the provinces of this country and that is what the bill would do.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, obviously this is an important debate, not just to Canadians who gave us a mandate to address this issue, which was in our platform, but it is important, when we are in government, to how we relate to other governments.

In Ontario, for example, Dalton McGuinty is behind this particular bill, wanting to see Ontario move closer to representation by population in the House.

My colleague represents a riding in the west. Could he talk briefly about some of the governments out west and what they want to see the federal Conservative government deal with?

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, I would reiterate again that it is important that we create fairness for all the provinces.

In my province of Alberta, one of those that is currently under-represented, there is broad support for the idea of trying to create fairness for our province in the House of Commons in relation to some of the other provinces, which is what the bill seeks to do. We are proud that we have been able to find a good balance that ensures the smaller province are not losing out, but ensures that provinces like mine, Alberta, British Columbia and the member's province of Ontario receive better and fairer representation as well, which is an important principle.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Speaker, today, the government is putting back on the table one of the most contentious issues in Canadian history, namely the representation of communities of interests in our democratic institutions.

Since this morning, we keep hearing “Quebec”, “Quebec”, “Quebec”. The government introduced a bill to achieve better representation for some provinces that are deemed to be under-represented. Then what happens? We immediately hear talk from all sides about “Quebec”, “the Quebec nation” and “Quebec's political weight”. Members rise and say some kind words about us.

But that is not all. Those are not the only words that are constantly being repeated today. Prince Edward Island—which everyone usually loves—has probably never before been the subject of such interest in this House. It is almost being demonized because of its four seats. There is almost a temptation to deprive the province of those seats. The message is “Prince Edward Island is bad because it is overrepresented and is destroying our dream of fair representation”. It would be so simple and convenient if we could reduce Canada's population to a simple equation. But, “heck, Prince Edward Island has four seats”. I am sorry, dear friends, dear Islanders, we really love you, so do not take it personally.

On a more candid note, we should take a moment to reflect on the comical aspect of our debate. In our day-to-day lives, we do not commonly say that Prince Edward Island's seats are protected by the senatorial clause. It is a good thing we understand each other, because an outsider listening to us would be completely lost. On a more serious note, this bill primarily seeks to change the number of members for Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. However, these provinces have barely been mentioned since the beginning of the debate. There is also very little being said about the fact that the overpopulation problem in some ridings is largely due to the electoral boundaries within the provinces.

What is most important to us is to recognize the specificity of certain elements of our country. We can certainly try to ensure that each vote in Canada has more or less the same value, but if we look at such basic features as the geographical and cultural structure of our country, it becomes clear that that would be utopian.

Government Orders

This problem is illustrated by a number of factors. Each territory has one seat in the House of Commons. Their contribution to the Canadian federation is undeniable, despite the fact that their population is significantly lower than the average for Canadian ridings. Does this mean that the territories should be deprived of their lone seat in this House? Of course not.

Just as a resident of the Northwest Territories is different from a Yukon resident, a Yukon resident is different from a British Columbia resident. In my opinion, we are doing justice to the richness of Canada's diversity by making this concession and compromise. We want to reflect this difference in a spirit of respectful nation building. These compromises are connected to a long history, and to view the reallocation of seats in the House of Commons as a mere cold calculation is to deny that rich history.

This is a Nordic country, but the NDP is fighting with integrity, passion and warmth for a united Canada. To succeed in that, we have to take off our little rose-coloured glasses that see this great country as a homogeneous whole, identical throughout. That is too simplistic a vision. We are told over and over that this bill is equitable, that it is fair. But I would like to come back to an interesting point made by my colleague, the very eloquent member for Hamilton Centre, when he asked the Conservative government what this fairness is. He is correct, there are several ways of looking at it. That is the fundamental difference between the government's Bill C-20 and the New Democratic Party's Bill C-312.

What does this discussion tell us above all? First, the idea of representation is an ideal that can never be completely attained. Any attempt to approach it is bound to end in compromise. But Canada loves compromises. Compromise is the basis of all of our political realities. If Jacques Cartier had been able to foresee the path that the history of this country would take, perhaps instead of the word "Kanata" he would have chosen the Mohawk word for compromise: *Ahsén :nen niío :re iahà :thne tsi ia 'teiorihwaientà : 'on.*

Second, under-representation of the provinces is itself bound to end in compromise. In theory, in a united Canada, we should not need to divide up the electoral map interminably. According to what we have heard since this morning in the House, there is only one instance of under-representation in this Parliament: the under-representation of the Quebec nation, because for it, this is a matter of survival. All the noblest efforts notwithstanding, the Quebec nation does not feel completely comfortable. It is prepared for an argument whenever there is a proposal to shake up the status quo. One need not be a Quebecker to understand that.

I am not asking anyone here for declarations of unconditional love for Quebec and its culture. What I would like to add immediately is that I consider it to be somewhat irresponsible to perpetuate Quebec's discomfort by introducing insensitive bills. But we must forgive the government. The Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords go back much further than the creation of the Conservative Party. Forgive them, they know not. They are wed to the ideal of fair representation. Good intentions are constitutional, I imagine. The conclusion I draw from these various points is this: fair representation and the justifications for it are fluid concepts.

● (1655)

We can talk about them interminably, or until Prince Edward Island has five seats, because whatever the government says, what it is doing is this: it is adopting a unique logical position and defending it. I say unique because the logic is inherent to a closed system. The starting proposition is completely made up. We are floating in the gases of a great cosmic nebula here. All of the positions are good in theory. But within this nebula there is one constant: the core of a star that exploded in the night of our history and burns in the firmament of our country: the Quebec nation. It is the solid core buried in the nebula. Without Quebec, there would not even be a discussion. Everything would be clear. Once again, we are approaching the limits of compromise.

The NDP is simply proposing that Quebec's political weight within the Canadian confederation be preserved. That is what Quebec wants. The National Assembly has called for that unanimously.

Please understand that I am not saying that giving Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia more seats is unwarranted. Not at all. If these provinces feel under-represented, we would encourage them to fight for what is their due. The NDP acknowledges that they are right and that the current situation must be addressed. What I am trying to say here is that these three provinces do not form distinct nations like Quebec and that the urgency of their situation is of a purely administrative nature. For Quebec, our very existence is at stake. I think that this difference needs to be acknowledged.

This Parliament has made fine and noble efforts to accommodate the Quebec nation in the past. Quebec gave the NDP a strong and clear mandate to represent it in the House. That is what we are doing. Quebec wants to maintain its political weight, which is reasonable.

A civilization that compromises is in a difficult position. Being able to serve the interests of the second-biggest country in the world while trying to accommodate everyone to the greatest extent possible is hard. That is the way things have been since 1867. This Conservative government will not be an exception to the rule, and it knows it.

For the time being, "compromise" is a word that this government does not seem to be able to utter. Without compromise, this country is but a chimera. If compromise is not sought, this country will no longer exist. Every Canadian knows this.

The NDP wishes to support this government in its decision to restore greater fairness in representation. That is the government's initiative, and we have listened to it. I am fortunate enough to sit on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where we have heard various witnesses explain the pros and cons of the new formula, the figures on population that are to be used, and the time allocated to the various stages of the readjustment of electoral boundaries. As a result, we are calling for Quebec's political weight to be maintained.

We are being asked for figures, figures, and more figures. How many seats would Quebec obtain under the scenario proposed by the NDP? Everything depends on the circumstances.

Government Orders

Why blame the party that is calling for temperance and harmony and not the party that always gives grudgingly? Take that, and you take that, and you over there take that. Moving on. We are talking about balanced representation in the House and not pieces of a pie. If we ended up somehow altering the perception of legitimacy associated with the House by acting too hastily, it would be a very serious matter. And yet, that is what the Conservative government's measures are more or less doing. The reform has a number of defects. There is a lot of noise being made, seats are being handed out willy-nilly, a fortune is being paid to make up lists of possible candidates for the Senate, and there is a lot of waving about of hands, but at the end of the day, not much is being achieved. Nothing is being done to address the deep-rooted and fundamental problems with our democratic institutions. If Quebec is robbed of even a scrap of political weight now, it will be a case of give them an inch and they will take a mile. This is not paranoia. One single department represents one of the founding peoples of Canada. If we want fair representation, we could start with that.

In closing, these initiatives in the area of democratic reform only improve our democracy in an almost accidental way. They leave the country in turmoil. They further alienate voters. And they add to Canadians' feeling of powerlessness when it comes to their democracy.

Our political party embraces this country's diversity and does not try to smooth it out. That is why I am going to support the bill introduced by my colleague from Compton—Stanstead and not the government's bill.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I want to tell the hon. member that I really appreciate the work we do together in committee.

She may have noted that, when they appeared before the committee, most experts said that we could have a very representative House by remaining at 308 seats and that it would be a good thing. I know she is bothered by the fact that we keep asking how many seats there would be with the NDP's bill, but that is critical information that Quebecers and other Canadians have the right to have. After all, they are the ones who are footing the bill.

By combining the rule whereby Quebec would be stuck at 24.35%; the fact—as the hon. member says—that we must be fair to Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia and give them more seats; the fact that the NDP, like the government, does not want to take away any seats from any province or does not have the required courage or vision; and the obligation to respect the Canadian Constitution by giving seats to smaller provinces based on the Senate, we end up with over 350 seats.

If I am wrong, then the hon. member can show me her numbers. Otherwise, she should recognize that her proposal would have the effect of making the House even bigger than what the Conservatives are doing.

• (1700)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Madam Speaker, first, I thank the hon. member for his question. He is always very useful in committee, when it comes to presenting various views and options.

In response to his question, I will simply repeat what I heard earlier today from the hon. member for Papineau, namely that there is no such thing as a good number. The number of members who represent the population is irrelevant. What matters is the quality of that representation.

So we are simply saying that we cannot achieve a better quality of representation for our ridings by setting the number of elected members and then, with the growing population, end up with ridings that have an ever-increasing number of residents.

All we are saying is that it is important that Quebec's weight remain the same in the House of Commons. We tabled our bill, and the hon. member can look at it, just like the other ones. It is a perfectly credible bill, and I think it is the best solution in this case.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the good work of my colleague from the NDP on the procedure and House affairs committee. We agree on more things than we disagree on for sure.

The NDP proposal suggests increasing the number of seats to Quebec by up to 10. Well, Quebec would be seriously over-represented in terms of the rest of the provinces. I just want to ask my colleague, how would it be fair to Canada and to the other provinces to have Quebec continuously over-represented, and increasingly so, with the formula that the NDP has put forward?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank the member, who is a pleasure to work with in committee. Indeed, this committee is very open and we are able to say what we are thinking. It is very interesting to work there, especially with the member opposite.

What I will tell the member is that I do not think it is good to always try to compare provinces and pit them against each other. Quebec's political weight will not affect representation of the other provinces. Yes, some ridings in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta are huge and have large populations, as members have mentioned, but this has much more to do with riding boundaries within the provinces than with comparing the provinces. When we look at the total number, there is not a very big difference between the number of members of Parliament and the population of each province. For example, we cannot compare a riding in Prince Edward Island with a riding in suburban Toronto. These ridings have vastly different realities that, in my opinion, must be examined by the electoral boundaries commissions.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my support for Bill C-20, the fair representation act. Representation by population is at the heart of our democratic traditions. Our role as parliamentarians in this regard should be and must be to do our best to ensure that the makeup and weighting of the House reflects that of this great country.

Government Orders

We face challenges in this regard. The Constitution and precedents both present barriers to achieving perfect representation by population. Bill C-20 addresses this challenge through that most Canadian tradition: accommodation. Changes in Bill C-20 would allow the representation from our fastest-growing provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario to better reflect their growing populations.

At the same time, Bill C-20 would ensure that our smaller provinces maintain their number of seats in the House. I cannot imagine the citizens of Manitoba, Saskatchewan or New Brunswick, for example, being eager to have fewer representatives in the House of Commons than they have presently. In fact, Bill C-20 would bring every province in Confederation closer to representation by population. It amazes me that there are some hon. members in the House willing to speak against the fair representation act. Why would they insist that we maintain the current unfair system or, in fact, actually make it worse with some of their proposals?

As a member from Ontario, I am obviously concerned that citizens whom I am so privileged to represent receive fair representation in the House. I am privileged to represent more than 129,000 Canadians in the great riding of Kitchener—Conestoga and I consider it a privilege to exercise my responsibilities as a member of Parliament. It is an honour to be their voice in this chamber, where discussions take place on some very important issues. Decisions are made every week when we vote on matters that will not only impact the current citizens of my riding but their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

When I vote on these important issues, my vote in the House is worth no more and no less than that of the hon. member for Malpeque. In spite of my NDP colleague's assertion, Conservatives do love Prince Edward Island. In fact, we on this side have a great member of Parliament from that province. In fact, she is the Minister of National Revenue. However, when the House considers items of business, whether it be putting an end to the monopoly of the Wheat Board, restoring balance to our justice system, or ending the ineffective long gun registry, my vote in the House is worth no more and no less than the member for Malpeque. That is how it should be. No hon. member's vote should be placed above another's. However, this does raise questions.

In the last election, on May 2 of this year, almost 29,000 Canadians chose to entrust me with their vote. I participate in the important business in the House, thanks to the trust of almost 29,000 individual voters. That is more than the total ballots cast for all candidates in the riding of Malpeque during the same election. Does it follow, therefore, that the citizens of Kitchener—Conestoga are worth less than those of Malpeque? I hope not.

I recognize that Bill C-20 will not address this inequity entirely. Ontario will still remain under-represented, while other provinces will continue to be overrepresented. Again, I come back to that word "accommodation". Because of our principled and reasonable accommodation, real progress is being made toward fair representation. Bill C-20 would not make the mistakes inherent in the proposals emerging from our opposition parties. The fair representation act would move Canada closer to representation by population instead of making the imbalance worse, as proposed by the official opposition. The fair representation act would not pit one province

against another or pick winners and losers, as proposed by the third party in the House.

I will also note that while this government has worked through three Parliaments to make Canada's representation more fair, the opposition's proposals came as surprises not only to members of the House but to Canadians who supported them in the last election. By contrast, neither the New Democrats nor the third party made even a token attempt to address this challenge in their platforms, despite the fact that they were well aware of it. We cannot dream up systems of fair democratic representation on the fly. These matters are far too important to try to develop a plan on the back of an envelope.

• (1705)

Bill C-20 delivers on our government's long-standing commitment to move the House towards fair representation. We campaigned on these promises. Canadians voted for a strong, stable, national, Conservative majority government. We received a strong mandate. With this bill, we would move the House of Commons toward fair representation for all Canadians. We are delivering on our commitments.

The fair representation act would add 30 seats to the House of Commons, for a total of 338 seats. Ontario would receive 15, Alberta and British Columbia would each receive six, and Quebec would receive three new seats. More importantly, the bill provides an adjustment to the formula in order to account for future increases in population following future censuses. In other words, the makeup of this House would more accurately reflect where Canadians live, thanks to Bill C-20. Population changes would no longer badly distort our representation.

I too serve on the procedure and House affairs committee that studied this legislation. I was there when the Chief Electoral Officer explained the needless cost taxpayers would bear if the bill is not quickly implemented. The Electoral Boundaries Commission needs to start its work in February of 2012. That is in just two months. If it is to do its job properly and not needlessly duplicate a lot of work, it needs the final seat allocation formula in place by February. On February 8, the process begins when the chief statistician sends the census return to the Chief Electoral Officer.

We promised to reintroduce legislation to restore fair representation in the House of Commons. We promised to allocate an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. We promised to maintain the number of seats for the smaller provinces. Finally, we promised to maintain the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population. With Bill C-20, we would honour those commitments.

Government Orders

With the status quo, over 60% of Canada's population is, and would continue to be, seriously and increasingly under-represented. This bill, the fair representation act, brings every single province closer to representation by population.

I really do hope that all members of the House will support this bill. It addresses many of the inequities that exist and restores the principle of fair representation for all Canadians.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my distinguished colleague. I found it interesting when he said that the government's bill does not pick winners and losers. There are no winners, there are no losers, there is just something fair. But I do not see that, because on the one hand, the government wants to increase the number of seats for Quebec, but on the other hand, it wants to diminish its political weight. There is clearly a loser there, and it is the Quebec nation. The francophone community, and that of Quebec in particular, is a founding people of Canada, and this bill does not reflect the importance of Quebec's being unanimously recognized as a nation by this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, I do not think that my colleague was listening to my speech. I said clearly that the bill would move every single province closer to representation by population. The province of Quebec would have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons, as it has 23% of the population of Canada. However, that is not true for Ontario. Ontario does not quite come up to that threshold, but we are very close to seeing improvements.

It would be totally unfair to guarantee any province, be it Quebec or any other, a disproportionate number of the increase simply to satisfy a particular region. This is important for fairness across the country. That is why the bill is called the fair representation act.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague, with whom I have the pleasure of working on the procedure and House affairs committee, has said that our plan, which gives exactly the same weight as the Conservatives' plan to each of the provinces, is one that would pit provinces against provinces. However, mathematically, the Conservatives' system would continuously increase the number of people every 10 years as the population increases. The government would not dare undertake a redistribution, such as our very sensible and brave plan actually proposes, such as Ontario did, such as New Brunswick is going to do.

An eminent MP in this House of Commons said many years ago:

Canadians are already among the most overrepresented people in the world. A small House offers considerable cost savings, less government and fewer politicians. Clearly, this is what Canadians want.

Those are very wise words. In fact, this particular person is now the Prime Minister and he was advocating not only for the status quo, but also for reducing the number of seats.

I would like to hear from my hon. colleague what he thinks about those wise words.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, it just goes to show where the Liberal Party is. The Liberals are still living in the past, wondering what might have happened if they had or if they had not.

This party is looking forward. There is no province and no individual constituent of the provinces who would be shortchanged by my colleague's proposal. Can members imagine going into Saskatchewan and saying, "By the way, we're removing four of the members of the House of Commons from your province"? I do not think that would be palatable.

Just to address his concern about continual growth, the current projections for 2021 increase the number by 11 seats. We can fearmonger about the total expansion of this place, but the studies have been done. We have many years to go before we outgrow the confines of this chamber without major renovations.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very interesting speech. I work with him on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It is very interesting to work with him.

When the House of Commons unanimously recognized Quebec as a nation, was the intention simply to get Quebecers to keep quiet, or was the gesture supposed to mean something? Can the government not give them something to demonstrate that it was not just empty rhetoric? I wonder what concrete action could be taken in that regard.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, we have many nations within this country. We refer to our first nations. In my recollection of the motion that was put forward, we wanted to acknowledge that the Québécois are a unique group of people who should be represented. However, there was no implication at any point that it had any special determination in terms of the number of seats in this House.

BILL C-20—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-20, which is currently being debated, moves every province closer to the principle of representation by population but the fair representation act needs to be passed soon in order for this decade's redistribution, which starts in early February, to use the fair updated formula outlined in the bill.

Government Orders

Therefore, I wanted to provide the following notice: I must advise that agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2), concerning the proceedings at report stage and the third reading 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 those stages.

REPORT STAGE

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have this opportunity to speak about Bill C-20, the fair representation act.

The significant and increasing under-representation of Canadians in the fast growing provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution. Something must be done. This problem is only going to get worse if we keep the status quo. Our government is committed to addressing this problem with the fair representation act.

Bill C-20 provides a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats that is fair to all provinces. This is an important point. Increasing representation for the faster growing provinces should not be done at the cost of pitting region against region, or even Canadian against Canadian.

That is why we made three distinct promises on House of Commons representation in the last election to ensure that any update to the formula would be fair to all Canadians in all provinces.

First, we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, we would protect the number of seats for the smaller provinces. Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government received a strong mandate to deliver these commitments. We are doing exactly that with the fair representation act.

It is important that these three commitments be taken together. When taken together, the update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats will be fair across the country.

The practical result of Bill C-20 would be that every single Canadian would move closer to representation by population.

First, I will underline the importance of introducing a seat allocation formula that is more responsive to population size and trends.

This legislation would move the House closer to fair representation for Canadians living in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. It would maintain the number of seats for slower growing provinces and ensure Quebec's representation is equal to its population.

The electoral quotient for 2011 readjustment will be set at 111,166, reflecting the average riding population prior to the last seat readjustment in 2001, increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates.

For the 2021 readjustment and each subsequent readjustment, the electoral quotient will be increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates since the preceding readjustment.

What is important is that the electoral quotient is not static. Under the status quo formula, the electoral quotient was set and did not move to accommodate population growth. This contributed to the faster growing provinces becoming increasingly and significantly under-represented.

Population growth within those provinces has been even higher in large urban and suburban areas. Canada's new and visible minority population is increasing, largely through immigration. These immigrants tend to settle in fast growing ridings such as mine of Don Valley East.

These three factors, high immigration to fast growing regions of the fastest growing provinces, combine to magnify the representation gap of these areas. This situation inadvertently causes Canadians in large urban centres, 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 the principle of representation by population in our country.

By introducing a seat allocation formula that is more responsive to population size and trends, the fair representation act would move the House closer to representation by population now and in the future. The practical effect is that Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta will be entitled to new seats under the fair representation act.

This is the best formula to move all provinces toward representation by population in a principled manner without creating divisions between regions by increasing representation in high growth areas and by taking it away from Canadians in other parts of the country.

Second, I would note that our government is addressing under-representation in a way that respects the representation of smaller provinces. This is a long-standing commitment of our government and our party. Canadians have given us a strong mandate to deliver in this regard.

Simply shuffling the deck is not as easy as it sounds. Canadians living in smaller provinces currently benefit from two long-standing constitutional provisions guaranteeing their seat counts. Repealing those guarantees, aside from the practical implications, would mean significant seat losses in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

● (1720)

We make no apology for addressing these significant and increasing under-representations of ordinary Canadians, but this should not be done by picking winners and losers or pitting region against region, Canadian against Canadian.

Government Orders

The fair representation act is fair to all Canadians, not just some provinces. In fact, it is a measured investment that brings every Canadian closer to representation by population.

Finally, the fair representation act also provides that the seat allocation formula apply as in the representation rule. If provinces become under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats would be allocated to that province so that its representation would equal its share of the population.

Based on population estimates, Quebec would be the first province to receive new seats in order not to become under-represented by the application of the updated formula. Quebec has 23% of the population and would have 23% of the provincial seats in the House of Commons, though the representation rule is nationally applied and applies to all provinces that enter this scenario.

The representation rule is a principled measure and ensures that smaller and slow growth provinces do not become under-represented in the future, that they will maintain representation that is in line with their share of the population, and this is fair. The serious and increasing under-representation of our faster growing provinces, Ontario among them, is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution.

The Chief Electoral Officer told the procedures and House affairs committee that passing this bill before the new year is the best scenario. That is why we are moving quickly to meet the deadlines we face in the new year to best facilitate the process that will bring these changes into place for Canadians. We will ensure parity for Canadians and it will avoid needless and costly repetition by an independent boundary commission set up to draw these new boundaries.

In conclusion, this bill, the fair representation act, is the best formula to address the under-representation of Canadians living in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario without picking winners and losers, pitting Canadians against Canadians or region against region. It is reasonable, principled, nationally applicable and fair to all Canadians. It would achieve better representation for Canadians living in fast-growing provinces while maintaining representation for smaller and slower growing provinces.

It would bring every Canadian closer to representation by population. It delivers on the government's long-standing commitment to move toward fairer representation in the House of Commons. I note that Parliament has the authority to pass this amendment under section 44 of the Constitution Act of 1982. This was the same authority used to pass the current formula in 1995, which was subsequently upheld as constitutional by the British Columbia Court of Appeal.

The fair representation act is principled, reasonable legislation that needs to be passed as quickly as possible. I encourage the opposition to work with us on this important legislation.

• (1725)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why would Canada be the only democracy where we say that when we allocate seats according to demography, it is picking losers and winners and it is playing regions against others? Well, that is not what other democracies are saying. They are able to have fixed

seats in their houses and to reallocate according to demography, and no one has said that it is unfair and pitting regions against each other.

Not too long ago, the Prime Minister said that the House was too big and that we needed to decrease the size of the House. Was he at that time picking losers and winners? Was he pitting regions against each other? How can he say that today?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are many ways of skinning the cat, and this is the one that is being proposed by our government. I believe it is fair to all Canadians. It is not picking winners and losers or pitting Canadians against Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I almost feel like making a joke to the effect that, if this country was built by two founding peoples, it is simple, it should be 50-50. But no party is suggesting that solution, and I understand why.

My question to the member who just spoke is this:

Does the Quebec nation represent a burden or a crucial asset to Canadian society? If it is a crucial asset, what is the minimum threshold the Canadian government would be willing to guarantee, under which it would never go, regardless of Quebec's demographic representation within Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are many ways of looking at how we will distribute the seats. Quebec is well represented with the allocation that is shown for 23% of the population. All of the provinces actually have a big contribution.

Another way of doing the allocation of seats could have been by the contribution by each of the provinces, which I think we would see as completely unfair.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of representation, we generally refer to the number of votes, but the representation of members of Parliament here also relates to the amount of work they do with their constituents. The access that a constituent has to his or her member of Parliament is very important.

For example, the riding of Brampton West has 170,000 people and one member of Parliament. Somewhere down in Winnipeg North, there are 79,000 constituents. There is a huge gap in the amount of access that a constituent has to his or her member of Parliament.

I wonder if my colleague would comment on the workload that members of Parliament with these large ridings like his must have in dealing with immigration, EI concerns and the myriad of issues that a member of Parliament deals with.

Private Members' Business

•(1730)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the bigger ridings have a much bigger workload. In Ontario and in the Toronto riding that I represent with nearly 60% to 70% of first generation Canadians, there is a lot of work in terms of immigration issues, et cetera. To have better representation would mean a more even workload throughout these different ridings.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PORT OF QUÉBEC

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize that the Port of Québec is of vital importance as a hub of international trade in opening new markets for Canadian business, creating jobs, generating significant economic benefits, particularly in terms of tourism, and ensuring the vitality of small and medium businesses in Quebec City and the surrounding areas; and (b) support key projects for the upgrading of port assets and the development of equipment, taking into account the climatic and environmental challenges of this particular section of the St. Lawrence River.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in this House today in support of my region and my city. Quebec City is more than just an extraordinary architectural showcase and a culturally vibrant city. It is also a city built along the St. Lawrence River. From the Promenade Samuel-de Champlain to Beauport Bay, the water is an integral part of the city and its people. It is therefore not surprising that in the very heart of the city lies the oldest port in Canada, the Port of Québec.

In the 19th century, it was even one of the largest ports in the world because of the enormous volume of merchandise and passengers that went through there. Marine and port activity played a role in developing the economy of the region, and for more than 150 years, the Port of Québec has been one of the key players in the regional economy.

Today, still, the Port of Québec is a major continental gateway with assets that the other major ports in the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes system as a whole do not have. Its facilities and traffic rank it among the most important ports in the country. In addition to its importance in bulk shipping, the Quebec City site has the distinction of being both a transshipping and destination port. The Quebec City region serves, in a way, as a logistical intermodal platform, from land to water and from river to ocean. This situation is a result of the advantages offered by Quebec City, which include the depth of the river at Quebec City and its location in relation to the Great Lakes and the Atlantic, in addition to its ability to offer a range of services such as transshipping and warehousing, to name but those two.

This means that the Port of Québec has the facilities to handle large ocean-going vessels with very deep drafts that cannot dock elsewhere in Quebec or Ontario. It is well connected, by rail or road, with the industrial heart of Canada and the United States. It is an essential component of the Ontario-Quebec Continental Gateway.

In concrete terms, the Port of Québec generates \$786 million in economic fallout annually. For the region, that represents more than

5,000 direct and indirect jobs and \$163 million in taxes paid. As well, trade with over 60 countries flows out from the port.

In addition to its economic functions, about 20% of the port facilities have recreational purposes. For example, a number of facilities provide families in the region and tourists with access to the St. Lawrence River. It goes without saying that Québec's national capital is the main beneficiary of the economic benefits measured. The operations of stakeholders in the shipping and port industry in Quebec City are heavily concentrated there, not to mention that a number of their suppliers of goods and services are located within the area.

For all these reasons, I am calling on the government today to recognize the Port of Québec as an international trade hub that opens up markets for Canadian businesses, creates jobs, generates significant economic benefits and ensures the vitality of small and medium-sized businesses in the city and surrounding areas. I am also calling on the government to support the plans to upgrade the port's assets, and ultimately to develop its equipment.

First, why is it important to recognize the Port of Québec as an international trade hub that opens up markets for Canadian businesses? The Ontario-Quebec Continental Gateway accounts for 71% of Canada's trade with the rest of the world, and that means \$600 billion.

•(1735)

The Ontario-Quebec Continental Gateway also accounts for 66 % of trade with Asia and Europe — \$138 billion — a majority of which is shipped by water. In addition, nearly \$600 billion in trade with our neighbours, the United States, passes through that gateway.

Second, why ask the government to support plans to upgrade the port's assets and the development of its equipment? The problem of the competitiveness of our businesses in Canada often comes up in this House. We are constantly having to deal with new players on the international markets. In order for us to be competitive, our infrastructure has to be optimized to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The Port of Québec already has strategic advantages, since its handling capacity is very high. That is not enough, however, if the facilities are in poor repair and unusable.

Upgrading the existing facilities calls for investments of \$150 million, as estimated by Mario Girard, the CEO of the Port of Québec. The authority does not have the borrowing capacity to undertake work that represents the essential minimum for businesspeople and the public in the Quebec City region. The current letters patent of the Port of Québec limit the authority's borrowing capacity to \$45 million and the authority's current average annual profit for the last five years has been around \$3.6 million. Without assistance, the Port of Québec will struggle along and may start down a road to decline that could easily be avoided by investing in this infrastructure.

Private Members' Business

This situation is like an albatross around our businesses' necks and they are seeing their competitiveness undermined by something over which they have little control. The federal government alone is capable of fixing the problem and should support the Port of Québec authority in its facility renovation projects. These are strategic investments to support the Canadian economy. It is very often more beneficial for Canadian businesses to have an effective business platform than tax credits.

We have the opportunity to not only make our businesses more effective, but also to reduce the environmental footprint left by business. The seaway is one of the most reliable methods of transportation. It has low carbon emissions, is regulated and is profitable. Using the seaway more often would be an excellent way of reducing the congestion on our roads.

In the end, what do our businesses need? We must always ask ourselves this question when developing policies. Do they need the money from the taxes they pay or do they need the government to fix simple problems that affect them? I am referring here to productivity gains derived from adapted infrastructure that promotes the development of business in Canada and the development of effective platforms that meet the needs of businesses that must also respect the needs of their clientele.

It is important to understand that supporting this motion means supporting not only the Port of Québec, but thousands of businesses that move products, resources, equipment and even people. Through this support, we are able to help tourism, international trade, domestic trade, logistics, local SMEs that both export and import, as well as all the workers who get quality jobs that are either directly or indirectly tied to the activities of the Port of Québec.

Despite all these excellent reasons to invest in the infrastructure of the Port of Québec, very little money is available to the port authority. I will say it again: there is not enough cash, insufficient borrowing capacity, and no grant program for this important infrastructure.

We are completing several rounds of negotiations with the European Union, which could lead to an increase in our trade. It is crucial, at this time, that we engage the government in an infrastructure investment plan that will be the logical follow-up to the future free trade agreement.

• (1740)

We cannot forsake our business people and leave them saddled with processing and transit facilities that are unable to meet their needs.

It is traditionally the responsibility of the state to support an infrastructure network that facilitates the flow of goods, people and information. Budgetary realism dictates that we do the work immediately to avoid ballooning costs due to inflation, crumbling infrastructure and the disappearance of businesses that do not feel supported in their efforts to break into new markets.

The Port of Québec infrastructure is in urgent need of support as it is in a state of disrepair; the port is currently operating at almost full capacity; the revenue generated is not enough to cover the cost of maintaining the port infrastructure; and the development of new infrastructure is not foreseeable under such circumstances.

Currently, the port is incapable of taking advantage of new opportunities and risks losing existing and potential clients.

The NDP pays particular attention to job creation. We firmly believe that strategic and responsible investments in our infrastructures will generate high-quality jobs. We also believe that modern infrastructures are a platform for Canadian businesses to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We think that offering generous tax credits while our infrastructures are being neglected is irresponsible. It is definitely better to invest in a modern and efficient commercial platform than blindly grant tax credits, particularly considering that 91,000 jobs were lost over the past two months.

It is absolutely critical to support this infrastructure. It is a priority for all my constituents and for all of Canada. The status quo will inevitably result in the decline of the port. The Canadian shipping trade strategy must be viewed as a whole. If the Port of Québec infrastructures are left to deteriorate without taking action, the commercial impact will be felt on Canada's whole shipping trade. All the activities in the Ontario-Québec Continental Gateway could be weakened. Let us not forget that the marine economy also supports continental economic activities. If we do not take action, the whole supply chain could suffer. Let us face it: in the current economic context, we cannot afford to hurt Canada's distribution and supply chain. Many Canadians depend on these chains. I am thinking, for instance, of the jobs in all processing stages and all commercial activities related to shipping trade. Many Canadian businesses also rely on these chains.

The Port of Québec is currently at a crossroads. If it is to keep its status as a strategic hub for trade, it must be able to restore its port facilities.

In conclusion, it is clear that the port is critical to the economic development of the Quebec City region and is also a major tourist and social attraction. It has been part of the picture for a long time, and it plays a fundamental role. It is an integral part of Quebec City, and we must absolutely take care of it.

• (1745)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his speech.

I would like him to speak a bit more about the types of opportunities that might be available to a port such as the Port of Québec. What does the future hold for this port? What could adequate and available funding do for the greater Quebec City area and, more specifically, for the Port of Québec?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the greater Quebec City area for his question.

Private Members' Business

When my colleague from the riding of Québec and I had the opportunity, we met with the president and CEO of the port, Mario Girard. He told us that the port was used to the max. Our lives are highly dependent on marine transportation for shipping wine, imported cars and other goods. As he told us, the port is already being used to maximum capacity. As I mentioned in my speech, if there is an increase in trade as a result of the EU free trade agreement, the Port of Québec will lose opportunities to other ports in the country and even in the United States.

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, I am extremely pleased today to discuss Motion M-271, which proposes that the government recognize the economic and strategic importance of the Port of Québec and support port infrastructure projects.

I would like to begin my remarks by saying that Canada has 17 port authorities. The Port of Québec is among them and is without a doubt a strategically important port for trade in Canada. It is financially autonomous, has diversified activities and is connected to a main railway line as well as to major roads, which fully complies with the terms of the Canada Marine Act.

The Port of Québec estimates that its port and marine activities not only currently generate economic spinoffs of over \$786 million but also help to maintain more than 9,750 jobs Canada-wide, including some 6,500 jobs in Québec.

I should also add, Mr. Speaker, that I am going to share my time with the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans, who will present his royal address in the House of Commons.

The employment statistics clearly demonstrate the fundamental importance of the Port of Québec to the economy. The port is a generator of jobs and economic spinoffs not only in Québec but across Canada.

• (1750)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I do not mean to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary, but on his point in respect of splitting time, if it is his intention to split the usual 10-minute allocation under private members' business, we would need the unanimous consent of the House to permit the hon. parliamentary secretary to split his time with the member for Ottawa—Orléans. Is there consent to allow him to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the hon. member across the way will never need unanimous consent for one of his requests in the future. I should also mention that it is a huge loss for the House of Commons, because I am certain that the remarks made by the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans would have been excellent and made a great contribution.

The Government of Canada recognizes this strategic role, which is why it made the port a Canadian port authority in 1999. This is one

of the reasons the government does not support the motion by the member for Beauport—Limoilou, since the importance of the port was established 10 years ago. By supporting this motion, the government could potentially be seen as treating the port authority of Québec City differently to the way it treats the other 16 Canadian port authorities.

There is another reason—and this is perhaps the main reason why the government does not support Motion M-271—and that is that it flies in the face of the fundamental principles that have made our national ports system the success that we know today. Let me explain.

The national ports network was set up in 1998 in order to be closer to its users. By users I mean shippers, exporters, importers, terminal operators and shipping companies. The goal is to make them less dependent on government subsidies.

The Canadian port network was overloaded and ineffective prior to the change in legislative and strategic direction. It was very costly for Canadian taxpayers. At that time, the government identified the financially autonomous ports essential to Canada's trade and, in 1998, it created the Canadian port authorities under the Canada Marine Act. This legislation introduced criteria for the commercial discipline and financial autonomy these strategic ports required in order to be competitive.

We have a system that meets users' needs and is reliable and effective. This system has greatly benefited Canadian taxpayers, the federal government and the Canadian economy.

For example, over the last 10 years, the market shares of the Canadian port authorities have ranged from 51% to 57% of the total traffic handled in the ports. Operating revenue went from \$264 million in 2000 to \$390 million in 2009. In 2008, the government introduced targeted changes to the Canada Marine Act, which gave port authorities access to federal funding programs—access that they did not have previously—putting them on an equal footing with the other transportation service providers, such as airports and railways.

• (1755)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Hamilton Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, it is my understanding that just a short time ago there was a request for unanimous consent to split time. I realize a little of that time has gone by, but if the member would like to do that, we certainly would give that agreement now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would draw to the attention of the House that the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is due to come up in the course of debate in the House this evening.

We are past the five-minute mark. I am certainly at the pleasure of the House. If there is unanimous consent to split or to leave the remaining time, would it be then to the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans?

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Normally, I would have no problem and I would have provided the member with consent to split his time. However, the question was asked when there were other members in the House who did not give their consent. Now there is a member who is representing a party, but I am not sure what he representing, so we are creating a precedent that I do not think there is a need to create. The member has a few minutes left. If he does not need to use them, the rest of us will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In any case, there is no consent.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has the floor.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, before I continue, I would like to thank members of the opposition for their helpful interventions here today.

[*Translation*]

As I said, in 2010, the Port of Québec received \$1.8 million from the infrastructure stimulus fund for sufficient pump capacity in case of fire and a distribution network to pump water from the liquid cargo storage terminals located in the Beauport area of the port. This accounted for 50% of the total cost of the approximately \$3.8 million project. Federal programs are already in place, and the Canadian port authorities can submit their projects for approval in the areas of sustainability, safety and infrastructure.

What our NDP colleagues are asking for, therefore, is already in place. What is unfortunate is that each time we have made these investments, the New Democrats have opposed them. Why are they rising now in the House and calling for bigger grants when they opposed these investments in the past?

Why are the New Democrats doing this? Because regardless of how much the government spends, their socialist ideological bent is such that the New Democrats think that it is never enough. In fact, the workers at the Port of Québec and across Quebec and Canada would not be able to pay the taxes required to fund all the spending demands made by the New Democrats on a daily basis.

[*English*]

What the NDP needs to understand in all of its demands for more spending and more government in every single area is that the government cannot give anything without first taking it away. Every day that NDP members stand in the House of Commons and demand more spending on every single varied priority, they would first have

to take that money out of the pockets of the hard-working Canadians who earned it.

Our view is that a dollar in the hands of the person who earned it is always better spent and invested than a dollar in the hands of the politician who taxed it.

Therein lies the distinction between the far left represented by the NDP and the centrist position that we take, which favours Canadian taxpayers. We will continue to take that strong position.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about this extremely important subject.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak today.

This motion is very long and deals with the Port of Québec, but I think it could apply to all ports in the country and not just the Port of Québec. That said, it will be my pleasure to support the motion presented by the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

The Liberal Party of Canada believes that we need more investment in infrastructure to secure the economic development of our municipalities and of our country. In fact, this is one of the key points that our party has always advocated. As I said, all of Canada's ports are examples of places where infrastructure investment could be multiplied to spur economic growth for a city.

I therefore do not understand why the Conservatives have just said they do not support this motion. I understand that the Conservatives do not believe in the importance of working with municipalities, and so they are perhaps somewhat reluctant to support this motion. The evidence can be seen in the recent Economic Action Plan, which has not worked over the last two years. They should perhaps consider changing their approach.

The Liberal Party also believes that this development must not occur at the expense of our environment. We must therefore be careful to preserve the environment. The Port of Québec is of crucial importance to the economic welfare of Quebec City, Quebec and Canada as a whole.

If I may, I will explain why the Port of Québec, in my opinion, is so important to Quebec and to Canada.

Let us first consider its historical importance. The very foundation of our country rests on the choice made by Samuel de Champlain, the founder of Quebec City, in 1608. That choice was based primarily on the strategic position of the site for controlling the St. Lawrence River. Quebec City was long considered to be the Gibraltar of America. Because of its strategic importance, Quebec City, formerly the capital of New France, has seen many battles over the course of its history. Those battles, and that history, contributed greatly to forging the character of Quebecers and Canadians. Quebec City has also long been one of the key economic hubs of Canada because of the Port of Québec and the importance of the St. Lawrence Seaway. For many years, the port was the first point of contact with Canada for newcomers. It has also always been crucially important for international trade. In short, the historical importance of Quebec City, which is inseparable from its port, is worthy of mention by and support from the House of Commons.

As has already been said, we are aware of the importance of the Port of Québec. It is the second largest port in Quebec, outranked only by the Port of Montreal. More than a quarter of goods shipped by water in Quebec stop in the Port of Québec. This makes it one of the most important ports of entry for shipping in Canada, still today. It enables Quebec City to be competitive in international trade and makes it possible for the local economy to prosper.

Although it has been mentioned, there has been no discussion so far about the importance of respect for the environment. Soil decontamination is of great importance in revitalizing the port environment. If we look at most of the ports in Canada, we see a contamination problem. We should therefore support this project, because most of the land surrounding these ports is contaminated. We must really find a way to decontaminate and develop that land.

● (1805)

Respecting and improving our environment is a priority for the Liberal Party. In addition, this decontamination goes hand in hand with other port improvement projects. Thus, it goes without saying that we absolutely must have an ecological vision for the Port of Québec and for other ports across the country.

Infrastructure projects and projects to develop the site will mean important economic spinoffs for Quebec City. Many tourists arrive in Quebec City by water, and infrastructure projects have definitely improved things in the past. According to statistics, traffic has tripled since the early 2000s when a cruise ship terminal was built. With just one terminal, the number of cruise ships has tripled in the port.

Tourism is vital to the Quebec City region. More and more people around the world are working, but there are more destinations. Thus, it is harder to get people to come. A port is always a good tourist attraction. For instance, on October 6, 2010, four ships were berthed in the Port of Québec for about 48 hours, which brought in economic spinoffs worth \$1.3 million in just two days.

Upgrading of port assets and developing the facilities of the Port of Québec would address the concerns of the Liberal Party regarding the poor state of infrastructure in Canada. The government must invest in this area in order to maintain Quebec City's competitiveness on the international stage.

Private Members' Business

[English]

As I was saying, across the country we are seeing a lot of ports that require investment, whether it be to upgrade their equipment or provide dredging to allow bigger boats to dock there. However, the problem we have with the motion is that we do not know how much money it would cost. There is not much detail.

I do not see how the government or members in the House cannot support the motion. There is nothing controversial here. We know that for every dollar that is invested in our economy, it multiplies five times. In a port, it would probably generate 10 times as a multiplier. I do not see how we can avoid investing in our ports.

Many ports across the country and in the world were used for different purposes. Since they were close to water, they were used for transporting goods and people. In today's day and age we have different ways of doing that with the arrival of rail, cars and trucks. Therefore, ports are now used for different reasons. Yes, they are still used mainly for bringing in goods, but as I said, now they bring in cruise ships.

If we look at the major ports that are being developed, they are being used for condo development and business development because they attract people. They attract business and make the economy of that particular city more vital and vibrant.

I see that in Montreal we have the same problem. There was some money invested, and it created a good environment. Investment brings tourists and dollars into the city. It brings respectability, things get renovated, and the city looks nice. However, as soon as we stop investing in the area, people stop coming, and the city does not look as nice.

I do not see why the government, in partnership with the provinces and the city, could not support the motion.

[Translation]

I am pleased to support my colleague's motion. Quebec City, the second largest city in Quebec, performs very well economically and the Canadian government has a duty to contribute to that. By supporting this motion, we are taking the first step, but further action is needed. We must contribute to the improvement and upgrading of the Port of Québec because of its economic and historic importance.

In closing, I hope the Conservative government will set partisanship aside and support this motion, not only by voting in favour of it but, more importantly, by taking action.

● (1810)

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou for bringing forward Motion M-271, on the Port of Québec.

This port is also partially located in my riding. Therefore, it is my pleasure today to support this motion to recognize the Port of Québec as a hub of international trade in opening new markets for Canadian business, creating jobs for people back home, and generating significant economic benefits.

Private Members' Business

As the member for Québec, I had the opportunity to meet with many stakeholders—along with the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou—regarding the port and its development. I am convinced of its importance for the economic growth of Quebec City and the surrounding areas.

Modern ports are critical elements of transportation systems in Canada and around the world. In the context of global trade, Canadian ports must be competitive in several activity sectors in order to continue to hold their own against international competition.

In order to clearly understand the challenges faced by Canadian ports, one must know that Canadian port authorities were created by an act of Parliament enacted in 1998, the Canada Marine Act. This legal framework set a local governance structure for the management of port authorities. These authorities were designated by the Government of Canada as essential to domestic and international shipping. Indeed, Canadian port authorities, which include 17 ports, deal with over half of all the ocean freight in Canada, or goods evaluated at over \$142 billion.

Under the Canada Marine Act, port authorities are responsible for their own funding and they must be self-sufficient. Moreover, the act closely monitors authorities by setting strict borrowing limits and, as a result, it is not always easy for a port to get a loan. Finally, the Canada Marine Act requires port authorities to give part of their gross revenues to the Government of Canada. Since Canadian port authorities operate under federal laws, it is our duty to ensure that relations between the government and these authorities are not only maintained, but also strengthened.

With global competition fiercer than ever, Canadian port authorities have to work harder to achieve the objectives of social and economic development for their regions. Canada has key marine transportation corridors on the St. Lawrence Seaway, which is one of the main corridors. Marine transportation generates \$3 billion in economic activity. According to a study by the St. Lawrence Economic Development Council, shipping on the St. Lawrence is the most efficient means of transportation both financially and logistically.

The same study estimates that in 2010, Quebec's ports and marine activities sustained 27,350 jobs. Again according to the St. Lawrence Economic Development Council, Quebec's port industry's spending translates into a contribution to Quebec's gross domestic product of roughly \$2.3 billion annually. In taxes, the governments of Quebec and Canada brought in \$500 million and \$180 million respectively in 2010.

The quality of its port services, its rail links at every terminal, and its 15 metre low tidal waters, make the Port of Québec a key element of the St. Lawrence Seaway and a gateway to the Great Lakes.

The Port of Québec is open 12 months of the year, is located roughly 1,400 km from the heart of North America and is less than 300 km from the first lock leading to the Great Lakes region. The Port of Québec has efficient links to the industrial and agricultural heart of North America. What is more, thanks to its port infrastructure, Quebec City's maritime community connects to roughly 60 countries. In 2010, the number of cruise ship passengers who set foot in Quebec City was 102,274, which is an increase of

18% compared to 2009. That has a considerable impact on Quebec City considering that those cruise ship passengers left behind some \$80 million in regional spinoffs.

If the activity came to an abrupt end on Quebec City's docks, the economic shock to the region would be brutal.

•(1815)

Overall, some 5,000 direct and indirect jobs are associated with the Port of Québec. It generated almost \$800 million in economic spinoffs and \$163 million in taxes in 2010. The port also pays \$900,000 per year in fees to the federal government.

Finally, since the turn of the century, the Port of Québec has increased its activity by approximately 75%. Today, the Port of Québec must invest \$400 million to modernize its aging infrastructure and increase by 50% the quantity of goods shipped along the St. Lawrence River.

With limited borrowing capacity and no grant program tailored to Canadian ports, the Québec Port Authority has problems and solutions, but rather limited financial means to ensure its development and to stave off U.S. competition. This is what the CEO of the Port of Québec, Mario Girard, has said in the past.

It should be understood that, despite the popularity of the port facilities, the port itself spends a portion of its profits on activities in the cruise industry, the marina and recreation and tourism. Since 2006, these activities have cost approximately \$10 million. Unfortunately, according to forecasts, these figures will continue to rise in 2011.

Mario Girard recently stated that cruises were a money-maker for the Quebec City region, but that it was the port that was footing the entire bill. Although the Port of Québec is in good shape, its infrastructure is aging. At present, the authority is looking at how it can finance \$370 million in work needed to maintain facilities at the required levels. Canadian ports are not really funded by the federal government and must generate their own revenue, as I explained earlier.

Nevertheless, we hope that this government will realize that going with the status quo is no longer possible and that the Port of Québec must find funding to start its renovation projects. It is even more important because, as we have shown, the port is an important component of Quebec City's economy and geography.

Among its potential solutions, the Port of Québec is counting on private businesses to pay a good part of the bill because they are the first to profit from the facilities.

Marc Dulude, executive president of IMTT Québec, a company specializing in liquid bulk, says that business people clearly understand that and are prepared to contribute to the modernization of the port. However, he is asking the governments to do their part. He says that the lack of space, the lack of access to the piers will eventually inhibit the growth of activities and revenues that contribute to the vitality of the local economy.

Private Members' Business

The port of Quebec City hopes to see an increase in the transit of goods, from 25 million to 37 million tonnes annually, to generate new revenues. However, to achieve that objective, an initial investment is necessary to reorganize space dedicated to solid bulk, liquid bulk and grain, three local commodities supported by world demand.

In this regard, it is important to mention that a regulatory amendment would allow Canadian ports to borrow more easily. Currently, Canadian ports cannot offer their land as collateral because it still belongs to the community. Port authorities must prove to lending institutions that all their projects are self-financing. That is a problem in many cases. Moreover, ports have basically no liquidity, and again, that makes investments difficult.

So, the biggest challenge for the port of Quebec City is to find ways to generate new revenues to ensure the future of the city's port facilities, while also taking into account social and environmental considerations. It is important to point out that, while this motion primarily proposes to support the port of Quebec City and its development, these improvements must be done with the support of the public.

This is why the NDP wants to ensure that the Quebec City port authority will continue its consultation efforts with the public, because it is essential to meet with citizens and to hear their views on the renovation projects that are currently on the table.

• (1820)

That public consultation is necessary because in addition to the economic nature of the Quebec City port, about 20% of its facilities are used for recreation and tourism. So, a number of these facilities allow tourists and families from the area to have access to the St. Lawrence River. The port of Quebec City wants to become a model for profitable port-city relations, as well as an example for the development—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The time allocated for the member's speech has finished. I would just remind hon. members that it is a good idea to watch the Chair from time to time so I can indicate the time remaining in one's allocated time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa-Orléans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members who made the most noise in the 40th Parliament are not here in the 41st Parliament. So I am participating in this debate on the new member for Beauport—Limoilou's motion regarding the Port of Québec with caution and respect.

I should warn you that I will not be delivering the royal address promised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport. My speech will be one from a humble servant.

It goes without saying that the Government of Canada—the government I support in this House—recognizes the importance of the Port of Québec. We are pleased to have supported the port through our financing programs such as the infrastructure stimulus fund and the marine security contribution program.

Over 13 years ago, the Government of Canada enacted the Canada Marine Act, which enabled Canada to develop the marine infrastructure it needed.

I originally thought that the member for Beauport—Limoilou was a patient and determined man. With these qualities, I thought that he had a promising future here. I would have thought he knew that the ports system created in 1998 was there to support our country's socio-economic and commercial development at the national, regional and local levels and to help promote and maintain competitiveness and economic prosperity. It seems as though I made a false assumption about the good faith of the member opposite.

[*English*]

The current government, which received a strong, stable, national majority mandate a mere seven months ago, is committed to ensuring that Canada's ports remain competitive so they continue to contribute to our economic growth.

[*Translation*]

The current legislative framework and this policy have proven to be flexible enough to maintain a balance between the commercial discipline required of Canadian port authorities and the targeted initiatives that improve Canada's transportation system and help to improve the supply chains.

The Canada Marine Act provides port authorities with a high level of autonomy and allows them to manage their infrastructure and services in a businesslike way that considers and reacts to their users' input and needs.

If I were to support the opposition motion, it could eventually compromise the system, and we would risk finding ourselves with the same problems we had before the Canada Marine Act was passed, namely, ineffective ports that are over capacity and dependent on government subsidies.

[*English*]

These would be inefficiencies and overcapacities that Canadian taxpayers would have to fund with their taxes.

[*Translation*]

Given the ever-increasing globalization of the economy, it is now more important than ever for Canada to have effective ports to move its imports and exports.

In 1998, Canada's port authorities did not have access to government funding, given the commercial discipline behind the Canada Marine Act.

In 2008, in response to market needs and in support of Canadian trade, the law was strategically amended, recognizing that ports had specific needs related to the capacity of their infrastructure. I was there.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1825)

[English]

These modifications allowed our Canadian port authorities to participate in various government programs in three key areas: environmental sustainability, security and capital costs of infrastructure. As a result, the Canadian port authorities are now eligible for federal funding programs.

[Translation]

I am referring to programs such as the Asia-Pacific gateway and corridor transportation infrastructure fund, the marine shore power program, the marine security contribution program, the gateways and border crossings fund, the freight technology demonstration fund, the infrastructure stimulus fund, and many other initiatives.

In recent years, Canadian port authorities have received close to \$300 million through these funding programs. The current government, under the great leadership of the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest, has contributed \$70.1 million to eligible projects from port authorities in Quebec. The sad thing in all this is that members opposite voted against these investments.

The Québec Port Authority itself benefited from the Canadian government's involvement. It received \$5.6 million through the infrastructure stimulus fund and the marine security contribution program.

[English]

If Canada's ports are a priority for the member across the way, he should ask himself why the NDP voted against our economic measures when it came time to support important economic initiatives to help Quebec City, the whole province of Quebec and Canada *a mari usque ad mare*.

[Translation]

If Canadian ports are a priority for the member opposite, he should ask himself why his party voted against the government's economic measures when the time came to support these economic engines that are so important for Quebec City, the province of Quebec and Canada. It is also sad to see that, in a period of crisis, while we are working to help Canadian port authorities to position themselves for the recovery, the NDP chooses to play politics instead of doing something to help them.

The motion presented by the member for Beauport—Limoilou also suggests that we should recognize the strategic importance of the Port of Québec. If the member wants to have a future here, he should not waste his time trying to break down open doors. By giving the Port of Québec the status of a Canadian port authority, our government has already recognized that port as a strategic facility in the national port system.

The Port of Québec offers its shippers direct access to major railway and highway networks that lead directly to large urban centres in the eastern and midwestern United States. For many years, before the economic recession of 2009, the port kept breaking its own records for volumes handled. In 2010, its volumes increased by 11%, to reach 24.5 million tonnes. It is estimated that the value of these goods was in excess of \$11 billion.

[English]

These goods came from or were destined for markets in the United States, Europe, South America, China and the Middle East.

[Translation]

The Port of Québec also broke its record for the number of cruise passengers and crew members, with 102,000 visitors in 2010. This government is led by a prudent economist who enjoys great support in every region of the country.

[English]

The percentage of people who think that Canada is generally moving in the right direction has increased sharply in the last year from 52% to 63.5%.

[Translation]

This is partly because we recognize the importance of ports such as the Port of Québec for their contributions to Canada's economic competitiveness, growth and prosperity. This is why we favour a port system based on financial autonomy, commercial discipline and the needs of users and of the market.

• (1830)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

CANADIAN AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my questions for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services concern the property at 65 Carl Hall Road in Toronto.

This building was designated by the federal government as a federal heritage building in 1992. It is the former home of de Havilland, where many aircraft were built for service for the Canadian Forces in World War II. It is a heritage building because of the long and storied connection to our aerospace industry, including our first satellite, Alouette, and the Canadarm.

Adjournment Proceedings

Aside from the building's historical value, it houses an impressive collection of artifacts from Canada's long history of air and space industrial developments. This collection is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum. It houses the only full-scale replica of the Avro Arrow, which was killed by the Diefenbaker Conservative government in 1959. It houses a full-scale replica of the Alouette satellite. It houses a Lancaster bomber that had a storied history in World War II and spent many years on a pedestal at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. It is being lovingly restored by volunteers, one of whom actually piloted Lancasters in the war. The museum houses many hundreds of donated artifacts from veterans from all over Canada.

The museum has been a significant part of Downsview Park and forms part of the public attraction to the park. Many thousands of visitors, including tens of thousands of school children from all over Ontario, come to learn about our aviation and space history in the building where much of that history began. In fact, in Downsview Park's own annual reports, there are lovely photos of the museum as an asset.

On September 22 of this year, the museum, along with other tenants of 65 Carl Hall Road, were suddenly and without warning given eviction notices. Downsview's public comments about the closure of the museum, which have been parroted by the government, were full of inaccuracies: there were no subsidies given to the museum; the museum was not 17 months in arrears; the park never consulted with the museum before serving the eviction notice; the museum did not opt to switch from profit-sharing to market rent, but was forced to do so by the park; the museum is not a private collection, but a volunteer-run charitable organization; the park has never offered an alternative to house the collection, and the museum was never given the opportunity to raise the funds to make the necessary repairs to 65 Carl Hall. The repairs were costed at \$3.5 million, yet no engineering report was forthcoming, and the repairs have been costed at much less by the museum itself.

The response to my questions in September was that the park is at arm's length, yet three weeks after that was said, an order in council was signed by the minister to authorize the leasing of the land. The park did not have the right to do it without the minister's say-so. Can the minister please answer why she informed us in September that it was at arm's length, yet in October signed the order in council?

There has never been an answer to any question about what process the government used to remove the heritage status of the building. The building was declared a heritage property many years ago, but nothing of its heritage or status has changed since then. Under what aegis or process did the government un-designate this site, and when?

As a result of investigations concerning the leasing of the land, we know that the order in council clearly states that 65 Carl Hall Road was being leased to Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, owners of the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Toronto Raptors. It is reported to us that the chief operating officer of Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment and the vice-president for park development of Downsview Park are in fact brothers. We would therefore ask what steps were taken to ensure that their business dealings were neither a conflict of interest nor had the appearance of a conflict of interest.

The government has indicated that its mandate included the preservation of heritage and the protection of museums, yet the actions of the government fly in the face of those statements. Recently, Toronto City Council adopted a resolution calling on the federal government to grant a reprieve to the Canadian Air and Space Museum and provide assurances of its preservation on the Downsview lands. In addition, the North York Historical Society called for the mayor to petition the government to preserve the building known as 65 Carl Hall Road as a heritage building.

We ask the government to respond to these two requests from the City of Toronto.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this adjournment debate.

I would now like to respond to the comments made by the hon. member for York South—Weston with regard to the broken lease agreement between the Canadian Air and Space Museum and Downsview Park, a crown corporation located in Toronto. Downsview Park's mandate involves building a national urban park without any subsidization from taxpayers. It must use its own revenue, including its rental agreements, to help it generate the funds necessary to build and operate the park.

Downsview Park has the challenge of preserving the heritage of the area and increasing public participation. The Canadian Air and Space Museum, which is a private museum, could no longer fulfill its obligations, and its operating costs had to be and still are being absorbed by Downsview Park. Downsview Park worked with the museum through three strategic alliances over six years and through lease agreements to help the museum develop a business model and marketing strategy.

Unfortunately, the museum was unable to stay open and meet its financial obligations. Downsview Park did its best to support the Canadian Air and Space Museum for many years. However, it could not continue to support an operation that incurred costs and caused the park a loss of revenue. Over the past year, the museum informed Downsview Park a number of times that it could not pay its current and future rent.

Downsview Park began issuing notices of default of payment in March 2011, and matters finally came to a head on September 20, 2011. The decision was made by Downsview Park, a crown corporation operating at arm's length from the government. Downsview Park is a self-financing crown corporation that has to operate like a business and generate revenue that can be used to build and maintain Downsview Park. As a not-for-profit organization, the Canadian Air and Space Museum has a responsibility to its members. It has to be fiscally responsible and fulfill its legal obligations in any agreements it has reached.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Canadian Air and Space Museum will receive assistance over the coming months for an orderly transition of its activities effective March 31, 2012 and to secure the various exhibits. Discussions are currently being held between the national museums and the Canadian Air and Space Museum in order to ensure that its historic treasures are preserved for all Canadians.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, once again some of what is being said here is just not true.

In fact, the Canadian Air and Space Museum contributed heavily to the profit of Downsview Park over 14 years. It was Downsview Park itself that changed the rules by which it operated. It did meet its rent obligations for 2009-10, but as a result of the recession it was a little slow, but not impossible, to meet its rent obligations in 2011. However, Downsview Park had made the decision several years ago to kick these folks out. That was the decision it made, and that is the decision the government is apparently supporting.

I have not yet heard anything about the heritage nature of the building, nor what the veterans who have donated all this material are going to be told when they are no longer able to look after their artifacts, which are now collected in Toronto. There has been very

little in the way of conversations with any other museums. The folks at Downsview Park have not been helpful at all in terms of finding alternative space in the park property.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Air and Space Museum is a non-federal, not-for-profit museum. The Government of Canada does not provide ongoing operational support to non-federal museums. The crown corporation made a business decision to terminate the museum's lease for non-payment of rent in arrears and current rent. The decision was made by Downsview Park, a crown corporation that operates at arm's length from the government. Downsview Park is required to provide space to store the museum's collection. Discussions are currently underway between the national museums and the Canadian Air and Space Museum to ensure that its historical treasures will be kept for all Canadians.

• (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:40 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, December 6, 2011

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Petitions

Prostitution

Mrs. Smith 4045

Human Trafficking

Mrs. Smith 4045

Asbestos

Mr. Martin 4045

Questions Passed as Orders for Returns

Mr. Rickford 4045

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Fair Representation Act

Bill C-20. Report stage 4046

Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker 4046

Motions in Amendment

Mr. Christopherson 4046

Motion No. 1 4046

Mr. Bellavance 4046

Motions Nos. 2 and 7 4046

Mr. Christopherson 4046

Motion No. 8 4046

Mr. Albrecht 4047

Mr. Dion 4048

Mr. Bellavance 4048

Mr. Albrecht 4050

Mr. Caron 4050

Mr. Dion 4050

Mr. Uppal 4050

Mr. Christopherson 4052

Mr. Dion 4052

Mr. Carrie 4052

Mr. Dion 4052

Mr. Uppal 4053

Mr. Hyer 4053

Mr. Cuzner 4054

Mr. Gosal 4054

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 4055

Mr. Dion 4055

Mr. Carrie 4055

Mr. Caron 4056

Mr. Uppal 4057

Mr. Dion 4057

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 4058

Mr. Wallace 4058

Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) 4059

Mr. Dion 4059

Mr. Dubé 4060

Mr. Trudeau 4061

Mr. Gill 4061

Mr. Nicholls 4062

Mr. Trudeau 4062

Mr. Uppal 4063

Mr. Allen (Welland) 4063

Mr. Lamoureux 4064

Mr. Dubé 4064

Mr. Chong 4065

Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) 4066

Mr. Dion 4066

Ms. Leitch 4067

Mr. Lamoureux 4067

Mr. Chong 4068

Mr. Hyer 4068

Ms. Leitch 4069

Mr. Del Mastro 4069

Ms. Davies (Vancouver East) 4070

Mr. Dion 4070

Mr. Preston 4071

Ms. Davies (Vancouver East) 4071

Mr. Carrie 4072

Mr. Dion 4072

Ms. Doré Lefebvre 4073

Mr. Preston 4073

Ms. Latendresse 4074

Mr. Lamoureux 4074

Mr. Chong 4075

Mr. Martin 4075

Mr. Chong 4076

Mr. Trudeau 4077

Mr. Angus 4077

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Government of Canada

Mr. Sorenson 4077

Violence Against Women

Ms. Chow 4077

White Point Lodge

Mr. Keddy 4077

Firearms Registry

Ms. Sgro 4078

Mayor of Pitt Meadows

Mr. Kamp 4078

Violence Against Women

Ms. Davies (Vancouver East) 4078

Senator Robert Carrall

Mr. MacKenzie 4078

Halifax Explosion of 1917

Mr. Armstrong 4079

Violence Against Women

Ms. Mathysen 4079

Religious Freedom	
Mr. Leung	4079
Firearms Registry	
Ms. Boivin	4079
National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women	
Mr. Gourde	4079
National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women	
Mrs. Mourani	4080
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Coderre	4080
Violence Against Women	
Mrs. Turmel	4080
Violence Against Women	
Mrs. Truppe	4080
National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women	
The Speaker	4080

ORAL QUESTIONS

Search and Rescue	
Mrs. Turmel	4080
Mr. Harper	4081
Mrs. Turmel	4081
Mr. Harper	4081
Port of Montreal	
Mrs. Turmel	4081
Mr. Harper	4081
Mr. Boulerice	4081
Mr. Lebel	4081
Mr. Boulerice	4081
Mr. Lebel	4081
Search and Rescue	
Mr. Rae	4081
Mr. Harper	4081
Phone Calls to Mount Royal Constituency	
Mr. Rae	4081
Mr. Harper	4082
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Rae	4082
Mr. Harper	4082
Port of Montreal	
Mr. Nicholls	4082
Mr. Lebel	4082
Mr. Nicholls	4082
Mr. Lebel	4082
Search and Rescue	
Mr. Christopherson	4082
Mr. MacKay	4083
Mr. Christopherson	4083
Mr. MacKay	4083

Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Angus	4083
Mr. Rickford	4083
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	4083
Mr. Rickford	4083
Mr. Genest-Jourdain	4083
Mr. Rickford	4083
Firearms Registry	
Ms. Boivin	4084
Ms. Hoepfner	4084
Ms. Boivin	4084
Ms. Hoepfner	4084
Search and Rescue	
Mr. McKay	4084
Mr. MacKay	4084
Port of Montreal	
Mr. Coderre	4084
Mr. Lebel	4084
Mr. Coderre	4085
Mr. Lebel	4085
The Environment	
Ms. Leslie	4085
Ms. Rempel	4085
Ms. Leslie	4085
Ms. Rempel	4085
Service Canada	
Ms. Crowder	4085
Ms. Finley	4085
Mr. Patry	4085
Ms. Finley	4086
Justice	
Mr. Toet	4086
Mr. Nicholson	4086
Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Chicoine	4086
Mr. Dechert	4086
Mr. Chicoine	4086
Mr. Dechert	4086
Asbestos	
Mr. Lapointe	4086
Mr. Paradis	4086
Mr. Martin	4086
Mr. Paradis	4087
Ocean Choice International	
Mr. Simms	4087
Ms. Finley	4087
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Casey	4087
Ms. Adams	4087
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	
Mr. Sandhu	4087
Mr. Toews	4087
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	4087

Mr. Toews	4087
Foreign Affairs	
Mrs. Smith	4088
Mrs. Ablonczy	4088
Search and Rescue	
Mr. Rae	4088
Mr. MacKay	4088
Canadian Food Inspection Agency	
Mr. Atamanenko	4088
Mr. Lemieux	4088
Violence against Women	
Mrs. O'Neill Gordon	4088
Ms. Ambrose	4088
Women Living in Poverty	
Ms. Freeman	4088
Ms. Finley	4089
Firearms Registry	
Mrs. Mourani	4089
Mr. Bernier	4089
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	4089
Points of Order	
Disturbance in Gallery and Decorum in the House— Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	4089

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Fair Representation Act	
Bill C-20. Report Stage	4090
Mr. Seeback	4090
Mr. Dion	4091
Mr. Hsu	4092
Mr. Reid	4092
Mr. Kellway	4092
Mr. Dion	4093
Mr. Garrison	4093
Mr. Lamoureux	4093
Mr. Reid	4094
Ms. Sims	4095
Mr. Dion	4096
Mr. Trudeau	4096

Mr. Garrison	4097
Mr. Aubin	4098
Mr. Lamoureux	4098
Mr. Hawn	4098
Ms. St-Denis	4099
Mr. Garneau	4100
Ms. Sims	4100
Mr. Strahl	4101
Mr. Dion	4101
Mr. Richards	4102
Mr. Hsu	4103
Mr. Aubin	4104
Mr. Watson	4104
Ms. Latendresse	4104
Mr. Dion	4106
Mr. Albrecht	4106
Mr. Albrecht	4106
Mr. Aubin	4108
Mr. Garneau	4108
Ms. Latendresse	4108
Bill C-20—Notice of time allocation motion	
Mr. Van Loan	4108
Report stage	
Mr. Daniel	4109
Mr. Dion	4110
Mr. Aubin	4110
Mr. Albrecht	4110

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Port of Québec	
Mr. Côté	4111
Motion	4111
Mr. Blanchette	4112
Mr. Poilievre	4113
Mr. Pacetti	4114
Ms. Papillon	4115
Mr. Galipeau	4117

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Canadian Air and Space Museum	
Mr. Sullivan	4118
Mr. Gourde	4119

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>